

RODOMONT

A Romance of Mont St. Michel
In the Days of Louis XIV

H. BEDFORD-JONES

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In the Days of Louis XIV*

BY
H. BEDFORD-JONES



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RODOMONT

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CHAPTER I

EAST MEETS WEST

SOME few miles outside Avranches, where the highway leading to this important town dips into a thickly wooded glade, was a medley of furious excitement—the clash of steel, a shrill voice of terror, cruel laughter. In the road lay a foam-lathered horse, dead; just beyond it, a dead man, blue bullet-smearred between his eyes. Five riderless horses clumped together at the hedge. Back against the green tangle stood a man, feebly fending with his sword the attack of four other men who ringed him in and laughed.

Though his pistol had slain one assailant, this lone defender was no hero. He was a thin, small, dark man, even darker than the Frenchmen around him, ill and exhausted and somewhat wounded. He parried and danced about, shrieking out cries in an unknown tongue; he was extremely terrified and knew nothing whatever of fence, so the four cavaliers gibed at him and took their time in pinking him, thereby gaining much amusement. As their uniform garb betrayed, they belonged to the picked corps nominally responsible to the marshals of France and hence named *maréchaussée*, who guarded all these coasts of Normandy and Brittany in the king's name. The day was of early summer, in the year 1707.

While this scene was going forward in the glade, two other horsemen were approaching along the winding road, unseen by reason of the sharp curve and the high trees. If they could neither see nor be seen, however, they could hear plainly enough, and in these days it did not pay to rush blindly in upon any roadside combat. They reined in and slipped from their horses, and stole on afoot to discover the cause of the tumult.

These two men were of unusual appearance. One was short, dark, with tremendous breadth of shoulder and huge hands; his swarthy features were marked by a certain alert eagerness, a hawk-like air, and when he smiled it was as though a wolf grinned. He was dressed as a gentleman, yet at his belt hung a knife and a singular little hand-axe. The second man was tall, with vivid red hair and more vivid blue eyes. His face was as powerfully outlined as his body, with wrinkles about his eyes which spoke of squinting into sun and wind, and of much laughter also. He carried sword and pistol; now, with the latter cocked in his hand, he peered through the leafy screen at the affair in the glade beyond. His companion glanced over his arm, then drew back and spoke in English.

“Four cats and a mouse, Rodomont! I'll work around and give the Mohawk yell, and you let fly.”

Rodomont nodded. With startling abruptness the dark man seemed to vanish. He wormed his way into the tangle of greenery on their right and disappeared bodily from sight, with all the silent swiftness of a wild animal.

Rodomont looked at the priming of his pistol, then returned his attention to the scene beyond.

There in the glade, four jesting swordsmen ringing him in, the little man had come to the end of his endurance. A sob of utter exhaustion burst from his lips. He dropped his sword and staggered back against the hedge, arms outflung for support.

“Spare me!” he panted out, in a queer French difficult to understand. “I can—do no more—you have me——”

“We have you indeed, vile fox!” responded the leading cavalier, with a roar of mirth.

“Why His Most Christian Majesty has ordered that a wretch like you be brought back alive, is beyond me; not to mention the solicitude of M. de Pontchartrain and all the marshals, the royal intendant and our own officers. However, the instructions say nothing at all about wounds. So, little fox, let us revive you first and play with you afterward——”

The trapped man reeled; he caught at the hedge for support, his pallid face sinking on his breast. The leader lunged forward and deliberately, with two swift and precise thrusts of his sword, pinked the unfortunate man through the back of each outflung hand. The victim started erect, uttered a loud cry of pain.

“Ah, beasts!” he gasped out. “To call yourselves—Christian men——”

Once more the leading cavalier laughed, and threw up his sword in mock salute.

“We’ll take you along presently, little fox! First a delicate blood-letting in the legs, to prevent you running away again——”

Those were his last words in life. From the opposite side of the road came a shrill and terrible yell, so innate with ferocity and bestial lust for blood that all four cavaliers whirled about, startled oaths breaking on their lips. Something glittered in the sunlight, too swift for eye to follow. The leader dropped his red-tipped blade, threw out both arms, and fell headlong. Squarely between his eyes, splitting his skull, stood a long-handled little steel hand-axe.

That frightful and inhuman yell pealed up again. Then from up the road bellowed a pistolet, followed by a yell in French.

“Hasten, comrades—we have them! Kill them all—kill, kill!”

One of the remaining three cavaliers dropped his blade at the shot, clapped hand to shoulder, and went staggering toward the horses. The other two leaped after him. They paused for nothing, but scrambled into the saddle, drove home the spur, swept all five horses away down the road at a

mad gallop, and so were gone in a dust-cloud. Remained only the dead bodies, the dead horse, the little dark man against the hedge, petrified with astonishment, staring wide-eyed before him.

Then from the opposite hedge broke the hatchet-flinger. He came forward, grinning in his wolfish manner, while down the road strode Rodomont, voicing a laughing call of assurance to the rescued victim.

“Hola, man! We are friends; you are safe. A good stroke there, St. Martin! Best get the corpses out of sight, for we’re on the highway here _____”

The little dark man uttered a sigh and toppled forward in a dead faint. Rodomont ran to him, knelt above him for a moment, then rose and shrugged coolly.

“Nothing worth the effort of bandaging; he needs food and drink most of all, I fancy. If you’ll get a fire going, I’ll bring along the horses.”

St. Martin nodded. He strode to the two dead men and lifted them, one by one, and hurled them over the low-trimmed hedge; he did it lightly, effortlessly, the heave of his huge shoulders betraying his enormous strength. He even dragged the dead horse into the ditch. Then, swiftly searching the wall of green, he returned with some dry sticks and bark. From about his neck he took a leather bag, opened it, fell to work with flint and steel and tinder. In an incredibly short space of time he had a fire alight. His every move was rapid, sure, silent.

Meanwhile, the tall Rodomont led the horses down into the glade. These were wretched beasts, poorly apparelled, scarce able to carry their saddles and packs, let alone riders. From one of the bags, Rodomont took a leathern bottle of wine and the body of a fowl from which the head had been wrung. He wasted no time plucking the bird, but sat down by the fire to skin and draw it expertly.

“A spit, St. Martin.”

The other man picked up the weapons in the road and flung them after the bodies. He gave the sword of the little dark man to his companion, who spitted the fowl on it and laid it to rest on two forked sticks above the little blaze. Evidently these two men were old campaigners. Rodomont now drew out a pipe, filled it with tobacco, lighted it from the fire, and glanced at the motionless figure of the dark man, propped against the hedge. He scowled reflectively at his companion.

“Now we’ll have to ride back to the cross-roads, two miles or so, and work around to Avranches by the northern road. We don’t dare go straight

ahead by this highway, or we'd be questioned and suspected. The other road to Avranches is more roundabout, but will take us there eventually."

St. Martin shrugged carelessly. "If I hadn't stolen this fowl when I had the chance, we'd get no dinner. See here, Rodomont, what the devil will we do after reaching St. Malo? We may have to wait months for a ship, by all accounts. How are we to live, not to mention buying a passage over the water? We're down to our last sol now; if we miss the last of the summer ships, we'll have to wait until spring. Devil take it! In this accursed country one must have hard cash for everything. If ever I get back to Canada, plague seize me if I don't appreciate my blessings!"

Tall Rodomont frowned into the little fire, and puffed at his pipe.

"I must give up all hope of seeing the place my grandfather came from," he mused aloud. "It's not far away from here, I believe, but this killing will push us forward hard. We can reach St. Malo, and there we must live by selling the horses, until we find boats out-bound for the Newfoundland banks. We may get service aboard one of them, at worst. Why so bitter against your own country, St. Martin?"

"My own country? This?" The other spat. "I'm a Canadian, not a Frenchman. Every time I think of Versailles, I want to curse. Devil take that old primped-out doll of a king! He looked me up and down while they told him that I was one of Iberville's men who had fought the English by sea and land. And what did the wrinkled old painted fool say to this? Why, he said my style of dress was devilish odd. Then he walked away. And I had come from Canada to be presented to him—devil take him! Back to Canada I go, and cruise the woods for castor, and stay there. When I think of how I fought half a life time for that tottering doll and those insipid, cruel-eyed, women-faced courtiers about him, it makes me sick. The pox on France and everything in her! I'll take my pelts to Boston or Albany after this, rather than obey laws made in Versailles."

Rodomont grinned at this outburst. "So you started home for Canada, eh?"

"Aye, and fell in with you. A good meeting, too. Odd, that I should have been in Fort Nelson two years ago when your ship was captured on the bay! I remember hearing of it."

"And I've been in prison these two years—would be there yet if someone hadn't remembered the war was over long since, and turned me loose."

"You might have told 'em your grandfather came from France."

Rodomont chuckled. "And make a bad matter worse? Not I. No, no, I'm no Frenchman, but a Bostonnais—an American. So here the two of us are, beating back home for the new world again like wounded birds, eh? If we only had a trifle more money between us, we'd be all right. Damn money! The lack of it is the curse of honest men in this country."

"True enough, on the faith of a Mohawk!" affirmed the Canadian moodily. "You're a good comrade, Rodomont. I'd give much if we were swinging up the trail for Hudson's Bay together, you and I, to loot furs! Devil take all Frenchmen, and their king the first."

"Amen, amen," said a weak voice.

The two glanced around. The little dark man had opened his eyes and was watching them, a ghastly smile wreathing his thin lips. Rodomont laid down his pipe, seized the wine-bottle, and held up the man's head while he poured wine into the sagging mouth. St. Martin removed the fowl from the fire, deftly carved off one or two cooked portions, and thrust them into the hand of the dark man.

"Eat, *mon ami*," he said. "We must get away from here in a hurry, so waste no time about getting strength."

The other made no reply, but snatched ravenously at the food, gulped it down, grasped other fragments that St. Martin thrust at him; his eyes flashed over them in roving glances that stabbed piercingly into each man. His wounds were slight and caused him no particular inconvenience. The flesh and wine immediately gave him strength, brought a little colour into his livid cheeks, and presently he sat up.

"So you need money, my friends?" he asked in his queer and halting French.

St. Martin laughed out, joyously. "Need it? Faith, we'd go through hell to get it, so we might win home again! And if we ship aboard one of those fishing craft for the banks, we'll go close enough to hell."

"You are not Frenchmen?"

"I am a Canadian."

"A new word to me." The little man looked at Rodomont. "And you?"

"I am from America. I've been a prisoner here in France, and am going home——"

"A fur-pirate, a Bostonnais!" St. Martin chuckled. "No, if we'd been Frenchmen, my little man, you'd never have been rescued. Eh, Domont?"

The other leaned back against the hedge.

“I heard you talking together. My name is Ketchedourian—do you know it?”

“Not at all,” Roger Domont frowned over his pipe. “Why should I know it? Yet it has the sound of a Mohawk name—”

“I am an Armenian.” Ketchedourian winced, put a hand to his head, and pain suffused his eyes suddenly. Then, with an effort, he conquered himself and reached into the pocket of his coat. He produced a small velvet purse, and emptied into the dust a dozen coins of broad gold. From his finger he slipped a ring, the bezel of which had been turned inward; it showed a diamond, large and brilliant, obviously of high worth. This ring, and these coins, he thrust toward Rodomont, who gave him a bleak look.

“Did we rescue you for money? Put it back.”

“You do not understand.” The dark man gathered his energy. “Look you! Here is all I have, but now I shan’t need it further. You two men are friends, and you need money. Well, I do not pay you for what you have done, but for what you will do. Are you interested?”

Rodomont jerked a nod at him. St. Martin spoke eagerly. “Aye!”

“Will you accept an errand, you two men—not for me, but for a greater man than I, whom I serve? You, American, are a man to trust. This other with you is a beast, but some beasts are faithful to death. Here is some gold, and with it a ring worth a thousand livres. They are yours, if you will carry out the errand I have failed in doing.”

Roger Domont carefully scrutinized the speaker. Here was a man pursued by the royal forces, undoubtedly for cause. His errand would be an illegal one, and probably would be highly perilous. Indeed, as the Boston man hesitated, the Armenian read his thought and gave him a wan, thin smile.

“I lie not. If any man learns you have spoken with me, much less helped me, you will never be heard of again. The errand is not easy. If you are caught, your happiest fate will be the Bastille for life. You will answer to the king personally, you understand? This is no affair of bailiffs and *huissiers*. On the other hand, all I ask is that you deliver a letter for me.”

“Why not deliver your own letter?” demanded St. Martin bluntly. “A beast, am I? Well, it was the beast’s claw that slew your chief tormentor! You are free. We will help you away. Why not go on and deliver your own letter?”

The Armenian took from the velvet purse a blackish pellet of opium, and mouthed it.

“I am ended,” he said simply. “They know where I am, have tracked me down; every road and town swarms with guards. I have been very ill and in prison. My physical strength is gone. You could not hope to escape with me—indeed, after what has happened here, you will be lucky to escape without me! I must submit to my fate; yet I submit gladly, if only this letter can reach my master.”

A hollow laugh came from him as he held out his feeble, hurt hands.

“Look at me! For this poor weak thing they are searching—cavaliers of the marshals, royal cavalry, messengers from Versailles, spies, garrisons of towns, special agents of the minister; because I am free, regiments are on the march! Yet I am only a domestic, the body servant of my master. What tumult would involve all France, think you, should *he* escape?”

“Faith of the Mohawk, you must be an important one!” exclaimed St. Martin, staring.

“Nay, but my master is. Well, respond! Yes or no?”

“Say the word, comrade,” ejaculated the Canadian. “Me, I would beard Satan himself for enough money to get out of this country. Shall we do it?”

“Aye,” said Roger Domont. He knocked out his pipe, put the ring on his finger, divided the golden coins with St. Martin. “Give me the letter, Armenian.”

And now at this, Ketchedourian was all torn between eagerness and sudden hesitation.

“Do you swear to me that—”

“I swear not.” Rodomont looked him in the eyes. “But I will earn your money.”

“Good; I trust you. If you are captured or even suspected, then destroy the letter. If it is discovered, your fate is certain.”

From about his neck, the Armenian lifted a thin silken cord on which was hung a flat packet. The opium had calmed and strengthened him, yet the sparkle in his dark gaze was feverish. He handed the sealed letter to Roger Domont.

“My master is imprisoned in the royal prison of Mont St. Michel,” he said. “There he is known only as the Nameless Exile. We know he is in the room occupying the third floor of the Perrine Tower. He is never allowed to be seen, he never leaves his room; he does not speak French, yet no one is allowed to so much as call out beneath this tower.”

“Good,” said St. Martin. “Letter to be delivered to the Tour Perrine, third floor, royal château of Mont St. Michel. Good!”

“Your master’s name?” demanded Domont.

The Armenian’s eyes showed a swift flicker of alarm.

“The knowledge is not necessary, and the secret is not mine to impart. It would only increase your danger tenfold. Now get away, go at once! If any peasant comes past and reports later that you talked with me, you are lost. You cannot save me; if you would earn your payment, go, escape quickly!”

The rugged features of the American softened.

“You are a brave man,” he said. “It goes badly to leave you to certain fate.”

“That is in God’s hand; the fate of my master, perhaps, lies in yours.”

Roger Domont nodded and rose to his feet. “Up, St. Martin! Farewell, faithful servant of an unknown man. I salute you.”

The two friends mounted and rode back by the way they had come, leaving the little dark Armenian sitting against the hedge and staring after them.

No speech passed between the two men. Roger Domont, known from his signature as Rodomont, rode frowningly and intent. St. Martin, who might be a bush-loper and voyageur for the fur company, but was none the less a gentleman, caroled a Breton chanson gaily enough. Two miles back, they came upon a cross-roads, and here turned off the main highway upon a little road meandering to Avranches by a roundabout way. Then St. Martin asked a question.

“Do you know where this prison is?”

Domont nodded. “It is only a little out of our way, to the south of Avranches. It is a famous place; an ancient abbey on a pinnacle of rock in the ocean. This errand, I warn you, will be a dangerous one. We may have to go as pilgrims—Mont St. Michel is a great place of pilgrimage from all Europe.”

“Bah! You and I are a match for any twelve Frenchmen,” said St. Martin with careless conviction. “And if we can do that painted puppet of a king some harm, as seems likely, so much the better! Comrade, you have a smudge of charred wood across your cheek.”

Rodomont rubbed at his cheek, and the other laughed, for now the smudge was made worse and was spread across all his lower face. Not knowing how upon this trifle hung a great share of destiny, the American shrugged and desisted.

“No matter; I’ll wash at some brook. Now, you observe that the letter is in my inside pocket. If anything happens to me, take it and make delivery.

We must earn this payment. It is not only the price of our passage to America, but it is the price of that Armenian's life—if we fail in our word, it becomes blood-money.”

“With all my heart.” St. Martin rose in his stirrups and pointed ahead. “Faith of a Mohawk—look there! Instead of avoiding the crowd, we have run into it! An auberge, and a village beyond. Since we parted with our dinner to the Armenian, let's break one of his gold pieces here.”

“No.” Domont gazed at the buildings ahead of them, lying at the bottom of a gentle declivity. “There is a coach, and I see horsemen—well, too late now. If we keep our mouths shut, we've nothing to fear. We'll not stop here for a meal, though; there'll be other inns and smaller places farther on. We'll stop somewhere for the night and make Avranches tomorrow, and the day after, Mont St. Michel.”

They clattered down toward the little village; it stood at another cross road, for in this country roads were everywhere. Before the inn, which bore the favorite sign of the Cheval Blanc, was standing a huge dust-covered coach, laden with baggage. Standing beside the coach was a plumed cavalier, half in riding attire, half in gay finery, jewels glinting on his fingers; he was a singularly handsome man, dark of eye, across his left cheek a sword-scar. He was talking with the occupants of the vehicle, two in number—a girl, and an older woman. To one side, half a dozen horsemen were grouped about a water-trough and Rodomont perceived they belonged to the *maréchaussée*.

As the two friends rode up, the coach took its departure, the cavalier bowing low, and both new arrivals crowded to one side of the entrance to let it pass. For a moment Rodomont met the eyes of the girl, full upon him, and she smiled; he removed his hat and bowed in the saddle. No painted and powdered court beauty was she, but a girl with a crown of golden hair, a smile so frank and unaffected that his heart leaped. Then, as the coach rolled away, he felt a touch and turned. At his stirrup stood the jeweled cavalier, regarding him narrowly.

“Your name, monsieur blackface, and errand,” said the cavalier brusquely.

Domont gave him a slow scrutiny. In the man's voice and air was authority, yet to judge from his garb he was no officer.

“Either,” said the American coolly, “your remark is an insolence or a justified query. Which is it, monsieur impertinence?”

“My faith!” The other laughed in drawling contempt. “Can one be insolent to a fellow of your quality, indeed? I am the Comte de Lussan.

Speak.”

“And I am a gentleman of America, of equal or better birth than you.” Domont regarded the other gravely, and De Lussan flushed slightly—then shrugged.

“Well, then, in the King’s name! I am the delegate of His Majesty on special affairs. Do I have to arrest you before you declare yourself?”

“Nay, I have every respect for His Majesty,” said Domont, whereat St. Martin stifled a grin. “Here are my papers. You will see M. de Pontchartrain requests that I be allowed to leave France unhindered and without molestation, on my good conduct.”

The name of the all-powerful minister had instant effect. De Lussan, with a curt acknowledgement, returned the document Rodomont had given him, and looked around at St. Martin.

“Dismount, fellow!”

“Go to the devil, fellow!” snapped the Canadian. “I am the Sieur de St. Martin, of Canada. If you want to read my passport, reach for it.”

White with restrained anger, de Lussan reached up, took the Canadian’s document, and read it. He handed it back without comment, turned away, and flung a curt order at his men. A moment more he had mounted and was riding away down the yellow road with them. St. Martin chuckled, as his horse pushed forward to the trough.

“Faith of a Mohawk, this fellow would be glad to clap us into jail!”

Domont shrugged and looked down at the inn-keeper, who was advancing to them.

“Bring us a cup of wine—we’ll not dismount,” he said. “Whose coach was leaving just as we arrived?”

“Ah, monsieur! That was the daughter or niece or wife or wench or something of the most eminent Baron de Karque, whom she goes to join.”

“And who the devil,” queried Rodomont whimsically, “is this Baron de Karque? A Breton name, perhaps?”

“Not at all. The great baron, monsieur, is spending the summer at his abbey.”

“At his abbey? Is he married, then, and an abbot to boot?”

The inn-keeper grinned. “He is a famous man, monsieur, a great Lord of Germany, and he is the commendatory abbot of Mont St. Michel. May I remark that monsieur’s face is somewhat obscured by grime?”

Roger Domont dismounted and washed his face at the trough. It was well for him that he had not found an earlier opportunity.

CHAPTER II

ROGER ONE AND ROGER TWO

ON the same afternoon which in the highways and byways of Normandy witnessed the foregoing events, the episcopal residence near the Cathedral of Avranches was witnessing a very different sort of event. This appeared wholly unrelated to the former happenings in any way, shape or manner, and yet upon it as upon a hinge swung the entire fate of the Armenian's letter, the man who bore it, and all connected with it.

Up those narrow and winding hill-streets of ancient Avranches creaked the coach of Baron de la Villeneuve, postillions yelling, driver flicking savage whip at the populace, and a groom riding behind with a led horse, saddled. Out upon the scattering townfolk glared M. le Baron, erect and savage; a terrible man, renowned for his inflexible cruelty as a magistrate, yet also known for his proud sense of personal honor. He looked not unlike a wild boar, a vicious old bear with red hair and long tusks, and acted the part.

With him in the coach sat his eldest son, Roger d'Aumont, very handsome in his uniform as a captain in the regiment of la Fère. Between father and son, as all men knew, no love was lost, for the son was a merry wastrel, a savage drunkard, and a reckless blade. Sieur d'Aumont had red hair, like many a Norman of the ancient viking strain, wore a red mustache and chintuft, and had a very eager eye for a pretty girl, a drinking bout, or a duel. Mad fighter as he was, he was also a poor swordsman. By an odd chance, good luck in his last duel had incurred misfortune, the hurt man being a favorite of M. de Pontchartrain, and so M. d'Aumont went home to cool his heels in disgrace.

The coach flung around the last turn, climbing laboriously toward the heights bearing the cathedral at whose door Henry II of England knelt to receive absolution for à Becket's murder. Now the baron regarded his son with an air grimly pregnant.

"Your last chance," he said gruffly. "Give up all these mad ambitions of yours, and you may return with me—"

"You grow very tiresome, M. le Baron," said the younger man, returning look for look. "Give up my ambitions? But that is all I desire. I'll gladly yield the title to my brother, and go seeking my fortune in the new world. What more is to be said?"

“You and your fortune!” The baron swore whole-heartedly. “Your purse is crammed with gold at this moment!”

“It is not a question of gold.” The son gestured rather wearily, as one who rehearses an oft-spun argument. “I am heartily sick of all this life. My only wish is to go away to Canada and there seek—”

“Go to the devil and seek perdition,” snarled the baron, and turned his broad back.

The son grimaced complacently, and then leaned far out to blow a kiss after a pretty girl. She smiled, as did most girls on the handsome captain, and Sieur d’Aumont twirled his mustache gallantly. He knew well enough what was ahead of him, and rather looked forward to it as a change of scene.

The coach went on. The massive gates of the episcopal residence swung open to receive it, and in the courtyard the equipage swung to a halt.

“Stay here until I send for you,” said the baron, and alighted. He took a pinch of snuff, then marched in to his audience with the bishop and the royal intendant.

The spiritual and temporal rulers of this corner of France received their visitor in ceremonious fashion, which the bluff Norman baron brooked impatiently enough. At length the doors of the large chamber, overlooking the monastery gardens and the sea, were closed, and the three men sat alone at a heavy carven table. The baron came bluntly to the affair in hand.

“Gentlemen, I have requested from His Majesty a *lettre de cachet* against the person of the Sieur d’Aumont my son, who is disobedient, mutinous, and of dissipated life. What of it?”

The intendant looked somewhat uneasy. The bishop, a genial nobleman who was never uneasy, smiled at the baron and made response.

“The order has been received. I regret to state that explicit instructions have also been received as to its issuance, and M. de Fontette here has been expressly directed to communicate these instructions to you. A written report must be countersigned by both of us in regard to the matter. You will perceive that His Majesty, due to your high favor in his sight, has been pleased to dispense with the usual procedure in this case. Perhaps my recommendation had something to do with it, also.”

The baron growled at this, and settled himself savagely in his chair, perceiving the bishop was taking a roundabout course. Then M. de Fontette gathered up his courage and spoke out.

“M. le Baron, I regret these charges you have preferred are not sufficient
—”

“Not sufficient?” exploded the baron vehemently. “When you shut up any fool or madman, when you send to a dungeon any petty criminal who can pay the expenses of his keep? When—”

“Your pardon, your pardon; but consider, I beg you!” M. de Fontette, newly arrived from the south, was anything but certain of his authority among these mad Normans. “By the act of parliament and the royal declaration of 1648, it is absolutely forbidden that any subject of the king should be imprisoned by royal order, more than twenty-four hours, without examination before a tribunal—”

“You fool, does not every magistrate know this?” roared the baron, then calmed himself. “Your pardon, monsieur; continue, in the devil’s name!”

“My instructions on this head are precise, and from the secretary of state himself,” pursued M. de Fontette. “No citizen is lightly to be deprived of his liberty. It does not suffice that his family desires his imprisonment, but his conduct must be such that he is a menace to society and a taint upon the honor of his house. These royal exiles are not to be easily—”

“Name of the devil, I do not ask a lecture on the law!” ejaculated the testy baron, losing his temper again. He turned his empurpled visage to the bishop. “My lord, come to the point!”

“I think,” intervened the bishop smoothly, “you slightly misapprehend our friend here. It is necessary to assure him of the vital importance of converting the *Sieur d’Aumont* from a soldier into a prisoner—or rather, an exile of the king. The arguments which will so assure him, would naturally prove sufficient at Versailles. Now, as you have informed me, this unhappy *Sieur d’Aumont* is an incorrigible drunkard, of a notoriously brawling disposition, and his love affairs—”

“He is mad! He is absolutely mad!” declared the baron. “He wants to give up his inheritance and go to Canada. He’s gone mad, I tell you!”

The effect of these words was remarkable. The bishop looked up to an invisible heaven, rolled his eyes, and folded his hands with an air of complacent finality. The intendant stared with fallen jaw, then muttered something inaudible.

“What did you say?” snapped the baron at him.

“I said—why in the fiend’s name didn’t you make such a charge in the first place?” retorted the badgered officer. “Instead of all this talk about mutiny and bad conduct, why not have said he was mad? This simplifies the whole affair.”

“Oh!” grunted the baron. “Does it? Then the charge is made. Now what?”

“Evidence of his madness,” said the intendant. “It is necessary, of course; this report must be clear as daylight. Besides the fact that he wishes to give up his heritage and go to Canada, which in itself confirms the charge, what additional evidence have you?”

The baron seemed about to explode once more, when the bishop made a slight gesture and leaned over toward the royal officer, in whose ear he whispered five words. At once the face of the intendant cleared in relief as though those five words had settled every doubt, had made the affair certain beyond any mistake. From his pocket he drew a folded, sealed and addressed paper, and handed it to the bishop.

The baron had been watching all this in astonishment, but now a glare of satisfaction filled his eyes, for this paper bore the bishop’s seal. The worthy prelate, smiling, touched a bell-cord and a servitor appeared.

“You will bid the Sieur d’Aumont to our presence,” said the bishop, and then turned to his guest. “I presume, M. le Baron, the usual course will be followed?”

The baron stiffened. “This rascal may be a madman, but his honor is mine. Naturally there will be no arrest.”

The intendant nodded, and the bishop smiled. Then the door was opened, and Roger d’Aumont entered the room, with a dignified bow to the three men at the table. Aware of why he had been summoned, he eyed them with a certain insolence, a cool disdain, that became him well and lightened the heavy stamp of liquor in his face. The intendant rose and bowed, and handed him the letter.

“Monsieur, here is a letter from His Majesty to the prior of the abbey of Mont St. Michel, which I have the honor to request you will present in person.”

D’Aumont bowed to the intendant. M. le Baron spoke out savagely.

“And when you’ve given up your mad ideas about Canada, you may communicate with me.”

D’Aumont looked at him gravely and bowed. “I fear Canada would be preferable to the sacred Mont, but I have no choice.”

“The letter,” intervened the bishop suavely, to avoid an outbreak between father and son, “is an expression of the royal wish in regard to the Sieur Roger d’Aumont. It will be presented and honored by the said gentleman, I am sure.”

D’Aumont bowed to him. “I assure you of the fact, monsieur. Gentlemen, I thank you for the honor of presenting this letter from His Majesty.”

Flicking an imaginary bit of dust from his gold-laced coat, he turned and departed. The baron glared after him with anger; the bishop, with smiling admiration; the intendant, with relief. The royal officer now rose and took his departure also. When he had gone, the Baron went up to the bishop, who was an intimate friend, and took him by the arm.

“Now come, tell me something! What was it you whispered to that fool of an intendant, so swiftly convincing him my son was mad?”

The bishop smiled slightly.

“My dear friend, this intendant is newly appointed, and comes from the south. He is not yet accustomed to our Normans, and he is a man imbued with all the southern superstitions. I merely appealed to his superstition, in order to further—”

“Yes, but what did you say to him?”

“I told him this,” and the bishop repeated the five words which, in English, would become four. “I said: He has red hair! This was all. This was enough. It is common belief that a red-haired man is possessed of the devil.”

The baron took a step backward.

“Yes—but, name of the fiend! I have red hair myself!”

The prelate sank back into his chair and held his sides with laughter.

Meantime, Roger d’Aumont swung into the saddle of the led horse that had been brought behind the coach, and rode from the courtyard. Outside, on the face of the hill, he drew rein. There, miles away against the sea-horizon, hung a shimmering miracle—a fairy pyramid of towers surmounted by a cross glittering in the rays of the afternoon sun. This was Mont St. Michel, seeming as though hung between earth and sea and heaven. Sieur d’Aumont regarded it for a long moment, then his lips twitched.

“My revered father, and my more revered spiritual father, you made one ghastly error!” he murmured whimsically. “You charged the honor of Roger d’Aumont with the delivery of this letter; well and good. You forgot, however, to specify immediate delivery—and so much the worse!”

With a laugh, he touched the horse with his spurs and departed at a mad gallop.

A league outside Avranches, on the south road among the hills, was an old inn by the name of the Rock That Boils. Among those who knew good wines and good cuisine, this inn was in high favor. One end of its big room was given over to an immense hearth, where a system of counterweights kept a ten-foot spit of polished steel turning over the drip-pans, and this spit was continually garnished with all manner of meat and fowls. The huge and

rubricund host, formerly cook to the prior of St. Benoit in St. Malo, favored his own wares with great relish.

To this retreat, one of his favorite haunts, Roger d'Aumont turned his steps. His worthy father would have to pay seven hundred livres a year for his keep at the Royal Exile of Mont St. Michel, so he determined to spend his pocketful of gold and have a last good carouse before delivering the *lettre de cachet*.

After some loitering along the way—the Sieur d'Aumont undeniably had an eye for a pretty face, and these were not rare in southern Normandy—he reached the inn, beside its farmhouse and smithy, about the sunset hour. A boy ran out to take his horse as he dismounted. Roger met the portly host in the doorway, laughed, and clasped him in an exuberant girth-shaking hug.

“Ha, my old rascal! Now we shall have a bout of the best, you and I—look out for your laurels, old tun-belly! Under the table you go this night. What do you say to a bird or two from M. de Kerlain’s preserves, eh? Shall we sally forth—”

“For the love of Sainte Anne, my lord, guard your tongue!” exclaimed the host in an access of terror. “Poaching is a joke to you, but it means death to me—there are two travelers inside here!”

“Eh? So much the better; we shall have company,” declared Roger gaily. He flung out one hand, and a shower of gold coins shot across the threshold to clink on the stone-flagged floor inside. The portly host, however, caught his arm and dragged him aside.

“Hark you, my lord—it is a strange thing! These two men talk together in a queer rattling language like the Moorish tongue. At St. Benoit I have heard the prior, Dom Nicolas Hougats, speak all these languages of the orient. Yet one of these men calls the other by your name—Roger—and this man is the image of you, my lord—”

“Very well. I’m thirsty as a soul in hell, so let us behold the marvel,” exclaimed d'Aumont, and pushed on into the inn room.

Two men sat talking in a corner beside the wide fireplace, whence issued a most appetizing aroma as the spit slowly turned and four fat birds browned. It was too dark to see the two men distinctly, but d'Aumont advanced toward them and bowed.

“Messieurs, I am promising myself the pleasure of a drinking bout against our host yonder, who I assure you is not to be despised at trencher or bottle. To find other gentlemen here is a pleasure; will you do us the honor of joining us?”

“With right good will, monsieur, since we are spending the night here.” Roger Domont rose and stepped out a pace, so that the firelight fell upon him. “My friend yonder is from Canada, where he holds the seigneurie of St. Martin—”

“From Canada!” cried d’Aumont, and opened his arms. “Sieur St. Martin, I embrace you with all my heart! The ambition of my life is to leave this country and go to Canada, hunt the redskins and English, find the beaver skins, seek glory and adventure!”

St. Martin responded with a bearlike hug that made the noble gasp. D’Aumont escaped laughingly.

“Good! Well met—you shall tell me of Canada, eh? Messieurs, I am Roger d’Aumont, son of the Baron de la Villeneuve.”

“Eh? Eh?” St. Martin peered at him. “The devil! But my friend here is also Roger Domont, and may the fiend swallow me if he is not you in the face, barring the scalplocks on your lips!”

The two Rogers stared each at the other, and the glow of firelight trickily increased the keen resemblance between them. Here was the same vivid red hair, the same vividly blue eye, the same contour of brow and nostril and chin; there the resemblance ceased. The American’s eyes were not so merry and reckless, were more icily cold, than those of the Frenchman. He bore no dissipated air, and lacked a certain fiery intolerance in the other’s features. However, the difference was a slight one. Domont put out his hand with a laugh.

“Well met, monsieur; I believe, indeed, that we are cousins of a sort. My grandfather left this part of France and settled in Boston, and my father changed the name to conform with American ways. D’Aumont and Domont—the same name, you perceive—”

“Ha, right, right!” D’Aumont gripped the extended hand, then embraced the American vigorously. “My heart to you, fair cousin! I remember well the story. My grandfather’s brother fled the country—when was it? Under Richelieu—Cinq Mars—La Rochelle—oh, I’ve forgotten the accursed time; or was it some plot against Mazarin? No matter, your face is sufficient guarantee. How now, fat tun-belly! Could ye not recognize my cousin, who is also Sieur d’Aumont? If he were in my shoes, he would be termed Rodomont—”

St. Martin uttered a bellow of merriment. “Faith of a Mohawk, but he is so known! And for the same reason, I’ll warrant—a play on the signature and the name—”

All four men broke into a roaring gale of laughter. The boy had fetched wine and was filling three cups; d'Aumont forced the fat host to fill one for himself, and thus was begun the evening.

Doors were barred and candles were lighted, the birds were taken from the spit and replaced by others—rarer and more royal fowl poached from the nearby estates of a Breton noble. Dusty, cobwebbed bottles came up from the cellar, the boy was banished to the upstairs room, and mine host assumed full charge.

Across the table the three men talked eagerly, rapidly, stirred into ready intimacy by the singular chance of their meeting. Domont told how he had been captured by two French frigates in Hudson's Bay, while fur-trading; and how, released, he was now homing again toward Boston to seek his fortunes anew. St. Martin chipped in with tales of Rodomont the fur-pirate, nor would he hush until d'Aumont plied him avidly for information about the new world. He described his longing to get out of France and roam—an atavistic tendency due to old viking forebears—and confided to them how he had broken absolutely with his worthy parent and was in prime disgrace at court. In twenty minutes the three men were firm friends, in an hour they were intimates. Yet Domont said nothing of the letter he carried, and d'Aumont did not mention the other letter lying in his own pocket.

By the time mine host cleared away the dishes and joined them with more bottles of wine and a flagon of fiery Calvados apple brandy, not to mention some very racy monastic tales, the party was grown decidedly merry. Sieur d'Aumont, enthusiastic in the extreme over his new-found cousin, insisted on increasing the resemblance by chopping off his mustache and tuft of beard. To this task St. Martin applied his razor-edged tomahawk. He was then forced to display his skill in hurling the weapon, to the vast admiration and interest of d'Aumont and mine host. Presently d'Aumont confided that he would assuredly never be allowed to leave France and seek Canada, whereat St. Martin proffered a maudlin suggestion.

"Faith of a Mohawk, listen to me! Crop that long hair of yours and stain it black, then powder it—and you're a different man! Then ride to St. Malo with us, and we'll all go to Canada in company!"

D'Aumont acclaimed the idea uproariously, and so did the fat host, for whose head the old Calvados had proved a trifle too old. No sooner said than done. St. Martin put his knife into play, trimmed the long red locks, and amid hilarious laughter the host rubbed the better part of an ink-horn into d'Aumont's head, spilling much of it over his face in the process. Roger Domont, having kept well clear of the apple brandy, smoked his pipe and looked on with twinkling eyes.

“But, the devil!” cried out d’Aumont suddenly. He staggered to his feet, clapping hand to pocket. “I forgot something—what was it? Oh, yes the letter, the accursed letter! The letter confided to the honor of Roger d’Aumont! Here is the thing—”

He flung out upon the table a letter showing a seal and superscription. The fat host, by this time quite forgetful of his place, seized and held it to a candle’s light. He knew the seal, as well he might, having more than once experienced its jurisdiction.

“Seal of his grace—the bishop!” he declared unsteadily. “Can’t read writing—but I can read this seal—Bishop of Avranches, devil fly away with him!”

“Oh, yes, the bishop,” said d’Aumont vaguely. He poured himself another drink of the fiery brown Calvados, half fell back into his seat, sipped his drink, and then blinked down frowningly at the letter. “Foxy old bishop! Seems to me he did give me the letter; no, it was somebody else—pox upon me if I can remember! Honor pledged to be delivered by Roger d’Aumont—here, coz Roger! See who the devil it’s addressed to, for the letters are all curiously blurred to my eye. Whoever wrote it must have used a queer quill.”

Domont reached out, took the letter, and read the superscription aloud: “To our dear and well beloved Dom Julien Doyte, Superior of the abbey of Mont St. Michel.”

“Very ’portant letter,” hiccuped the fat host seriously. “Letter from bishop to prior of the mount. I tell you, I have reason to know this accursed seal! Bread and water for a week—”

D’Aumont broke in with a nod of confirmation.

“True enough, it’s the seal of the bishop. I remember, now—letter had to be delivered without fail by Roger d’Aumont. But if I do it, how the devil can I appear with my hair blackened? Anyone would know I’m not Roger d’Aumont any more! And how can I go on to St. Malo with you gen’lemen, if I’m going to Mont St. Michel—oh, the fiend seize me! I’m all tongue-twisted and in a muddle.” He broke off laughingly.

It was quite true that the *lettre de cachet* had been sealed by the bishop, after a careful perusal of the contents. Despite their name, these direct orders of the king were rarely closed by the royal seal, a graceful touch reserved for notable political “exiles,” as the recipients were termed.

“Give me the letter,” said Roger Domont suddenly. “I’ll pass for you and make the delivery. I have another letter to deliver—it fits in well. You can ride to St. Malo and meet us there.”

“Death of my life, it is done!” bawled d’Aumont in delight. “Pledge me your honor!”

“It is pledged.”

D’Aumont swayed to his feet, reached across the table, and managed to embrace the American in maudlin joy, his ink-besmeared countenance set in a laugh of wild merriment.

“Remarkable idea, cousin—cousin Roger! Solved all the diff’culty—honor of the house in your hands—good hands—”

“How do I reach the place from here?” demanded Domont. “By way of Avranches?”

“Not at all,” bleated the fat host. “Go to Pontorson, two leagues from the Mont, the nearest town. Water all ’round the place at high tide—quicksands at low tide—most devilish place to get at—”

From the darkness of the corner, where a ladder ascended to the upper floor, came a shrill cry in the voice of the boy.

“Messieurs! Messieurs! There are horses coming at the gallop—the *maréchaussée*!”

“Bring ’em in to join us!” roared d’Aumont. The host, however, came to his feet with sudden pallor in his rubicund visage.

Outside sounded a rushing thunder of hooves, sharp cries, a rattle of steel. A fist pounded on the door, and then the butt of a pistolet.

“Open, rats, open!” blared a strong voice. “Open in the king’s name!”

Mine host waddled hastily toward the door. Roger d’Aumont, with a furious oath, shoved his chair back crashingly, and stood fumbling at his sword.

“Call me a rat, do you? Foul fiend strike you! Let the scoundrels inside and I’ll show ’em—”

At a sign from Domont, St. Martin seized the angry, fuddled Norman and bore him down into a seat. The doors flew open. Into the room surged half a dozen cavaliers, headed by an officer, whose sword-point threatened the host.

“Who’s here?” demanded the latter. “Speak up, you fat rogue!”

“Mercy, M. du Moulin, Mercy!” quavered the host, recoiling from the bared steel. “Here are only the Sieur d’Aumont and his cousin and the Sieur St. Somebody—St. Martin—”

Roger Domont, whose head was fairly clear, stepped forward.

“What does this intrusion mean, monsieur?” he demanded. The officer peered at him, then uttered an exclamation and a burst of laughter.

“Roger—and shaved! Pardon me, my friend—devil shrive me if I thought to find you in this kennel—and shaved! Tonsure next, eh?” He sobered suddenly. “Two cavaliers of the guard were murdered today on the Avranches road, and we’re scouring the country. Have you encountered any strangers?”

“My cousin, here, and Sieur St. Martin from Canada, lately presented to His Majesty at Versailles,” said Domont quietly. “No one else has been here. Come, join us over a bottle and let your men ride on—”

“Thanks, I’ve no time for it now. A man with his head split, imagine! Split by some devilish weapon flung through the air! Well, we must on our way. Drink a health for me, d’Aumont, until our next meeting!”

The party surged out and were gone. Then Roger d’Aumont broke clear, leaped erect, and his sword flashed forth.

“Call me a rat—you gang of scullions! Rat in your throat! Have at you —”

Eyes blazing with fury, he lurched across the floor toward the entrance. The host tried to block him and failed; outside, the cavaliers were mounting. Then St. Martin was over the table in one leap. If the drunken noble got outside and attacked the guards, there would be no end of explanations and inquiries and worse. St. Martin caught the Norman at the doorway and whirled him around by the shoulder.

An oath of insane rage burst from d’Aumont, and he lunged. The Canadian evaded the thrust, skipped nimbly aside, and d’Aumont drove at him again with transferred fury. The sword-point pierced his left arm above the elbow. St. Martin uttered one savage snarl, caught up a long billet of firewood, and hurled it. Struck fairly across the head by the blow, Roger d’Aumont staggered against the wall and then collapsed in a limp heap.

Meanwhile, the fat host hurriedly closed the door and barred it. Standing with his back against it, he stared at the scene before him. He had been sobered by fright.

“And now—the devil himself to pay!” he cried, and signed himself nimbly. “Here is the Sieur d’Aumont dead—and heard you what was said, Sieur St. Martin? A man of the royal guard with his head chopped open? And it is you, you who throw axes through the air, whom they are seeking! We shall all be broken on the wheel for this—”

“Peace, you fat fool!” growled St. Martin, and looked at his comrade. “Rodomont, this burly devil knows. Shall I slit his throat?”

“No; he is to be trusted.” Roger Domont came forward. “Let’s see your arm—ah! Not bad. Here, master host, get this wound bound up. I’ll attend to

our friend here.”

“He’s not dead,” said the Canadian sourly, as Domont knelt above the limp figure by the wall. Examining the ink-stained scalp, feeling that injured head, Domont rose with a grave face.

“Not dead, but you’ve broken his skull. He must have a surgeon.”

He stood watching, while St. Martin’s wound was bound up by the unhappy host. Then he spoke, quietly taking charge of the situation.

“Sieur d’Aumont is badly hurt, but the damage is far from mortal; can you keep him here, fat one? He has money; pay yourself from his gold. It is evident he wants to keep his identity secret, therefore respect his wish. When he is able to travel, he can come on to St. Malo—better yet, I’ll return here for him. What say you?”

The fat man quivered. “Yes, I can arrange it, monsieur. The surgeon at Pontorson is a discreet man—the surgeon of the town, not of the prison, remember!”

It was arranged that the two friends, departing early in the morning, should send back the surgeon from Pontorson, and on this they carried d’Aumont up to bed.

When they departed at dawn, the hurt nobleman was still unconscious, but without fever. Whether his coma came from his injury or from a drunken stupor, was by no means certain.

CHAPTER III

THREE GENTLEMEN ARE ASTONISHED

IT was a new Roger Domont who rode from the little inn long ere the sun was up. He had now doffed most of his rough and sober costume, and wore instead the gold-laced uniform, the plumed hat, the sword, of Roger d'Aumont. Also, he was mounted on the excellent blooded horse of his distant relative, and he was in a hurry.

"We owe my good cousin much, St. Martin; I hope he is not seriously hurt," he observed, as they wound along the yellow hill road.

"Needs must when the devil drives. How do we owe him so much?"

"This letter he gave me to deliver. Mont St. Michel is a royal prison, so we might have found entry very difficult, and our errand still more difficult; but now it seems that the way is cleared by the letter from the bishop. Also, I shall take occasion to pay my respects to this German nobleman, this Baron de Karque or whatever his name is."

"Eh?" St. Martin frowned. "I do not see how he is a German baron and at the same time an abbot—"

"Not an abbot, but a commendatory abbot!" Domont chuckled. "That is to say, he is abbot in name only, enjoys the revenues and the titles, and is doubtless some highly-favored man at court. The real ruler of the place will be the prior."

"Well, why are you in so confounded a hurry?" grumbled the other. "The place is solid. It has been there a long time. It cannot escape us."

"I've been calculating." Domont chuckled, and drew forth a rude charcoal drawn map provided by the fat host. "Here, look at this, woods-loper!"

"Well, I see it," grunted St. Martin. "I see it. What is that brain of yours driving at?"

"Why, just this! How far will a huge coach, drawn by weary horses, go in one afternoon? Not far, you may be sure! It must be a good five leagues from the spot where we met the coach yesterday, to Pontorson. On from there to the Mont is another two leagues, but it is possible to reach the Mont only at low tide, since the abbey stands out in the sea. Moreover, the coach carries two women; after these long leagues up hill and down dale, they will not be up and about at any early hour."

The Canadian drove a sharp look at his companion.

“The girl with the yellow hair, eh?”

“Precisely; some relative of this German baron, at present graciously visiting his titular abbey. We may be in time to catch her at Pontorson.”

“And why catch her?”

“In order to gain the Mont in her company. We need all the good impression we can create, if we’re to earn the Armenian’s pay.”

“Ah! Is this the only reason?”

“No,” said Domont frankly. “I’d like to see her again.”

The other grinned. “Well said! She’ll remember you—yesterday she laughed at your black-smudged face, though you look very different now. So that is why we go to Pontorson!”

“We must go there in any event. Presently we shall come into the highway, leading to Pontorson; from there is the best means of access to the Mont, across the sands. They are dangerous, those sands.”

“It’s a most devilish complicated trail. I don’t like you in the guise of your cousin, either. I begin to wish you had not promised to deliver his letter for him. He may look like you, but he’s not you; something confoundedly unstable about him.”

“Thanks.” Domont chuckled. “Wait and see. We’re not in Mont St. Michel yet.”

St. Martin shrugged.

Once the long hill was topped, they put the horses to full speed and thereafter spared the animals no whit, for speed was essential. By sunrise they were in the main road, passed Pontaubault without pause, and spurred for Pontorson with the sun at their backs. So, still early, they topped the hill above Pontorson, little more than a straggling village dominated by the Charité, a hospital and prison for the poorer folk unable to afford the luxuries of the Mont. And now this sea-girt goal of theirs burst full into view at its best and most splendid aspect.

Tide was at flood. Surrounded by more than a league of water inshore, where the sails of fishing craft flashed in the sunlight red and brown, the pinnacled abbey rose from the sea like a thing created by fairy hands. Small wonder St. Martin caught his breath as he gazed, or that the eye of Domont kindled with admiration. It appeared as though these towers must have been miraculously built in the air, to then take root in the sea, rather than to have been reared upward by puny men. Seeing it, thus, one could well comprehend why the usual term applied to the church and the whole Mont

was, simply, 'The Marvel.' A marvel it was, outside and inside the finest flower of medieval architecture to be found in all France.

"On!" said Domont, and they pushed their foam-lathered horses down the gentle winding slope into Pontorson.

With the tide high and the sea surrounding the Mont, they were now certain to find their quarry in the town, and the search was no difficult one. The place was largely composed of inns, which battered upon the pilgrims flooding hither from half Europe. Ahead, by the turn of the road, was the tavern of the Croix Brancard with a baggage-laden coach standing in its courtyard. When the two men rode up, they saw a dozen saddled horses being hastily baited; and as Domont dismounted, came swaggering from the inn no other than his acquaintance of the previous afternoon—Comte de Lussan, special delegate of the king.

"Ha, Rodomont!" he cried gaily, then halted and stared. "What the devil! You have shaved! And here is that rascally seigneur from Canada—"

The count stopped short, gazing in amazement at St. Martin, whom he recognized at once. It was evident that he took Domont for the Sieur d'Aumont. Two other officers emerged from the inn, and the situation was awkward until St. Martin saved it by his quick wit. With a gesture toward de Lussan, he turned and addressed Domont.

"Here, Sieur Roger, is the troublesome sprig of nobility of whom I spoke to you. Faith; I thought yesterday he and my friend the Bostonnais would come to swords! Since you appear to know him, you may vouch for my honesty of heart and my spiritual welfare—he has already examined my papers."

Domont smiled. "Why so astounded M. de Lussan?" he asked. "Do you know this excellent gentleman from Canada—this Sieur St. Martin? Surely you remember his presentation to His Majesty?"

De Lussan scowled a little. "Hm! I might ask why he is now with you, Roger! Only yesterday he was keeping company with a black-faced rogue from America, who, as I now recall, somewhat favored you—"

"Eh?" Domont assumed the brusque arrogance of his cousin. "Eh? Monsieur, do I hear you aright—I am a blackamoor, am I?"

"Oh, devil take you touchy Normans!" cried de Lussan, and laughed out, "No, no, my friend—you misconstrued my words."

"Then allow me to present M. de St. Martin—he was fighting with another man last evening when I encountered them; a man, indeed, with a smudge of black across his face! He left the fellow hurt, and wanting to see the famous Mont, he rode on with me."

“Ah, that accounts for it, naturally.” De Lussan bowed to the Canadian, then clapped Domont on the shoulder and uttered a low laugh. “I heard you were bound for the Mont, Roger. A family matter, I understand. It has nothing to do with that duel behind the Palais Royale?”

Domont shook his head and smiled, not being able to do anything else. It was obvious de Lussan knew the real d’Aumont and was thoroughly deceived.

“Well, luck favor you!” went on the other easily. “I’ve had the good fortune to gather in an *évadé* and have despatched him under guard to the Bastille, and now I shall be some little while at Mont St. Michel on other business for His Majesty.”

“Good news!” Domont was mystified yet dared not betray his ignorance. “I suppose this Canadian seigneur may see the Mont as a pilgrim? Perhaps on the strength of a letter which I carry to the prior—”

The count broke into a roar of laughter. “I was in Avranches last night and heard about your letter—aye! We may house St. Martin in a dungeon for a night or two, if you like.”

St. Martin met this pleasantry with a grimace. Then, however, the two officers behind de Lussan came forward and bowed to Domont, gravely.

“Monsieur,” said one, “may we have a word with you apart, if M. de Lussan will pardon our importunity?”

“With all my heart.” De Lussan turned again to the inn. “Roger, I’ll order something to eat for you and St. Martin—you’ve not had your morning draught yet? Don’t detain him overlong, de Beauveu! You gentlemen have already drunk, I think? Good.”

The count vanished. The two officers met the puzzled gaze of Domont with somber looks, obviously antagonistic.

“I trust you recall the occasion of our last meeting, monsieur?” asked de Beauveu.

“Perfectly,” returned Domont. “Should I be detained from my morning repast for that reason, monsieur?”

“For that reason we have come here to detain you from your mission to the Mont, of which we have heard.”

“The devil! All the world appears to know my errand there!”

The officer shrugged. “We arrived here yesterday to intercept you. I trust you will find the time convenient to settle our slight affair. De Lussan will keep the chevaliers of the guard away, while we step outside to a garden ready to hand.”

A question of a duel, then! Domont laughed at this, but it was no laughing matter, if he were to maintain his new identity. He turned to St. Martin.

“My friend, join M. de Lussan, I beg of you. He will be eager to hear of your encounter with the Bostonnais. Your wound does not trouble you?”

“Not in the least.” St. Martin had no idea of abandoning his comrade, for he could not miss the significance of the words that had been exchanged. “If you require a second, I am at your service, with knife or tomahawk—”

“First a bite to eat.” Domont nodded pleasantly to the officers. “Make what arrangements seem best, gentlemen, and presently I shall be at your service.”

They bowed. Domont was advancing toward the inn, when from somewhere among the upper rooms came the frightened scream of a woman, followed almost at once by the roar of a pistol. St. Martin jerked about, toward the stone stairs winding upward from a corner of the inn courtyard.

“This way, Rodomont!”

They leaped up the stairs together. The court below erupted questioning, shouting men who blocked the approaches. The stairs took them into a passage, where they had only to follow the acrid scent of gunpowder to reach a door already open. Then they halted, checked abruptly by the scene before them.

A woman stood shrinking back against the opposite wall, smoking pistol in hand; it was the young and golden-haired woman of the coach. The bosom of her dress was torn, and blood was welling across it from a raking cut along her right shoulder. Her eyes were not upon the two intruders, but were fastened in fright and horror upon the figure of her traveling companion. This older woman lay on the floor, feebly struggling to one elbow, and a glance told Domont she was dying, a bullet through her breast. In her hand was still gripped the knife which had slashed the younger woman.

“Hold the door, St. Martin!” said Domont in English, and stepped into the room. As he swung the heavy door shut, the eyes of the girl lifted to him, hunted, harried.

“You are English!” she cried out. “Oh! This woman attacked me—”

“Quick, quick!” The dying woman lifted her failing gaze to Domont’s uniform. “Call de Lussan, quickly! She has a letter—in her bosom—a—a letter—tear it from the false wench! De Lussan! De Lussan! She has—a—a letter for—for the—Nameless Exile—”

Death rattled in the woman’s throat. She fell prostrate, and so died.

Domont, stupefied by these words, no less than by the scene itself, lifted his astounded gaze to the girl. She dropped the weapon, took a step toward him.

“Help me!” she cried, implorant. “The woman was a spy—I did not know it! She was a French woman in London, asked for a place: I took her when my uncle sent for me—how was I to know? She acted as interpreter, because I speak no French. And the Duchess of Marlborough herself asked me to carry the letter—”

The girl had lost her head, apparently, yet Domont had a swift perception that she was not nearly so excited as she appeared. He checked her with uplifted hand, spoke in English.

“Madame, in heaven’s name be coherent! You are the daughter of Baron de Karque?”

“His niece, Elise de Bebambourg. When my father died three months ago, the baron sent for me to join him here—”

“Very well. The letter, swiftly!”

Her hand flashed to her bosom as she drew back. “No! I must either deliver or destroy it—I cannot give it to you—”

“I give you my word of honor I shall either deliver or destroy it. Swift, or we both are lost! Do not reveal to anyone that I speak English. Don’t trust de Lussan. What it means I don’t know, but men will die outside there if you hesitate!”

Domont spoke rapidly, desperately. From the passage outside he caught angry voices, the cool danger-laugh of St. Martin, the trampling of feet, the sharp, imperative accents of Comte de Lussan. For an instant the girl met his gaze, then she drew a folded and sealed paper from her bosom and handed it to him.

“I trust you, sir,” she said simply.

Domont seized it, thrust it from sight, and leaped to the door. This he swung open to reveal St. Martin, knife in hand, facing the angry de Lussan.

“M. de Lussan!” he exclaimed. “Enter, I pray you, but leave your men outside. This is something very strange—”

The count flung a word at his men and strode into the room. At Domont’s gesture, St. Martin followed, then shut the door again. Knowing he must keep the situation in his own control, Domont spoke rapidly.

“This woman attacked the young demoiselle, yonder—look at her throat! Fortunately, mademoiselle had a loaded pistol and used it. Before the woman died, she spoke your name as though she knew you—”

“What did she say?” De Lussan started at this information.

“Your name, and died as she uttered it. This demoiselle, I suppose, is the daughter of Baron de Karque. She speaks no French—”

“The niece, the niece,” said de Lussan. His dark gaze went to the girl, and he bowed, and addressed her in very fluent English. “Mademoiselle, I regret this happening. What was the cause of the attack?”

“I—she tried to rob me, I think.” Desperation was in the eyes of Elise de Bebambourg. “She seized at my dress, then tried to kill me.”

“Ah! You carry something very precious?” said the count smoothly. “Jewels, perhaps?”

“No.” The girl shrank a little from his hard gaze. “Nothing! She must have thought I had jewels; oh, she was mad, mad!”

“She was not mad yesterday when I met and spoke with you at the roadside inn, and directed your driver on his road,” said de Lussan thoughtfully. “Let me have your treasures, mademoiselle. I will keep them for you.”

The star-glinting eyes of the girl widened in terror at his manner. Domont quietly stepped forward and touched the arm of the noble. De Lussan swung on him angrily.

“Back, Roger! There’s more to this than you know.”

“Indeed!” said Domont. “Perhaps you are acquainted with this dead woman, monsieur?”

“I? Not at all,” denied the count, though his eyes narrowed with the words.

“I understand a little English,” said Domont, “I think mademoiselle says the woman was mad, and that she had no jewels, and you have twice given her the lie. Perhaps I am wrong—my knowledge of the language is horribly imperfect.”

“You are quite correct,” said de Lussan, and sneered a little.

“Then, of course,” said Domont, “I have only one course open to me.”

“And that course?”

Unexpectedly, Domont struck him across the face, struck him heavily and sent him reeling—then snatched at the door and jerked it open, revealing the scene to the crowded men outside.

“You have twice given this lady the lie, monsieur. As a Norman gentleman, I take much pleasure in chastising you. Mademoiselle, will you accept my arm? Ah, she speaks no French—one of you men run for a surgeon from the hospital.”

Only at this instant did Domont recollect that he had not yet despatched the town surgeon to attend the real d'Aumont. In response to his gesture, the girl stepped forward and took his arm.

De Lussan, meantime, stood in helpless fury, yet his brain was hard at work. This meant a public admission, or else failure; self-control mastering his whirlwind of rage and chagrin, he made swift decision and spoke.

"One moment! M. d'Aumont, as one gentleman to another, you shall answer to me for this blow. At the same time, I am a special delegate of His Majesty, and I order you to halt. You have intervened in an affair beyond your knowledge; if you persist, you shall suffer for it."

"For a gentleman who forgets himself, I have no regard," Domont returned coolly. "For His Majesty's lieutenant, I have every respect. And what do you wish with me, M. the delegate of the king?"

"This woman," and de Lussan pointed to the dead body, "was an agent of M. de Pontchartrain—"

"Ah, a spy!" broke in Domont. "Then, monsieur, you are a self-convicted liar, for only a moment ago you told me you did not know her."

De Lussan went livid with fury, yet kept himself in hand.

"Either this woman was mad, which I do not think," he pursued steadily, "or else she knew that Mlle. de Bebambourg was carrying some illegal message. Since the matter is now a public one through your stupidity, I must state that the woman yesterday informed me she suspected some such letter. I believe mademoiselle is carrying it innocently. I have no desire to affront her. I suggest, then, that in order to set these doubts at rest and perhaps to save herself from undue suspicion, she allow a woman of the Charité to search her person and bring her belongings to me for inspection. If nothing is found amiss, it will be obvious that the unfortunate woman here was attempting robbery. With your permission, I will put my suggestion into English."

He did so, but before he had finished, Domont broke in.

"Perhaps, monsieur," he said cuttingly, "you would prefer to make the search yourself?"

This was almost too much, since de Lussan was a gentleman of great birth.

"Monsieur," he returned, his voice shaking with passion, "do not forget I have the power to make arrests. I prefer to deal with you privately, but—"

The girl turned to him and spoke in English.

“M. de Lussan, I refuse to submit to such an indignity at your bidding. I am willing, however, to give you my word that I bear no letters or message whatever, except three letters to my uncle from his relatives in London. These I will give you to carry on to him and examine at leisure, if he desires you to read them. If, when he learns of this affair, he wishes to have me searched, I shall submit. But I think you will answer to him for all this matter when he learns of it.”

De Lussan met her proud and collected gaze for a long moment, and bit his lip. His fury had led him too far. After all, the dead woman might have made a mistake. If the powerful de Karque took this matter to the king, not even M. de Pontchartrain could save him, for the old king was very chary of what was done in his name. This affair had been horribly bungled, and withdrawal was imperative.

“Mademoiselle, if you give your word that you carry only the three letters to your uncle,” he returned, “this affair shall be settled without further trouble to you.”

“I give you my word of honor, sir,” returned the girl quietly, “that I have those three letters, and those alone, for delivery.”

To doubt the truth of her words was impossible. De Lussan bowed low.

“I beg you to accept my very humble apologies for the inconvenience caused you by my mistaken zeal. If I appeared to doubt your word, of your kindness pardon me. This gentleman will escort you to another chamber. Outside there!” He spoke in French to the men at the door. “All of you, go below! One go after a surgeon—”

“He is mounting the stairs now, monsieur,” cried a man outside.

Elsie again took the arm of Domont, who escorted her to a door farther down the passage, where waited a frightened woman of the inn. St. Martin followed them. Domont bowed the girl into the room, motioned the woman in, saw the surgeon enter, and closed the door after them. He caught St. Martin’s arm, and spoke swiftly.

“Go quickly. Find the town surgeon—not this man from the prison. Tell him about the other Roger; get him off in haste. Then come back here and join me.”

St. Martin departed hurriedly. Domont, in leisurely fashion, followed him down the now empty passage to the head of the curved stone stairway, descending into the inn courtyard. Here he found de Lussan awaiting him.

“Monsieur,” said the officer abruptly, “I cannot brook either your words or your blow.”

“What would you?” Domont smiled at him. “Arrest me, perhaps?”

The other made a quick, passionate gesture of repressed fury.

“Let us forget my position. As a gentleman, I demand satisfaction.”

“I am at your service,” said Domont, then frowned. “Ah! Wait a moment. I have not yet had my morning drink. Afterward, I have an appointment with M. de Beauveu, whom I shall thrust through the shoulder. This finished, I shall be happy to treat you likewise.”

De Lussan’s teeth showed in a snarl of indescribable rage. The slight scar across his cheek glowed as a dark smear.

“Monsieur, you will not live to present your letter to the prior of the Mont.”

“I’ll wager you the sum of five livres on the event,” said Domont reflectively. It was clear the Sieur d’Aumont was not considered a very skillful swordsman.

“Done. I shall have the pleasure of collecting the debt from your father, monsieur.”

Domont laughed, and descended the stairs. Picking his way through the throng of excited and staring cavaliers, he entered the inn and took a seat by the fireplace to await his meager breakfast and the return of St. Martin.

His thoughts dwelt with a troubled wonder on the imbroglio in which he found himself now involved. He was quite confident he could pass as his distant cousin; this was the least of his troubles, after de Lussan had been so well deceived in the matter. But what was this affair of the mysterious prisoner of Mont St. Michel?

Certain points were significant and clear. The entire provincial forces, and a special royal deputy from Paris, were afoot for the capture of an Armenian named Ketchedourian. Why? In order to keep the man’s mouth shut, and to prevent the delivery of a letter to the Nameless Exile. Who, then, was this Nameless Exile? A Frenchman, a noble?

Unlikely. The minister’s spy at London had accompanied and had nearly trapped Elsie de Bebamourg, bearing a letter to the same mysterious prisoner. A letter, this time, from the Duchess of Marlborough, the woman who was absolute ruler of England in fact if not in name, the Lady Sarah at whose beck and nod half of Europe went to peace or war. And was this golden-haired girl so innocent of the intrigue as she had seemed? Domont fancied not.

“This Nameless Exile must be no ordinary man. The affair begins to look less simple, and my head more unsafe,” reflected the American. “I had to play poor de Lussan the way I did, in order to save the girl—it was a close thing, too. Hm! I don’t like M. de Lussan. There’s the devil’s own mischief

in the man's eyes. I don't like the look of things here, either. I'm bound in honor to deliver or destroy the girl's letter; so, as I don't choose to risk carrying two of the accursed things—"

He took the letter from his pocket, made sure it was the right one, and tossed it into the fire beside him.

Breakfast arrived, and on the heels of it, St. Martin. The wide-shouldered Canadian dropped to a stool and began his meal ravenously.

"Errand done," he said between bites. "The town surgeon's saddling a horse now. Two hours to low tide. Any more trouble?"

"None. I have made an appointment with de Lussan, to follow that with the other officer, de Beauveu."

"Oh! Bad medicine, comrade. I think you'd better give me the Armenian's letter—"

"Watch your words, man, watch your words; never mention again having met that man! We've stumbled into a game of state politics."

"You've stumbled into a wasp's nest."

"Not I. For the past year and more, I've done nothing but practice fence. It was our sole diversion, thanks to our Swiss jailer, an old master of arms who loved extra fees. He tells me I am one of the best swordsmen in France, and I believe him."

"Faith of a Mohawk! You are confident in your ability."

"Does it pay to under-estimate one's self? Now listen." Domont leaned over and tapped the other's knee. "All this business looks perilous to me. I strongly advise you to post on to St. Malo and await me there, and let me finish this errand alone—"

"Bah! I'm not the man to desert you," grunted the Canadian. "If you take the scalp of de Lussan, he may arrest you on the spot."

"No. He's above that. At all events, take the ring." Domont slipped the Armenian's diamond from his finger and handed it to the other man. "You'd better keep it in case of necessity. Carry it in your firebag for safety."

Ten minutes afterward, the two men from the western world re-entered the thronged courtyard. To one side, de Lussan stood talking with the two officers, and he flung a black look at Domont.

"There is an excellent spot for our purpose," he said, "behind the Charité. Does it suit you, M. d'Aumont?"

"I am entirely at your service," said Domont carelessly. "St. Martin, will you oblige me by asking the prison surgeon to attend us? Tell him that M. de Beauveu's right arm will require a sling, and M. de Lussan will require a

bandage for his left arm; a slight thrust will not incapacitate him for any length of time.”

De Beauveu’s second laughed a little. “I hope you have improved in fence, M. d’Aumont, since your recent lucky affair behind the Palais Royale!”

Domont, assuming the swiftly intolerant mien of his cousin, lightly struck the officer across the cheek.

“For this,” he exclaimed, “I shall have the pleasure of showing you that the aforesaid affair did not depend on luck—after I have finished with M. de Lussan. You shall have it directly through the shoulder also, my dear sir, in order to keep M. de Beauveu company.”

The other flushed, bowed, and turned away.

Fifteen minutes later, the five men and the prison surgeon were standing in a little glade behind the prison and hospital buildings. The first “En Garde!” sounded. It was exactly two minutes later when de Beauveu cursed and dropped his sword, thrust neatly through the right shoulder.

“Drunken man’s luck,” murmured de Lussan, advancing into the open with bared blade.

“Not at all,” and Domont smiled. “En garde, monsieur! There is no necessity of waiting, I assure you. I do not need the rest.”

The steel clashed. De Lussan’s face passed from a confident sneer to swift incredulity, then to amazed desperation, and was finally set in swift fury. It was slightly less than four minutes when the sword of Domont passed through his left arm above the elbow. He cried out fiercely that they should continue, and the seconds hesitated.

“Not at all—I have no desire to kill M. de Lussan,” said Domont. “Besides, there is another gentleman awaiting his turn.”

The other officer, serving as de Lussan’s second, threw off his coat and advanced. He wielded his blade exactly one minute and a half, then staggered backward with a splotch of red growing on his shoulder.

“So.” Domont sheathed his sword and took his coat from St. Martin. “When I have collected our wager, M. de Lussan, I shall ride on. I have an important letter to deliver, and I think the tide is rapidly clearing the sands.”

Just how important that letter was, Domont could not guess.

CHAPTER IV

THE EFFECT OF A LETTER DEPENDS ON THE SIGNATURE

WHEN the party returned to the inn and it appeared that de Lussan and the two officers were all wounded while the supposed d'Aumont was unscratched, the cavaliers of *maréchaussée* displayed great interest in the affair, many of them congratulating the Norman very heartily. Domont concluded he was altogether too well known to remain here safely, so he ordered the horses saddled. He had already ascertained that Mlle. de Bebambourg was injured very slightly.

Five minutes afterward, he and St. Martin mounted and rode forth. It was not yet ebb tide, but the road was marked by a straggling procession setting forth toward the island—country folk with fuel and provisions, itinerant merchants and peddlers, a score of lusty peasants from the villages held in fief by the abbey, going to relieve their fellows and serve as garrison. Mont St. Michel, an impregnable fortress often besieged but never captured, no longer had any complement of soldiers.

The two friends rode on in silence, passing the unhurried groups of peasants and the creaking carts. They came at length to the wet and glistening stretches of sand already showing bare for miles around, and rode on to the verge of the slowly retreating water. Here they drew rein and dismounted, indescribably impressed by the splendor and unreality of the pinnacled rock now standing forth clear cut against the sky and sea. Domont, who had not dared to use his pipe at the inn, filled and lighted it, and St. Martin followed suit.

“Faith of a Mohawk!” exclaimed the Canadian, who could not stare enough. “No wonder folk call it the Marvel—was it built by men, indeed?”

Domont did not respond; he shared the awed feeling of his companion, and felt that words were futile. Forth from the sea jutted the mighty mass of rock, girdled about the whole shore-line on this side by massive walls, bastions and towers. From these the precipice ran upward unbroken, as it seemed, to the mounting towers and pinnacles of the abbey, whose long buttresses ran sheer down to the solid rock below, heightening the impression of a fairy castle of old romance.

“The effect of perpendicular lines,” observed Domont presently, “is stupendous!”

“So is the effect of horizontal thrusts.” St. Martin turned to him with a slow chuckle. “I’ll never forget de Lussan’s face, when he saw you attending so neatly to de Beauveu! Roger, you have made a mistake. You should have killed that accursed de Lussan.”

“And then be jailed for killing the king’s deputy? Nonsense. We’re well out of a bad matter, St. Martin! Now let’s use caution. You must not appear too friendly with me, since there’s no telling what lies ahead of us here. It may require several days to deliver the letter in my pocket. I understand there is no lack of inns in the town below the abbey; whether we’ll stop there, or will find guest-quarters in the abbey itself, remains to be seen. Delivery of d’Aumont’s letter may get me an invitation to spend some time in the place, and so much the better. Between us, we must find some means of reaching the mysterious prisoner.”

“Hm! I don’t like the idea of shutting myself up in that place.” St. Martin eyed the mount with narrowed gaze. “It’s all very grand from a distance, but I dislike walls. Well, we might be walking on and following the tide.”

“No; make haste slowly.” Domont glanced back to the straggling line of country folk. “Let those people show us the road. Much of the sand around here, I understand, will suck down a man beyond rescue.”

“Ah!” St. Martin stood listening. “Bells—hark to them! Bells of fairyland!”

So it seemed, indeed, as a long, sweet chime drifted faintly on the breeze from the distant mount, and then was silent. The sense of reality was enormously increased. Just as the wondrous place was isolated and cut off from the mainland, so it seemed cut off from all the things of actual life.

“And now,” observed St. Martin in a low voice, “the devil in person, by his looks!”

Domont turned. One of the approaching procession had left the other folk and was walking rapidly toward the two friends. He was a queer creature in all conscience; a little man with one shoulder higher than the other, a shambling gait that none the less covered ground remarkably fast, huge flapping ears amounting to a positive deformity, and rusty black garb carrying a hint of the cassock. Domont thought he had seen this odd creature at the inn, but was not certain.

Coming to them, the misshapen little man doffed his black hat with a humble air, and upon Domont fastened two bright and sparkling eyes, full of a lively craft and a livelier intelligence.

“Your pardon, M. d’Aumont!” he said. His voice was surprisingly low, musical, rich. “I am called the Mole of the Mont; I am the librarian yonder,

scrivener and servant of Dom Julien, our superior. Word came to me that you bear a letter for the prior. If you will permit me to guide you across the sands, it will be great honor.”

“Certainly,” said Domont, and indicated his comrade. “Perhaps you can tell us something of which we were debating. This gentleman is from Canada, and is on his way to St. Malo. He wishes to visit the Mont. I suppose there is an inn where he can stop?”

The Mole broke into laughter, quickly checked.

“Surely, M. d’Aumont, you forget the pilgrimages? The whole town is an inn! However, I think Dom Julien will receive this pilgrim from Canada with keen delight, and will lodge him in the guest chambers of the abbey. He is evidently a great gentleman.”

Domont bit his lip, perceiving he had made a bad error.

Now the three started forward. Domont paused an instant to knock out his pipe, so that St. Martin took the lead with his horse. The hand of the Mole fell upon Domont’s wrist, and as the American met those keen, sparkling brown eyes, the deformed scrivener made a silent gesture, indicating that St. Martin was to be allowed to get well ahead. Domont nodded and slackened pace, falling behind out of earshot.

“Have you forgot, monsieur,” asked the Mole in a low voice, “about the peasant girl who was hanged for poaching on the preserves of the abbey lands?”

Domont looked at the man. “Certainly not,” he ventured, then saw the wide, thin lips of the Mole curve in a sardonic smile. Another error—or a trap?

“I had not heard of the affair before,” said the Mole, and chuckled. “Good player, good player! I like you, monsieur; now see how swiftly the Mole can burrow! I heard of the meeting back there, behind the Charité—in fact, I was hidden among the trees and witnessed it. M. d’Aumont has become a remarkable swordsman in the space of a very short while, eh? Then, he has forgotten a fact known to all the world—the pilgrimages and the inns at the Mont, which are famous. Again, he has suddenly acquired the abominable habit of using tobacco in a pipe and sucking the smoke. What is more to the point, he has also acquired a new and manly look about the eyes —”

“Enough,” said Domont quietly. He understood perfectly that his imposture had been pierced by the keen brown eyes of this deformed man, and that any protest or evasion was absolutely useless. “What of it?”

“What of it? Why, I suppose money in your pocket, and Rodomont at liberty, eh?”

Domont did not entirely understand the drift of this. “Something like it,” he assented vaguely, and the Mole chuckled in bubbling glee. An odd man, this Mole.

“Monsieur, fear me not!” he exclaimed, catching at Domont’s arm. “Me, I like to play a game, and I like you; trust me, and I’m your man. Also, I have heard gossip of what took place in the upper chambers of the inn, behind there, and I can make a shrewd guess at a thing or two. Perhaps it was not for the sake of Rodomont at all, but for the sake of a certain demoiselle with fine yellow hair like golden flax, that you came hither in the place of Rodomont—eh?”

In sudden consternation, Domont inwardly cursed the fellow’s penetration. Then he met those sparkling brown eyes, and a revulsion of feeling swept over him, until a laugh sprang to his lips. The straight, direct gaze of those eyes held a warm friendliness he could not mistake.

“My faith, Mole, you are well named!” he exclaimed whimsically. “Good; I shall trust you as you ask. My name is Roger Domont. My grandfather went to the New World years ago, from these very shores, and the Sieur d’Aumont is a distant relative—”

“I remember, I remember!” As the Mole cried out, he gave a grotesque caper, and his musical voice rang shrill with excitement. Turning to look at them, St. Martin caught a gesture from Domont, and went on again. “Aye, I have read about it in the chronicles—ha! A good game, a good game! Go on, then; what next?”

Under the avid curiosity of those peering eyes, Domont resolved to twist the tale to serve his purpose, avoiding all mention of the Armenian’s letter.

“Why, I met this Canadian gentleman on the road hither, and I met also the niece of Baron de Karque, and I met the Sieur d’Aumont. Now, my Mole, you have made a shrewd guess. I’ll admit to you that I was drawn into the matter from a desire to—shall we say—see more of a certain person. On the other hand, I could also do my cousin a service, and this is the way it fell out—”

He proceeded to relate his meeting with d’Aumont at the tavern of the Rock That Boils, and what had taken place there; but at the finish he was interrupted suddenly.

To his utter astonishment the Mole, who had been softly chuckling to himself, now stared hard at him for a long moment, and then burst into a fit of wild laughter absolutely beyond control. His shrill mirth passed into

paroxysms of shrieking; tears flowed down his cheeks; he doubled up and sat on the sand, still roaring forth repeated outbursts of merriment, hands holding his sides. The file of country folk regarded the scene in ox-eyed wonder. St. Martin turned and stared at them, puzzled, holding the reins of his horse, but did not rejoin them. In vain did Domont demand some explanation of the joke—his angry words only increased the frenzied mirth of the Mole, until at last the creature had fairly laughed himself into exhaustion.

“St. Michel have mercy on me!” he gasped at length, dragging himself erect. “So you don’t know—you don’t know what’s in the letter to the prior, eh?”

“And how the devil do you know what’s in it?” exclaimed Domont angrily. The Mole broke into more laughter, but conquered it.

“I don’t. I was thinking of something else, monsieur,” he answered, and though the words formed a palpable lie, Domont did not press him. “Come, let us be going on! Forgive my laughter, monsieur; it was not at you, I assure you.”

“I think you are a liar,” said Domont coolly.

“Of course! All men are liars,” was the imperturbable response. “The pot calls the kettle black, eh? Ho, ho! Come, we shall be friends, I perceive; onward, then! Have no fear monsieur. There is no other person who can pry beneath the surface of your imposition; only the Mole can do that. I am glad you are coming to this accursed place.”

“Eh? You speak thus of a sacred shrine?” said Domont, astonished anew.

“Oh, devil take the sacred fiddlestick!” The Mole grimaced, and then chuckled as he met Domont’s eye. “Never mind, you understand me; I see in your face that you are a man after my own heart. You and I shall crack many a stolen bottle, with none of the sanctimonious brethren at hand to bother us. And I fancy the look of yonder wide-shouldered Canadian.

“He, too, is a man! I’d like rarely to see him at the grapple with fat brother Simon, though there’s more muscle in Simon’s fat than most people would believe.”

“Of what order is the prior?” asked Domont. At this, the Mole gave him a long look, and then whistled.

“Sieur d’Aumont, your knowledge assuredly needs great extension! But Mont has always belonged to the Benedictines, of course; now it’s the property of the reformed order—the congregation of St. Maur. Fuss and feathers! These Mauristes are always dragging me away from my books to hear their prayers and whining of psalms and what-not, and to grind paint

for their illuminations, and whiten vellum and parchment for their books—br—r—r! *Domine, non sum dignus!* And did you hear that fool of a Brother Gabriel ring the bells just now?”

“Aye,” said Domont, regarding his singular companion with astonishment, yet with a certain understanding. “They sounded like fairy bells.”

The Mole spat a curse, and then his face lighted up with strange tenderness.

“Ah, I love to play the bells—they are mine, for I have arranged them in chimes, and no one can play them as I can! They sing to me, those bells! There is the big bass fogbell that is rung when pilgrims are coming across the sands, for the fog is sudden, and one caught in it is often lost forever; then there are Benedict and Catherine, made in the almonry furnace seventy years ago, and the others—all twelve of them. They come from a prince here, a cardinal there, a noble pilgrim yonder. They are silvery-tongued, beautiful, and when I make them into music they sing a rarer praise to God than all the whining brethren in the abbey church, with the mass on their lips and petty strife and jealousy in their hearts!”

Odd confidences, for this abbey servant to bestow upon a stranger! Some men might hold that much reading had driven the Mole mad. None the less, Domont realized he was astoundingly sane, living far within himself, or perhaps far within a world he had created for himself, to replace another and more harshly grim world outside. And realizing, he felt sudden pity for the other.

“You,” said Domont, though more to himself than to the creature who walked along at his side, “should go away to the far north land, the land of ice beyond the Bay of Hudson, where eternal fires streak the heavens and make glories in the ice, where a man lives to his own mind and not to the minds of little men around him! Or out into the wilderness of the western lands, where no white man has been. After all, there is a place for everyone in this world, if it could be found.”

“Ah, if it could be found!” The Mole turned and gave him one glance, and Domont saw a sparkle of sudden tears in the great brown eyes, and the low musical voice was mournful as the voice of breaking waves along a night-shore. “If it could be found—yes, there’s the tragedy of it for poor moles like me! For it is seldom found, and men are bitter cruel at heart; and sometimes when the gulls wheel about the Mont they squawk to me of far lands and peace beyond the horizon yonder—but I, I have only to dream and read and plot and die.”

Now there was a little silence between them, for Domont was startled by these words, and did not know well how to make answer to this revelation. But presently the Mole touched his hand, lightly, affectionately, with a swift change of mood.

“My friend, my friend, you understand! Now I am more glad than ever that you are coming to the Mont. There are no secrets for me in this place of secrets. Who reads the ancient books now, except the Mole? These Mauristes are too busy making other books. Who knows the secrets of that old Carolingian builder except the Mole? No one. Who knows the hidden things done by Sollier and Pierre le Roy, while building their parts of the Marvel? Only the Mole, the little blind despised Mole! My friend, the Mole turns up some strange things in that old library, and goes strange ways underground where no man has walked these many years. Well, we shall see!” A harsh, ironical laugh from him. “You follow a pretty face, and the Mole follows his nose. If he did not serve the good fathers, he would be burned for a wizard at Avranches—because he is saner than most men. Accept or be burned! Me, I do not accept; instead, I serve. I serve, little parrot, like the gay bird that sits and chatters before the hostelry of the Licorne; serve, parrot, and eat your crumbs and mumble your words over and over—*Domine, non sum dignus, non sum dignus, non sum dignus*—”

Ironical, bitter, scornful, the words of the strange creature were instinct with a frightful mockery. Domont looked down at the little man, with his askew shoulders, flapping ears, large unnatural face, feeling a great pity for the poor creature—and, singularly enough, a growing respect.

It was true enough that out in the world of men this Mole would be in rare peril, since a grotesque exterior such as his would infallibly become a prey to hunters of heresy and warlocks. The preternaturally keen and alert brain in this poor body had found him a sure and certain refuge, and if he served indeed, there was in the service a breath of peril to those who sat above him.

“St. Martin!” called Domont. “Join us.”

The Canadian turned, drew his horse in, and waited. He had mounted, and now sat in the saddle gazing down at them. Domont touched the arm of the Mole.

“I have not been entirely frank with you,” he stated quietly. “This seigneur from Canada is my friend, and in my secrets. St. Martin, I adjure you not to look at the body of this man, but look into his brain and you will find there a rarer spirit than one would ever guess. I commend him to your friendship.”

Now St. Martin regarded the Mole full in the face, and instinctively crossed himself; but, as though to make amends for this significant gesture, he smiled and held down his hand to the other.

“Greetings, comrade!” he said. “Rodomont gives you road belts; I welcome you.”

The Mole was far from understanding this Indian jargon of belts, but was swift to comprehend the spirit behind the words, and his eyes were eloquent.

“The tide ebbs, friends,” he said simply. “Let us go on.”

The three moved forward, Domont remaining afoot and leading his horse.

Now, as they drew closer across those shining sands, the wonder of the place grew ever upon Domont and held him silent. The lower battlements ringing in the island shore were stout and imposing enough, but from these the town ran upward, ran steeply up to the Marvel itself—a creation whose fairylike aspect did not die away, but grew more pronounced upon closer view. Gray and ancient and massive were those stones; up and up shot the great towers, the high walls, the pinnacles of granite, all surrounded by a lacework of carving, a perfection of detail almost beyond comprehension; and at the height, all this culminated in the cupola of the bell tower.

St. Martin glanced behind them, and uttered a low word of warning. Domont turned, to see the coach of Elise de Bebam bourg rolling rapidly toward them. Behind it ran along the straggling procession of carts and countryfolk, and behind these again, a mass of horsemen—de Lussan and his men. The events at the inn had made Domont give up his scheme of reaching the Mont in company with the girl; now he saw her leaning from the coach window, and saluted her gravely. At a word from her, the coach slowed and halted.

“I have not thanked you,” she said in English, her clear blue eyes meeting his gaze, “but believe me, I am not ungrateful. I shall hope to see you soon.”

“And I,” said Domont, “I also, mademoiselle—shall hope.”

A touch of color leaped into her cheeks, then the coach was rolling forward again. The voice of the Mole sounded with droll emphasis.

“A miracle has happened, a miracle! M. d’Aumont has learned to speak English!”

At this remark, St. Martin looked around with a startled air, until he caught the eye of Domont, who laughed.

“He knows everything, St. Martin—have no fear! Or,” he added in English, “if not everything, then everything except our prime errand.”

The Mole gave him a sharp glance, and chuckled.

“I do not know English,” he said quizzically, “but I can read faces, my friend. So you do not trust me completely? Well, small blame to you. These days, our Mont St. Michel is a seat perilous, and holds dark secrets.”

Domont spoke frankly. “There is one thing I have not told you and shall not tell you yet awhile, friend Mole. It is not my secret to tell.”

“Fair enough,” and the Mole nodded approvingly. “But now mount, my friend, mount! Do not forget that you are great gentlemen, and that I am only a Mole, a humble servitor. I do not want fat Brother Simon asking questions.”

Domont nodded, and swung up into the saddle.

Time had passed during their gradual approach, and now the waters had withdrawn almost entirely from about the Mont. The Mole led them straight to the south gate, where the coach was standing, being unladen. Elise de Bebambourg had disappeared. As they came close to the gateway, the coach turned and started back for Pontorson.

“We have no quarters for your horses here,” said the Mole. “Two of the returning villagers will be glad to ride them back, and they’ll be cared for. Follow me, now.”

About the gateway were grouped a number of armed peasants, and the half-dozen invalided soldiers quartered at the Mont. The two visitors were passed without more than formal questions, but Domont noted that a man preceded them with word of their errand.

Now, once inside the barbican, they were fronted by the massive Boulevard Gate, whose portcullis was down; a postern was open, and through this they advanced into a narrow street flanked on either side by taverns. A hundred yards ahead of them rose a moated battlement, tower-flanked—the King’s Gate, this, and to it the Mole pointed.

“Our lord abbot,” he observed, “being a nobleman and a soldier and not a priest, has moved out of the abbatial chambers, and occupies those quarters over the gate and in the tower, with his charming niece. To tell the truth, I think he quarreled with Dom Julien, for the garden and certain other portions of the Marvel are cloistered, and the honest baron does not understand why the rule against women should apply to the niece of the lord abbot—eh! It’s a queer world.”

Passing the King’s Gate by another postern, they were at last in the cobble-stoned and extremely steep street leading up to the abbey. Here too were taverns; as the Mole said, the entire town was a trap for pilgrims, and

the inn-keepers did a thriving business in votive offerings as well as in chambers.

“This is a devil of a place to get out of!” said St. Martin, staring.

“So the king thinks,” and the Mole chuckled. “There at the bend to the left, is the house Bertrand du Guesclin built for his lady. If your baggage is not lost, it will be after us presently—indeed, I spoke about it at the gate. Here is our host of the Unicorn; get past him if you can, for he has a devilish eye for pilgrims of quality!”

The Licorne inn spanned the narrow way ahead of them, with the aproned host standing in the doorway. He was already bawling at them, loud-mouthed.

“Excellent chambers, good sirs. If you wish votive hearts, a blessed rosary with the beads of solid amber, a reliquary containing the little finger of St. Michel or other objects of piety, I pray you reserve your patronage for me—”

They passed on, beneath the aegis of the little Mole, and wound up the toiling street. With pauses on the landings, they climbed the flights of ascending stairs, and so came at last to the long flight ending at the gate house or Chatelet, with all the vast buildings of the abbey yet towering high above. Here the Mole presented their names and errands to the guard, styling St. Martin a pilgrim.

After passing the gate there was another climb, and Domont found himself in the guard-room—a great hall thronged by peasant guards anxiously awaiting their relief. Here the two friends exchanged a handgrip of farewell, and St. Martin was conducted on to the church and guest chambers above. Domont accompanied the Mole out to the Great Inner Degree—a seemingly endless stairway, a great climbing and winding stair walled on one side by the church, on the other by the abbatial buildings, spanned here by a massive arch with portcullis, there by a bridge. Then, weary and aching of leg, the American followed his guide through a small doorway, up more stairs, and so into a large ante-chamber where a monk sat diligently writing. The Mole spoke briefly with this monk, and turned.

“Dom Julien will receive you in a moment, M. d’Aumont—he is already advised of your arrival.”

With this, the Mole departed, giving Domont one look significant of caution and hidden mirth—a singularly incomprehensible look. Domont thankfully dropped into a seat, but it was only a moment or two when a monk appeared and silently beckoned him. He followed into an adjoining

chamber and found himself alone with Dom Julien Doyte, prior and ruler of Mont St. Michel.

A singularly powerful man was Dom Julien, his intellectual features darkly framed in his severe monastic habit. They were pleasant features, yet those of a commander, the eyes authoritative, heavy-lidded, the nostrils and lower face thinly ascetic. A smile sat in the dark eyes as Domont approached and bowed respectfully.

“I am glad to make your acquaintance, my son, for I knew your father long ago,” said the prior. “Peace be with you! I believe you have brought me a letter?”

“Here is the letter, father,” said Domont guardedly.

The prior took the sealed paper, examined and broke the seal, then opened the letter. He nodded thoughtfully and glanced up.

“It is my duty to read this to you, M. d’Aumont.”

“Your duty?” exclaimed the surprised Domont. “But, I assure you—”

“You may be acquainted with its nature already, yet my orders are very strict,” broke in the other, with an air of gentle regret. Somewhat alarmed and much puzzled, Domont made no further protest. Holding the letter to the light of the high window, the prior proceeded to read it aloud.

“DE PAR LE ROY

“Cher et bien aimé, nous vous mandons et ordonnons de recevoir dans votre maison le Sieur Roger d’Aumont et de l’y garder jusqu’à nouvel ordre de notre part, au moyen de la pension qui vous sera payée solidairement par la famille. Si n’y faites faute, car tel est notre plaisir.

Donné à Versailles, le 21 Juin, 1707.

Signé: LOUIS

Contresigné: Pontchartrain”

“IN THE KING’S NAME

“Dear and well beloved, we order and command that you receive in your abode Sieur Roger d’Aumont, and keep him there until new orders come from us, at the charges of the pension which will be paid on his behalf by the family. Let no error be made, for such is our pleasure.

Given at Versailles, June 21, 1707

Signed: LOUIS

Countersigned: Pontchartrain”

The frightful significance of this letter did not reach Domont for a long moment, until he found the prior regarding him, a little sadly.

“My dear M. d’Aumont, I greatly regret you have come hither bearing a *lettre de cachet*. At the same time, you shall have no cause to complain of our hospitality. You are not a prisoner, but an exile—”

A *lettre de cachet*! Domont caught his breath, and did not even hear the admonition that followed—the gentle, kindly lecture upon his supposed offenses.

He knew now why the Mole had laughed.

CHAPTER V

A PRISONER IS NOT ALWAYS A CAPTIVE

DOMONT was bowed out by the prior and handed over to the graces of Brother Simon, a fat and rosy-cheeked friar, before he had recovered from his shock of consternation. Now he saw everything—why those two officers had intercepted d'Aumont, knowing their duel might never be settled, otherwise; why the real d'Aumont had been in so reckless a mood; worst of all, why the Mole had burst into such uproarious laughter. A man bearing a *lettre de cachet* and not knowing it!

Tempted to speak, Domont held silence with grim restraint. A word from him, the other papers which he carried, would prove his real identity; upon this, would ensue all manner of lengthy and judicial inquiries, and his chance of delivering the letter to the Nameless Exile would be tremendously jeopardized, if not lost altogether. Domont was stubbornly resolved to deliver this letter at all costs, not so much because of the payment received, as by reason of his promise to the brave little Armenian. Moreover, it was an extremely serious matter to juggle with the direct orders of the king, and exposure in this affair would undoubtedly prove of the gravest peril not only to Domont himself, but also to Roger d'Aumont. For the moment, he must hold his peace, and let circumstances dictate to him.

Brother Simon was, on the surface, a jolly soul, and grinned familiarly at Domont as he jingled his bunch of huge keys.

“Welcome to our royal hostelry, Sieur d'Aumont!” he exclaimed, as he led the American from the reception chamber. “We were advised yesterday of your imminent arrival, and you have caused us much anxiety of spirit; more, in fact, than we have known for years—I swear it upon the bone of the blessed St. Maur, the friend of St. Benoit, which now reposes in our treasury!”

“I am to be congratulated upon my importance,” said Domont drily. “And how have I caused such disturbance, Brother Simon?”

“Well, consider—go more slowly, I pray you! We have this staircase to mount, and I am not exactly slender, despite fasting.” The fat brother winked greasily. “Here is seven hundred livres a year come to visit us; and where are we to put it—where, I ask? The old dungeons beneath the west platform are extremely unhealthy, and would put our seven hundred livres in grave peril. The cells of the royal exiles, such as are empty, are in shocking disrepair,

and our seven hundred livres would certainly complain to the king. There is always the wooden cage, but this is only to be used on express royal orders, and you, monsieur, are not a prisoner but an exile, an excellently paying guest! Name of St. Maur—what are we to do?”

“Precisely the thing in which I am most interested,” commented Domont. “What, then, have you done?”

“We have given you an excellent chamber, one of our very best; a trifle in the air, perhaps, being *au quatrieme*, but with an admirable view of those beloved shores from which you are temporarily exiled. Through this door, monsieur, past the guard chamber and straight on into the little court—right! There is the Perrine Tower. We mount by this outside staircase, if you please —”

The Perrine Tower! This name wakened Domont sharply, like a shock of cold water. He realized that on the third floor of this tower, in the room below his own, was the prisoner of mystery, the Nameless Exile. The thought fetched him on the alert, brought him from his dull mechanical acceptance of everything.

This tower, built in the fourteenth century by Abbot Pierre le Roy, was composed of six superimposed chambers. An outside stairway from the court served the first four floors from the inside, then passed above the adjoining walls to the outside, where it acted as a parapet for the defense of the great stairs descending from the abbatial building to the terraces below. All Mont St. Michel, indeed, was built as much for defense as for utility.

As they passed the entrance of the third chamber, Domont glanced at it. Unlike the others, it was locked hard and fast; he remembered the Nameless Exile was never allowed to emerge from his cell. The door was massive, iron-bound, impregnable as the gaunt gray walls around. Then he found himself at his own doorway, which the fat monk opened.

“*Voilà*, M. d’Aumont!” exclaimed Brother Simon grandly. “This is one of our best rooms; the exposure, as you will see, is to the south. Down the hillside behind the abbey are the Grand and Lesser Exiles, the buildings occupied by less fortunate mortals. I distinctly draw your attention to the comparison, in view of what Dom Julien will presently say to you. So you came across the sands with our Mole, eh? A droll one, the little Mole! Somewhat amiss in his head, and said to be suspected of dealing in the black arts—but one never knows. Alas, poor creature! He will come to no good end, I fear.”

Domont looked sharply at his companion. Behind this jovial exterior, behind these twinkling little eyes, for an instant he discerned a something

malignant and terrible; then it passed, and he forgot the brief glimpse.

“And now,” pursued Brother Simon, “if you will excuse me, I shall get on my way to perform other errands. Dom Julien will visit you in a few moments for the usual instruction. Good day, monsieur, and a pleasant visit to you.”

The fat brother departed, leaving the door ajar.

Domont inspected his new quarters. The room was surprisingly large and comfortable, the barred window alone presenting any semblance of a prison cell. There was an excellent bed in one corner, in another a chair and table; the furnishings of the room were completed by a commode, a wardrobe, and some dishes. From the window was a magnificent view of the Norman and Breton coast, far outspread in the morning sunlight.

Sinking into his chair, Domont tried to face the overwhelming situation with some degree of common sense. He comprehended that as a paying guest, his lot was far from being that of a madman or a strictly royal prisoner; he was, in effect, an exile and little more. However, since the prior was coming to visit him shortly, he must reach some decision at once—to speak or not to speak? Confession might be perilous, yet the risk of being exposed later on was of a certainty more perilous.

“Plague take it, I’ve d’Aumont to think of!” reflected the American with sudden hope. “When he shows up, will be time enough to speak. Beyond a doubt, too, Roger d’Aumont is not the man to let another rot in his place. He’s not to blame for this. He was drunk as a lord and could not remember the import of his letter. When he recovers and learns what has happened, he’ll come here hotfoot to set me free at any cost. No wonder the Mole laughed! It’s enough to make me laugh myself—”

Laugh he did, and he was still chuckling when the tall figure of the Maurist prior, in his black garb, filled the doorway.

Dom Julien bowed and accepted the chair offered him. His eyes were twinkling as he surveyed his paying guest, and he seemed in anything but a severe humor.

“Well, M. d’Aumont,” he began genially, “I have received a letter regarding you from his grace the Bishop of Avranches, and I have also talked with our librarian, the Mole, who guided you across from Pontorson this morning. It appears your offences are not particularly heavy, and you will be at liberty to depart whenever you address a certain letter to M. le Baron, your worthy father. Eh?”

“That letter,” said Domont, with an affectation of stiffness concealing an exact truth, “I shall never write.”

“Then we shall enjoy the pleasure of your company for a long time,” and the prior laughed. “Come, I mean the words, my dear d’Aumont! It is a real pleasure to receive a guest who is neither a family disgrace nor an absolute madman, whom we may treat as a gentleman. I trust most sincerely the triple fugue you played with the sword, this morning, will not bring orders to treat you with greater severity.”

“So do I,” rejoined the American, and smiled. “You have heard of the affair, then?”

“I hear of everything,” said Dom Julien seriously. “It is my duty, however, to acquaint you with our rules, which in your case are not too strict. In the first place, I am in absolute charge of Mont St. Michel. I, and I alone, lodge you, punish you, hear any complaints after morning mass, and give such liberty as seems best. If I am absent or ill, these duties devolve on the sub-prior, but never upon others; Baron de Karque himself has nothing to do with my charges. On Sundays and feast days you are obliged, as a good Catholic, to assist at mass.”

Domont was not a good Catholic, but his cousin undoubtedly was, so he said nothing but bent his head in assent. The prior continued to rattle off rules and regulations, but presently abandoned his usual form of speech, drew forth a document which bore his seal, and tapped it in a leisurely fashion with one finger.

“At this season, the doors are unlocked at six in the morning, and locked at seven in the evening; no lights are allowed. Any letters to or from M. le Baron, your father, or M. de Pontchartrain, the minister, go sealed but all others must be read by me. Now, monsieur, I desire to show you every consideration, as I believe you are worthy of it. Here is a *billet*,” and he extended the document, “good until revoked by me, giving you permission to circulate at will during the day, either within the abbey itself or the town below. If you desire to hunt in the preserves of the abbatial fiefs along the coast, this also may be arranged.”

Domont could not repress a movement of astonishment, as he took the document.

“But this is not imprisonment: it is hospitality!” he exclaimed, marveling. “Are your guests always treated in this fashion?”

“When they deserve such treatment, yes. We have at present two or three gentlemen, but they do not all enjoy these liberties. If you desire to have your meals served in company with them, or to play at cards, or to receive visitors here, you may do so. Monsieur, have you any arms, other than the sword at your side?”

“None,” said Domont. Dom Julien gave him an attentive regard for a long moment, then deliberately and gravely winked.

“In a few minutes,” he said, “I shall send two of the brethren. They will take charge of your sword, which should have been taken below, also of any papers or money you may have upon your person. Your word will, of course, be sufficient that your pockets contain nothing; you will then be free to amuse yourself as you like. So, monsieur, for the present I bid you good day.”

The prior took his departure. Domont had not missed the significance of his wink and his last speech; after bowing out Dom Julien Doyte, he emptied his pockets of everything and put the papers and money in the bottom of an empty water-jug.

If he had been stupefied to discover himself a royal exile, he was even more astounded to discover the manner of the exile. He had heard of Mont St. Michel as a place worse than the Bastille itself, a far more cruel and rigorous prison. He had heard of its dungeon, the Trappe, gained only by a narrow entrance barely sufficient to give passage to one man, and of its barbarous wooden cage fashioned by order of Louis XI, of its eternally wet prison-cells—and this chamber of his was immeasurably far from such dire reality! In winter, however, the whole place must be anything but comfortable.

Reflection now swiftly showed him that, if he owed his misfortune to Roger d’Aumont, he also owed his distant cousin much to counterbalance the misfortune. A gentleman and a great noble was not to be treated like some insane scapegrace, arrested and haled to a dungeon, but his imprisonment was handled according to his quality. In this case, it amounted to no more than exile from family and court and usual surroundings. A man so detained might escape, at cost of attainting his name and honor; he might even reach England or Flanders and live out his life. A man so detained, however, did not have any life imprisonment to anticipate, and such an escape would be bought at too bitter a price. After all, the system was extremely logical, and from the highly important financial point of view, it was also very sensible. The prisoner or his family paid all expenses.

Domont chuckled at this thought. “Why worry? I’ll send St. Martin to find d’Aumont and keep him quiet for a day or two, until I get this letter delivered. Then d’Aumont can show up here, explain the imposture as a dodge to save his honor, and show his hurt head in proof of being unable to come sooner. All will go well. Afterward, d’Aumont can either stay here until he makes peace with his family, or else he can escape and go to Canada with us, if he likes. Decidedly, it was wise to keep my mouth shut! Things

are not so bad. I'll have two or three days of this, and then be off to St. Malo."

In an extremely cheerful frame of mind, he received two black-clad brethren who relieved him of his sword. They then accepted his word that he had not so much as a scrap of paper or a sol on his person, and departed. Domont sauntered after them, promptly lost his way below in the twisting maze of the abbey, and presently gained the outer terraces by showing his permit to the guards. He wondered how the devil he was going to deliver his letter to the Nameless Exile.

Leaving the black mouth of the Chatelet and gaining the battlemented terraces and the bright sunlight, he stood gazing out across the glistening yellow leagues of sand which stretched around the mount in all directions. To an ignorant eye, escape from this slenderly guarded place looked ridiculously easy. Nearly two miles to the north, yet apparently only a stone's throw distant, was the long rock of Tombelaine, stronghold of the English during the Hundred Years' War, whence the mount had twice endured long sieges. To the east ran the coast of Normandy, and to the south, that of Brittany, both easy of access at low tide. Yet across these sands came sudden fogs and without warning, so that here and there men would sink abruptly and be swallowed up; also, the tide crept in with insidious speed, sometimes with a thundering tidal wave of foaming water. Those sands, now dotted by the moving figures of cockle hunters, had buried the secret of more than one escaped prisoner, as they had buried many a joyous but incautious pilgrim.

"Ha, Rodomont! Said I not this was an ill trail to follow?"

Domont turned and saw St. Martin coming down the stairs toward him, looking anything but happy. He knew at once the Canadian had learned of his predicament.

"You've heard, then?" he asked. St. Martin nodded gloomily.

"Aye; your medicine is weak, comrade. I am to lunch with the prior in an hour, and relate to him the state of the missions in Canada. Shall I tell him this is all a mistake and—"

"Not at all, not at all!" exclaimed Domont hurriedly. "Keep your mouth shut about me! Nothing could be better, I assure you!"

"Eh?" The other stared blankly. "Nothing could be better? When you are doomed to this pinnacle of rock for the devil knows how long?"

Domont explained the nature of his imprisonment. While he was making St. Martin comprehend the situation, the grotesque figure of the Mole

appeared, climbing toward them from the town below. The Mole panted up, grinning amiably.

“Ho, friends, you should hear Baron de Karque mouth rolling German oaths!” he cried jubilantly. “Hot words are passing down there; it wants little but he and de Lussan will have swords out presently! By the way, friend d’Aumont, he is going to bid you to dinner with him tonight. How like you our hostelry?”

“It is admirable.” Domont met the sparkling brown eyes, and chuckled. “No wonder you laughed this morning, devil take you! I had to laugh myself when I thought about it. But pardon me one moment—” he turned to St. Martin and spoke rapidly in English.

“Listen! I will find a way to deliver the Armenian’s letter; meanwhile, I must depend on you. Get away from here sometime today or tonight, ride back to that tavern, and find that cousin of mine. Keep him from coming here for a few days—say three days—until I have time to deliver the letter. Then he can show himself and straighten out the tangle. We can then go on to St. Malo. You understand?”

St. Martin nodded, comprehending the situation readily enough, and his face cleared. But now the Mole plucked at Domont’s sleeve, and his over-large face was stamped with a look of diabolical cunning.

“Hark, my friend!” he exclaimed softly. “I do not speak English, it is true, but you should have more caution. Certain words are alike in both tongues.”

“Eh?” exclaimed Domont. “What words, then?”

“Why, for example, the word Armenian—and the word letter.”

Domont started. For a long moment he met the brilliant eyes of this singular creature, and upon him crept a wave of startled doubt. St. Martin dropped hand to knife and cursed softly. Perceiving the disconcerting impression his words had created, the Mole clapped his hands and chortled.

“Ho, ho! The Mole can guess something of your errand here, my friends—and so much the better! You need have no fear of me; are we not comrades and allies? Long live the devil! Without him, where would all honest monks be, and where would the poor Mole be? Now play well your part, M. d’Aumont, for you’ll have need of finesse!”

“So will you, I think,” said Domont. “Brother Simon tells me you are suspected of dealing in the black arts.”

Then Domont was indeed startled. The little deformed man took a step backward. The grin upon his lips died into a grimace of freezing horror, and

his face became ghastly white. With an effort, he collected himself, and spoke soberly.

“My friend—I owe you thanks for that warning.” He paused, wet his lips, and laid a trembling hand on Domont’s arm. “One word! Don’t forget you met Baron de Karque last year in Cologne, where he drank you under the table. Farewell! I must be off to my work—*pax vobiscum—non sum dignus, non sum dignus*—”

With his absurd burst of parrot-like chatter, he darted away and was gone up the stairs toward the Chatelet. St. Martin glowered after him.

“Foul fiend fly away with the creature! That fellow is shrewd; he is like the *jongleurs* of the Mohawks, and as unfathomably dangerous. Look at his legs! All these folks here have ankles like trees, and have need of such muscles if they climb about this mount daily. So I am to ride off tonight, eh?”

“If you agree,” assented Domont, frowning over the words and air of the Mole.

“Oh, I agree to anything,” returned the other, and shrugged lightly. “I’ll do it, then. Three days will serve you, eh?”

“It should be enough. Come, walk down a little toward town, and I’ll point out my prison window.”

“And do your talking now,” grumbled St. Martin. “They’ve warned me that in the refectory and elsewhere in the abbey proper, I’m not to speak a word—there’s a rule of silence. I’ll have to think up some lie to get out of the accursed place tonight.”

To get any view of the Perrine tower was not easy, however. They descended the terraces as far as the parish church of St. Peter, which stood above the buildings of the town, and then as they studied the place from below, Domont gripped his companion’s arm abruptly.

“Solved! You note that each of the rooms in the tower has but the one central window? Now I’ll procure a light, thin, strong line, and the rest is easy. I have only to tie the packet to it, attach a weight, and lower it to the window of the chamber below me, where the Nameless Exile is confined. The thing is simple, after all!”

St. Martin grunted. “Simple things are usually the most difficult, when you come to do them. Hold—what in Satan’s name is that! Look!”

A dolorous creaking and groaning drew their attention, and rising from below toward the high platform of the abbey, they perceived a great load of faggots. This was the hoist of the abbey, a huge wheel worked by prisoners,

which drew up from below the provisions and materials that came to the place.

The two stood watching this until a passing monk informed them it was nearly time for the noon-day meal, and together they turned back into the soaring pile of rock, making their way aloft to the abbey. Save for inquiries as to direction, they were as silent as the black-clad figures about them, for St. Martin was in a mood of gloomy oppression, and Domont was still somewhat uneasy over the shrewdness of the Mole. It was difficult to be certain of that creature's professed friendliness, although Domont was strongly inclined to believe in it; none the less, to go upon instinct were little less than folly, and he could not but worry. These feelings, however, were soon lost in sheer amazement at the place around, when the two friends reached the refectory.

This huge thirteenth-century hall, on the second floor of the Marvel, was lighted by large windows at each end, and on the side by fifty-seven lancet bays, all rich with carving and softly radiant with the most exquisite of stained glass. In the south wall was the reader's pulpit, and doorways led to the kitchens and the almonry. Henry II of England had sat at meat in this hall, and many another monarch after him, and this lofty vaulting had more than once reverberated to the clash of knightly steel; but never had it echoed to the sound of human voices, save from the droning reader in the pulpit.

The company now assembled here was almost as remarkable as the place itself. Domont and St. Martin were silently assigned places near the prior, and a dozen monks filed in; then entered the more important guests from the pilgrims' hostel adjoining the church, the poorer folk being fed in the almonry. Of these guests a few were Germans, this nation sending many pilgrims to the mount each year, but the greater number were French and Flemish, either rich tradesmen or of the petty noblesse; all wore the standard pilgrim garb, with a green cockade, a blue bandolier, and white sheepskin gloves. Last of all entered Comte de Lussan, left arm hanging stiffly but with bandage concealed. He gave Domont and the Canadian a grave bow, and took the seat awaiting him beside the prior.

Except for the reader in the high lectern, absolute silence obtained during the meal, which was anything but cheerful. Domont tried to imagine the real Roger d'Aumont condemned to such a daily routine, and smiled at the thought. The pilgrims were repressed, fearful, or mildly ecstatic; the monks, very cream of the Benedictine cream, were dour and pallid men, all of them great students or chroniclers. Brother Simon alone did not bear out the reputation of the order for austere learning, and this rubicund friar appeared singularly out of place in such a gathering.

As soon as the meal was over and grace said, Dom Julien beckoned St. Martin, who took his departure with the prior to a place where speech was not barred. The entire throng, indeed were eager for release from constraint, and Domont followed one of the gesturing groups into the magnificent cloister, proclaimed as the most beautiful architectural monument of all France. Passing through this, he came at length to the great platform outside the church, where most of the pilgrims were assembled in vociferous converse. Awed by the marvelous view here greeting him, with all the east and south coasts outstretched for miles, and beyond them the green depths of Brittany even to Mount Dol, blue in the distance, Domont was standing by the parapet when he was aware of a figure approaching. He turned to see de Lussan, who bowed slightly.

“Monsieur,” said the count in a grave voice. “I trust you do not consider our quarrel settled by this trifling pin-prick in the arm?”

Despite the quiet air and voice, Domont was startled by the gusty passion of fury looking out at him from those dark eyes. He had thought his affair with de Lussan ended, but with such a man, it could have only one ending.

“Why not?” he demanded coolly.

“What has passed between us, monsieur, cannot be settled in so light a fashion,” said de Lussan, with hauteur. “This scratch does not trouble me in the least, let alone disabling me. I await your answer, monsieur.”

Domont shrugged. “As you like; though I do not perceive how I am to carry on any quarrel under present circumstances.”

“That can be arranged.”

“Very well. When do you wish me to kill you, and with what weapons?”

De Lussan whitened at this, but retained his self-control.

“If you will request permission to hunt on the Norman coast with Baron de Karque, the third day from now, the affair will prove itself. I have already spoken with the baron, and the prior will interpose no obstacle. The weapons will be swords, if that suits you.”

“Very well, monsieur.”

De Lussan bowed again and departed, fingering a snuffbox. Domont gazed frowningly after the lithe, handsome figure, and knew that in this man he had now a deadly enemy. Three days, eh? Well, if he had to kill de Lussan, so be it; and much might happen in two or three days. By that time, indeed, he might manage to deliver his letter to the Nameless Exile—and who was this mysterious prisoner? The query tugged suddenly at his brain, wakened his dormant curiosity to a vivid and compelling interest.

An Armenian came from the direction of Paris, hunted down, harried by all the king's men, and gladly paid with a diamond worth a thousand livres for the delivery of a letter; a girl coming from London brought another letter from the woman who virtually ruled England. These two letters for a man immured in the Perrine Tower and held incommunicate, a man whose very name was unknown! Who was this man, that he should be of international importance? What had been his crime, that he should be thus buried alive from the world and lost to the sight of men?

A touch at his arm, and Domont turned to find the Mole standing beside him.

“My friend, I have a letter for you; Dom Julien has read and requested me to deliver it. Come into the scriptorium. It is the recreation hour, and we may steal a word in peace without penalties. *Silentium per duas dies*—gr—r—r!”

The Mole shambled away, and Domont followed the deformed man, wondering.

CHAPTER VI

SAUCE FOR THE GANDER IS SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE

THE scriptorium of the abbey, situated directly beneath the wondrous cloister, had not always been a room of silent labor over manuscripts and books. It was a tall and splendid hall of four naves, divided by heavy columns, and was well lighted by curious Moorish windows. Here, under the banners of great houses and famous men, Louis XI in 1469 instituted the order of St. Michel, and here since that day the knights of the order had held their assemblies. Now banners and knighthood were one in dim dust, and like the high abbatial dignity of the Mont itself, over which the slumber of kings and popes had been keenly disturbed in times past, the famous chivalric order was now only a toy decoration to be granted some royal favorite or wagered across a gaming table, and the two tremendous fireplaces warmed only tonsured men as they wielded brush and pen at the tables and drawing racks, their sandals waking shuffling echoes from the roof that once had rung to the sharp clang of du Guesclin's battered armor.

The Mole dropped swiftly into a chair, and drew manuscript and ink-horn before him as though at work. He spoke with his low, musical chuckle ringing accompaniment to the words, and threw out an unsealed paper on the table.

“Read, read! Oh, here is a pretty game, my friend! Read, for time lacks.”

Domont opened the paper and puzzled out the awkwardly written words. He was bidden to dine with Baron de Karque de Bebambourg this same evening—an early meal at six, since he must be back in his prison ere vespers were finished. He was to come as much before the hour as suited him.

“What's all the mystery about?” he demanded, perplexed by the portentous and chuckling air of the little man.

“Mystery?” The Mole peered up at him keenly. “By St. Michel, there's more mystery than either you or I know as yet; and neither of us can afford to hang back from the other. I love you, Rodomont! I have scented your business, and your head hangs looser than you know, but I saw friendliness in your eye this morning. And you are a proper man, a man such as I might have been had my poor mother borne me aright. And we are friends—do you know, Rodomont, I have never had a friend? Well, I shall go to Canada or America with you, if you'll have such a poor creature at your heels.”

The abrupt pathos of this appeal startled Domont inexpressibly. The passionate words poured out with a rush, borne upon a flood of emotion; those liquid brown eyes upturned to him were suffused by a pitiable depth of feeling; the musical cadence of the voice drove straight to his heart. The Mole's large hands were gripping the manuscript before him, gripping it hard. Domont put down his hand and touched those hot fingers.

"Friend!" he said gently. "Yes, there's much in the word, more in the act, and more yet in the thought itself, my Mole! Only men who've experienced much can know this. Yes, little man of the mighty spirit, I'll give you my friendship and more, if you'll have it; and go to Canada with me you shall, if that's your wish. Body of me, what a heart there's in you! Not for all to see, either, though you've shown it to me."

"Because you could see it, Rodomont; few can," came the answer. Then the Mole's mood changed abruptly. "Listen! We can't talk here. I'll come to you tonight. So you dine with the baron, eh? And you hunt with him on the third day—hunt, in this hot summer season!" A laugh bubbled from the man's lips. "Well, there'll be blood of that hunting."

Domont stared at him in blank amazement. "Devil take you! How do you know so much about things?"

"I—know so much?" came the sardonic response. "Why, like Dom Julien, I know everything; but I know more than he does. Look out for yourself down in the town there, my friend. The devil's brewing a hot kettle, I can tell you. Who is the man you should most fear up here, eh? Come, inform me!"

"Why," said Domont slowly, meeting those keenly laughing eyes, "I suppose the prior."

"He? Oh—ho! Look to yourself day and night, Rodomont, but take no thought to poor Dom Julien. Nay, turn your eyes to fat Brother Simon!"

Domont's brows drew down. "The fat brother—that merry rascal? Hm! I did notice something devilishly malignant in his eye—but why fear him?"

"Why fear the hawk, quoth the pigeon! Oh, Simon plays his part too, plays it very subtly indeed. Who's he but a chief spy for M. de Pontchartrain, to watch our prior and our prisoners and the conduct of things here? And Simon has his own spies down below in the town. One of them, a wry-necked rogue, serves Baron de Karque. Hm! I had rather be the Mole who serves, than the great abbot who is served!"

"Spies, eh?" Domont was startled; although he realized that this might have been expected, none the less it was something of a shock. "Spies, in this sacred place?"

“Sacred rat-hole!” ejaculated the Mole with acerbity. “You know the reason very well—that man enclosed in the third chamber of the Perrine tower. Why, I heard de Lussan tell the prior half of Christendom would go fluttering if that man were loosed, or if it were even known he was here!”

“Well, it is known,” said Domont impatiently. “Who is he, then?”

The brown eyes widened at him.

“Eh? You know not—you, who bear a letter to him?”

“Nonsense. I met a poor wounded Armenian on the road, saved his life, undertook to deliver the letter for him, that’s all.”

The Mole started to his feet, staring incredulously. He read the truth in Domont’s eyes, and let his long arms fall in a gesture of helplessness. A grin swam into that over-large face of his, only to be suddenly stifled.

“Rodomont, Rodomont, what a devil of a jest—you and your letters! But behind the jest is tragedy, and I can’t laugh at it; tragedy, no less! And you are my friend. Well, I know the man’s name and, I think, his nationality; but who he is, I haven’t the least idea. Hold, my friend, no impatience! I shan’t tell you his name. I doubt if six people in France know it, and certainly Dom Julien himself does not know it. I’m the only person to speak with him alone since he came here last winter, and yet neither of us can understand what the other says.”

Domont frowned in dismayed perplexity at such a patchwork of riddles, yet he was aware of the earnestness in the Mole’s voice.

“I think you’re telling me the truth, but I can’t make head or tail of it,” he said at length. The little man laughed.

“Neither can I, so it’s equal! Now let me guide you. Go down and talk with the pretty demoiselle in the baron’s garden. Ask her something! Ask her to show you the handsome snuffbox she brought as a present to the baron.”

“For the love of the saints, speak openly!” demanded Domont irritably.

“Not I; the Mole works in the dark, my friend. He watches people’s eyes and their looks tell him more than their words, and he has the ability to draw his own conclusions. Careful, now—here is that damned cat-footed rogue —”

The Mole seized quill and bent over the manuscript. Domont, watching him at work, was aware of Brother Simon entering the great room. Now he noted how this fat and jovial monk moved about with singular lightness, and how his sharp eyes stabbed everywhere. Simon nodded to him and he returned the nod; then, moving away, the American sought the open air of the west platform once more.

Here was mystery piled upon mystery. How much the Mole actually knew, how much was sheer guesswork, it was impossible for Domont to tell—he could be certain only of the man’s friendship, and of this he was now very sure. A shrewd creature, well named indeed, this singular little Mole! The fellow obviously had a natural facility for probing into the secrets of those around him and making conjectures from a careless word or look. Though his remarks anent the Nameless Exile were not to be so explained, this only added to the growing and determined mystery. The talk of spies, however, was sufficient to warn the American that he was treading in parlous places.

After a time he made his way back to his own prison room, and there found not only his few personal belongings, fetched up from the barbican gate, but also a large bundle of garments evidently sent from home for the use of Roger d’Aumont. With much relief, Domont abandoned the gold-laced officer’s coat, shaved, washed himself and dressed anew in clean linen, then got into a suit of rich but plain plum-velvet and enjoyed a pipe in safe solitude.

Later in the afternoon, he left the abbey and descended to the terraces and ramparts, strolling down past the town church and the booths where innumerable *béatilles*, small objects such as rosaries and medals and shells, were sold to the pilgrims. Here, as he watched the visitors and townfolk, he was aware of St. Martin swinging down the narrow street, so Domont went on until he came to a walk passing to the ramparts, where he stepped aside. St. Martin followed, looking very much pleased with himself.

“All lies told, and well told,” said the Canadian. “I go back to seek a good horse that I left foundered at an inn; I’ll make use of our friend d’Aumont’s horse, now at Pontorson. Dom Julien has given me a blessed rosary to deliver there, and I’ve another errand for that fat Brother Simon. As soon as the tide’s out tonight, I’ll be off. I should sleep with your worthy cousin later in the night, if I ride hard.”

“Good. Hold! What’s your errand for fat Simon?”

“Why, I’m to dine at the Pontorson inn where we breakfasted and met de Lussan. I’m to tell the host he was short by a barrel in the flour sent over today.”

Domont frowned. “No road belts?”

St. Martin displayed a tiny brass heart tipped with a flame—a small brother to the many and splendid ex-voto gifts in the same shape, tendered St. Michel by pilgrims.

“For the inn-keeper’s daughter. It may signify who sent me—I know not.”

Domont nodded thoughtfully.

“Brother Simon is a spy here; you’re carrying messages for the enemy, and so much the better, I suppose. Now, the third afternoon from this, I’m to ride with the baron over on the mainland, and meet de Lussan again. A killing game, this time! it seems the fool isn’t satisfied.”

“Oh, that’s news! Where does the meeting take place?”

Domont shrugged. “Not settled yet, apparently. It’s bad medicine for us all, though I’ll have to deliver the letter and then be prepared to run, after killing de Lussan. If possible, be at Pontorson that day, and meet us when we come from here.”

“Agreed.”

“Since you’re in no haste to be off, suppose you look about and buy me a thin line and some sort of weight, as I might be watched. I’ll be at the King’s Gate, where Baron de Karque is stopping. Pay your respects to him, and give me the purchases.”

St. Martin chuckled and assented. As the two men strolled along the ramparts toward the lower town, it was arranged that St. Martin had best dispose of the diamond in Avranches, before going to meet d’Aumont, and secure the money without delay. Much hung upon the swing of chance; to make plans at this stage of the game was impossible, but it would be best to have as much cash in hand as possible.

Twenty minutes later, Domont was announced to the commendatory abbot of Mont St. Michel. Baron de Karque, as his long string of titles was usually curtailed, was a brusque, burly man of thirty-odd, very richly dressed and immensely wigged; his eyes were heavy and protruding and he was plainly none too quick of wit, although he belonged to a celebrated line of Rhenish diplomats. Perhaps the abbatial dignity had been bestowed upon him in order to keep him out of mischief, thought Domont, for certainly he was an assertive and positive person. His cordial greeting, was unassumed and very eager, and he insisted on shaking Domont’s hand repeatedly.

“I owe you much,” he said impressively. “I have heard the story from my niece, and also from de Lussan; if you do not kill him later, I shall do so myself. Ah, the dog, the swine!”

Not being aware just what the worthy baron had heard, Domont held his peace and listened to hearty German oaths, for de Karque was a simple sort of man, something of a glutton in food and drink, given to expressing himself with violence and without tact. In attendance, was a little black-clad

man, who held his head somewhat to one side, and Domont recalled the Mole's warning about a wry-necked spy. He was glad enough when the baron conducted him to a window and showed him a tiny garden space below, just inside the rampart wall.

"Karl will lead you there, my friend—will you excuse me for a little while? I must scrutinize a report that goes off tonight to His Majesty, and I'm a devilish poor hand at reading these monkish scrawls. Elise is waiting to receive you and thank you herself for your kindness. Then we shall dine—and what a dinner! A sturgeon, a rare fish nowadays—well, well, get along with you and be thanked by prettier lips than mine. Karl! Conduct this gentleman to the garden and announce his presence to my niece. And, d'Aumont, you remember our last meeting in Cologne? Well, I have secured some of that excellent Maine wine you liked so much."

"And this time," said Domont, laughing, "we'll see who slides under the board first, eh? With all my heart, I assure you!"

The garden was a tiny place, a little nook crouched beneath the ramparts gained by a stone stair-flight; the entrance from the tower was cloaked by a heavy growth of bushes which still further decreased the garden space. It was quiet here, deeply secluded and private, the lichen-covered walls rising high all around, a niche entirely out of the world. Thrust into the earth of a tiny flower-bed, as though left to mark some command, was a long walking-stick, ivory-handled.

Finding himself alone while the baron's niece was being summoned, Domont pulled out the stick, inspected it curiously, and saw a crest cut in the ivory handle. It was, no doubt, a possession of the baron's left here.

"Good afternoon, M. d'Aumont!"

At the English words, Domont whirled, stick in hand, and then bowed. Coming toward him was the girl, hand outstretched, and he lifted the slim fingers to his lips. She was very beautiful, now wearing dove-gray satin with lace high about her throat, evidently to conceal the injury there; her unpowdered yellow hair hung in heavy masses about her head, and her deep blue eyes, much darker than his own, struck out at Domont frankly and unafraid. Those eyes of hers were very clear, and were lighted by a joyous eagerness, so that Domont was a trifle startled when he met their piercing quality. He instantly perceived this woman to be perfectly mistress of herself, and he sensed rare depths in her. All his conception of her as a light and careless-hearted girl, was dissipated like smoke on the wind in this moment.

“I regret I do not speak your charming language, mademoiselle,” he returned quietly and caught a slight widening of her eyes. So she understood French, after all!

“But, monsieur! We are alone here—”

Domont cut her short.

“You perceive this stick?” he said, laughing a little, “It is an excellent thing, and very well balanced. Regard, now, how it swings to the hand——”

He held it out like a rapier. Then, swift as light, he thrust with it into the depths of the bushes before him, drove home the thrust hard. There was a choked cry of agony. Out into the open path plunged a man, pitifully stammering, holding his bleeding mouth, dancing frantically under the cruelty of the thrust which had hammered his teeth and ripped his lips. Domont put the stick into his hand.

“Take this to M. le Baron. When you have business again in those bushes, make sure the garden is unoccupied. Go!”

The wry-necked fellow departed, groaning. Domont turned to the wide-eyed girl, and quietly addressed her in English.

“Your pardon,” he said. “That fellow is a spy, and I thought best to get rid of him—I saw him slip in among those bushes. I am not supposed to know English, you apprehend? Well, I trust you are not inconvenienced by your injury of this morning?”

“It is only a scratch, thank you,” she murmured, still staring at him. “I do thank you for your great help there at the inn, with all my heart; but now—this! I did not dream there could be other spies——”

“There are many here, it appears,” said Domont. “This man was a spy upon your uncle, not upon you.”

“Tell me, monsieur,” she asked quietly. “Are you really the Sieur d’Aumont?”

Domont smiled. He gave her his true name, and briefly explained his distant connection with the real d’Aumont, although saying nothing of his errand here. Inwardly, he was wondering why this woman professed ignorance of French. Woman indeed? Girl, rather. He guessed that she was not more than three-and-twenty. Suddenly she started, turned to him with swiftly anxious gaze.

“Monsieur, my letter! Give it back to me, please. The danger is over now——”

“Unfortunately,” said Domont, “I promised you that I would either deliver that letter or destroy it. I have kept my promise.”

“Oh!” The word broke from her as she realized the import of his words, and she faced him in a blaze of impetuous anger. Besides the anger, however, her eyes held alarm, and quick fear. “You—how dare you, how dare you destroy it, when I trusted you! That letter meant everything!”

Domont’s gaze hardened a little.

“I do not like these involved trails,” he said abruptly. “Listen to me, if you please! There are certain things I should like very much to understand. You are the niece of a German nobleman; you are an English girl with a French or Rhenish name, pretending to speak no French when in reality you understand it perfectly. You professed this morning to be carrying that letter quite innocently; now it appears otherwise to me. Instead of coming to meet your uncle in Germany, you come here to an out-of-the-way corner of France. My dear young lady, I am quite willing to be frank with you as regards myself, but I think you are far from exhibiting frankness to me. You will not regret it, I assure you, if you trust me. Do you know, I am rather curious to inspect the snuffbox you brought as a gift to your uncle?”

While Domont spoke, the girl had watched him with startled gaze, a little flush coming into her cheeks. Then, at his last words, she turned pale as death.

“How—how do you know—about that?” she uttered in a low voice.

“So simply as to appear incredible,” returned Domont coolly. He resolved to make good his boast of frankness. “I have made friends, and by making friends, have turned acute danger into profit. One of these friends is a queer little distorted man who is called the Mole—”

“Oh! That half-witted creature with my uncle today—” She broke off abruptly, clenched her hands at her breast. Terror flooded into her eyes, and wild consternation. “Then he was a spy—you too are a spy! And I have failed—”

“I am not a spy.” Domont glanced around and lowered his tone. “If you want the exact truth, I am here for the same reason you seem to be here—to deliver a letter. Yours, coming from England, would involve you if discovered; to save you, I destroyed it. Mine, if delivered, can do you no harm.”

Doubt and alarm struggled in her face, and then she drew a long breath.

“This is true? Yes, I see it is true—oh, you are a man, a man, and it is all so different for a man!” she exclaimed passionately. A sudden smile touched her lips. “And it is not hard to see why you make friends. Please forgive all I said. I have been tormented; you cannot imagine what it has meant to me! With the destruction of that letter, I have failed absolutely and beyond repair.

I was doomed from the start. That spying woman must have suspected the truth——”

“What truth, then?” asked Domont, as she paused.

“It was not the letter alone she wanted—it was to kill me!” A rush of confession burst from the girl. “Somehow, she had guessed all the truth. The real Elise de Bebam bourg was detained in London; her uncle had not seen her for fifteen years, she spoke only English and German. I could impersonate her without danger——”

A sharp exclamation broke from Domont; he was astounded at this information.

“If you are not Elise—then who are you?”

“Mary Suffolk. My father is dead; I have had a post at court——” she broke off. Domont thought he could read the thought in her mind, and a little laugh came from his lips.

“You undertook to deliver this letter to gain money, eh?”

“You are cynical, sir!”

He bowed gravely. “My dear lady, I honor you for the fact; I am sincere. No one would undertake court intrigue and spy work for patriotic motives; that is a pretty fiction. It is very different in the field of action, in military service, in behalf of some great and definite cause! You, obviously, are not a spy by profession——”

“Thank you, sir, you are very gracious!” she said, and Domont perceived she was angered by his words. “I am no spy. I merely undertook to deliver a letter.”

“It amounts to the same thing; this letter delivery makes no great appeal. It is undertaken for love of man for master,” and here Domont thought of that poor Armenian on the highway, “or for direct payment, or because the person concerned is fitted for no better work. Evidently, in your case, it is for direct payment.”

“And in your case?” she exclaimed.

“For exactly the same reason,” he said, and her eyes widened suddenly. “Now, I’ll tell you my story another time. Just at present, we had better stick to the affair in hand, since we may not have long to speak English together. First, please to understand that I am entirely at your service, in any way possible. I think you may have need of me.”

Her lip trembled slightly. “I—I think so too,” she said unexpectedly. “And I thank heaven for you—even if you have destroyed my letter! I was to deliver it and get a reply. Now I have failed. Within a few days there is to

be a boat awaiting me at St. Malo, supposedly a Dutch lugger. I was to get aboard her, somehow, anyhow.”

Domont’s eyes brightened. Admiration leaped in him for the brave heart of this girl, who had undertaken a task too full of peril for most men; he felt swift regret for destroying her letter and with it all her weary labor of danger.

“Do you know the name of this prisoner, who is called the Nameless Exile?”

“No,” she said quietly. “Do you?”

“The secret, it appears, is not entrusted to ordinary mortals; however, I hope to learn everything shortly. And don’t be too sure you have failed. If I can deliver a letter, I can also receive one. This prisoner may confide to me a letter which will serve Her Grace of Marlborough. If I can do this, then I shall ask passage aboard your lugger—for I think that ere another fortnight I shall have dire need of it!”

“Good!” She held out her hand to him, and her dark blue eyes were like stars. “Then we are friends!”

“With all my heart,” said Domont. As he met her shining gaze, he once more saw a faint tide of color creep into her cheeks.

Now interruption broke upon them, sharp and imperative. Baron de Karque came striding into the garden with St. Martin following. He addressed his supposed niece in German, presented St. Martin, and the latter bowed above her hand. Then the Canadian turned to Domont and explained that he was leaving, but might return later to the Mont.

“I have brought you a slight remembrance,” he pursued gravely, but with a roguish twinkle in his eye, as he produced a small packet. “It is a rosary and reliquary, containing a portion of the cloak which St. Martin shared with the beggar. I beg you will accept it in memory of our acquaintance. When I return to the Mont, I shall see you again.”

Domont thanked him soberly, slipped the packet into his coat pocket, and St. Martin departed with the baron.

“He is one of your friends, eh?” said the girl softly. “He seemed to find that reliquary very amusing, for some reason.”

Domont chuckled. “Aye. St. Martin knows everything—this is the means whereby I hope to deliver my letter.”

“Oh! But here is the baron—”

De Karque rejoined them, looking rather red in the face, and with his wig awry.

“Devil take it!” he ejaculated. “M. d’Aumont, now you are in trouble for striking that man. He has made a complaint to the superior, and I have been asked to send you up to the abbey at once——”

Domont shrugged. “The fellow is a spy set upon you. Do not trouble yourself about it.”

“Well, spies are necessary,” said the baron philosophically. “These accursed blackrobes guard their prisoners well, I can tell you! Any act of violence brings punishment.”

“Then, I shall depart——”

“Death of my life!” roared the baron in sudden furious outburst. “You are my guest: I have told the prior he may go to the devil. Am I one of his scoundrelly dogs, to take his orders—I, the abbot of this place? Thunders of heaven, we shall see whose orders are most regarded! You will return when we have dined, and not before.”

“In such case, let us forget the entire matter,” said Domont, and the baron was at once mollified.

“Good!” he declared jovially. “Eat, drink and be merry, and the fiend take the morrow! But come; we are having an early dinner for your benefit, my friend, and I think it is about ready. I am always ready to eat, and this excellent sturgeon draws me strangely, I can assure you. A beautiful fish!”

The pury baron produced a large snuffbox of gold and tortoise-shell, proffered it to his guest, who refused it, and inhaled largely. Then with complacent mien, he displayed the box.

“A gift from Elise, bless her heart!” he declared. “Very pretty, is it not?”

Domont shot a glance at the girl, who made smiling response, and examined the box. He found it in no way unusual, and without having fathomed the mystery, returned it to the baron with a few words of due praise.

The three entered the tower and ascended to the apartments occupied by the baron. The early meal was served in an ancient oak-paneled room; darkness would not fall until nearly ten at night, but none the less the baron had ordered two large candelabra lighted. He was earnestly desirous of manifesting his gratitude for Domont’s action in protecting his niece.

Not a little to his dismay, when the meal was over and the girl left them, Domont discovered his host had no intention of rejoining Elise. Instead, a dozen bottles of Maine wine were produced, and Baron de Karque settled resolutely down with song and story to drink his guest under the table. Domont found himself forced to play the part of his distant cousin, and having to do it, he did it well.

“You’ve heard about the prisoner up yonder?” demanded the baron, at the fifth bottle.

“Which one?” Domont laughed. “My own case, I confess, is of most interest to me—”

“Bah! You’ll be out of here in a few weeks, I understand. No, I mean the man guarded night and day, confined like a felon, allowed no communication—the one they usually call the Nameless Exile.”

“I know little about him. Who is he, then?”

“Hm! Wish I knew,” grumbled the baron, by this time red in the face but still stout of head. “He’s a person of tremendous importance, by the fuss they make. I hear he was brought here last November under a strong guard, but his name did not figure on the order; he came from Marseilles. Some say he is a prince of the blood, but I know the court too well for that story to go down. It is of course possible that he is the Man in the Iron Mask—”

“It may be rather a dangerous matter to waste vain speculation on,” said Domont drily, to which the baron nodded assent. “It’s much safer to discuss our ride three days hence—I think de Lussan spoke to you about it?”

“Aye. What a devil’s dog he is! Look out for that man. Saturday we ride hunting, though you may be confined for striking this hangdog servant of mine.”

“In which case—”

“De Lussan will see that you are allowed to go, never fear. He means to kill you.”

“But I mean to kill him,” said Domont quietly. The baron broke into laughter at this, then sobered suddenly.

“He mentioned you had pinked him the other morning—when the devil was it? Yesterday or this morning? No matter. He had drunk too much at the moment; was fresh from his morning draught. Look out for him next time. I am to be your second, with your permission.”

“I shall be honored, I assure you.”

“Just one thing; you are to go on parole, understand? I’ve taught these cursed monks that I have some right in my own abbey, even if this is the second time I have ever visited it. You go in my care. Therefore, you will give me your word to return here with me.”

This was a stiff and unexpected blow, but Domont saw no help for it.

“Very well; I give it,” he said quietly. “Another bottle?”

“By all means.”

Twenty minutes later, the good baron was talking thickly, and so was Domont, but the latter had kept a fairly clear head and was biding his time. Presently this came, while the baron was relating some curious incidents of a three-cornered duel in which he had once participated at Cologne.

Domont, under cover of this relation, quietly picked up the snuffbox lying on the table, and fell to examining it. To any casual scrutiny, the box was merely a handsome toy of gold and shell, and being half filled with brown tobacco dust, betrayed nothing unusual. Nor could Domont discover anything about it which tended to solve the mystery, until he idly put his finger into the snuff. Then, in a flash, he had the answer to his puzzle. The box had a false button.

For a moment he was tempted by the wine mounting to his head. Why not carry off the little box, inspect it thoroughly, and find just what was in the false button? Then swift shame reddened his cheeks at thought of such treachery to Mary Suffolk. Angry at himself for having drunk so deeply, he came to his feet and insisted on departing at once, and the baron was forced to assent.

He saw the girl again, for an instant only, bowed over her hand, and sought the tower gate with the worthy baron accompanying him on unsteady feet. As they parted at the gate, de Karque seized his arm and hiccuped a last admonition.

“A—a word in your ear, friend d’Aumont! These monks are the devil. If an exile shows any surliness, they are prone to call him a madman and treat him so. Be affable, then! Be affable, and the world is yours! Good night; health and long life to you, Sieur d’Aumont! I shall have good horses for us to ride on the Saturday.”

Domont went on up the hill, and was considerably sobered by the time he reached the Chatelet and was ordered to follow a guard to the quarters of the prior. He was still more sober when he had received a stern lecture from Dom Julien regarding his conduct, and was asked if he had any excuse for his action in striking the man.

“I am not accustomed to be spied upon,” he said stiffly, in the manner of Roger d’Aumont.

“Then,” retorted the prior, “you will be confined to your own chamber for two days, in order that you may reflect upon such things. Next time you are tempted to strike blows, my dear M. d’Aumont, you will stop and consider. I bid you good night.”

Domont fell asleep, however, reflecting not upon such things, but upon the blue eyes of Mary Suffolk.

CHAPTER VII

ONE DEVIL AND TEN

So it came about that Roger d'Aumont spent the following two days in the solitude of his chamber, seeing only fat Brother Simon three times each day, when his meals arrived. During this while, however, there was no lack of activity beneath the placid surface of life at the sacred mount.

Wealthy pilgrims lodged at inns, occasionally in the abbey, while poor folk were guests in the abbey hostelry, but it did not become the rank of Count de Lussan or the dignity of the king's deputy to accept either alternative. Instead, he was installed in the guest chamber of the abbatial buildings, close to the dwelling of the prior.

His room was very grand, but it was also large and drafty, and showed signs of age. Some part of the granite walls was hidden by blackened and outworn tapestries, the carven beams were dark with the smoke of many hundreds of winters, and the huge bed, almost entirely enclosed by paneling and hangings, was a perfect fortress of privacy. Across the eight-foot fireplace, quite unused during the summer season, was hung another ancient tapestry woven with the arms of Lorraine, thanks to a previous commendatory abbot, a duke of that ilk. This tapestry, despite its weight, was never still. The draft down the huge chimney kept it in a continual stir, and it was always lightly waving, while one tattered corner in particular seemed on a perpetual devil's dance.

Night somewhat banished the gauntness of the old chamber, but increased its air of mystery, since there was little wherewith to dispel the darkness. On a table in the center of the room was a great silver candelabrum, flickering with eight candles, and at this table sat de Lussan, just finishing a letter. He sanded it carefully, re-read it, then folded it and applied hot wax fresh from a candle-flame; into this wax he set the carven face of a signet-ring from his finger, first wetting the stone. He appeared quite recovered from his slight wound.

There was a knock at the door. De Lussan called a careless order to enter, then leaned forward and addressed his letter with imposing flourishes. The door swung open to admit the figure of fat Brother Simon, huge and sinister in its black garb. De Lussan laid aside his completed missive, glanced up at the intruder, and sat back in his chair. He tasted with critical air a cup of wine beside him and then spoke.

“Well?”

Brother Simon closed the door and came forward, his sandals flapping on the floor and a grin widening on his lips.

“Dom Julien will be pleased to receive you in ten minutes, monsieur, if this suits your pleasure. He wishes speech with you regarding the letter today from M. de Pontchartrain.”

“The contents of that letter?”

“I have not yet had an opportunity of perusing it.”

De Lussan nodded comprehension. His manner toward this fat monk was a singular compound of his usual insolent hauteur and a certain tolerance, as though he found Brother Simon rather amusing to his taste and somewhat worthy of his confidence. He touched the letter he had just written.

“I am sending a good report of you, Simon.”

“Thank you, monsieur, I shall endeavor to justify it.”

“You yourself asked speech with me this evening. Well?”

“Perhaps you prefer to see Dom Julien first—”

“Bah! Let the prior wait; what is he to me? Speak.”

Brother Simon chuckled. There were few men daring so to speak of the prior of Mont St. Michel, and he did not love Dom Julien.

“There are a number of small matters, monsieur, that I desired to bring to your attention. First, as regards the injury done to Karl by this Sieur d’Aumont.”

De Lussan made a brusque gesture of dismissal. “The penalty for clumsiness. Take warning. Besides,” he added, with a slight smile, “within a few more days there will be no need of punishing M. d’Aumont.”

Simon shrugged. “Very well, monsieur. Next, the Canadian gentleman of whom you spoke to me, has departed on some errand regarding a horse. He returns in a few days. I sent by his hand a letter to the inn-keeper at Pontorson—”

“By his hand?” De Lussan looked up sharply, but the monk smiled.

“Inside a votive heart of brass; it is safe, and the usual method of communicating. This Canadian, when he returns to Pontorson, will be drugged and searched; he will then be turned over to the Charité as a vagabond. Thus, he will be detained until you can satisfy yourself about him.”

De Lussan nodded with an air of satisfaction, and stared reflectively at the monk.

“Well arranged. I have heard they kill people in Canada by throwing knives and axes after the custom of the savages, and this man wears a little axe at his belt. I think he possibly had something to do with the affair—”

He paused. Brother Simon finished the sentence for him.

“Of the escaped prisoner whom you recaptured.”

“And who is now on his way to Paris. Exactly. By the way, Simon, have you heard any whispers uttered concerning the identity of the Nameless Exile?”

“None, monsieur. Dom Julien has been diligent in keeping the name unknown.”

“Dom Julien does not know it himself,” said de Lussan drily. “In fact, not five men in France know it.”

The ragged corner of the tapestry hung across the fireplace, doing its continual devil’s dance, waved slightly in the air as though in protest at these words.

“Another matter,” went on Brother Simon. “Monsieur, there is here a scrivener, who is also librarian—a lay brother called the Mole. He is a little man, presumably half-witted, with one shoulder higher than the other and very large ears—”

“I have observed the man,” said de Lussan, and his eyes narrowed sharply. “Surely this fellow has not been prying?”

“Oh, monsieur, it has nothing to do with the Nameless Exile, nothing at all! However, I distrust the creature, who is no more half-witted than I am—in point of fact, he is extraordinarily sharp of brain,” and there was a touch of venom in the voice of Simon, as though this sharp brain had made him squirm in time past. “Yesterday I caught him in the scriptorium with the Sieur d’Aumont. He pretended to be working on a charter, but that charter had been previously finished and illuminated by Brother Gabriel. The two men had been talking secretly, it was evident. I think, monsieur, this creature might well repay an interrogation at Caen.”

“An interrogation?” De Lussan frowned swiftly; he knew well enough what this meant. “You accursed Normans, will nothing stop your passion for torturing and burning? True, the English checked it when they introduced the custom of burying spies alive; but they spoiled their work by burning Jeanne d’Arc—well, well, go on! On what grounds would you have this poor simpleton interrogated?”

“Monsieur is pleased to jest, but it is no jesting matter,” said Brother Simon doggedly. “On the grounds of evident traffic with Satan. He has been seen to appear suddenly in odd corners of the abbey; the other day I left him

at the King's Gate and came straight up to the Chatelet, yet he was loitering there ahead of me. Others have remarked his habit of invisible travel, particularly by night."

"Very well," said de Lussan carelessly. "I shall write to the delegate at Caen, and on his next visit he will inquire into the matter. Have your evidence ready. Now await me here. I may have instructions for you when I return."

So saying, de Lussan emptied the wine-cup, rose, and strode from the room to visit the prior.

Left alone, Brother Simon sank into a chair, investigated the wine-flagon on the floor, and lifted it. He relieved it of half its contents at one lengthy swig, then wiped his lips and sat placidly, quite at his ease. Behind him, the fluttering tapestry moved again, although now no draft was in the room.

After some time de Lussan returned, his brows heavily drawn down, and Simon came out of the chair with agility. The count seated himself, poured more wine, sipped it, then looked up.

"You know Dom Nicolas Hougats, prior of St. Benoit at St. Malo?" he inquired, and the fat monk nodded assent. "He will arrive here in a fortnight, commissioned by M. de Pontchartrain to interview the Nameless Exile."

The fat monk looked astonished at this, as well he might.

"Ah, monsieur! But if a man does not speak French—"

"Another man must be found to speak his language," said de Lussan. "On Oct. 8, 1704—that is to say, not three years ago—one Omar Mahomet of Algiers was baptized by the Canon of St. Benoit. Since then, many others of the same infidel persuasion have been converted. How? Because this monastery has specialized in the study of Arabic and other eastern tongues."

"So!" exclaimed Brother Simon, thoughtfully. "So! Then the Nameless Exile, monsieur, is an Arabian!"

De Lussan gave him a slow, cruel look. "You're curious in the matter, are you?"

Under this regard, the monk paled perceptibly. "I? Curious?" he faltered. "Not in the least, monsieur! I—I merely voiced a worldly thought—"

"Keep your thoughts to yourself, or suffer," said de Lussan, with cold curttness. "When Dom Hougats arrives, he will interview the exile in your presence. You will not understand what is said, but you will observe what is done. No letters must pass. If Dom Hougats gives or receives anything beyond words, he is to be arrested on the spot and sent to Avranches. Of course the prior of St. Benoit is to be trusted, but at the same time—"

“No trust is taken for granted. I understand, monsieur.”

“Now we pass to another matter.” De Lussan sipped his wine, then took a pinch of snuff. “The niece of Baron de Karque. Have you done as I bade you regarding an attendant?”

“As ordered, monsieur. The daughter of Pierre Oury, syndic of the town and married to a German woman, has been engaged to wait upon her; an honest, stupid girl who speaks German very well. She will not report much regarding Mlle. de Bebambourg, but I shall draw from her more than she realizes.”

“Good. Papers, remember, documents of any kind!”

“If they exist, I shall have them.”

“And you will forward them—”

“Unopened, monsieur.”

“You may depart.”

Brother Simon, walking lightly as was his wont, departed. He threw open the heavy door, and the tapestry before the fireplace waved in the draft, but was immediately still again. Then, as the door slammed, the sound seemed to be curiously re-echoed from the fireplace—so sharply, in fact, that de Lussan sprang up and in two swift strides reached the hearth. He pulled aside one corner of the tapestry; nothing showed in the dim light except the fire-blackened stones.

“My imagination,” he muttered, and dropped the tapestry again. “Well, one never knows when dealing with these plagued monks—”

Some little while after these events in the abbatial building, the man who occupied the third chamber of the six composing the Perrine tower, sat on the edge of his bed, in absolute darkness. Over the grilled window was hung his bed-cover; over the door, hiding any possible glint of light from anyone passing outside, was hung a blanket; yet no glimmer of light showed within the chamber.

Suddenly, from some point close to the sitting man, came a faint scratching sound. The prisoner rapped twice on the stones with his knuckles. Almost at once, one of these large stones grated open, and presently there was the sense of a second person being in the room. Flint streaked on steel and sent sparks flying, tinder caught, and presently a candle was aglow. In this light was revealed the misshapen figure of the Mole, a flat wide packet beneath his arm, while behind him gaped a large, musty-smelling hole in the side of the wall. The Mole set down his packet and shoved against the open stone, which swung shut again without a sound; then he stood up and

grinned vacuously at the occupant of the room—the man known as the Nameless Exile.

This man, now plainly revealed in the mounting candlelight, was of perhaps sixty years. He wore an odd sort of black cassock, yet he was not tonsured, nor had been. His long hair and long square-cut beard were of an intense and deep black, thickly strewn with gray. His features were extremely high and intelligent, his dark eyes were very proud; his entire countenance was not only strikingly handsome but evinced a peculiar nobility. Upon one of his long and slender fingers was a large signet ring, the stone being an oval onyx half an inch across. In this stone were graven curious letters in an unknown script which might have been Hebrew but was not.

Abruptly, the Mole went to his knees and bowed his head above his folded hands. The prisoner lifted one hand in the attitude of benediction, closed his large eyes, and murmured a few words in a strange tongue. When he had finished, he lowered his hand to the Mole, who seized and kissed it and then rose. About this little scene was a strangely impressive dignity. The prisoner smiled at his visitor, indulgently, but did not break his silence. This man, who understood no French and spoke none, could communicate with his nocturnal visitor only by signs.

“Well, we’re safe enough,” said the Mole cheerfully, of necessity speaking to himself. “Devil take fat Simon! So he’s trying to get me on the rack, is he? Well, such things take time, and in the meanwhile, the Mole goes on burrowing!”

He turned and took up his flat packet as though to open it, but the prisoner checked him; and, with a questioning glance, pointed to the roof. The Mole glanced up, comprehended suddenly, and chuckled.

“The man upstairs, eh? Up there? You want to know who he is?”

The prisoner comprehended tone and gesture, if not words, and nodded, his grave eyes watching the Mole intently.

“A friend—oh, Satan fly away with me! You don’t understand. You know no Latin—ah! what’s the word, now? Amicus? Amicus it is. I speak Latin, you Greek—do you understand my Latin, then? Amicus!”

The prisoner nodded, and a sparkle came into his dark gaze. He pointed to the window, and made signs, gestures. Presently the Mole wrested some intelligence from all this, and his eyes widened.

“Oh! So M. d’Aumont, who has a letter for you, lowered a cord this evening, eh? Where is the cord?”

More signs. After some time, the Mole gathered that the Nameless Exile had not touched the lowered cord, being afraid of some trap or device of his enemies. At this the Mole chuckled, and then knuckled his teeth in thought for a moment.

“*Los à Monseigneur St. Michel!*” he exclaimed softly, exultantly. “I promised Rodomont I would visit him tonight, but it is impossible; the way is blocked and I cannot reach his cell. However, it might be worse. No guard is posted above, and I can at least reach his ears. Out with the light, then!”

He quickly pinched out the candle, after stripping the bed-cover away from the barred window. He placed his face against the bars; his voice rang out low, musical, yet penetrating.

“Rodomont! The cord!”

Silence responded. Once more the Mole called the name of Rodomont, and then a faint sound came from the chamber above, as though something had fallen on the stone floor. The Mole grinned exultantly.

“We have a new patron—St. Rodomont!” he murmured. “Above there! The letter!”

Now the prisoner came close to the window beside the Mole, and his deep breathing sounded clearly with swift pants of excitement and eagerness. The two men waited, motionless. Unexpectedly, a tiny white thing appeared against the star-strewn square of sky in front of them; this was the letter, attached to the end of the cord. As it jerked downward, the Mole reached out one long, skinny arm between the bars, and seized it.

“Direct the answer to London,” floated down the voice of Domont.

The Mole drew in the packet and unloosed the cord from about it. He jerked the cord twice, and it was drawn up from their touch. Putting the sealed packet into the hands of the prisoner, the Mole now recovered the window with great care, himself almost as excited as the captive. This done, he fell to work relighting the candle, and presently its flame flickered up.

In this light, the prisoner examined the packet in his shaking fingers, tears of joy glinting on his bearded cheeks. He pressed the letter against his bosom, closed his eyes, and appeared as though in thankful prayer. Now, with an abrupt and hasty motion, he tore open the parchment. There was revealed, to the curious eyes of the Mole, a letter written in Greek. A flush in his pale cheeks, the prisoner rapidly scanned the lines, then lowered the letter and fastened a burning gaze upon the Mole.

“Ketchedourian!” he murmured, and gestured toward the upper room. “Hatchadour Ketchedourian?”

“Eh, eh?” exclaimed the Mole with sudden eagerness. “Ketchédour! That’s the name of the man de Lussan has recaptured and sent back to Paris, for I saw it written in one of the letters in de Lussan’s chamber—”

The Mole, obviously, did not fear to confess his sins of commission.

“Ketchédourian!” repeated the Nameless Exile affirmatively, repeating his inquiring gesture to the room above. The Mole shook his head.

“No. Paris—the Bastille, I suppose. What a talk we would have if you knew much Latin or I knew any Greek! No, upstairs is an amicus—amicus! An Englishman, or what amounts to the same thing. English. Ah, that reaches you, does it?”

The prisoner’s eyes blazed suddenly. He made gestures, as of one plucking and sharpening and splitting a quill, then of writing. The Mole understood, and nodded.

“Yes, but not tonight; tomorrow. I have to get into the scriptorium for a quill, worshipful one! Do you understand me. Vertabed? Tomorrow! Your reply goes to London—Londres—Londinum—what the devil would the word be in Greek? How Rodomont hopes to deliver it, I’m blessed if I know.”

“Londres!” exclaimed the prisoner, nodding excitedly and pointing to a word in the letter. He was not a fool, and he clearly understood the idea perfectly.

Now the Mole made an imperative gesture toward the candle and the letter. Recognizing the necessity, yet with obvious regret in his face, the Nameless Exile assented. He held out the missive to the flame; the fine parchment crinkled and curled, blazed, and finally dropped and was crushed into a flaky powder beneath the sandal of the Mole. So in a few seconds was destroyed the letter whose delivery had cost so dear.

The Mole opened up his flat packet, to display a small chess-board and a set of men, but at this the prisoner shook his head. He smiled gently, took the Mole’s face between his hands, and kissed him on the brow.

“I blame you not for wanting no game tonight—ah, that’s a good soul!” exclaimed the Mole sorrowfully. “God help you. Vertabed! It’s honest, noble men like you who are always destroyed by the damned scoundrels of intriguers and politicians; aye, you’re destroyed and your work is swept away, and yet the world goes on and on until you come again, and all’s to do over! Now, I wonder why I don’t give a thought to the benediction of Prior Julien or gaunt old Brother Benoit, whereas yours makes a catch come into my throat and the blessing of God rise in my soul—even if I don’t understand the words?”

He shook his head mournfully, and began to put away his chess-men.

“Well, well, the abbey church is a beautiful place, God wot, but there are cursed hard men in it. If fat Brother Simon whimpers at the mass while he schemes to get me on the rack, there’s something wrong somewhere in religion. Wall up proud Vertabed and rack the humble Mole—aye, that’s their way! Tomorrow night, I’ll bring you pen and ink and paper, unless I can steal a sheet of parchment or vellum. What is it in Greek, now? Pen—that should be penna for quill, eh? Understand that, do you? Good. Paper should be papyros; and ink—eh? Black—mavro? By St. Michel, you have it? Devil take all Greek, say I. Good night, Avedis Vertabed—is that right? Avedis Vertabed?”

The prisoner smiled a little, and his fingers went gently to the bare head of the Mole. “*Kala nikte!*” he said. “*Kyrie Eleison!*”

“*Kyrie Eleison!* Well, I know what that is, anyway.” The Mole crossed himself as he rose. “Lord ha’ mercy on the two of us! And so, good night to you.”

He took up his packet, nodded to the prisoner, pinched out his candle. The rest was darkness, until one stone grated slightly on another, and silence fell.

Upon the following evening, vespers had been finished, the cells and chambers of the prisoners and exiles were locked for the night, and from the abbey cupola rang the bells for the singing of the Magnificat. They rang the more sweetly, those high bells, because thick fog had swooped down across the sands in the darkness. Something fantastic lay in their chiming, until the brethren glanced one at another with frowns, and Brother Simon muttered something about the Mole. After their song was done, however, the deep fogbell sent out his booming clang to warn any late-arriving pilgrims, and to guide them, until the tide came in and covered the dangerous sands.

The last services ended, both monastery and abbey were dark. Then, like some unearthly thing, a dim shape might have been seen gliding along the architectural wonder which spanned the empty space between flying buttress and roof—the Lace Staircase, as it was known, from its delicate tracery of carving, laboriously constructed when Philip Augustus was lord of France. Across this to the gutters flew the dim shape like a black seraphim, and then melted into the shadows and was lost to sight.

Count de Lussan sat in his chamber, one of the few still lighted, and wrote letters. From time to time, the tapestry across the fireplace took up its devil’s dance, and it waved more than ever when after a tap, the door opened

to admit Brother Simon. The fat monk hastily closed the door and came forward to the table, a suppressed excitement in his manner.

“I have important news, monsieur!” he exclaimed, to de Lussan’s inquiring look. “It is something you should know—”

“You have my permission to speak,” said de Lussan, eyeing him without love. “In connection with the Nameless Exile?”

“Not at all; with the niece of M. the Baron de Karque!”

“Ah!” De Lussan laid down his quill, and smiled slightly. “All the same, there may be more connection between the two than you imagine. Speak.”

Simon shrugged at this. “The girl attending mademoiselle saw me tonight—I have had no opportunity to reach you before now. She tells me she heard mademoiselle talking, early this morning, in her sleep. The words were in English. The girl could not make them out, but she caught a name. It was Marie, and after it another name which the girl could not pronounce. She said it sounded like Sous-phoque, which I do not understand.”

De Lussan took up his quill again, glanced at his letter, and nodded.

“Very well,” he said carelessly. “You have done right to tell me, Simon, though it is not of great importance. You may go.”

Somewhat taken aback by this reception of his news, fat Simon departed. No sooner had the door slammed behind him, however, than de Lussan flung away his quill, was out of his chair, and strode back and forth with a blaze of excitement in his face. More than mere excitement glowed there, also.

“By all the saints, can this be?” he murmured, gripping his hands and pausing to stare at the blank wall. “Is this why the London spy tried to kill the girl—oh, incredible, impossible! And yet, why not? What could the name have been but Suffolk, Mary Suffolk? I remember there was such a name at court, and did I not meet her? It was just before the peace was signed—no, I did not meet her. Oh, devil take it all, the fat rogue has dropped on to something large here! It is certain she carried a letter, though she must have destroyed it. If this is true, if she is Mary Suffolk and not—”

He strode up and down again. Presently he dropped into his chair and stared at the glittering candles. Now was a cruel twitch to those thin lips of his, and the scar on his cheek glowed darkly and in his eyes gleamed the intentness of the hunter seeing the prey within his very grasp.

“I dared not touch her before, but now—now!” he said aloud, with a sharp intake of breath. “She must have been sent in place of the baron’s niece, to bring a letter; has she fooled de Karque also? By the mass, this is a game worth while, yet I must make sure, make sure beyond error! Easy

enough to do that, too—but when? Hm! I’m off early in the morning to meet this cursed Norman fool—perhaps I can do it on the way. If not, then later.

“Now I must change my plans, return here tomorrow night, and spend a few days. If this thing’s true, I’ll teach the wench a thing or two; the little beauty will learn something, eh? Yes, a change of plans and a return here tomorrow night. Shall I get a *lettre de cachet* for her, or not? No, time lacks, and it’s not necessary. I’ll clap her into a coach and take her to Caen under arrest. By the time I have enough of her, M. de Pontchartrain may have what’s left for questioning—it works out prettily, by St. Michel! A pretty game! But first to make sure of the prey.”

In his thin, hearty laughter he did not observe the tapestry waving at the fireplace.

At nearly the same time on the same evening, Roger Domont was sitting in his own prison chamber, staring from the dark room at the fog beneath stars and finishing a bottle of good wine sent him by Baron de Karque. He was thinking of the note that had come with the bottle. At nine in the morning, he was to meet the baron at the barbican below, where horses would be waiting; they would spend the day hunting together on the Norman Coast, returning to the Mont with low tide, before vespers. No mention was made of de Lussan, but Domont could read behind the words.

This matter of return irked Domont sorely, yet since he had passed his word to return hither, he would keep it. At the same time, he was resolved to kill de Lussan, though once the king’s deputy were slain, he might have little further opportunity of escape. Domont wanted very badly to be off with St. Martin at once, and it was not his promise alone drawing him back here to the Mont. The blue eyes of Mary Suffolk, and the girl’s own peril, summoned him.

“It was almost incredibly easy to deliver my letter, after all,” he reflected. “Will there be another for her to take, I wonder? The Mole must have been in the room underneath me last night; I could swear to his voice. Well, my pay’s earned, my errand done. If I can earn Mary Suffolk’s pay for her also, and my own passage with her in the Dutch lugger, so much the better. Bide the time—that’s the thing to do.”

He started. A faint sound reached him, as though someone in the chamber below had struck the ceiling. Domont rose, stamped with his foot for response, then got out his ball of cord and lowered the weighted end from the window. Almost at once, it was seized and drawn taut, and held.

Then, for a long while, nothing happened. Domont lighted his pipe and composed himself to unhurried waiting. He had knocked the pipe clean,

before two pulls came at the cord, which then swung clear. He drew it up, and found the end securely knotted around two letters. Since no candles were allowed the exiles at this season, he had no light, but one letter was sealed and the other unsealed, so he guessed the latter must be for him.

Not until the morning light broke in upon him and roused him from slumber could Domont learn anything about those two letters. Then, however, he learned enough and to spare. The one was heavily waxed and sealed with a large signet, whose device of queer characters he could not decipher; this one, bearing no address, was obviously the letter from the Nameless Exile to London.

The other letter, unsealed, was addressed to himself, and spoke bluntly enough:

RODOMONT:

St. Martin is to be drugged and thrown into jail when he returns to Pontorson from his errand after the horse. He is suspected of throwing the little hatchet at his belt—what it means, I am not sure.

Mlle. de Bebambourg, who it seems also bears an English name, talks in her sleep; her maid, a spy, betrays the talk. Dangerous business for a wife, and more dangerous for a girl. I shall try to warn her today that de Lussan knows everything. Did I not tell you he was the devil?

It is a pretty game, Rodomont. De Lussan wants her body before he arrests her; therefore we are given a little time. Kill him today, and you avoid three things; the wooden cage for yourself, the rack for me, and something worse for her. I trust you to destroy this.

No signature—none needed.

Struck by dismay and consternation as he was at this message, Domont was yet more deeply struck by sheer wonder. Decidedly, if de Lussan were the devil, this little Mole with the twisted body was ten devils rolled into one!

CHAPTER VIII

BULLET FOR WHIP

THE *billet* given Domont by the prior had not been revoked, so he experienced no difficulty upon leaving the Chatelet in the morning. As he descended toward town, he looked anxiously for some sign of the Mole, but in vain. The King's Gate appeared deserted, save for two invalided soldiers on duty.

At length, when Domont was past the barriers and approaching the barbican across the cobbled little square, he saw saddled horses in waiting outside. The tide was at ebb, and the lower town here was crowded with folk from the mainland. Domont made his way through the throng, and outside the gate discerned Baron de Karque, his pseudo-niece, and Count de Lussan. They greeted him cordially enough.

"Good morning, my friend!" exclaimed the baron. "All ready? I have arranged for a boat to bring us back this afternoon—we cannot await the next tide, for it comes too late. To horse, gentlemen!"

Domont met the eyes of the girl, fastened upon him in anxious alarm. He bowed over her hand, but dared not attempt any private speech with her, but with de Lussan it was otherwise. The handsome Frenchman, tapping hip-boot with riding crop, drew the girl's hand to his lips; then, smiling into her face, he uttered two low words which Domont heard. She went white, but made no response.

The words uttered by de Lussan were: "Mary Suffolk!"

Domont could only give her a reassuring smile and a wave of his hand, and then he was off. He rode away at the side of de Karque, with de Lussan in advance, and his heart was sore for the girl behind, who must now think her imposture known, her secret betrayed, and herself lost. He could only hope the Mole would make good his promise and give her some warning. So Domont faced ahead, to a day of stranger experiences than he dreamed.

The baron chatted gaily, and handed Domont a baldric and extra sword. He was keenly anticipative of the coming duel, and in his important manner was already ruling the affair himself.

"This is an excellent blade I brought for you," he said, glancing at the sword which Domont was fastening about his shoulders. "It is a piece of rare German steel, my friend, a trifle longer than ordinary, but de Lussan has

quite approved your use of it. Death of my life! I hope you will kill this pig ahead of us!”

“I shall do so,” said Domont quietly. De Karque chuckled.

“He is possessed of equal confidence, it seems. It will be a fight, I warn you! He’ll pick up a second at Pontorson, where there are always some cavaliers of the *maréchaussée*. We are riding to the ruined tower of St. Gilles, a few miles from Pontorson. You know the place, no doubt.”

D’Aumont did, if Domont did not.

“It is an excellent spot for our affair, I understand,” pursued the baron complacently, puffing out his cheeks and regarding the bare yellow sands around from his slightly protruding eyes, which lent him an expression of eternal astonishment. “Have you considered the outcome, however? If you should kill the count, it will be very unfortunate for you. M. de Pontchartrain will undoubtedly be angry, and so will the king, not to mention Monsieur and certain royal duchesses—this de Lussan is in all good graces. Really, my friend, you should content yourself with less. Let me kill him instead, for I am quite capable of dealing with all discontent and they will not dare send me to the Bastille—”

“Thank you, but I intend to kill him,” said Domont calmly, and the finality of his manner settled the argument. He had quite made up his mind to this end, indeed. Through his head was ceaselessly running that ominous trilogy penned by the Mole—“the wooden cage for yourself, the rack for me, and something worse for her!”

Since de Lussan now guessed or knew the girl’s secret, Domont was well aware of the peril threatening her. As the niece of de Karque, she was quite safe from the advances even of de Lussan; but as a spy, she was practically in the same class with a peasant girl or a serf. De Lussan was a thorough aristocrat, a coldly polished thing of steel and stone, so far as any feeling of humanity or sympathy went; aside from his class-arrogance, he was responsible to none except the king or minister.

Yet there was also St. Martin to consider. How to save the Canadian from the fate awaiting him, even by the death of de Lussan, caused Domont torments of uncertainty. If St. Martin had gone to Avranches to dispose of the diamond, he might not return to Mont St. Michel for some days. Domont now recalled the votive heart of brass, and he did not doubt St. Martin himself must have delivered the message which would seal his fate. It might be possible to leave a letter for him at the Pontorson inn, but that was a long chance.

So, chatting lightly enough with Baron de Karque as he rode, but conning other and weightier matters in his mind, Domont came in past the long headland to Pontorson and the roadway winding up from the yellow sands. They had passed many folk going to the Mont, and the little town itself was all in a bustle, for a large party of pilgrims had just arrived and were being examined by the cavaliers of the guard before being permitted to pass on.

The three horsemen worked their way through the crowd on the road, de Lussan wielding his riding-whip to the peasants, and so turned in at the gateway of the inn. Then, as he entered, Domont caught a sudden hearty curse from de Lussan—and saw a foam-lathered horse standing in the courtyard ahead. Holding the horse's bridle, and just lifting a great pewter cup of wine to his lips, was St. Martin.

With a shout, Domont leaped from the saddle. He hurled himself at the Canadian, caught the startled man in what was apparently an embrace of enthusiastic delight, and managed to knock the cup aside so that the wine was spilled.

“Well met, well met!” he cried boisterously. “Ha, St. Martin! Get a fresh horse and ride with us! Join us inside over a flagon—”

St. Martin's dark gaze gripped into him. In this swarthy face Domont perceived something ominous, portentous, even desperate.

“Devil take you, d'Aumont—you've spilled wine down my boots!” growled St. Martin, then broke into a short laugh. He turned and bowed to the baron and the frowning de Lussan.

“Come!” said the baron promptly. “The question of a second is solved. I trust, my dear St. Martin, you are free to ride with us? Well, well, join us over our morning draught and we may discuss the matter. I shall order a horse for you at all events. Inside, gentlemen, inside! Let us get away from this confounded crowd of peasants.”

The four men passed into the inn for the usual drink which took the place of breakfast. As they followed the baron and the count, St. Martin gripped long fingers into the arm of Domont.

“The devil's own news—”

“Keep it. Your wine was drugged.”

There was time only for the sharp word or two. They joined the others, and the inn-keeper, who had noted the keen eye of Domont, brought wine; the Bostonnais, however, saw him shrug helplessly before the glance of de Lussan. Domont found the seals of the bottles unbroken, and following the

custom of the countryside, the four men touched glasses over the table. Then de Lussan addressed St. Martin courteously enough.

“I shall be honored, M. de St. Martin, if you will do me the honor of acting as my second in a meeting with M. d’Aumont.”

“Either as second or principal, with all my heart!” exclaimed the Canadian readily.

Domont was inexpressibly relieved. In the eyes of the count he had read indecision, for de Lussan had clearly hesitated whether to arrest the man from Canada or not. Having resolved to let the matter wait, de Lussan now set down his cup and addressed the baron.

“Monsieur, you will understand that if by any accident, such as befell the other morning, M. d’Aumont should kill me, he would be in danger of stern treatment from certain persons at Versailles. I have therefore written M. de Pontchartrain a letter, which I confide to you.” From his pocket he took a sealed paper, and handed it to de Karque. “In the event of my death, this will entirely absolve M. d’Aumont from any blame. In the event of his death, which I confidently expect, I shall bear my own case against his family without assistance.”

“Spoken like a gentleman!” Domont came impulsively to his feet. “M. de Lussan, I fully intend to kill you—but first I drink to you.”

“And I fully intend to kill you, monsieur,” returned de Lussan with a dark look, “but I do not intend to take advantage of you.”

St. Martin leaned forward and touched his cup to that of de Lussan.

“Monsieur, I am honored in your choice of seconds,” he said, and with such sincerity in his tone that the Frenchman flashed him a smile of thanks.

The drink and the exchange of courtesies ended, they returned to the courtyard after de Karque had paid the score, and found a horse being saddled for St. Martin. As they waited, a yellow-haired Norman peasant, stooped and gnarled, approached them. His bearded features were powerful, but his blue eyes were those of a wild beast.

“M. le Comte!”

De Lussan turned, and his brows went up. “Ah, Gabriac!” he said coldly. “So you are still alive, eh?”

“Yes, M. le Comte,” returned the peasant, with a decided snarl. “And my daughter is—where? She went at your bidding to Paris. What have you done with her?”

De Lussan’s face hardened. “What is that to you?” he demanded arrogantly.

A sudden intensity of passion shook the yellow-bearded countenance of the peasant, blazed out in the blue eyes.

“Body of God, is she not my daughter? Where is she, you damned aristocrat?”

“That is not your affair,” said de Lussan, with a slight shrug. “You are the serf of M. de Kerian—it is for him to ask questions, not you. Get to your kennel!”

The cold contempt of his manner was frightful. The gnarled peasant shivered, though not with any fear.

“I have asked you twice where she is,” he said in a hoarse voice. “Ah, you devil, you devil—”

A knife flashed out in his hand.

Calmly, de Lussan swung his riding-whip, and slashed the man twice across the face—blows that stung, blinded, brought blood, sent the peasant stumbling to one side. Two cavaliers of the guard came running, seized the groaning, reeling man, and brought him back before de Lussan.

“We saw the whole affair, M. le Comte,” spoke out one. “To the Charité?”

“By no means,” said de Lussan with an air of unconcern. “He is not my serf, but that of M. de Kerian. Let the dog go free. Your horse is ready, St. Martin—off, gentlemen!”

The four men swung into the saddle and rode away from the inn.

Domont scarce heeded the incident which had just passed. By the demeanor of St. Martin, he knew well his friend carried some tidings that sought urgent delivery, yet for this there was no immediate opportunity. De Lussan beckoned the Canadian and began to talk with him, riding in the lead; from a chance word or two, Domont gathered they were discussing conditions of the duel to come.

“You heard what passed, there?” Baron de Karque gave Domont a look and a grimace, as they rode after the other pair. “I have no desire to criticise my adopted country, but I find the ways of its nobility sometimes wonderful to comprehend. Now, if I were de Lussan, I would not sleep easy of nights, with that peasant at large.”

“You are not de Lussan,” said Domont significantly.

“Thank the saints for that! It is true that a pretty wench is a gift of heaven and not to be despised; and,” the baron added with some complacency, “I confess these flaxen-haired Norman girls keep me from

becoming homesick. At the same time, you understand, there is a certain way of handling these affairs.”

“Undoubtedly,” agreed Domont, and smiled slightly. “I presume that since the advent of your niece, you must assume the tonsure and cowl?”

“Ah, yes, to a certain extent; but not the vows, I assure you. And,” pursued de Karque frankly, “you will find Mont St. Michel a place possessing peculiar advantages, at least so far as the lower town is concerned—”

St. Martin drew rein and fell back between them, giving Domont one look of frowning resignation, and then turned to the baron.

“I am instructed by my principal, monsieur,” he said with formality, “that this duel is to the death, despite wounds or other accidents. It is so understood by your principal?”

“Entirely so, I assure you,” returned the baron. “I believe the spot is only a scant league from Pontorson, so we may arrange details when we get there.”

St. Martin assented and rejoined the count, and all four men rode on through the morning in silence.

Presently they neared the place selected for the meeting—one of the many ruined and abandoned structures of ancient days dotting the Norman hills. Dismounting, they tethered the horses by the roadside, and then traversed a path across a small thicket of trees, which after a hundred yards brought them into a grassy glade. Above this, on a little eminence, arose the ruins of the long-deserted keep of St. Gilles. A brook trickled past, and de Lussan knelt at it, when he had removed his upper garments, to bathe face and wrists. Domont followed his example.

St. Martin and de Karque now walked together over the greensward and selected a spot free of mole-runs. They measured the rapiers, deciding these were equal; if Domont’s were longer, that of de Lussan was a trifle thicker and had a notch near the hilt to snap an enemy blade. Domont waited quietly, stripped to his shirt, and de Lussan likewise. The seconds rejoined them, de Karque moving with a pompous air of importance as he presented the weapons.

“You are ready, gentlemen? Your swords,” he announced, bowing. “The meeting is to be to the death; there is to be no intervention or delay because of wounds; if either of you is disarmed, he rests at the mercy of his opponent. You understand?”

A nod of assent. The four men walked together to the selected place. Domont, sword in hand, faced the other man, read the deadly enmity in

those dark eyes, and smiled slightly. He had already measured de Lussan.

“Commend your soul to God, monsieur,” said the count coldly.

“And you yours, monsieur, to the devil,” said Domont, with an air of grave calculation. “At the fourth pass, I shall kill you.”

De Lussan’s eyes flickered a trifle. In these sober words he perceived, not a threat, but a prophecy. He became watchful, alert, cautious.

“En garde, messieurs!” said the baron, and stepped aside, snuffbox in hand. The two opponents saluted—and the steel met.

For a moment the blades hung crossed in the sunlight, as though frozen together; then de Lussan disengaged and lunged, with swift and deadly accuracy. So sudden was the thrust, Domont parried it only by a miracle of alertness, returning a lunge that failed of its mark.

“One!” he said quietly.

Again the thin rapiers met and glinted together. Now de Lussan took the offensive savagely, driving in vicious thrust after thrust, his wrist like steel, his face hard-lined and tense. He was, as he had foretold, fighting much better than on the previous occasion, and his dark eyes were fastened in hatred upon those of Domont. The latter, unmoving, seemed as though defended by a wall of flaming steel, until suddenly he drove in an unexpected ripost which de Lussan escaped only by a backward leap.

“Two!” said Domont.

Still de Lussan held to the offensive. Now he summoned up trick after trick, plied his weapon like a darting flame, head thrust forward, sweat beginning to break upon his face, dark eyes savage with the lust to kill. Domont stood like a rock, but his opponent was crafty; exultation blazed in the dark eyes, the steel flickered in and out, and Domont felt a prick at his neck. He knew blood was drawn. Instantly he lunged, a terrific thrust that bore aside de Lussan’s guard and touched the other’s ribs, though only slightly.

“Three!” said Domont, his voice impassive. “And now—”

With a low oath, and a spot of crimson spreading on his white shirt, de Lussan flung forward to attack—but at this instant came the thunder of horses at the gallop, a rising storm of shouts and cries. Baron de Karque sprang forward, knocking up the two crossed swords with his own drawn blade.

Into the opening among the trees came bursting men in uniform, running, cavaliers of the *maréchaussée*; these, at sight of the scene facing them, came to a sudden dismayed halt. One advanced, an officer, who swept off his plumed hat and bowed.

“Messieurs, I regret—”

“Explain this intrusion!” snapped de Lussan in angry hauteur.

“Your pardon, M. le Comte,” returned the other, panting with his haste. “That hulking serf, that peasant who assaulted you at the Pontorson tavern, stole a pistol and was said to have followed your party. We thought that—that—there might be trouble—”

De Lussan appeared not to hear the words. Flicking out a handkerchief of filmy lace, he wiped his sword-hilt free of sweat; then, with a slightly bored air, he turned to Domont and spoke.

“Monsieur, I can only trust you will overlook this most unfortunate interference, which I regret extremely. We have in this corps of cavaliers, it seems, a number of gentlemen who have had no instruction in the ethics of conduct or the duel.” He regarded the officer with a cutting stare as bitterly intolerant as his words. “M. le sous-lieutenant, you have my most cordial permission to betake yourself to the devil, with your men—and the quicker about it, the better!”

Flushing scarlet with humiliation and anger, yet not daring to reply, the officer bowed, then gestured to his men. They trooped back among the trees and were lost to sight. De Lussan shrugged and glanced at the baron.

“Your intervention is needless, M. de Karque. Monsieur is ready.”

The baron retreated, and the two opponents faced each other anew. Domont smiled as he fell on guard.

“It’s a pity to kill you, de Lussan—en garde!”

“At your service, monsieur,” and de Lussan lunged.

Domont parried. “We may now resume the count; I believe that I had just called three. Well, then—”

The opening came—the opening for which Domont had been waiting and hoping. He was in the very act of driving home the thrust, and the word “Four!” was upon his lips, when suddenly de Lussan whirled half around and fell sideways, untouched by the blade, so that Domont staggered with the force of his lost blow. At the same instant, the bellow of a pistol arose from the nearest copse of trees.

“Die, ravisher!” swirled up a wild, fierce yell. For an instant the yellow-bearded face of Gabriac, aflame with maniacal ferocity, glared out upon the scene. Then it was gone, in a flash.

De Lussan came to one elbow. “After him!” he gasped. “I—I am—not hurt—” The words died, and he fell full length.

St. Martin was already leaping into the brush, though he was too late to catch the assassin. The cavaliers, however, had not yet departed from the road outside the thicket. Now came a flurry of shots, followed by a crash of several pistolets, and then one shrill screaming voice, abruptly silenced. Presently St. Martin returned, with a grim nod.

“They killed him.”

Domont upheld the head of his late enemy, while de Karque made an examination. The ball had struck de Lussan in the left side, glancing across the ribs, making a tremendously ragged wound that welled forth blood, but doing little serious injury. Next moment the officer and his men were running in from the trees. De Lussan was unconscious, and while two of the men bound up his hurt, Baron de Karque talked with the officer, discussing what had happened and what was to be done.

Domont caught the eye of St. Martin, and stepped to one side with him, beyond earshot of the others. A swift exclamation broke from the Canadian.

“Rodomont, there’s the devil to pay!”

“There are ten devils to pay,” said Domont harshly, “since I can’t very well kill de Lussan now. Go on. What’s happened?”

“Your cousin is dead.”

“What! D’Aumont dead!” Domont whirled, faced his friend incredulously. “But it can’t be—he was not so badly hurt—”

“Dead as the Mohawk we burned at Michillimackinac,” affirmed St. Martin gloomily. “All was going well, it seemed, when the fool got into some wine and guzzled half a dozen bottles of it. He was in a raging fever yesterday and died an hour before dawn. I sold that ring in Avranches, by the way, and got eight hundred livres for it—lost my way and had to go through Avranches, else the mischance might never have happened. Poor d’Aumont was worried about you. He had realized about the *lettre de cachet* and was anxious to be on his feet and get to the Mont to take your place. Last thing he said was to tell you to cut and run for it at all costs.”

“No need of telling me that,” said Domont morosely, then perceived Baron de Karque coming toward them.

“Gentlemen, we have decided to take M. de Lussan to Ardevon, one of the abbey’s fiefs a quarter-league from here, and hence by boat to the Mont. Shall we all go in company?”

Domont had no mind for this. He needed a space to compose himself from this stunning information, and wanted badly to talk with St. Martin.

“What about luncheon?” he asked. “I think you ordered it at Pontorson.”

“Ah, true!” The baron pursed up his lips. He removed his huge curled periwig, and mopped his shaven skull. “True; an excellent meal, and admirable wines. Hm! Suppose I see the boat off with de Lussan, and return here for you. There is no surgeon at the Mont, so we shall have to get the man from Pontorson, in any event, to attend de Lussan. That’s the best plan. I’ll leave this accursed wig in your care, if I may; it’s too devilish hot in these woods.”

The baron clapped his hat on his shining pate and made off. Frowningly, Domont watched as the cavaliers, carrying the senseless de Lussan, filed away after de Karque. Then, when the little glade was again deserted, St. Martin spoke.

“When he comes back, run him through and ride on to St. Malo.”

“Wait, comrade. Let me tell you the situation.”

A certain desperation in his soul, Domont related what had taken place during St. Martin’s absence from the mount. He went on to tell about Mary Suffolk and the girl’s predicament, in view of the letter he had received from the Mole and what he had overheard from de Lussan’s lips at leaving the Mont that morning.

“We’ve earned our pay, and I have in my pocket the prisoner’s letter for Mary Suffolk and London; so far, so good,” he concluded. “On the other hand, this thrice-accursed Norman peasant has ruined everything for us, since he not only failed to kill de Lussan, but kept me from doing it—at the very instant I was thrusting for the man’s heart! Fate has played us a scurvy trick today.”

“Fate’s way,” said St. Martin uneasily. “If our business is done, what’s to prevent our going on to St. Malo?”

“We are dealing with honorable men,” said Domont, “and I have given de Karque my word of honor to return with him to the mount.”

St. Martin cursed softly.

“Honor always makes trouble for men like you and me,” he growled. “So, then, de Lussan knows everything! He’ll be up and around tomorrow; he’ll be a long while finishing this duel with you, but he is not badly damaged. If you go back to Mont St. Michel, there’ll be the devil to pay. That fat swine of an inn-keeper is wild with fright over d’Aumont’s death and may confess everything at Avranches. It seems I’m under suspicion and slated for arrest. Comrade, you’re going to have your scalp danced, sure as fate, if you go back! Your cousin is dead and can’t show up to relieve you from prison now.”

“Oh, I know, I know,” exclaimed Domont with a groan.

“Then damn honor, and take to your heels. What’s to hinder?”

“My word to de Karque, and the fact that de Lussan’s alive.”

“Hm! What about the yellow-haired girl, eh?”

Domont nodded silently. Filling his pipe, he began to pace up and down the green glade, while St. Martin sat down and vented his feelings in low oaths. Both men realized they were facing an impasse.

The unexpected death of Roger d’Aumont was a swift and vital blow, instantly transforming the whole affair from comic drama to stark tragedy. Now Domont was indeed doomed to fill the other man’s shoes, for good or ill; his only safe course was to take to flight while he still had a chance to escape. A word from de Lussan, and a company of the *maréchaussée* would close in upon the island and arrest all concerned. The fact that the imposture of Mary Suffolk was known, alone spelled certain peril, for it must be evident to de Lussan that she was actively concerned in the affair of the Nameless Exile. Presently Domont strode back to St. Martin, came face to face with the Canadian, and spoke curtly.

“Comrade, take the best horse remaining out there, and ride.”

“Eh?” The other scowled. “And you?”

“I can’t do it,” said Domont quietly. “I’m not sure that my parole alone would hold me, to be frank, but there’s Mary Suffolk. I can’t abandon her; somewhere there must be a way of escape for her. And, as much as anything else, there’s the Mole.”

St. Martin ground out a savage oath. “That imp of damnation?”

“That friend,” said Domont steadily. “The most a man can be proud of, St. Martin, is his friends.”

“You cursed fool!” cried the other in impassioned anger. “If you think I’ll run and desert you, think again! I stay with you.”

“No.” Domont frowned. “You shall go—ah! What’s this?”

His eye had fallen upon the heavy gold-laced coat of the baron, left with his periwig and the other coats. He darted to it swiftly, and rummaged through the pockets. To his delight he found the tortoise-shell snuffbox in his fingers, and drew it out.

“Now’s the time to see what’s here,” he exclaimed. Ruthlessly, he flung down the little box and smashed it under his foot. From the fragments of shell and gold and snuff, he drew forth a small folded sheet of thin paper, on which were three lines of writing.

What the bearer does, is done
by our command.

ANNE, R.

A low whistle escaped Domont—less at the writing itself, than at what such a paper implied.

“Look you, comrade! Here, at the very risk of causing war and embroiling nations, was a way of escape given the girl in case she were caught or betrayed in the business—only to be used in most urgent need, you may be sure!”

“The English queen, eh?” St. Martin shrugged. “I’ll warrant she looks after her spies better than the painted doll at Versailles looks after his!”

Domont seized his arm suddenly, drew him to his feet, face blazing with eagerness.

“Here’s our way out, St. Martin! Take this paper, hide it, and ride to St. Malo with all haste! There seek the Dutch lugger; if she is not yet arrived, await her. Watch your words carefully; the fact that you speak English, means a good deal now. Don’t show this order unless it’s necessary, and be sure of your man before you show it. Then you’ll be obeyed.”

“Hm! To what end?”

“Rescue. Tomorrow is Sunday; a week from tomorrow, have this lugger come to Mont St. Michel—Sunday night at high tide, whenever it befalls. If not then, the following Sunday. We dare not put it before Sunday, as the lugger may not yet be at St. Malo; we must take our chance as to what happens at the Mont before then.”

St. Martin grunted doubtfully, yet his eyes kindled at the prospect.

“Think you she can sail up to the Mont and pick us off like a bale of peltries?”

“Aye. You remember that little tower on the seaward face, the north side, where the windmill stands? I’ll show a light from that tower, and the lugger can send in a boat. You comprehend? Then off with you, for now you don’t ride to save yourself, but to save all of us! Off, and luck follow you!”

St. Martin nodded and thrust the paper into his pocket. Then he drew forth a double handful of gold coins and thrust them at Domont.

“Here—you may need the money. Agreed! The signal, a lantern showing from the windmill tower; for Sunday night. I’ll come back to the Mont and let you know how it goes.”

“Don’t do that!” cried Domont sharply. “You can’t risk it—”

“My good comrade, kindly go to the devil with your orders!” St. Martin flung out an eager, joyous peal of laughter, and clapped Domont on the shoulder. “Play your own game, and let me play mine; now that I see sense in the riding, I’ll ride! And I’ll hide this tomahawk of mine, since it betrays me, but unless I miss my guess, the trail will be red ere it’s washed away in water. Hide the pieces of gold and *ecaille*, there—farewell!”

Before Domont had flung the bits of broken snuffbox into the nearest bushes, St. Martin was gone from sight among the trees. Domont, however, had no great hopes of seeing him again; before the next Sunday came around, the net of intrigue might well have snared its victims.

CHAPTER IX

ANOTHER SORT OF MOLE

SOMETIMES—NOT often—one will encounter a fat man who, behind an apparent jollity, will hold in his piggish eyes a lurking maleficence. Such an one is liable to misjudgment in more ways than one. He will appear clumsy and lethargic, when in fact he is of extraordinary agility in body and mind; he will be deemed a boorish mass of fat, when he may actually be an ambitious mass of sinew; he will be considered a tender-hearted unfortunate, when in reality he may cherish cruelly a grudge against the world.

Brother Simon had not become a confidential agent of the all-powerful minister who ruled France, without gaining an accurate knowledge of how priors and abbots were made, in these days of intrigue and wire-pulling. History is silent as to his name before he donned the black cassock, yet a hint regarding his true quality is to be found in a letter addressed by M. de Pontchartrain to Dom Julien Doyte:

This man is of a peculiar worth, and if the “de” of nobility is not found in his present name, so much the more praise to his humility. Cherish him, I adjure you.

Brother Simon was cherished, although he was not disposed to depend upon others for cherishing, particularly where fast days were concerned.

When Count de Lussan was brought back to Mont St. Michel by boat, being immediately put to bed in an empty chamber of the King’s Gate to avoid the lift up to the Marvel above, Brother Simon at once set to work turning the event to his own purposes. Perhaps he entertained a vivid resentment of the arrogance and cold contempt received from the king’s deputy; certain it is that Brother Simon soon joined the cavaliers who had come across in the boat, finding them in the guard-house to the right of the barbican. There he proved himself a jolly and boon companion over the winecups, and managed to pick up many interesting facts regarding the events ashore this same morning.

Presently Brother Simon climbed toilsomely up to the abbey once more, and made his way to the handsome old chamber occupied by de Lussan, but now temporarily deserted. Here he spent a profitable half-hour inspecting documents and papers, and used a goodly amount of the deputy’s stationery in the concoction of a lengthy epistle to M. de Pontchartrain. He reported his discovery of an English spy in the Mont, stated that M. de Lussan had

abandoned his duty in order to fight a duel in Normandy with an exile, and there had been seriously wounded by a peasant whose daughter he had some time previously debauched; all this covered, he prayed he might be immediately advised what course to pursue, in view of de Lussan's condition, and so signed and sealed the missive. He despatched it the same day by the cavaliers returning to Pontorson, and considered he had done a very neat stroke of business.

The same ebb-tide that saw the letter depart, witnessed the return of Baron de Karque, Domont, and the surgeon from Pontorson. Brother Simon was on hand to meet them. Being at present more concerned in the health of de Lussan than in anything else, he went at once with the surgeon to inspect the wounded noble.

Domont, on the other hand, cared nothing about de Lussan but was vitally interested in getting a word apart with Mary Suffolk, and soon managed it. Baron de Karque had made the most of the good wine at Pontorson, and retired to his own chamber in some disorder, leaving Domont to walk on the ramparts with his niece. To her, Domont frankly related his entire story, this being her first indication of his real estate and what he was doing here. She listened gravely, but it was impossible to remain serious before that affair of bungled letters and her mood brightened.

"Why, then," she exclaimed smilingly, "we are both impostors!"

"And both destined to find ourselves in hot water when de Lussan gets on his feet. Have you seen the Mole, or he you?"

She flushed a little. "Yes. It appears that I talk in my sleep. Now, what are we to do? Have you any hopes of getting a letter for me from the Nameless Exile?"

"It's in my pocket; I'll slip it into your hand before I leave," said Domont, with a gesture toward the guards walking the ramparts above. The girl's blue eyes deepened on him in wide astonishment.

"You're not jesting? You have it—already?"

"Yes; and now we must get away. My friend St. Martin has gone to St. Malo, to look up that Dutch lugger of yours. If she is there, he will have her here a week from tomorrow—Sunday night—to take us off. Despite the danger, I dared not make the appointment for an earlier day; the lugger may not yet be there, and things are uncertain. You must be ready. We are to display a lantern on the little tower above the shore, the one with a windmill."

"I'll be ready," she said. "But you had better not give me the letter; keep it. My maid is a spy, it seems, and anything may happen to me——"

“Your uncle, by the way, has lost his snuffbox.”

“What?” She paled suddenly, then met his smile with anxious gaze. “Oh! But it has not been——”

“I gave the paper it contained to St. Martin, to make certain the lugger would not fail us. It is our only hope, I’m afraid. Ah—now be careful, be careful! Here is the arch spy of all!”

Brother Simon appeared coming toward them, his little eyes prying and probing, belying the jovial smiles that wreathed his heavy jowl. Domont inquired after the count, and Brother Simon sighed profoundly.

“Ah, we must burn tapers for him in the crypt of the Thirty, monsieur! He is in no actual danger, but has lost much blood. The surgeon is afraid lest fever come on him. For the present he will remain where he is, though we shall perhaps move him up to his own chamber in a couple of days.”

Here Brother Simon turned to the girl, and spoke in very fair English, to her great surprise. “He must be given a sleeping potion tonight in a cup of wine. Will you take charge of it, mademoiselle? It is difficult to trust the domestics, you comprehend.”

“Gladly,” said the girl. Brother Simon handed her a tiny vial filled with a murky green fluid. “At what hour?”

“With his dinner. It will cause him to sleep very deeply all day tomorrow; on Monday he will awaken, refreshed and himself once more. Give him the entire vial tonight, in a cup of hot spiced wine.”

“Very well.”

The brother turned to Domont. “Will you walk with me to the Marvel?”

“I am not yet returning,” said Domont shortly.

Brother Simon ignored the rebuff, and with a smiling nod passed on his way, the ponderous black figure withdrawing toward the upper town. Domont frowned after him, then felt the gaze of Mary Suffolk upon him. He turned, met her eyes—and stood staring, paralyzed by sudden comprehension. They both realized the same thing, almost at the same instant; no words passed and none were needed. Brother Simon had addressed the girl in English, had spoken to Domont in the same tongue—and Domont had replied unthinking.

“Well! Another drawstring comes taut on the net; luckily, it was set for me and not for you,” said Domont quietly, after a moment. “Now, if I thought we could make St. Malo, I would say to mount and ride at once—but it would be impossible. Our only escape lies by sea. Do you think we could get hold of a fishing boat, at night?”

“I doubt it; I’ve thought of it myself,” returned the girl. “Each night the boats are pulled up among that little nest of rocks just to the right of the barbican, below the walls. Two men are always on watch there, sometimes more.”

Domont shrugged resignedly. “Brother Simon spoke as though he wanted to talk over something. Another trap, perhaps—he’s a smooth rascal!”

At this moment appeared the wry-necked serving man Karl. He saluted the girl, gave Domont a dark look, and sped past on the run. He was very much in a hurry, and presently caught up with the solemnly climbing Brother Simon on the Great Outer Degree, before the Chatelet was reached.

“Return, Brother Simon!” he panted. “Return quickly, for M. de Lussan wants you at once! He is in a devil of a temper, also.”

His temper was no worse than that of the fat brother, at the prospect of another trip to the bottom of the hill. Simon uttered an exclamation which, had it reached the abbey precincts, would have drawn him at least five days of silence and confinement.

“What does he want?”

“He wants you to write a letter, and it must be sent off tonight without fail.”

“Get up with you, then.” Brother Simon motioned toward the Chatelet. “Inform Dom Julien Doyte where I am going and why, and ask him to assign another brother to my duties until vespers. Any word from that girl who waits on the niece of M. le Baron?”

“There are no papers except her passport.”

Brother Simon grunted and retraced his steps down the hill, going this time by the road instead of by the ramparts.

Upon reaching the King’s Gate, he mounted to the tower and presently reached the room where de Lussan had been bedded. The count, bandaged and pale as the sheets on which he lay, sharply commanded him to fetch writing materials and close the door. Having already provided himself with ink, Brother Simon sat him down at the table, trimmed a quill to his taste, and looked to the wounded man for orders.

“Write M. de Luynes, in command of the *Maréchaussée* in this district, at Avranches. Order him to make ready a coach and six, with an escort of four cavaliers, the expense to be charged to my name. Stay! When will ebb-tide occur on Friday night next?”

Brother Simon lifted his head and reflected an instant.

“Somewhat before midnight, monsieur.”

“This coach and escort will come to the barbican at the South Gate an hour before midnight of Friday night,” continued de Lussan. “No lights are to be carried. They will inquire for me at the barbican and await my orders. When the letter is written, I will sign it.”

Brother Simon, bent forward over his paper, bent his lips as though murmuring words which assuredly were not prayers. Then a sly grin came into his face, and he hurried on. The letter finished, he carried paper and quill to the bedside and de Lussan made shift to sign, though not without a grimace of pain.

“Despatch this tonight without fail. Have you any further news for me?”

“None, monsieur,” and the eyes of Simon twinkled malignantly, “except that M. d’Aumont speaks English as well as I do myself, or a little better.”

De Lussan stared up at him for a long moment, incredulous.

“Eh? Eh? Impossible! Rodomont knows not a word of English! He understands it a little, but his attempts at speaking it are ludicrous——”

“I assure you, monsieur, he speaks it perfectly. I was talking with him only a few moments ago.”

De Lussan whistled a little. His eyes widened, then narrowed reflectively.

“Also, monsieur,” pursued Simon, with a baby-like stare of innocence which might have warned the other man but did not, “I think M. d’Aumont is extremely interested in the niece of M. le Baron. He has been walking with her on the ramparts ever since his return this afternoon, and since she speaks no French, he must have been using his English. *Peste!* If he has an eye for yellow hair, then she has an eye for red! there is heat, monsieur, there is heat! It is easy to perceive that the sins of the flesh will soon be entering this sacred place——”

“Silence, you fat bullock!” snarled de Lussan, writhing on his pillows. His dark eyes were beginning to blaze both with fever and with mental fires. “Death of my life, to be helpless at such a moment! What’s this about Rodomont? A master of fence, has learned to speak English fluently—ten thousand devils! That’s the thing—look for the mole, look for the mole!”

“Eh, monsieur? You mean our librarian, our little scrivener——”

“Fiend fly away with you—no!” roared de Lussan in an access of passion. “The mole under his left ear—Roger was always vain of it! If this man has it not, he is not Roger d’Aumont! Oh, I see it now, all of it!” From his lips broke a sudden wild oath. “Here is the red-haired man who was with St. Martin—the man with the black-smudged face! What was his name on

that passport? Roger—ah, devil take me! Domont! The same name—and there was a look of d’Aumont in his face! Ah, that accursed Canadian! These men have fooled us, have tricked us all—and they’re in league with that girl——”

His voice died away in panting silence. Brother Simon, who had not missed a word of all this, was shrewd at guessing. He pursed up his lips in a grimace of amazement and sudden comprehension.

“Shall I have him arrested at your bidding, monsieur?”

“No, fool! He is here, you say? Returned?”

“An hour or more ago.”

“Then watch him closely; look for the mole, and if he has it not, say nothing but let me know. Tell Dom Julien he is not to be permitted to leave the Mont again. Where is that man St. Martin? Did he return? Have you heard anything from him?”

“He did not return, monsieur,” said Brother Simon. “Baron de Karque mentioned he had ridden to Caen——”

A blasting oath burst from de Lussan. “Open the letter! Order that man’s arrest—a dozen cavaliers out to patrol every road between here and Caen. Quickly!”

Brother Simon returned to the table. He opened the unsealed letter and added the postscript. De Lussan initialed it, and then fell back exhausted, with a gesture of dismissal. When the letter had been sealed, Brother Simon left the room. Outside the closed door, he paused to wipe sweat from his fat jowl.

“Now, here is a most rascally piece of business all around!” he observed complacently. “My good M. de Lussan is about to carry off this young woman to serve his own carnal desires; Sieur d’Aumont is another man entirely, undoubtedly a spy, which fact I shall verify before dinner; and that accursed Canadian is loose—what he has done, I don’t know and don’t care. He’s one of them, at all events.

“Hm! It is decidedly my business to get another letter off with this one, informing the minister of these things. If M. de Lussan escapes the Bastille, he’ll be a lucky man! What a blessing I did not order the sleeping potion given him at once—otherwise I would not have learned all this! As it is, de Lussan will be a scatter-brained idiot until Wednesday night at least. He cannot possibly take any action before Thursday—good! By the end of the week he’ll be in disgrace, and there’ll be a new royal deputy on the scene—and why not one who wears a cassock?”

Brother Simon hurriedly went his way, chuckling.

Domont, in the meantime, being mindful of the slowly enveloping peril, arranged with Mary Suffolk as to the place and hour of meeting on Sunday night week, then bowed over her hand and slowly ascended toward the Abbey. If nothing went wrong, he would see her every day—yet there was much to go amiss.

To his untold relief, as he turned the swing of the great stairs leading to the black maw of the Chatelet, he saw the figure of the Mole hurriedly coming down. The misshapen creature scarcely paused to return his greeting, however.

“So you failed to kill the devil, my St. Michel!” said the Mole, and his liquid brown eyes looked anything but merry. “No time to talk; one of the madmen in the Lesser Exile has become violent, and I must fetch the town armorer to iron him. Come to the west platform in half an hour and await me.”

Domont nodded and passed on, seeking his own chamber. He mounted past the ever-locked door of the Nameless Exile, came to his private prison-cell, and discovered it had been very thoroughly searched during his morning’s absence. Over his pipe, he gazed out at the waters and sands, glittering in the afternoon sunlight, and perplexed worry drew a frown to his face. Suspicion must be aroused by the discovery that he spoke English; in that case, what to do about the letter in his pocket—the sealed letter from the Nameless Exile? There was nowhere to hide it safely.

He resolved at length to give it to the Mole, who was in least danger of them all, and this resolve banished his care. Knocking out his pipe, he stowed it away and betook himself to the west platform.

His way took him by the Great Inner Degree, that massive stairway following the bend of naked rock, mounting gradually by flights and landings between the church and the abbatial buildings, steep walls of stone rising high in air on either hand. As he mounted, Domont marveled anew at the indescribable labor of ancient days in building such a pyramid of masonry on an ocean islet. This long climbing way was itself wider than most streets, was crossed overhead by defences and a covered passage between abbot’s rooms and church, while looming far above could be seen the delicate granite lacework of the Marvel. Small wonder that Mont St. Michel had never in history been taken, when a handful could defend it against an army!

The top of this tremendous stairway brought him to the south platform. Being in no haste, Domont continued his route by way of the church, and found it empty at the moment. He had heard much about the basilica, and

when he set eyes upon it, this monument to medieval and monastic achievement enthralled him.

Far down beneath his feet, crouched against the naked rock, was the ancient church of Carolingian builders; around and above this was erected the early Norman structure, where Harold the Saxon and William of Normandy had knelt side by side in the days before Senlac; and above this, in turn, while preserving the others, now towered the architectural wonder, par excellence, of France—so far beyond all others that it was usually known simply as “The Marvel.” Yet, if the exterior was worthy such a name, here beneath the soft glory of the stained glass windows was a creation of rare and miraculous beauty.

The vast extent of the place, with its carvings and pillared arches, was overwhelming. The seven-bayed naves and transept led into the choir and the apse chapels, only finished in the fifteenth century, four hundred years later than the remainder. Overhead opened the great tower, the very summit of the Marvel. Ahead was the semi-circular sanctuary towering high, while below its long windows glimmered the richness of votive offering and sacred service collected here across the ages. In the nave, at the altar of the saint, showed the high golden image of St. Michel given by the royal pilgrim Philippe le Bel, and in the transept was the abbey’s “treasure”—a splendor of enamels, goldwork, jeweled reliquaries, crowned by the gemmed mitre and the carved pastoral cross, the most beautiful in all France, made for the traitor abbot Robert Jolivet in 1412—him who assisted at the burning of Joan the Maid.

With a sigh Domont turned from the contemplation of these things amid the peace of the dim church, to seek the west platform before its portals. He walked out toward the parapet. There, far out against the sea-horizon, he could see the blue dots marking the archipelago of Chausey, given as a fief to the monks in 1179, whence had been brought all the granite for this magnificent work. And then, abruptly, he was aware of the Mole shambling toward him across the platform.

“Tell me all that has happened, everything you know—all of it!” exclaimed the Mole rapidly, his large face set in anxious lines. “Now our heads hang loosely indeed, my friend, so leave out nothing. Let the Mole burrow!”

Domont related everything since he left the island that morning. He omitted nothing, yet from the Mole came no comment until Domont spoke of his recent meeting with Brother Simon on the ramparts below. Then the little man uttered an ejaculation, sharp and swift.

“Eh? What was that again? What did he say?”

“Why, he tricked me very neatly into speaking English——”

“No, no! About the sleeping potion for de Lussan! Did you see it? Could you describe it to me?”

“Of course.” Domont was astonished by the larger incident being ignored for the lesser and by the Mole’s eager excitement. He looked down at those flashing brown eyes, and frowned. “It was a small vial, filled with a greenish liquid——”

“That’s it, that’s it, by the bone of the blessed St. Benoit!” The Mole clapped his hands suddenly, then uttered a low, amazed whistle. “What a devil’s game! Look you, we sought the stuff for the madman in the Lesser Exile, but the bottle was gone. And why should fat Simon give it to poor de Lussan, eh?”

“Why indeed? You don’t mean it is poison?”

“No; here is the explanation, friend Rodomont! The prior of St. Benoit, in St. Malo, has much dealing with the orient, and occasionally sends us vials of this stuff to use on poor devils of idiots or madmen, when they cannot be handled otherwise. It is a potent eastern drug called *hachich*, or some such word. It puts them into heavy sleep for a day or two, and they waken without any ability to think or act either violently or coherently for another day or so. I tried some of it myself, once, and beheld marvelous visions of hell and paradise and other places—well, well, to the point! De Lussan will be incapable of any action for some days—we may confidently assume this much. What is clever Simon planning? I smell the devil in it, Rodomont. Simon tricked you into speaking English, eh? Then, depend upon it, your head is looser than ever on your neck!”

“If we can stave off any crisis until a week from tomorrow——”

“By tomorrow week,” said the Mole with emphasis, “I shall be on the rack, you in the wooden cage down below, and the maid no longer a maid— or else we shall be gone. That is very certain.”

“But we can’t get away before then!”

“Granted—perhaps. All things are possible, though, if God has a hand in them. Now let me think a moment——”

The Mole leaned on the parapet, chin on folded arms, and peered out at the long seascape and the Brittany shore to the south. He fell to humming presently, his eyes brightened, and with a half satirical smile he intoned a verse of the hymn of St. Ambroise:

“Hostem repellat ut saevum
Opemque pacis dirigat,
Et nostra simul pectora
Fides perfecta muniat.”

He swung around with a quick, sharp laugh.

“I have it! That business of the letter was awkward, Rodomont, because of the position of your cell; you should have been two stories below, for I cannot reach you where you are. Tomorrow morning after mass, petition the prior to move you to the room on the second floor of the tower, which happens to be vacant at present. It will be done readily enough. Assign any reason you can think up.”

“To what end?” queried Domont, puzzled. “I meant to ask how you had managed that letter exchange. Were you in the room of the Nameless Exile?”

“Was I, indeed!” The Mole chuckled. “We have a game of chess together every night, and sometimes a bottle of wine. Listen? Why should we not play for a big stake, if any?” The brown eyes dilated with eager thought. “Once you are in the chamber below his, I can reach you; the Mole burrows, my friend, burrows far and into strange places! If we are to get away, then, why not take the Nameless Exile with us? He has powerful friends, I assure you, though I do not know who they are. His rescue would put a king’s ransom into your hand; besides, I have a friendship and reverence for him. I should like to take him with us.”

Domont nodded instantly. “Agreed. How do you expect to escape?”

The other shrugged. “How does the bird fly?”

“Nonsense.” Domont was nettled by this response. “Either you have some scheme, or you have none. Which is it?”

“Rodomont, let us be honest together.” The Mole faced him with eyes that shimmered and glinted. “You know, and I know even better than you, we cannot endure until Sunday week; too much is in the brewing, and even now the pot simmers! At any instant, we may lose life or liberty. Simon knows you speak English, so you are as good as unmasked already. The girl is discovered, and only de Lussan’s arrogant lust has saved her from arrest, for once arrested by others, he could not touch her. The recommendation has already gone in that I be put to the rack, for my virtues. St. Martin is undoubtedly being hunted along every highway and byway, at this moment—or will be by tomorrow. You recognize these facts?”

“Of course,” said Domont, wondering at the passionate earnestness in the words and manner of the little man.

“Good. Now, then, you ask if I have any scheme; and I answer that I have none. But, my friend, I have faith.”

“Eh? Faith—in whom?”

“You, myself, destiny! This Nameless Exile may be a king or a pope—I know not; but I do know that he is a holy man, and bestows the blessing of God. I confess, Rodomont, I do not find God among those walls yonder where the black brethren whine. Sometimes I am almost ashamed to reverence the Blessed Host, knowing what thoughts are rioting in those tonsured pates, and I am quite certain the Blessed Host is ashamed of such servitors as most of them are. Yet when I ring those bells, my friend, God speaks to me; and you will comprehend when I say that I speak to Him, then, also. Well, something passes—I do not know what. There is a touch from above, and sometimes I shed tears as I stand there pulling at the ropes, tears of pure joy for the touch of beauty reaching to me. The mass they sing down below is a hollow mumble of parrot-words—but mine is something else, and different. Do you think me a blasphemous fool, my friend?”

Domont nodded a little, his eyes tender.

“I think you are a dear fellow,” he said, and smiled. The Mole bit his lip.

“Ah—the heart of a friend! God is good to me. Well, I have no scheme, but I have this faith in a higher power. Perhaps some inspiration will come to us; who knows? Let us trust, and wait.”

“Very well,” assented Domont quietly. “And you want me to change my room?”

“Aye. Do it, and you are free of the Mont at night.”

“You mean—I can leave my locked chamber?”

The Mole nodded, seemed about to speak, then suddenly turned and was gone across the wide platform, and vanished. Domont stared after him in blank astonishment, until, an instant later, he caught sight of a mountainous black bulk, and realized that Brother Simon was approaching. He turned to the fat monk.

“Well, Brother Simon, did you want to speak with me?”

“A trifling matter, M. d’Aumont!” The other chuckled jovially. “I only wanted to say that if you suffer for an extra bottle of wine at any time, slip a word in my ear—you comprehend? On lean days the fare is ferial enough—ha, ha! There are rabbits down yonder in the little wood below us, and not a few birds, and the cook is my very good friend. To eat of such things is

undoubtedly a sin, but if you attribute this sin to curiosity alone, it becomes only a venial fault, which is effaced by eating a morsel of blessed bread.”

Despite himself, Domont’s lips twitched. “Thank you,” he said gravely. “You’re a friend in need. This is a wonderful view, Brother Simon; has this platform a name?”

“It is called Plomb-du-four,” said the monk, and pointed down at the abrupt gulf three hundred feet below, where the sea lapped at the rocks. “It was sung by the trouvère Benoit de St. More, and was built seven hundred years ago. A jolly leap, monsieur, a jolly leap!”

Smiling the fat monk passed on. Domont wondered why Brother Simon had looked so hard at his neck.

CHAPTER X

THE MOLE BURROWS FARTHER

UPON the following morning, Domont interviewed the prior. He perceived at once that Dom Julien held him in no suspicion, although he was given another chiding about having struck the wry-necked Karl. The request that his chamber be changed was at once assented to, though the removal could not take place until next morning, this being Sunday.

During the day, Domont saw the Mole only at a distance. He noticed, however, how he himself was continually under observation by some of the brethren, confirming his belief that Brother Simon suspected him. This rendered him increasingly uneasy. In the rush of other matters, he had entirely forgotten to turn over the letter of the Nameless Exile to the Mole, and it burned in his pocket.

In the afternoon he sauntered about the abbey precincts, saw a few of his less fortunate fellow-exiles taking the air, but had no desire to talk with them; instead, he turned his steps to the ramparts below. He found Baron de Karque and Mary Suffolk in the garden of the King's Tower, joined the baron in a glass of wine, and heard about the loss of the snuffbox, now discovered by the baron. De Lussan, he learned, was in a profound slumber, from which he had not stirred since the previous evening.

Occupied with some embroidery and unable to admit knowledge of French, Mary Suffolk said little, yet when her eyes met those of Domont, the latter read in them a tacit message to make his pulses leap. This girl trusted him—good! Might she more than trust him? From his first meeting with her, Domont had found in Mary Suffolk a singular attraction—rather, an instant comprehension, an invisible bond of the spirit existing between them. This was all the more strange, in that Roger Domont as a rule gave no passing look to womankind; his life had been hard, too filled with struggle by bleak New England coasts and Hudson Bay marshes to admit of dreamy romance. In these past few days he had come to let himself dream at times, though he was well aware what a vain and futile vision it was.

Presently the baron was summoned away, the sub-prior having come to consult with him on a matter of administration. Mary Suffolk, looking up from her work again to meet the intent gaze of Domont, smiled suddenly.

“A penny for your thoughts, dreamer! Or are you afraid to speak English?”

“Bah! The secret’s out by now. My thoughts were far away from here, in Boston town.”

“The Boston overseas? Someone is waiting for you there?”

“No one. I was wishing I were able to take someone there.”

“Oh!” Surprise came into her eyes, and a laugh. “Why can’t you?”

“Because I’m a poor man. I lost everything when my schooner was captured, and I’ve been a prisoner these two years. Once back in Boston, I can always get command of a raiding ship for the bay—but why turn back to piracy? That is what it amounts to, particularly in time of peace. If I could make some money, then I might buy into a trading firm who are friends of mine.”

“Hm! I should like to go to America,” said the girl softly, reflectively. “Does one need to have money there? I have heard stories about gold being plentiful, and diamonds, for the mere picking up!”

Domont chuckled at that. “Aye, there are tales enough. But why would you, a girl, like to go to such a land? From caprice, I suppose.”

“Not at all.” She met his smile gravely, seriously, and he was a little astonished by the earnestness of her gaze. “I’ve spent most of my life about the court—not from choice, but from necessity. I’m heartily sick of such an artificial existence, my friend. In the colonies, I believe, birth and blood count for little, achievement counts for everything. Is this only another tale?”

“To a certain extent, yet it is true in some of the colonies. How could you go without money, though? Have you none?”

“Little enough,” she said. “Could I not go there, earning my own way, without being forced to the plantations or sold as a slave-wife?”

“Earn your own way—how?” Domont’s eyes bit at her.

“Why, by teaching music or languages, or by needle-work—”

“No, no!” He laughed curtly. “It’s a grim land, Mary Suffolk; and these accomplishments would earn you scant payment. If you go, it’ll have to be as the wife of some man who can fend and provide for you.”

“In other words, a man who has money. Is money of such prime importance, then?”

Domont nodded uneasily. Somehow, he had the sense that this girl was playing with him, amusing herself with him; the twinkle lurking in her eyes was warning enough of this. Her words were one thing, he fancied, and her thoughts quite another thing. A sudden laugh broke from him.

“I’d like to know what’s really in your mind!” he said quizzically.

“And I in yours,” but she did not laugh as she uttered the words, and her scrutiny was very intent. He shrugged, and spoke softly.

“Well, here’s one thing at least in my mind—to try and take the Nameless Exile with us when we get away, providing we get away. The Mole wants it, and I’ve agreed. It is not primarily a question of gold, though I suppose someone would pay well for his escape if we could manage it.”

“His escape!” The girl caught her breath, and a flash leaped in her eyes. “Oh, if it could be done, if it could be done! They’ve thought it impossible. Lady Sarah herself told me twenty thousand pounds would gladly be paid for his freedom, were it possible.”

Domont whistled in amazement. “Then, by the sword of St. Michael, he goes with us!”

“For money?”

“No. As I say, the Mole loves him.”

“You’re a queer man!” She broke into a little trilling laugh, then sobered and leaned forward. “Listen, my friend,” and her face was tender, “I must confess something. I have told you a terrible lie, mainly to see what you would say to it—never mind just what the lie was! I only want you to know that I did lie to you. If you ever find it out, then you’ll understand—”

Domont swept aside her words with a smile.

“My dear girl, you can tell me all the lies you like, and I’ll love them for your sake! Now I must be going, and we must not talk in English again. There’s been enough risk in what we’ve said. I don’t know what may come up, but be ready at any time for a message from me or the Mole. If St. Martin is fool enough to come back here, it will precipitate trouble. Our one hope rests on the night of next Sunday.”

She nodded to this. Making his farewells, Domont departed, and as for the lie which she had told him, gave it no more thought.

That same afternoon was held the funeral of the unfortunate madman in the Lesser Exile, who had died early in the morning. For such persons, there was no ceremony in the abbey. Domont, mounting the one crooked street, saw the bier laid down outside the Chatelet by the brethren, where the clergy of the parish church took it up again. In this instance, as the deceased had belonged to a noble family, the sub-prior and two monks assisted at the ceremony in the churchyard below.

No word came from the Mole that evening, nor had Domont any sight of him.

With morning, Brother Simon arrived to make the change of rooms, and pried curiously into the reason therefor. Domont alleged, truly enough, how

in time of fog his room swam with moisture, so he trusted a change to a lower level might be for the better. Simon favored him with a sharp look, but made no comment beyond a shrug. The change was effected, and Domont found himself installed in the chamber below that of the Nameless Exile. Much to his relief he had no further converse with Brother Simon, for with thought of the letter still in his pocket, Domont was anything but easy in presence of the fat monk.

Later in the morning, an unusually clear and fine one, Domont was preparing to ascend to the terraces on the very summit of the Marvel, there to enjoy the magnificent view and to smoke a pipe in quiet, when from the window of his chamber he discovered Count de Lussan slowly making his way up the Great Outer Degree toward the Chatelet. He was obviously returning to his own quarters, since the wry-necked valet Karl followed him with a bundle of clothes.

De Lussan was apparently much himself, though he used the baron's ivory-handled stick with heavy hand; yet Domont was indescribably startled by the man's altered aspect. His step had lost its arrogant confidence, and had become hesitant, vacillating. His white features were now all vacant and irresolute, while those handsome, vigorous eyes were quite blank. Domont understood perfectly that the drug had temporarily shattered all the man's power of will and energy and, despite his fear and hatred of de Lussan, a hot wave of anger mounted in his heart against the user of so diabolic an agent.

A little before noon, the Mole was in the prior's chamber, having just written and sealed a letter for Dom Julien, when Brother Simon sought admission and humbly craved leave to visit the town below—it was a question of returning to the armorer the irons and tools employed in confining the late madman. The prior readily granted leave, and Brother Simon took his departure.

So did the Mole—who needed no leave—but not by the same road. The little twisted man had a certain curious faculty of remaining un-noted and unseen in dark corners, or of plunging abruptly from sight, by no obvious means. Now, as he passed along the Great Inner Degree, the Mole went into the shadow of a buttress, and did not emerge—he simply disappeared from sight. Before fat Simon was halfway down the winding street, the Mole made a sudden appearance below the church, hurried on down to the King's Gate, and there entered under plea of obtaining certain toilet articles overlooked by de Lussan in departing. He slipped into the tower, and was no more seen.

Whether the Mole acted by shrewd guesswork, or by some hint of knowledge, his prevision was accurate. Brother Simon fulfilled his errand

with the armorer, and then sought the King's Gate, where he craved audience with Baron de Karque in the tower. He was led to the room where the baron was sealing some letters, and carefully closed the door against Karl. He then came forward to the table.

"Monsieur," he said gravely. "It is my duty to lay before you certain information. I beg you will hold it sacredly confidential."

The baron stared up at him, adjusted his wig, and cursed the ink on his fingers.

"Well, well, what is it? I'll grant your wish. What is this information?"

"It concerns M. de Lussan. Being a humble brother of the order and unversed in worldly affairs, I know not what use to make of it. As it concerns your honor, however, I believe that it should be imparted to you at once."

"Hm!" said the baron, regarding him frowningly. "De Lussan—and my honor! Devil fly away with me if I like your hints. Go on to the meat of it."

"M. de Lussan," said Simon, "has ordered a coach and escort from Avranches, to be waiting at the barbican gate below, toward midnight of Friday. I regret to inform you, monsieur, that he plans to carry off your worthy niece, the young lady—"

"Eh? Eh?" With a rousing oath, the baron sat bolt upright. "Thunder of God, is this true? That devil wouldn't dare attempt such a thing!"

"None the less, he has made full plans," asserted Brother Simon drily. "His scheme, monsieur, is not entirely known to me; none the less, I learned some details of it. The means I cannot reveal, as it involves the secrets of Holy Church."

This was a sly stroke, implying that Simon had learned something under cover of the confessional. The baron reddened with rising anger and struck his fist on the table.

"Go on, go on! The details?"

"He plans boldly, monsieur. He will, if discovered in his abduction, make the accusation that your niece is a spy sent here by the English, and that she is not your niece at all but some imposter, whom he is taking away under arrest. He also intends to say that M. d'Aumont is not M. d'Aumont at all, but another spy impersonating that gentleman. This will be his pretence for carrying off the young lady. I do not know, however, what he intends regarding M. d'Aumont."

"Satan fly away with me—what a preposterous outrage!" roared the baron, and vehemence increased upon him rapidly. "Abduction, eh? A member of my own family, and under such absurd pretences? I'll write to

His Majesty this moment! I'll have the rascal clapped into the Bastille for this, or into my own château of Mont St. Michel—”

“Monsieur!” exclaimed Brother Simon hastily. “Remember your promise to me! It would be unwise to cause any breach with M. de Lussan, who at the moment is high in favor with the minister. Besides, he is a very headstrong man, certain to resort to violence. It would be much better to summon a score of cavaliers, have them here on Friday night, and catch M. de Lussan in the act of abduction. Then you may kill him or not, as you choose.”

“I never heard of such enormity!” puffed the baron, by this time purple in the face with rage. “Why—why, I know M. d’Aumont very well indeed, and certainly I know my own niece—the impudence of that devil!” The worthy nobleman trailed off into sulphurous German oaths, amid which Brother Simon carefully intruded renewed suggestions. At these de Karque now caught eagerly.

“Good, good!” he approved. “Hm! I'll summon a score of the *maréchaussée* to arrive here—hum! Thursday afternoon, by boat. I'll set them at work examining the defences on the other side of the Island, and keep them at it Friday. I'll give their officer private instructions. We'll catch this rascal at his work Friday night—”

“There may be a question, monsieur,” said Black Simon thoughtfully, “as to whether your authority over these cavaliers exceeds that of the king's deputy.”

“Oh, may there?” The baron glared at him, and showed his teeth in a mirthless grin. “I happen to know the privileges of my position. Under His Majesty in person, only one man alive has authority in this place, and that is the Abbot of Mont St. Michel. If I choose to turn M. de Lussan from the gates and bid him be gone, or Monsieur the King's royal brother, or M. de Pontchartrain—that's my right, by the thunder of heaven! My orders are supreme here, under His Majesty, and they'll remain supreme!”

“Quite so, monsieur,” said Brother Simon humbly. “But may I suggest that you write M. de Pontchartrain immediately, stating what you have discovered, and also that you are taking steps—you need not detail them—to prevent the outrage? I would not mention this nonsense about your niece being a spy; merely that you have learned of de Lussan's intent.”

“An excellent idea. And if I don't put six inches of steel into the rogue Friday night, wounded or not, may I never see Cologne again! Good brother Simon, I thank you with all my heart for this timely warning, and I shall keep its source to myself.”

Brother Simon departed, smiling softly to himself; and, a little afterward, the Mole slipped quietly from the King's Gate and departed likewise. Now, had not the Mole been in a hurry, the entire course of his life—and perhaps the course of history as well—might have been somewhat altered. He was, however, in a hurry, and Brother Simon was not in a hurry. So, as he toiled up past the parish church and its open-air crucifix, the Mole came plump upon Brother Simon, seated on the bench to one side and resting in the shade. Brother Simon's eyes opened wide in amazement.

“Ha, little brother! I thought you were with Dom Julien!”

“So I was, but I had an errand,” said the Mole, taken somewhat aback. Brother Simon frowned and squinted at him.

“Oh ho! And what was this errand, eh?”

“Why,” flung back the Mole with a grin, as he hurried on, “perhaps to follow you!”

Now this was the greatest folly that had ever left his lips, although he chuckled at it and Brother Simon laughed in hearty merriment at the jest. With this utterance, the Mole sealed his own fate. The possibility of truth in those words raised in the heart of the fat brother a perfect whirlwind of fear, consternation and anger.

That afternoon Domont was approached by a pale, health-broken marquis who inhabited the Lesser Exile and was hungry for companionship and news. Taking pity on the wretched man, immured in this place during the past seven years for some momentary folly, Domont accompanied him to the Teste d'Or, where they enjoyed excellent wine and a fat lobster fresh from the bay. Most of the afternoon being thus spent, Domont saw nothing of Mary Suffolk for this time.

After vespers were over and his prison door had been locked for the night, Domont sat waiting impatiently, smoking the last of his tobacco and watching the shadows of night close down across the sands and shores below, until at length Normandy had faded into a purple haze and the stars twinkled clear. Then, without warning, he heard a sudden thump in the wall beside him, and another, followed by a scrape as his commode was shoved into the room. He sprang up and lifted it away. With a dolorous squeal, a stone of the side wall swung inward, and he heard the voice of the Mole in a panting ejaculation.

“By the bone of the blessed St. Benoit—this thing has not been moved for a century and was rusted fast! I must bring oil for it tomorrow. Are you here, Rodomont?”

“Aye. A secret passage in the wall, eh?”

“One? A dozen of them, though some have been blocked or walled up. We’re safe enough but must keep our voices down, for guards are outside the Chatelet, on the stairs.”

“What news have you?” inquired Domont.

The Mole crawled through the hole into the room, and fell into silent laughter.

“Why, I’ve discovered the fiend’s own business, my friend—this fat brother of ours is playing a secret game of his own!” The Mole came erect. “Now I know why all these letters have been sent off, and why he gave de Lussan the green drug. I was listening at the keyhole of the baron’s door this noon, and could have doubled up with laughter then and there. Fancy sleek Simon laying a trap for the aristocrat de Lussan! Well, lust has ruined many a better man, and it will put this one into the Bastille unless it puts him in hell first. The German baron has sworn to run him through, and by his voice he meant the oath. That’s what fat Simon is after, of course.”

Domont was puzzled. “I don’t see why—”

“Ambition, no doubt. Our Simon would like well to rise higher in the world, and is well on the way to accomplishing it. With de Lussan dead or disgraced, as will assuredly happen, who will quietly pull all the net-strings together and catch these English spies? Why, fat Simon! You and the demoiselle will be nabbed; St. Martin will be laid by the heels; the royal delegate at Caen, who alone has any authority to investigate things here, will burn me as a wizard; and Brother Simon will get a priory out of it at the very least, or perhaps an abbey! He can pull the strings, never fear.”

“Explain, man, explain!” begged Domont desperately. “Remember, I don’t know what’s in the air or what has happened!”

“Imprimis,” and the Mole chuckled, “de Lussan knows the demoiselle is a spy, and so he means to carry her off to Paris, indulging his lust on the way. He has planned this for Friday night.”

Domont started. “Friday! Then our last hope’s gone—”

“Wait, my friend, wait! The count proposes, but Brother Simon disposes; sly one, to shift all the onus of action from his own shoulders!” Vastly delighted, the Mole went on to relate the conversation he had overheard between Brother Simon and Baron de Karque, for he had missed very little of it.

“The good German,” he concluded, “will now assuredly bide his time, catch de Lussan in the act of abduction, and kill him like a dog. Being the abbot of this place, his position carries some amazing privileges, so he need not fear the king’s deputy in the least. Brother Simon gets letters off to Paris,

in order to insure that he will get all the credit in proper quarters; then, de Lussan dead, will tell the prior what it's all about. Dom Julien will put you into the cage or the Trappe, being himself responsible for all prisoners and exiles, the abbot's mitre being after all a thing honorable rather than potent; he will then make certain of the demoiselle, and await orders. I'll be on my way to the rack. A new royal deputy will come post-haste, or else Brother Simon will receive the appointment, and then the old mount will boil like a kettle!"

Domont stared at the darkness in blank dismay.

"But this knocks all our plans in the head! Whatever happens, by next Sunday we'll be separated and perhaps in cells down below!"

"Exactly." A fluttering sigh came from the Mole. "As Brother Gabriel always says, 'Absit omen!' Which is to say, being translated, what the devil are we to do?"

Domont was silent for a space, consternation weighing heavily upon him.

"Escape. If we can reach St. Malo—"

"We cannot. Our friend in the room above speaks no French, and there is the girl to consider. Suppose we got away on Thursday night? We could leave the Mont easily enough, and reach shore. We should be caught before the sun was an hour high above the Norman hills! Even if we secured horses, we could never hope to get ten leagues on our way."

"What about escape by sea? Could we obtain a fishing boat?"

"Readily; but suppose we did so? The boat would be missed, for a check is kept upon them. By dawn, the pursuit would be out. Every port along the coast would send out craft to run us down, and the other boats here would be after us. Besides, don't forget the baron will have a score at least of the *maréchaussée* here on Thursday! If a miracle happened and we reached St. Malo, would we find that Dutch lugger ready to sail? Not before Sunday night. No, friend Rodomont, we must rest patient, bide our time, see what happens. Perhaps a way will open out before us."

Domont grunted ironically. He could see nothing but disaster ahead. No matter what might happen on Friday night, the result to him would be the same—a dungeon. Suddenly he started in the darkness.

"Listen! It appears de Lussan has said nothing about me or the demoiselle? He is keeping his discoveries to himself?"

"Yes. He trusts only Brother Simon—to his future sorrow!"

"Then he'll be attended to on Friday night, and his secrets go with him. Now, if we could dispose of Brother Simon somewhat before then, say on

Thursday night—”

The Mole caught his breath sharply, and there was a moment of silence. Then, in the darkness, a large hand clamped upon the arm of Domont.

“Good, oh, good; I knew that somehow we’d discover a way—yes, it could be done! Yet, can you cope with Simon? No wasted fat there; he’s a very bullock in strength, I can tell you! If we could catch him unawares—and I might arrange that matter somehow—then could you down him? It’s not a matter for killing, I hope.”

“That’s all one to me,” and Domont laughed.

“I have a better notion. We could leave him tied in one of the cells that are ruined and unused; there are enough of them, St. Michel knows! We have only a dozen brethren here where used to be sixty in the old days. Aye, excellent, excellent, my Rodomont! De Lussan will certainly be killed by the baron or his men; and with fat Simon out of the way, we have a breathing space and room to act. A pretty game, my friend—if only you can handle the fat brother!”

Domont smiled grimly in the darkness. “Trust me! But we shall need weapons, and where shall we get any?”

“Weapons enough in the armory, but I cannot get at them. The captain of the guard always has the keys about him.”

“There are plenty of votive swords and dirks near the chapel altars,” said Domont. “We could get them, I suppose?”

The Mole was silent a moment, then answered in a troubled voice.

“In case of urgent need, I suppose so; the sword of du Guesclin is there, and others. However, they would be missed, of a certainty. And besides—besides—”

His voice came to an uncertain pause. Domont prompted him. “Yes?”

“Well, my friend, it is like the prospect of killing Brother Simon; something warns me most frantically against it. To take those votive weapons would be a sacrilege, though in case of extremity I would take them. But to shed the blood of a brother here in the very abbey, would be to invoke the sure punishment of God. There are some things, Rodomont, of which the Mole is afraid; call him a fool if you will.”

“I don’t,” said Domont quietly. “Perhaps we’ll have no need of weapons. How to get Brother Simon where we want him?”

The Mole chuckled eagerly at this.

“His report of certain accounts is overdue, and he has been too busy to make it out. I shall speak to the prior about it Thursday afternoon. Brother

Simon will be told to hand in his report on Friday morning—it means he'll have to work late Thursday night, which means he'll have to work in the scriptorium with a candle. This, all of it, means we shall catch him easily—and we are then secure until Sunday night at least. Good! Now let us go. I have a couple of bottles of good wine on the stairs, and we'll visit the man overhead."

"This is a curious sort of prison," and Domont laughed. "It's folly to regard any further danger, so tell me who this Nameless Exile is, if you please!"

"I don't know who he is, Rodomont."

"But you know his name—"

"His name is Avedis Vertabed. Who is he, why he is here, I don't know. If you could speak Greek, you could talk with him."

"Not I. Well, lead on! If he wishes to escape with us, signs will do the work."

The Mole took Domont's hand, and led him to the hole in the wall.

CHAPTER XI

AMBITION ENDS IN THE AIR

INSIDE of five minutes, Domont found himself in the room of the Nameless Exile.

A singular scene was revealed in the candlelight—the awry figure of the Mole, casting a grotesque shadow against the ceiling, the tall and severely noble prisoner, who by his looks might well have been the ruler of orient lands, and then the red-haired, vigorous Domont from the other extremes of earth.

Those dark and serene eyes searched Domont for a long moment, and then the prisoner held out his hand in dignified benediction to his two visitors. After this, the Mole opened a bottle of wine and the three men disposed themselves comfortably. Domont attempted to talk with the Nameless Exile, in every tongue he knew, but had no better luck than the Mole, whose monastic Latin was quite beyond the mysterious prisoner's comprehension.

However, when it came to the subject of projected escape, that was a very different thing. The word "London" reached its mark, and the signs which the Mole made. Now those proud eyes flashed, and a swift animation leaped into the features of Avedis Vertabed. He assented with a fiery eagerness, pouring forth a torrent of words in his unknown tongue until the Mole warned him to silence; and when Domont with one finger drew the outline of a ship, he nodded complete comprehension. The name of Ketchedourian followed, and at this, closing his eyes, the Nameless Exile silently blessed the absent Armenian. Here, reflected Domont, was a churchman, and at the very least a bishop; perhaps even some higher potentate of the church—not at all incredible, in a day when such dignitaries were active politicians, and the Bastille held more than one of them.

Now ensued more signs, to make clear that the escape would take place on Sunday night. This was finally accomplished, after which the Mole opened out his chess-board, set forth the men, and Domont, who knew nothing of the game, watched the silent match as it progressed. It was late when he at length followed the Mole from the shrouded chamber and groped his way back to his own room along the narrow staircase piercing the ancient walls. After he had scrambled through into his abode, however, the Mole refused to follow.

“No; but come with me tomorrow night, Rodomont,” said the twisted creature. “We shall be gutter cats in truth, and I’ll show you how we are to get away. Did you arrange with St. Martin for any signal when the boat comes?”

“A light shown from this tower where the windmill stands, on the seaward side.”

“Ah, the Tower Gabriel! Well, that’s impossible; but if we show the light from the Fount of St. Aubert, it’ll be all the same. Good enough! And now, my friend, guard your speech and actions with care, so no crisis may come upon us. It comes to my mind how I said a very foolish thing to Brother Simon today, and when I think of the way his little pig’s eyes looked at me, I am moved to regret it—however, we must do what we can. And so, good night to you, my friend!”

With this, the Mole took his departure.

Domont remained sorely puzzled by what he had seen. The name of Avedis Vertabed was a singular one, might even be some title rather than a name; who or what was this unknown prisoner? The man’s extraordinary appearance and personality was impressive evidence of his high estate. It was obvious that such extensive precautions would never have been taken against any petty intriguer, or any ecclesiastic who had offended the rules of his order. No, this was a man whose destiny involved the fate of kingdoms—but what kingdoms? For the present, the puzzle had no solution. So ended Monday.

Tuesday brought a sharp and severe thunderstorm, deluging the Mont with rain at intervals during the day, but clearing away toward evening. De Lussan showed up for the evening meal in the refectory, having slept most of the day and preceding night as well, after reaching the Marvel. The sleep had not refreshed him, for though he walked with some steadiness, his face was that of a drunken man and worse, being filled with the look of awful and vacant irresolution which Domont had previously noted in it. Despite everything, Domont could not help feeling sharp pity for the man. Destruction of the body was one thing, but this infernal undermining of the soul and spirit was another.

Late in the afternoon Domont went to the lower town, found the baron and his niece had gone for a walk around the island, it being low tide and clearing weather, and so went back again without a glimpse of Mary Suffolk. Night came, with the storm gone but shreds of cloud sweeping across the sky to hide moon and stars, and night brought the Mole to scratch upon the stone.

Domont had by this time resolved to keep that all-important letter himself. Between the schemes of de Lussan and those of Brother Simon, it now seemed that the threatening peril might be prolonged to his own advantage; so he had hidden the packet securely in the lining of his breeches, where any but the most careful search would pass it over.

“Our friend,” and the Mole pointed to the room overhead, “is ill tonight, so there’s no visiting him. He has a touch of fever at times, but will be all right in a day or two, barring weakness. And now, my friend I have an idea! I shall go to de Lussan tomorrow evening, and reveal to him what Brother Simon did about the drug—oh, I’ll be cunning enough, never fear! De Lussan is already as good as destroyed; so, if he destroys Brother Simon in his fury, as well he may—you comprehend? There’s the prettiest game of all, Rodomont!”

“Good enough!” Domont’s laugh chimed with the delighted chuckle of the Mole. “But is it safe for you?”

“Safe enough; indeed, how can I be any worse off than I am? I met fat Simon today and he gave me a terrible look—I could read strange things in his eyes. I am afraid of him, bitterly afraid! Well, I am not afraid when it comes to pitting my wits against him, and we shall see. Poor M. de Lussan is in horrible shape, like a man who has lost half his brain. He sits in dream, tries to write letters that he cannot finish, and when he discovers the reason for his condition, I verily believe he will kill Brother Simon like a rat!”

“Let us hope so,” said Domont. “Your scheme is a good one, if you can manage it—but I am afraid for you.”

“So am not I,” declared the other confidently. “Well, are you ready for our little excursion? It’s an excellent night for us, all the brethren are snoring, the pilgrims are housed, and the rampart guards as usual warming themselves in sheltered corners and cursing Dom Julien.”

“I heard two of them talking today,” observed Domont, “and they seemed anything but complimentary. Why is that?”

“They are fishermen from the village along the coasts, fiefs of the abbey. They’re bound to give watch and ward service, and they hate it most bitterly. Last winter two of them deliberately turned their backs so an exile could escape! He was sucked down in the quicksands, true, but that was immaterial. Well, get along with you, and wait for me at the bottom of the stairs.”

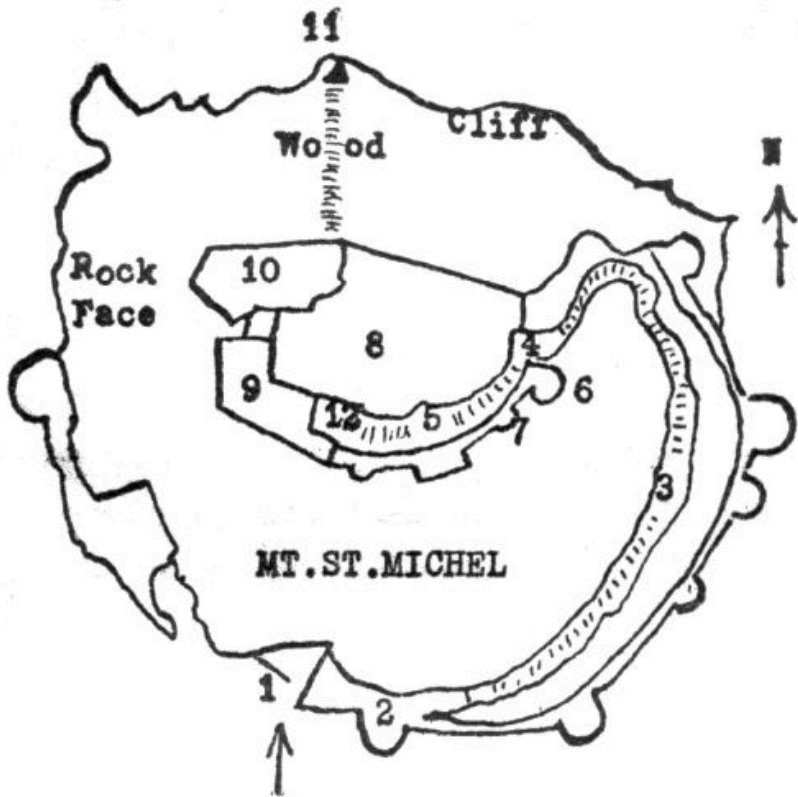
Domont crawled through the hole in the wall, reached the narrow staircase, and descended this for an interminable distance until he came at

last to a damp level. Here the Mole joined him, and taking him by the hand, led him along until presently they came to an ascending flight.

“This brings us out in St. Stephen’s chapel, by the way we go tonight,” explained the Mole. “From there we can go openly to the covered walk, take another burrow in the wall of the Charter House, and come out in the garden below. That’s only one way of doing it—there are half a dozen others. What’s secret to the Mole? Nothing! If these brethren would only study the old manuscripts and plans as diligently as they whine psalms and write histories, they’d discover a lot about our sacred Mont!”

After some little time, the two men crept from another tiny opening into fresh air and darkness. Domont, unable to see a thing in the dense obscurity, accompanied his guide in blind silence through echoing passages; now another squeaking stone moved back, they descended another desperately narrow and slimy staircase, and came to still another emergence—this time finding themselves in the garden of the abbey, with high black walls towering behind and to the right. To their left was the steep rock scarp, a precipice ending in the black sea below. Directly ahead, falling sharply away from the perpendicular masses of walls, dense trees covered an abrupt slope to the rocky north shore. These trees composed the abbey “wood,” where rabbits and birds were warrened and fattened for table use.

“Come,” murmured the Mole, starting away. “Keep close to the wall, and mind your step.”



MT. ST. MICHEL

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Barbican and South Gate. | 7. Abbatial Buildings. |
| 2. King's Gate and Tower. | 8. Church. |
| 3. Street Leading to Abbey. | 9. West Platform. |
| 4. Chatelet. | 10. Garden. |
| 5. Great Inner Degree. | 11. Fount of St. Aubert. |
| 6. Perrine Tower. | 12. South Platform. |

Domont followed him narrowly. Where the garden adjoined the massive walls, they came upon a long and narrow staircase of stone, piercing down through the wood toward the shore below, at this spot free of cliffs. Once on this staircase, once fortified but now unguarded and half in ruins, the two men rapidly descended until they discerned a small square building at the very edge of the water.

"Tide's not in yet," said the Mole, flinging himself down to rest. "Now we can talk in peace. You perceive my system of escape, Rodomont?"

“Aye,” and Domont laughed in delight. “You must have confoundedly strong legs, to wander around this sacred hill of yours as you do!”

“Freedom gives strength, friend of mine. By day I am a poor slave, but by night I am myself—and how I laugh at those rogues up yonder! Night sees the little Mole come into his own, and only the moon and the cloud knows how many secrets he has won from this ancient pile of Chausey granite! Well, here is the Fount of St. Aubert, where water may be had if the cisterns fail; and it is here I plan to meet the Dutch lugger—that is, if we meet her.”

“I’ve been thinking over the matter, since seeing this staircase and landing,” said Domont, and pointed to the sandy strip beyond. “What’s to hinder our fetching around one of the fishing boats, after dark? If those guards hate the place and their duty, as you say, a bribe might effect much.”

“The thing is easy enough; only, when daylight shows a missing boat and points our way, pursuit would certainly overtake us,” answered the Mole. “Nothing would be easier than to get the boat, so far as that goes. For a couple of gold pieces I could bribe any of these covetous Normans to close their eyes.”

Domont understood the futility of such an escape, unless they could meet the lugger, for in order to gain the open sea from the head of the deep bay enfolding Mont St. Michel, they would have to pass St. Malo and a dozen more ports, and a small boat would certainly be cut off and run down.

For an hour he remained here talking with the Mole, and it was settled that on the following evening the little scrivener should acquaint de Lussan with Brother Simon’s treachery. Then they retraced their steps to the garden above, and after much weary climbing, Domont found himself safe home once more, heartily glad to fling himself on his bed and seek slumber.

On the next afternoon, of Wednesday, Domont encountered Mary Suffolk on the ramparts, and together they spent an hour in wandering high and low about the Mont, only certain portions of the Marvel being cloistered from the eye of women. In the course of this ramble, Mary Suffolk not only gained a clear idea of how their escape would be affected, but she became acquainted with the change in their plans and assented readily, for in case of any emergency Domont was determined to take a fishing boat and run his chance of getting away.

Since the unfortunate discovery that she talked in her sleep, the girl had barred the maid from her room at night; thus she was confident she could leave at any time without observation, as the window opening was unbarred

and was just above the rampart. She apprised Domont of its location, in the event of necessity.

“No guards are stationed near,” she went on, “so if you have to come unexpectedly, throw a stone at the window and I’ll hear it. If nothing happens before then, I’ll be ready Sunday night—I’ll be ready each night, in fact.”

Domont perceived de Karque had told her nothing of de Lussan’s plan to carry her off, and he himself was careful to keep silence about it. Beneath her exterior of quiet poise he divined she was nervous and sharply on edge.

Vespers was little more than ended that night, and darkness had not yet crept in from the sea, when the stone in Domont’s wall slid on its hinges, now well oiled, and the Mole beckoned from the opening.

“Now’s the time!” he exclaimed softly. “De Lussan has been abed all day. He’s gone now to the abbey hostelry to settle some dispute among those pilgrims, for none of the brethren speaks German and he knows the tongue well. Come along! The letter is written—it is not signed—we’ll go direct to his room and leave it, then watch what happens—”

The little man was excited and at high tension. Domont followed him into the secret passage, and presently found himself climbing a twisted and narrow staircase. Now the Mole, knowing his way perfectly in the darkness, touched Domont and uttered a word of caution; he leaned his weight on a stone, which slid away to reveal the obscure and unlighted chamber of de Lussan.

“Good! He’s not back yet. We’re in the fireplace—this tapestry hides us, but you can see through the tatters. Wait for me—”

So speaking, the Mole scrambled through the hole, lifted the tapestry, and darted out into the room, where he tossed a folded paper on the table. Almost at the same instant, steps sounded at the outer door. By dint of agility, the Mole regained his hiding-place just as de Lussan strode into the room, holding a lantern.

With a curse at the chill darkness, the king’s deputy lighted his candles from the lantern-wick. He had left the door ajar, as though expecting someone to follow, and the Mole drew Domont’s attention to this with a nudge of his elbow. No sooner were the candles alight than de Lussan, still looking somewhat shaky, observed the letter on his table. He picked it up and held it to the candles. His face changed, swept into passionate storm.

“Ten thousand devils!” he exclaimed. “Where did this come from—and no name signed! No matter, no matter; this explains everything. Drugged, eh? You cursed fat rascal, I’ll let the life out of you for this work!”

Impetuously, he dropped the letter to the floor, ran to the corner, and caught up his sword. His aspect was wild in the extreme; a low torrent of oaths rushed from his lips. Suddenly he flung down the weapon with a clang and caught at the wall for support, one hand over his eyes. A groan broke from him, but not from the pain of his wounded side.

“Drugged, drugged—and my wine tasted bitter tonight! My head’s bursting—I’ve no will, no ability to do anything; and yet Friday night draws on! Oh, treachery—devilry—”

A low knock at the door, and Brother Simon stepped into the room.

De Lussan came erect, drew his disordered and unpowdered hair out of his eyes, and somewhat calmed himself. He went forward, stooped and picked up his sword, and laid the blade across the board. Then he seated himself. Only the deadly pallor of his face, against which the scar stood out like a new dark wound, and the blazing fury of his eyes, betrayed any inward emotion.

“Shut the door and come here, Simon,” he said.

The fat brother obeyed, shuffled forward with his silent tread, and paused before the noble. De Lussan stared at him.

“Why did you steal that vial containing the green oriental drug, and have it put into my wine?”

Brother Simon started slightly. His little eyes widened, his mouth hung open. Then de Lussan’s clenched fist crashed down on the table.

“Answer, you dog! So you thought to destroy my work and me together, did you? And there was something in my wine tonight. By St. Michel, I’ll give you quittance for this!”

Leaping to his feet, he seized the sword and drove forward as though to spit the fat monk where he stood. Brother Simon did not flinch, however; instead, he lifted one hand, and the gesture stayed de Lussan.

“It is quite true, monsieur,” he answered quietly. “Will you let me explain?”

“True?” cried de Lussan. “You dare to confess that you drugged me, poisoned me?”

“So the surgeon ordered, monsieur, though it is not a matter of poison. This drug leaves no bad effects, after a day or two. It has the virtue of giving absolute repose and deep slumber. The surgeon knew we used it here on prisoners, and he advised me to give you a large dose.”

The Mole drew back a little beside Domont. “We’re lost,” he breathed and his voice was inexpressibly mournful. “Simon’s too much for him—he’s

had more of the drug tonight.”

Lost, indeed! De Lussan’s whirlwind of fury was dissipated and broken by the absolute calmness of Brother Simon, and by this ready confession and explanation. For a moment he glared at the monk with wild eyes, then the storm-light died out of them, to be replaced by a confused irresolution, and his sword fell and clattered on the table. He frowned, trying to collect himself, but ended by sinking back into his chair.

“You are right, you are right,” he muttered, and covered his face with his hands. “I might have known! My wits are all at loose ends—”

“You directed me to come for orders, monsieur,” said the monk steadily.

De Lussan drew a deep breath and looked up vacantly.

“I have forgotten,” he said, and his voice was tremulous, shaken. “It was about—about the letter from Avranches—”

Hastily and feverishly, he began to paw over a litter of documents upon the table. Brother Simon quietly stooped down and picked up the paper almost at his feet. He perceived that de Lussan was paying no heed to him, and glanced down at the writing. His jaw fell for an instant; then he swiftly crumpled the paper in his fat fist.

The Mole drew at Domont’s sleeve. “Away! Now he knows all—my writing—”

The murmured words were instinct with fear. Domont heard de Lussan say something about the coach and escort to arrive Friday night; then the stone quietly slid into place and the hand of the Mole was jerking at his sleeve in frantic terror.

“Lost, lost! We have failed! What shall we do—quickly! Now he knows I wrote the letter—did you see his face? He will go to the prior—it means the wooden cage for me at once, until they send me to Caen—”

Domont took the man’s hand in his.

“Quietly now, my friend!” he said, his voice deep and steady. “We’ll have to make sure of him at once, instead of tomorrow night. Do you know which way he’ll go from here, when he leaves?”

“Up the Inner Degree, of course, and through to the dormitory.”

“He’ll cross that south platform at the top of the Inner Degree?”

“Yes.”

“Then lead on, and we’ll catch him there.” In the darkness Domont patted the shaking hand of the Mole. “Fear not!”

“Easily said, friend!” but the Mole laughed uneasily. “Come on, then—”

Domont was drawn down the narrow flight of stairs. He marveled at the unerring manner in which the Mole guided him in this dense blackness, for he could sense other passages all about. Now they went up long steps seeming without end, until suddenly the Mole paused and shoved open a wooden panel.

“A disused room at the top of the Degree—this way!” he panted hoarsely.

Domont followed him through a doorway, sucked the fresh night air into his lungs, and then realized their position.

To the right was the upper portion of that great stairway called the Inner Degree, and behind were the abbatial buildings. To the left was sheer walled precipice; they stood on the short battlement leading to the south platform, a few feet ahead. This platform was small, walled in on two sides by the church, on the third by the great stairway descending into blackness, and was open only to the southern side where lay the precipice. By going on through the basilica, one might gain the great west platform.

“He is coming,” muttered the Mole, looking down into the abyss of the Inner Degree.

The slap of ascending sandals could be heard echoing and re-echoing faintly from the high walls, but Brother Simon carried no light. A faint light still lingered on the platform, from the last remnants of after-glow in the sky overhead, where the stars were as yet glimmering only faintly.

“Meet him, talk with him,” said Domont calmly. “I’ll tap him behind the ear.”

The Mole slipped across to the church entrance, keeping close to the wall, then returned openly and crossed to the head of the great stairs, as though on his way down. The huge figure of Brother Simon appeared climbing to the platform, puffing a little, and then uttered a sharp ejaculation at sight of the Mole. Domont, crouching at the wall-angle, was invisible.

“Ho, my little Mole, whither flitting so late? Now stop and talk a while,” said Brother Simon, with a savage undertone in his voice. The Mole halted.

“Who is it—ah, Brother Simon! Why, I thought Brother Gregory had been assigned to night duty—”

“Ar—r—r, you hypocritical little imp of the devil!” snarled the fat monk in a burst of fury. “You will write letters to the king’s deputy, eh? Prying and peering, sticking your nose into the business of other folk?”

“A mole burrows, Brother Simon—why not I?” The little twisted man attempted a faint-hearted facetiousness. “If you drug a man, should I not tell

of it? If you filch a cutlet from the kitchens of a fast day, should I not tell of it? Aye, or be myself a party to the sin—”

“Sing your song, Brother Mole, and ring your bells, and trim your quill,” broke in the other, his voice ominously low and deadly. “You’ll have little more time to do it! Here’s your letter—take it again. Much good may it do you on the Saturday!”

Brother Simon viciously flung down the crumpled ball of paper. The Mole stooped and gathered it up.

“And why,” he asked, “on the Saturday?”

“Because then the delegate from Caen comes for you, dealer in the black arts that you are!” snapped the furious monk, and shook his fist wildly. “You told the truth, when you said the other day you’d been following me; perdition seize you, now you’ll give up a few of your secrets on the rack!”

The Mole stood as though frozen by horror; and so indeed he was.

“Saturday!” he repeated, and his voice came in a low wail.

“Aye, you abominable little miscreant!” exclaimed Brother Simon. “Off you go to stand trial—you and your flitting of nights! When they get through racking you, there’ll be a fine burning, you little devil’s spawn! Aye, shrink back—for half a sol I’d throw you over the parapet yonder and let you fly to your father the fiend!”

Brother Simon was in furious rage. With the last words, he lunged swiftly forward as though indeed to seize the wretched creature before him.

This sudden lunge spoiled Domont’s aim in the obscurity. He had flung himself from the shadowed angle, launching a terrific blow for the side of the monk’s chin; instead, his fist only sank into the fat neck. The weight behind that blow fairly knocked Brother Simon off his feet. Domont went with him, overbalanced, and the two men crashed headlong on the flagstones.

Beyond a low, gasping grunt of sheer rage, Brother Simon uttered no word. Domont was half erect again when a threshing foot took him in the side and hurled him backward full length; he rolled over, dimly perceived the huge figure of Simon rising, and gained his feet. Simon paused for nothing, but drove in at him like a madman, and Domont met him with two full, smashing blows in the face which utterly failed of any effect. Next moment he was caught in a grip of iron.

“Now squeal, pig, whoever you are!” snarled Brother Simon.

In that tremendous grip, if it were to endure, Domont at once knew himself lost beyond hope; his only chance was to break it asunder. His fists hammered Brother Simon paunch and jowl, yet his blows had absolutely no

result. The two locked figures reeled back and forth, brought up against the side wall, staggered over against the knee-high parapet. Ever the frightful crushing grip grew more tight, as Brother Simon put forth his giant strength. Domont felt himself slowly suffocating, felt his ribs giving way, saw before his eyes bright flashes of darting light.

Frantic, desperate, he managed at last to get his head down underneath that huge chin, locked his arms about the immense body, and then shoved. Not even the fat monk could stand against this. Brother Simon grunted, gasped, relaxed his hold slightly. Instantly Domont was free, and hammered in a lightning-swift buffet, receiving in return a smash that knocked him a dozen feet away, drove him staggering and reeling against the parapet, all but hurled him over the edge into the gulf. And as he gained his balance, the huge figure of Brother Simon swept forward upon him with a snarl of rage.

Domont, trying to evade that rush, slipped and fell prostrate.

He received a terrific kick. It doubled him up for an instant, until he desperately twisted aside, rolled over, came to his feet in time to get home a blow to the paunch, staggering the fat monk. He followed it with another. Blind to all around him except this looming black figure, carried out of himself by the savage frenzy of fight, Domont whipped in blow after blow in a fury of energy. He was lost to everything except the necessity of hammering this great bulk into silence and subjection. His fists sank home repeatedly, hammer-like drives that would have subdued any other man, but now had no effect. Twice Brother Simon fastened a deadly grip upon him, twice Domont smashed it clear in mad lunges; both men fought with an utter ferocity as blind as heedless. For the third time, Brother Simon got in his grip. Domont buried one fist in the fat paunch, drove the other up to the big chin, lashed in a third blow sounding on the night like a whipcrack. A fourth

The fourth blow missed. Brother Simon fell away from it, seemed suddenly drawn backward by an invisible hand. One frightful scream burst from his lips, one scream that rang out, then wailed away on the night and was gone below. The great body was gone also. Domont's eyes cleared. He found himself standing at the very parapet of the platform, in front of him nothing but empty darkness, and that horrible wailing scream echoing in his ears.

Domont took an abrupt step backward, and stood panting, trembling. Thin startled cries came sounding up from the ramparts; voices rang far down the black abyss of the Great Inner Degree. Then Domont found the Mole at his elbow, tugging frantically at his arm.

“God forgive me—I tripped him and you struck—back with you! Quickly, back, back by the way we came—”

Domont allowed himself to be guided, only dimly realizing the truth. They were swallowed up in the darkness. Not until he was on the narrow and damp-dripping stairs did he fully comprehend what had taken place. Then, as his brain cleared and drove into action, he gripped more tightly to the hand of the Mole.

“Wait! After this—we dare not risk more delay. Can you have a boat awaiting us all tomorrow night?”

“If I have money, yes. I have none.”

“Here is money.” Domont feverishly searched his pockets, pressed coins into the Mole’s hand. “Arrange everything. In case anything happens and I fail to see her, you must reach the niece of Baron de Karque. Tell her I’ll come for her an hour before midnight—no, at high tide, whenever that befalls. Be ready yourself, and warn the Nameless Exile. You understand?”

“Yes. Where will we go?”

“To St. Malo and find the lugger, if possible. We’ll do our best. You’re willing to make the attempt?”

“Yes.” After this one word, the Mole was silent for a moment; then, when he spoke, it was with an indescribably mournful intonation.

“But, my friend, it was I who tripped Brother Simon. It is I who have shed the blood of a monk in this holy ground. For that deed, there will be punishment, I warn you!”

“If we stay here, there’ll be destruction for us all,” snapped Domont, and the vibrant timbre of his voice rang hollowly back from the stones.

“Very well. It shall be done.”

Fifteen minutes later, from the window of his prison chamber, Domont saw the flickering flare of torches below on the terraces, where men brought in the lifeless body of Brother Simon, his ambitions now satisfied for all eternity.

CHAPTER XII

THE KING'S SECRET

ON THURSDAY morning, Domont opened his eyes to streams of warm sunlight, and a rattle at his door; one of the servants was just bringing his breakfast, for this thin and simple meal was served in the prison cells. Domont sat up—and was made to remember the previous night's happenings by his bruises. He swiftly found, however, that except for a soreness in the side where Brother Simon's foot had caught him, he was little hurt, and was not marked in the face.

The domestic entered and set down the tray, and paused.

“Eh, monsieur, you heard the commotion last night?”

“I saw torches and heard voices,” returned Domont carelessly. “What was it?”

“Terrible work, monsieur!” came the eager response. “Brother Simon fell from the south platform. No one knows how it happened; a terrible thing, this sudden transition—holy St. Michel preserve us from the like! But that is not all, monsieur,” and here the servant lowered his voice fearfully, fastened his wide gaze on Domont.

“Brother Gabriel was at prayer, and two of the guards were below—they all heard the sound of rushing wings, and queer voices calling through the air; one of the guards beheld something soar from the south platform and then rush into the sky and vanish. You comprehend, monsieur? Poor Brother Simon, known for his piety and good works, must have met the foul fiend in combat—indeed, it is certain.”

Domont laughed in sudden relief.

“Then St. Michel failed signally to protect his own,” he commented. “Perhaps Brother Simon was not so holy after all, since he was worsted in the combat.”

“Sacrilege, monsieur!” exclaimed the servant indignantly, then shrugged. “However, one must admit there is something in such a view of the matter; undoubtedly, the poor brother was taken in some moment of temptation. The prior will pass judgment upon this, and we may well leave it to him. The burial takes place an hour before nones, if you desire to attend.”

The domestic went on about his work, and Domont sat down to his meal, an ironical smile touching his lips. It was certain that no human agency was suspected of having any hand in the death of Brother Simon; so much the

better, then. Perhaps the defunct brother would go far toward sainthood ere the matter was done with.

So the escape was definitely set for tonight! Now, with morning sunlight and blue sky overhead to lend sanity, Domont keenly regretted that hasty decision. Panic, fear of crowding incident, suspicion of the unknown, had driven him to it on the spur of the moment, but in view of what he had just learned, there seemed to be no necessity. True, with wind and tide aiding, they might hope to reach St. Malo sometime in the morning, if they got away without alarm toward midnight; but it was a tremendously uncertain chance. Again, there was St. Martin to consider—an overlooked equation. If they did not find him aboard the lugger, if he had started back for the Mont, the game was lost. Domont could not find it in his heart to abandon the Canadian.

“Plague take it, I was too hasty! I’ve bungled everything in this whole affair from the very start,” he thought uneasily. “As it now stands, Brother Simon is safely out of the way. The chances are excellent for de Lussan also to be out of the way by tomorrow night—and yet, there’s the Mole to think of! If he’s to be carted off on Saturday, as Simon said, we’d be helpless. Hm! It’s a queer problem, taken all around.”

An hour afterward, in troubled thought, Domont issued from the gloomy portal of the Chatelet, regretfully wishing he might get hold of some tobacco, yet not daring to seek any here. Sieur Roger d’Aumont, obviously, was no pipe user. As he strolled down past the parish church of St. Pierre toward the town below, Domont observed groups of pilgrims and townfolk and guards, all excitedly discussing the mysterious death of Brother Simon, many of them on the way to visit the spot where the late brother had come to earth. From the talk he overheard, Domont gathered that the fall had completely done away with all marks of combat. He was passing on down the narrowing street of booths and hostelries, when he started suddenly and came to a halt.

“Rodomont!”

Domont glanced around. No one was in sight whom he knew, yet he had certainly heard the word uttered. Now he caught it again, this time in a laughing voice that struck amazed recognition into him.

“Rodomont! Look up, man, look up!”

Gaping upward, Domont beheld St. Martin waving a hand to him from an upper window of the Licorne tavern. A sharp word broke from him.

“Take to cover—red belts are out for you!” he exclaimed swiftly, knowing this redskin jargon was beyond the understanding of anyone who

might catch his words. "I'll come up at once."

Domont entered the tavern and was directed to St. Martin's room on the floor above. In another moment he was gripping the hand of the Canadian.

"How on earth did you get here?" he exclaimed, wondering. "The alarm's out for you. The Mole tells me de Lussan has sent out orders to Avranches for your arrest, and every road is being scoured for you."

St. Martin chuckled widely. "Faith, he forgot to issue the orders here at home, then! I didn't come by road, for that matter, but by sea—landed here at sunrise this morning, fishing boat from St. Malo. I've just been getting a shave and a change of clothes."

"The lugger—you found her?"

"Aye; and that road-belt of the maid's was a good one. The lugger puts out with the ebb this afternoon, and ere midnight will be cruising off Tombelaine, hanging on and off until morning. If nothing shows, she'll come back Sunday—"

"Thank heaven!" Domont dropped into a chair with an exclamation of tremendous relief; everything was settled now, by this unexpected turn of chance! He disregarded the astonished look of the Canadian. "You had no trouble getting in here?"

"Devil a bit. The guards remembered me, and were not interested." St. Martin's swarthy face settled in a frown, as he scrutinized his friend. "But what's happened to you? You look damnably uneasy! And—faith of a Mohawk, who's been hammering you? Coat torn, and a swelling to your jaw, a fist must have made. Eh? Come, what's the yammering I've heard from the street ever since I landed, about some monk falling from the walls? Had you a hand in the business?"

"Both hands, and the Mole a foot." Domont drew a long breath. "Comrade, this news of yours about the lugger is like a dispensation of providence—and perhaps it's just that. We were making plans to break for it tonight in a fishing boat, at all hazards; it was tonight or never."

"Bah!" St. Martin leaned his chair back against the wall and put his feet on the table, grinning. "You haven't heard my real news yet—I've something worth while! But go on and deliver your belts first. Need any tobacco? I brought along an extra supply in case yours had run low——"

Domont seized upon the proffered weed and filled his pipe avidly. Now he imparted the situation of affairs in brief words. By the time his pipe was alight, the Canadian was fully informed of how matters stood at the Mont.

"Hm!" St. Martin rubbed his chin reflectively. "Red axes are out after me, and no mistake! I'll lie low here today and pretend illness; no great

pretense to it, either, after tossing on the accursed sea all night. The boat's gone back already—a hired craft. You've danced the scalp of that fat monk, have you? Good riddance. How many of us to get away? You, I, the Mole, the yellow-haired girl—”

“And the Nameless Exile,” said Domont. The other started suddenly.

“Ho! Devil take me, but I forgot my news! He goes with us, does he? Have you seen him? How?”

Having already explained the nature of the Mole's burrowings, Domont now told of his silent interview with the mysterious prisoner of the Perrine tower. As he listened, St. Martin's eyes were sparkling, blazing, vibrant with excitement, but he said no word until Domont had quite finished. Then he held up his finger.

“Now, listen! Night before last, I was drunk; I was in worse case than an Ottawa newly come to Montreal. You see, I fell in with a Greek merchant on his way to England. He was a jolly soul, and full of stories, and we saw most of St. Malo in company. One of his stories was about some Armenian king, which made me remember the little man we rescued on the road. So I got him drunk, and got drunk myself, and wormed the whole blessed yarn out of him—it took some doing, for at first he was afraid to talk about it. There's a chance that it concerns the Nameless Exile here. It's about a man named Avedick—”

“Avedis?” exclaimed Domont, amazedly. “Avedis Vertabed?”

“By the mass, that's it!” St. Martin's fist crashed triumphantly on the table. “Eh? What do you know about it?”

“Nothing!” said Domont. “The prisoner can talk no language we know. The Mole says his name is Avedis Vertabed, but we cannot find who he is or what he is.”

“Then, by the saints, here's the whole belt as I received it!” St. Martin lowered his voice, took his feet from the table, leaned forward eagerly. “Avedis what's-his-name was the pope or patriarch of the Armenian church, whatever that is; he was a great man and a patriot, and was high in favor with the Turkish sultan at Constantinople, who ruled his country. Our little painted puppet of a King Louis was busy with intrigues around the sultan, and tried to bring all the Armenians into true faith. I don't understand it rightly, for it's some cursed theological problem. At all events, with the help of the English, this patriarch fought the French intrigue tooth and nail. It became an international affair, until the whole Levant trade hung on the issue. So what happened? Nobody knows for sure, but my Greek merchant affirmed that the French ambassador, Marquis de Fevréol, was deeply

concerned in it. At all events, the Armenian patriarch vanished overnight. He's never been heard of since then. And there's the game for you!"

With a wave of his hand, St. Martin leaned back and gazed at his friend. Domont nodded slowly.

"Like enough. So this is why the English want to get in touch with him, eh? Look you, comrade! Mary Suffolk tells me if we get him safe to London it'll be twenty thousand pounds in our pockets—how's that, eh? Well, it's not for this I'm helping him get away, but it'll be a welcome sum all the same. If we can win the game tonight, I stand to gain more than the money."

"So?" queried the Canadian, with a shrewd look. "And what's worth more than money? At a venture, I'd say—a pretty head of yellow hair. Eh, comrade?"

"*Touché!* At least, I hope so," admitted Domont frankly. "As things are now, I'm a pauper, without a shilling in the world except the money we got for that diamond, which will assure us passage home, at least. But if we can get our fingers on this big sum, which we'll split four ways with the Mole and Mary Suffolk, then what? I can ask someone to start life with me in Boston, leave off fur-raiding, and go into respectable trading. You see? It's a droll gamble."

"Droll, sure enough," responded St. Martin thoughtfully. "Here we started out by saving a poor devil on the road from the king's men; now your whole future in life depends on running the ball between the posts! Twenty thousand pounds, eh? A high price to pay for a cleric, but I suppose worth it. Get that bottle of wine on the table in the corner, comrade; we'll drink to the patriarch, the Mole, and the pretty girl under the baron's roof! Still, you're a cursed fool to let such an event hang on that money."

"Why a fool?" demanded Domont, from the corner.

"If I loved a girl, the foul fiend take money or its lack! She'd come with me for love, not for ease. If she wouldn't run my road, she could take her own trail and the devil go with her!"

Domont laughed and came back to the table with the wine.

"Aye, but no two of us are built alike, comrade. Now, you're sure the Dutch lugger won't fail us tonight?"

"Not she. The skipper is no Dutchman, but an Englishman—and a man of quality if I know anything! He's to carry a green light at the masthead, until dawn. Well, here's a health to the lass, and luck all around!"

The pewter mugs clanked over the table.

Domont impressed on the Canadian the importance of keeping under cover for the day. If de Lussan had sight of him or learned he was here, he

would be arrested without delay, and the game would be up. St. Martin, somewhat in arrears of sleep, readily promised to spend the remainder of the day in bed, and upon this agreement Domont rose to depart. It was now close on noon.

“Farewell until tonight, then,” said St. Martin, “Where do we meet?”

“I must come down here in any event to get Mary Suffolk,” returned Domont, “so why not pick you up at the same time? I’m not certain of the hour, but I’ll pick you up an hour before midnight, if you’ll be here at your window. Whether we go around the island or back to the abbey, I know not. The Mole will have it all arranged; leave it to him.”

“With all my heart,” said St. Martin, and pulled off his boots.

Domont left the tavern in high spirits, feeling that luck had now swung definitely in their favor; this unexpected meeting with St. Martin, and the certain arrival of the lugger that night, marked the turning-point. Upon this, more and more large loomed the importance of what had previously been no more than an after-thought—the escape of the Armenian patriarch. As St. Martin had said, Domont could now feel his entire future depending on this event, and on the twenty thousand pounds involved. With his share of such a reward safely in his pocket, he could ask Mary Suffolk to seek the New World in his company. Without it, he was a penniless adventurer who might ask no woman to share the discomforts and privations of poverty in that land across the water.

So, turning over these eager and hopeful thoughts in his mind, he had climbed as far as the parish church, when he discerned Baron de Karque coming down the road toward him. The nobleman hailed him with hearty greeting.

“How now, d’Aumont—well met! Come back down this cursed hill with me, and join us over a fat capon that’s browning beside a pheasant. No protests, now; the little Elise will be joyous of your company.”

“With the best grace in the world,” assented Domont, and turned down the hill again. “Have you been inspecting your abbatial domain so early, or _____”

“I’ve been up at the funeral of that fat monk who fell over the wall last night—I owed him a bit of decency, pardie! It’ll need a few bottles to wash the taste of the miserere out of my mouth, though. De Lussan’s a madman!”

“Eh? What?” Domont turned to him suddenly. “What do you mean?”

“Well, there’s something amiss with him,” insisted the baron. “He’s planning mad schemes, as I happen to know; and you should have seen him up there just now! He stood gawking like a fool, and signed himself like a

man in dream. Well, in the midst of death we are in life, so enjoy it while we can! Dom Julien gave the corpse a noble absolution; you should have been there to hear his discourse——”

Domont was nothing loath to let himself be taken down to the King’s Gate. Upon gaining his apartments, the baron ushered his guest into the presence of Mary Suffolk, then excused himself. Alone with the girl, Domont seized his opportunity.

“You’ve not seen the Mole? Then be ready an hour before midnight, tonight. St. Martin is here, the lugger will arrive tonight for us, and I’ll come for you. Is all well?”

“So far as I know.” Exultation flashed in her dark blue eyes, and she regarded him curiously for an instant. “You seem very happy today, Rodomont!”

“Faith, I am that!” He laughed out quickly. “This night we’ll earn twenty thousand pounds, I trust, and with my share of it——”

“Yes?” she prompted, as he broke off. “What’ll you do with your share of it?”

“Why, with money in my pocket I’ll be a beggar no longer, and I can ask someone to accompany me to Boston town across the water!”

“Oh!” She put her head on one side, smiling. “Who is it, then, you’re so set on dragging to the colonies?”

“That’d be telling!” Domont chuckled. “When I’m sure of the money, I’ll whisper the name in your ear!”

“But you’re sure of it now. I can promise definitely the money will be paid if we succeed——”

“We haven’t succeeded yet, fair lady. Have a care, now——”

De Karque bustled into the room, freshly wigged and powdered, and their talk was at an end, nor was it renewed. An hour later, while the baron and Domont were discussing their wine and such topics as went with it, arrived a messenger from the abbey—no other than the Mole, indeed. He brought a message for Domont, and shambling into the room, the little man presented a note.

Domont half expected to be confronted by some new emergency, but opening the note, found only a request from de Lussan that he would see the latter at his earliest convenience. Grasping at the chance for speech with the Mole, Domont handed the note to the baron and made his farewells. De Karque cursed the impudence of de Lussan, but was forced to acquiesce.

“I’m going to be busy as the devil this afternoon,” he growled, accompanying his guest and the Mole to the street entrance below. “I am expecting a party of cavaliers from the coast, by boat. They’re to make certain inspections tomorrow and be at my orders generally for a day or so, and I shall have reports to make. Come back later, if you wish, and entertain the little Elise.”

“Thank you.” Domont’s lips twitched slightly as he bowed. “I’ll promise myself the pleasure, baron, most certainly!”

The Mole grinned.

Presently Domont and the little scrivener were walking up the hill road together. Once away from the crowded taverns, Domont spoke his news.

“All’s arranged with the demoiselle. St. Martin’s here, at the Licorne, keeping his bed for safety’s sake. The lugger will be off Tombelaine tonight, to pick us up.”

The Mole skipped with sudden joy. “Ha! *Los à* Monseigneur St. Michel!” he cried. Then his manner changed, and he shook his head morosely. “After all, I don’t know—I don’t know; something tells me there will be bitterness before sweetness, my friend! Did you hear the bells as I tolled for Brother Simon? They said harsh things to me, sad things! And if we make the attempt tonight, it means we must have swords; that means sacrilege, for they can come only from St. Michel’s weapons.”

“Bah! He can well spare them,” exclaimed Domont, who was in no mood to indulge in forebodings. “And here’s news for you, my friend; the Nameless Exile is no other than the Patriarch of Armenia! Let him give you absolution for your troubles, if you like—perhaps his blessing can wipe away all sacrilege.”

The Mole brightened at this information. “Indeed? There is truth in your words, Rodomont, truth! I always knew the benediction of that man gave me peace; good, good! I’ll do it!”

“What does de Lussan want with me?”

“No one knows. There’s no doubt Simon put something in his wine last night—he’s been like a half-dead fish all morning, but now it’s different. He’s been into our medicine chest, has retched himself free of poison, and is coming into the semblance of himself again. Peril is in the air, Rodomont—watch yourself! He has the prior’s permission to send for you. I know not what passed between them, since Dom Julien is jealous of his prerogatives, but this morning he is in a black mood, I can warn you.”

They gained the top of the street, and paused on a landing before turning toward the Chatelet and the further climb. Domont looked out across the

waters to where the rock of Tombelaine lay like a crouched lion, dismantled of its old fortifications and now unpeopled.

“Hm! No doubts of our getting a boat tonight, I hope?” he asked. “De Karque expects his cavaliers of the *maréchaussée* sometime this afternoon. Will their presence make the fishermen afraid to fetch the boat for us?”

The Mole laughed sardonically. “If a Norman can earn a gold coin, he’ll brave all the powers of hell or heaven—and these men have been promised three coins each, on delivery. I’ll see the boat is there, then come and bring you weapons.”

“But at what time?” Domont frowned. “I’ve set the time for an hour before midnight; if the tide is not right——”

“It will not worry us,” said the Mole confidently. “At the Fount of St. Albert is a landing, where was once a wharf. A swift current has cut away the sands there, or perhaps it was done by the monks in the old days. At all events, except at the lowest ebb there is always a channel of water sufficient to float a boat, to the very landing. Hm! How stands the tide program? It will be at ebb an hour before midnight—half an hour afterward, the channel will fill and the boat, tied to the landing, will be afloat. Besides, the tides are high just now, unduly high, and a strong west wind is beating in today, which means higher water tonight. Aye, no trouble at all, Rodomont! I doubt if the boat will ever touch sand tonight. If we get off at midnight we’ll find a great broad channel, and the sea not far away, for the tide will come in fast. If the west wind holds, the boat can sweep out to the north even despite the tide.”

Domont nodded, his eyes bright. “Then it seems heaven is fighting for us after all, and your gloomy brooding will come to naught, eh?”

“Let us hope so,” returned the Mole. “I have seen the patriarch and warned him. He’s eager to be off. The fever has weakened him greatly, and we can’t count on his sword in case of danger.”

“No matter. How shall we reach the boat? I’ve promised to get St. Martin and the demoiselle from down below.”

“I’ll free you. Bring them straight to the Chatelet, for we must go up the Inner Degree to the west platform and there take to the secret stairs. I’ll have the warder dead drunk, I can promise you. The portcullis is never down, these days, either at the Chatelet or the gate above, across the Degree. To make certain, I’ll block the counterpoise.”

“Good—it’s understood!” Domont laughed happily, confidently, and clapped the Mole on the shoulder. “This time tomorrow, friend, we’ll all be safe on our way to London—and then the New World!”

“St. Benoit grant it!” murmured the other.

Mounting the last flight of stone stairs, they entered the gloomy maw of the Chatelet.

The Mole led his companion straight to the chamber occupied by de Lussan—the same into which Domont had peered on the previous evening. At the table now sat the King’s deputy, and a very different man he was. True, he was pallid and sunken in the face, but his eyes were bright and sharp, nearly normal, and at first glance Domont saw the man was much himself again in resolution and wits. As the two entered, de Lussan’s gaze struck at them like a sword, but he listened without interruption to the sub-prior, who was standing beside him and speaking earnestly.

“If you will forward this communication, monsieur, it will be of great joy and advantage to us. The accusation you lodged with Dom Julien this morning, that Brother Simon had drugged you, has cleared up the entire mystery, and affords conclusive evidence as to the watchfulness of our patron St. Michel. It is true Simon had abstracted the drug from our stores; he gave it to you, whether for good or ill, and what happened? Last night, two credible witnesses beheld a shape rising in the air from the south platform, whence poor Brother Simon fell to his death. It is perfectly evident that St. Michel himself avenged the affront offered to the envoy of King Louis. The evidence is being set in writing by the committee on miracles, and meantime, we beg you will forward the primary report, to the satisfaction of His Majesty.”

Domont saw the Mole turn aside and give him a subdued grin, at this new twist in the matter of Brother Simon. De Lussan nodded and waved his hand.

“Very well, very well,” he responded impatiently. “I shall do so, gladly. Will you ask Dom Julien to join me here in five minutes? Thank you.”

The sub-prior retired. De Lussan flung an imperative gesture at the Mole, who bowed and took his leave. When the door was closed, de Lussan came to his feet and gave Domont one piercing look.

“Monsieur,” he said quietly, “I have learned everything. You understand?”

“Not in the least,” returned Domont. “Will you have the goodness to elucidate what you mean by everything?”

“Drop the mask,” snapped de Lussan. “You are not d’Aumont; you are that man with the black smudge across his face—a released prisoner returning to Boston. Where is the real Roger d’Aumont?”

So, it had come! Domont thought swiftly, knowing that the other man was in dangerous mood, and made his decision.

“He is dead, monsieur.”

De Lussan started. “Dead! Then you murdered him?”

“No. Will you hear the story?”

“If you please.” De Lussan resumed his seat.

Domont told frankly of his meeting with Roger d’Aumont, and of how he had undertaken the delivery of a letter, whose contents were unknown to him. He then reported what St. Martin had told him of d’Aumont’s death, and gave his own distant connection with the dead man. De Lussan leaned back in his chair, lips compressed, and did not interrupt until Domont had finished. Then:

“You forget one thing, monsieur. That is, your meeting on the road with a dark foreign man, and your rescue of him. St. Martin, I believe, flung an axe?”

“I regret,” said Domont calmly, “that on this point I cannot inform you.”

“Look out!” De Lussan leaned forward. “Monsieur, I desire a statement from you in writing, covering all this matter from start to finish. If you refuse, I shall have you brought to Paris by a special order from His Majesty; you will then be interrogated in another and more direct fashion.”

“As you please, monsieur,” said Domont.

The door opened, and Dom Julien Doyte came into the room. De Lussan, who had been on the verge of a furious outburst, composed himself and greeted the prior courteously. His own position here was entirely on sufferance, for not even the royal deputy could issue orders in Mont St. Michel.

“Dom Julien, I am about to request you to revoke the *billet* given this gentleman,” he said, motioning to Domont, “and to hold him in a close confinement, in the same manner you hold another person in the Tour Perrine. I can assure you he will be ordered to Paris as soon as I reach there, or before—I leave tomorrow night, as you know.”

Dom Julien regarded Domont curiously.

“If you make this request in the king’s name, M. de Lussan, it is of course my duty to grant it. I hope you have not found M. d’Aumont unworthy of his parole?”

“I have found him worthy the Bastille,” said de Lussan savagely. “If you’ll have the goodness to order his confinement in the name of His Majesty, I shall be relieved.”

The prior silently assented.

Domont, however, as he was led away to his prison room, smiled quietly to himself, for de Lussan had been somewhat late in waking up. How little was the king's name worth, against one who had a Mole for friend!

CHAPTER XIII

A SPIT MAY PIERCE MORE THAN ROASTS

THAT evening somewhat before the dinner hour, the lower town of Mont St. Michel was unwontedly full of guests. At low tide a numerous company had arrived from the mainland—not alone the usual throng of country folk, who had now returned, but a large party of pilgrims from the Rhineland, men of means and of exceeding great thirst, exultant at having finished their long pilgrimage, who took up quarters at the various inns. Later in the day arrived by boat a score of cavaliers of the *maréchaussée*, to render themselves at the orders of the abbot-baron, de Karque. Having been newly paid, these cavaliers were very thirsty men, and eager to assuage the inward burning.

The Unicorn Tavern spanned the narrow street well back from the King's Gate and somewhat farther up the hill. From his window, that afternoon, St. Martin witnessed a very pretty quarrel that took place just before the Licorne. Baron de Karque was standing in the street, talking in German with some of the pilgrims, when down the hill came de Lussan in hot haste, having learned of the newly-arrived cavaliers.

He was angry, and let loose his passion at the head of the baron. De Karque, who had a high sense of his own importance and of his abbatial rights, gave him word for word, and a word more to boot; had de Lussan been armed, blood would have flown on the spot. As it was, de Lussan remembered that he had business of his own on the following evening; while de Karque remembered how, upon the same occasion, he would have every excuse for putting his sword through the king's deputy. So the two parted. St. Martin, smoking his pipe in shelter of his window curtain, laughed heartily to himself.

Some time later, the appetizing odors of cookery reminded the Canadian very urgently that he had forgotten to order his own supper. There ascended to him from this little street of taverns the rich fragrance of roasting meat, of broiling fish; above all, of the cockles fried in Avranchin butter and *fines herbes*—those cockles for which the Mont was famous, brought in by thousands from the sands at each low tide, and the first ambition of every hungry pilgrim.

St. Martin was not a pilgrim, but he was confoundedly hungry, having slept most of the day and missed his noon meal. So it happened that, when

darkness came down and he could no longer endure the cravings of the flesh, St. Martin made his way down to the main room of the tavern; he had waited until the dinner hour was past, and could wait no more. He found the tavern nearly empty, and encouraged by this, ordered a good dinner and a bottle of wine. He then settled himself comfortably before the fireplace, to watch his fowl roasting on the long six-foot spit that crossed the hearth. It occurred to him that the bird looked lonely on that tremendous spit, so he ordered another, and sniffed the fragrance eagerly.

Presently the door swung open to admit a raucous sound of drunken songs and brawling voices from the street. The landlord rushed forward hurriedly.

“Out with you!” he cried. “I’ll have none of your drinking crew here—I can’t risk my good repute with the gentlemen of the abbey—oh, sirs, your pardon!”

“Asked and given, and be damned to you; put out cavaliers of the guard, would you?” broke in a gay voice. “Wine and a table, and dice! Away, and bring in good Gascon wine, and none of your thin vin ordinaire!”

St. Martin glanced around. He beheld two officers and two cavaliers settle themselves around a table to his left, but paid them no immediate attention. His first fowl was done, and was being set before him, so he attacked it with his back to the party. The four guards had already dined, not wisely but well; they fell to their dice and wine, and St. Martin fell to his dinner.

When the first fowl was but bones, he demanded the second, and his strident voice drew the attention of the four gamesters.

“Spurs of the devil!” exclaimed the lieutenant in command. “Here’s a man who must have two birds to his dinner—health to you, empty-belly! If you can drink as you eat, you’ll need a deep pocket for purse!”

“He’s a hungry pilgrim, eh?” said one of the others, and there was a laugh and a jest. Then, suddenly, the lieutenant rose and came over to where St. Martin sat, and none too steadily. He stared down, and amazement leaped in his eyes.

“What’s this, what’s this?” he cried out. “Why, here’s the very fellow we’ve been riding the Caen roads after—sink me if it’s not! What’s your name, eh?”

“Go to the devil,” said the Canadian. “If you want my name, it’s the Sieur de St. Martin, of Canada.”

“Hola—we have him!” cried out the lieutenant, steadying himself against the table with one hand. “Sieur de St. Martin, there’s an order of

arrest against you! Why, every road within twenty leagues has been scoured for you——”

St. Martin leaned back in his chair, having finished his second bottle before he began his second fowl.

“Well,” he said coolly, “consider me arrested, gentlemen! It’s safe to say I can’t get away from this sacred mount, so here I am. Suppose you join me in a bottle of wine, and when I’ve finished my dinner I’ll join your game, eh?”

“Agreed, with all my heart!” and the lieutenant broke into laughter. Then he sobered. “Is it truth that you’re from Canada, monsieur? I had a cousin killed in the Hudson’s Bay battle ten years ago.”

“Say you so?” cried St. Martin, in whom the wine was working well. “I was there myself, and aboard Iberville’s ship! Your cousin’s name, monsieur?”

“De Ponfret——”

“Of the marines! He was struck down at my side, died in my very arms! Monsieur, I salute you gladly!”

St. Martin came to his feet, and the lieutenant embraced him in delight. Now there was high talk, and that second fowl was long in being finished, since everyone would have St. Martin tell of the naval fighting in frozen seas, and he was nothing loath.

After this, if the sounds of revelry lessened up and down the street, they heightened from within the Licorne. Three more cavaliers, reeling home to their quarters from farther up the hill, wandered in and joined the dicing, and the host was kept running for wine from the cellar bins. Everyone had long since forgotten that St. Martin was a prisoner, while St. Martin himself forgot all about his appointment with Domont.

Outside, the night was brilliant and cloudless, stars all ablaze across the deep bowl of the sky, and a thin slice of old moon silvering the sea. Under this faintly clear yet deceptive radiance, the ancient Mont rose like some fairy castle, its mossy battlements and spiry pinnacles transformed in the starglow, bathed in a softened and unearthly beauty exquisite beyond words. In the dense shadow of the outer wall, where a darker shadow gaped like a hole among the gray stones, stood two figures. Domont now wore a black friar’s gown, the cowl pulled up over his head, and the Mole chuckled at his aspect.

“You have the two swords where they’ll not fall and clatter? And the hoods? Good. Then go your way, friend, and if you meet anyone mutter a ‘Pax vobiscum!’ under your breath. You’d better go down by way of the

ramparts. The fisher guards will be only too glad not to see you, and no questions will be asked of a brother, you may be sure.”

“The boat’s waiting?”

“Aye, money paid over, sails loosed and ready to run up, and tied to the landing. As I thought, there’s a high water, and even at the full ebb they brought the boat right up to the landing.”

“Right. I’ll come back with them to the Chatelet, eh?”

“Aye, openly; there’s no danger. The warder’s drunk by the guard-room fire, everyone’s abed, and I’ve fixed the portcullis. Take care of that heavier sword I gave you! It was du Guesclin’s own blade.”

Domont shrugged. “I like the other better, the long rapier. St. Martin can have the historic blade, and welcome. If we get through without trouble, you can replace them, and your mind will be easier. You’re going for the patriarch?”

“Aye, now. St. Michel speed you, friend!”

The Mole appeared to melt into the solid wall and vanish. There was a slight scrape of stone on stone, and Domont found himself alone.

Although it appeared rank madness to strike out across the open stretch of starlight where his black figure must be startlingly distinct for any to see, Domont started for the battlements, to the left of the Outer Degree. He soon realized the Mole had spoken truth, however. Any guards he encountered would be men from the abbey lands, heartily disgusted at their enforced service, and would be only too glad not to meet one of the monks from above.

He had speedy proof of this, indeed, as he gained the ramparts. A figure, pike in hand, started toward him and then turned hurriedly away and was lost to sight. Domont laughed and strode along at a steady, measured pace. As he reached the lower levels, he found the guards non-existent; beyond doubt, most of them were sound asleep in nooks and corners of the walls.

The tide was swirling in far-away channels here and there across the glittering sands, and the blue dimness of the moonlit night showed not a flicker of yellow torches anywhere. Domont quickened his pace, eagerness rising strong within him, and he could have sung aloud for sheer joy of his freedom and the promised swift action ahead. All going well, no hindrance this time! Under his robe he clasped tightly the two long swords given him by the Mole.

Now, as he drew down to the level of the town and taverns, he heard a sudden bawling of maudlin voices; frowning, he cautiously shorted his stride again to that of a sedate monk, and here he passed a guard, but

without question. Ahead of him loomed the bulky round mass of the King's Tower and adjoining buildings. The platform hereabouts was all deserted, and in another moment Domont found himself beneath Mary Suffolk's window, six feet overhead.

"Here's Rodomont!" he called softly, gaily. His answer came in the creak of an opening shutter, and he saw the girl's face looking out at him.

Having laid down his burden, carefully, he held out his arms in silent invitation, and blessed the forethought causing her to don a dark dress and mantle. She climbed out, poised a moment, and then let herself drop. Domont staggered under her weight, but lowered her safely to her feet. For an instant, he held her against him, and laughed into her wide eyes.

"Well done!" he murmured. "Now we're off. Here, you must don this black hood; keep the other, and the second sword. I must get St. Martin—he'll be waiting at the Licorne."

"There are stairs here, going down to the street," she said quietly, and flung the cape about her head and shoulders. "I'll guide you."

Domont put the rapier, an ancient weapon of fine steel, beneath his arm and followed her, as she held the du Guesclin blade and led the way. Passing down a flight of wall steps, two minutes later he found himself standing in the street, on the uphill side of the spanning building which housed the Licorne; and there he came to a stop in blank consternation. The front of the tavern showed lights, and from within came the sound of loud-ringing, laughing, drunken voices.

"Go on up the hill," he said quietly, and then looked at the Canadian's window. "Ho, St. Martin! St. Martin!"

There was no response. Mary Suffolk, obeying his order, had melted into the darkness of the narrow street and was lost to sight in the shadows. Domont, giving up hope of any response from the upper window, now stepped close to the inn-front and peered through the glass at the scene inside. And here he had the answer to his perplexity.

St. Martin was there—very much there, indeed. He had risen from the table and, standing before the wide fireplace, was just taking a cup of hot mulled wine from the host. He scowled above the flagon at his companions. Some word, some hint, had wakened his fuddled brain to a flash of uneasy memory.

"Will ye stop your bawling?" he roared out angrily. "I want to think of something. I had an appointment, and Satan grip me if I can remember——"

At this there was a rousing shout of merriment.

“Ho, an appointment!” bawled the lieutenant, holding his sides for mirth. “Who’s the lass this time? Breton Meg from the Head o’ Gold up the Street? Or the slim wench at the Trois Sauciers?”

“It’s a lousy jade at the Lévrière,” yelled somebody, amid a chorus of laughter. “And where’s the rendezvous, St. Martin? Tell us! We’ll keep it for you!”

St. Martin glowered angrily around. “Ye shall not,” he said. “Host, what’s the hour?”

“It’s hard upon midnight, messieurs,” said the anxious and perturbed host. “The gentlemen above will lay a fine upon me for this night’s noise! Messieurs, I pray you——”

Somebody flung a tankard at the whining host. The pewter missed its intended mark, but struck St. Martin squarely in the face and sent him staggering back until he brought up against the chimney-piece. With a snarled oath, the Canadian jerked his hand down, then up. His long knife sang in the air. The blade of it plunged into the throat of the cavalier who had flung the mug, and the man fell dead across the table with a great rush of blood.

There was silence for one instant, silence paralyzing and horrible; then a yell pealed up, drowned in a slithering clatter as swords whipped out. From St. Martin broke one choked, frightful cry. During this instant of silence, he had remembered everything.

Back against the fireplace, ringed in and cut off from the entrance, he cast a wild look around and saw no escape. He was unarmed, save for the tomahawk inside his shirt, but this one glance had shown him a weapon. Behind him leaned the spit, cleaned and standing against the stones—a six-foot rod of whitely polished steel, hooked and turned at one end, thinly pointed at the other.

Not waiting to be rushed, St. Martin seized this weapon in both hands and hurled himself forward, his immense strength wielding that terrible steel bar like a feather. Swords licked out at him with deadly tongues; the heavy steel smashed them aside, shivered them, struck two men like a club and sent them reeling. From the right, the lieutenant drove in a thrust, but St. Martin wheeled and evaded it, then plunged his weapon at the officer—it drove through him from breast to back and stood out a hand’s length from his shoulders, ere St. Martin jerked it free with a great wrench. That awful sight brought frantic madness and horror upon all who saw the thing. The scream of the dying man was drowned in a crash as St. Martin overturned the table and leaped for the doorway, in the moment of sickened pause.

He gained the entrance, swung open the door, then turned and flailed out with his weapon at those leaping forward. One cavalier crashed down, groaning, and the others hesitated an instant. From the rear a hand of iron clamped on St. Martin's shoulder and dragged him across the threshold into the night.

"Drunken fool!" groaned Domont in despair and anger. "Up the street with you—go!"

He hurled the Canadian away, reeling and staggering. A burst of figures erupted at the doorway, and Domont faced them, plying his long rapier with rapid and desperate skill. Two men were run through the body, another groaned and collapsed on the threshold. Then, flinging off the enveloping monk's robe, Domont turned and ran.

Too late! Before he had caught up with St. Martin, there was a sudden rush of figures from all directions—from the buildings on either hand, from the guard-room of the King's Gate, from the quarters below that gate. Most were cavaliers, others were of the town guard, pikes glinting in the starlight. The greater part of these hesitated in uncertainty, until St. Martin swung his iron flail and sent a man screaming to the stones—with this, the crowd centered upon the two fugitives.

"To the Chatelet!" cried Domont, almost incoherent with furious anger. Well ahead, he caught sight of the girl's hooded figure. "On! Run, St. Martin!"

"Run yourself." From the Canadian broke a groan of remorse and wild grief. "I'll stop here and check——"

"Run!" snapped Domont, and the other obeyed the savage word and voice.

Ahead of them now sped Mary Suffolk, needing no urge. A fusil thundered and its bullet whistled eerily somewhere overhead, but there were no other shots; firearms were very few, and those few with unlighted matches. As an alarm, this shot served its purpose, for it informed all the lower town that here was something more serious than a mere drunken brawl. Domont was swift to realize the most urgent peril—this came, not from the yelling swarm of figures that streamed up behind, but from the ramparts ahead. These ran almost parallel with the road, and if the guards had wits enough to collect at an upper platform, they could cut off the road of the fugitives long ere the Chatelet was reached.

Glancing back, Domont realized the furious pursuit was rapidly gaining. Just ahead was the sharp turn of the upper street, where the road came to the

rampart terraces and then swept to the left in the Great Outer Degree ending at the Chatelet.

“Make a stand—there!” panted Domont, and the Canadian growled low assent. “On with you, Mary—don’t stop!”

Domont toiled on up the steep rise, inwardly cursing the foul luck which had brought about this uproar and now threatened to cut all their plans in the bud. He pounded past the parish church with leaden feet and drove at the steps beyond, St. Martin at his elbow. With untold relief, Domont ascertained that the platform ahead, where the ramparts curved in, was free of men; the guards had not assembled, and the dark shape of the girl was flitting on toward the Chatelet. The yelling pack in the rear, however, were not a dozen paces behind, and must be halted at all costs.

“Now! At the head of those stairs!” gasped Domont, at the turn of the way.

Up the dozen long stairs they dashed, then turned suddenly and came to a pause. St. Martin leaned on the grim weapon which he still carried, and Domont’s rapier glittered in the starlight. The throng below, thinking them trapped, drove upward with a howl of joy. St. Martin stepped well to one side, took the long steel bar in both hands, and whirled it.

A frightful scream of terror broke from the foremost as that flail swept on them, but those behind shoved them forward. Domont smashed aside the flickering sword-points and his rapier lunged out swiftly, once, twice—thrice. Then, when the terrible crimsoned bar of steel crushed down at them again and again, the crowd broke asunder and broke down the stairs in wild horror, leaving sprawled figures behind. St. Martin whirled up his weapon once more, and sent it flying point first into the thick of those below. Ere his gasp of effort had died, two men were plunging away, horribly linked together.

“Run!” cried Domont, seeing the black surge of men coming by the ramparts, with pikes gleaming and thrusting. “Run! She has a sword for you _____”

They turned, and flung themselves at the steep, long mount of the Outer Degree side by side, unhurt. High ahead of them yawned the black maw of the Chatelet, low-arched, gained by a narrow and steep flight of stairs passing up between the two towers. Staggering, all but exhausted, the two men forced themselves up the last of the flight. That mad run up the steep hill, the fury of fight, had drained them; human endurance could do no more. And ahead still loomed the tremendous climb up the Inner Degree.

Under the entrance of the arch were grouped three figures. Domont collapsed at the head of the stairway, gasping for breath. He was aware of the Mole, and beside him the towering shape of the Nameless Exile; as he sank down, Mary Suffolk caught his hand.

“You’re not hurt——”

“No—winded—by climb. On with you!” Domont rallied a little. “Get the portcullis down—close the gates——”

“I have jammed them so they cannot close,” rang out the mournful voice of the Mole. “We cannot bar the way. Our friend Avedis is feeble—ah, punishment is upon us——”

“Go on!” St. Martin scrambled to his feet again, seized the sword held by the girl. “Here’s a weapon—we’ll hold them here! On with you!”

“I’ll wait at the west door of the church—leading to the platform!” cried the Mole’s voice, and then the three figures slipped away, up toward the blackness above. The two men remained alone, gasping air into their lungs.

Domont glanced around, desperately. Below them was the Chatelet approach, steep and narrow; they stood on a wide flagged platform that opened into the guard-room and courtyard to the left. Behind them was the massive archway and black steps ascending to the Great Inner Degree itself.

“Stop them here,” said Domont, “then run for it. They’ll not be sure whether we went up or off to the left.”

“No! No hope there,” cried the other, with an oath. “Torches!”

True enough; a glow of ruddy torchlight showed down below, and ahead of it a horde of figures flooding like a wave up the narrow stairs. Domont faintly heard cries of startled alarm echoing from the abbatial buildings far above. The very thought of the interminable climb to the west platform was benumbing—the achievement seemed beyond all hope, out of all reason.

“Ready!” grunted St. Martin.

Domont straightened. Up the narrow stairs burst the wave of assailants, but the torches were not close enough to disclose the two figures standing in the blackness of the low arch; until suddenly the long rapier and the heavy blade of du Guesclin began to bite, and here in the blackness was grim slaughter.

So steep were the stairs, built for just such work as this, that those crowding up could scarce get at the two defenders, while blade and rapier wrought bitter ruth on the thronging mass, until the stones ran red and the attackers cursed as they slipped, and gave backward from the assault.

Then, at Domont's word, the two men darted back, dashed across the pavement, and took the flight of stairs beyond at a leap. Hopeless to evade pursuit, however—the torches had come up, and a savage yell from below showed their evasion fully disclosed. As they topped the stairs and gained the Inner Degree, Domont glimpsed window-lights flashing in the walls to the left. He caught St. Martin's arm, and here at the stair-head they paused and rested, regaining breath and strength. Ahead of them still remained that long winding climb, now in short flights of stairs and platforms, again in the steep contours of the mounting naked rock. Here was little light from the sky, as the high walls to either hand kept the Inner Degree in blackness.

"Now," said Domont quietly, and met the attack.

It came this time in more deadly fashion, for the pike-armed guards had been shoved to the front, and their weapons lunged upward perilously, shielding the men who wielded them. Here the heavy blade was of more use than a rapier. St. Martin slashed, and as he opened a way among the pikes, Domont slipped in and drove down with the point. Men fell there, and the cursing throng recoiled, broke back.

"My folly's paid for, comrade!" St. Martin reeled away, with an oath. "Leave me."

"Not I." Sobbing for breath, Domont caught the Canadian. "Where?"

"Pike-thrust—in the ribs——"

"Arm around my neck. Step out with your right foot first—now! Run for it!"

Run they did, though in awkward manner, and went scrambling up the blackly mounting steep, and so gained three landings before they halted. The mass below was pushing upward, and torches flared, sending ruddy streaks of light along the Inner Degree. Then, suddenly, a door burst open not ten feet from the two men, and de Lussan ran out into the increasing light, sword in hand. He saw them, and his voice screamed out in shrill rage. A moment earlier he would have cut them off from the rear; as it was, he drove in upon them, alone, while the crowd and the torches below surged upward.

Here, beneath an angle of the church apse, the way was narrow and turning, easily held. St. Martin had recovered his strength enough to meet the rush and cut down the first man, whereat the others hung back, shouting for pikes. Domont had already met the savage rush of de Lussan, and on the issue of this the others waited, also, while St. Martin leaned heavily on his blade.

"Now, devil that you are!" cried out de Lussan eagerly, as the rapiers crossed in the torchlight. "Now I have you——"

“Remember the count of four!” panted Domont, and laughed harshly. “One and two—and three—and you have it at four—take it!”

De Lussan flung out his arms wide, and his sword clattered away on the stones; then he fell, death driven into his very heart by the long rapier. Over his falling body, Domont hurled himself madly upon the throng behind. These gave back with yells of terror as his red point bit; the torches fluttered down and lay smoking, and the crowd surged back from the wild apparition of death smiting them.

“On with you, St. Martin!” rang out the voice of Domont.

The Canadian staggered up the black road, until presently the gasping Domont was at his side again and aiding him. Here the brave blade of du Guesclin clinked dismally on the black stones and was gone.

“I can make it—with luck,” panted St. Martin.

“These damnable stairs! Look out, now—they’re after us——”

“Save your breath. Go on.”

Domont left him to reel onward alone, and darted suddenly to one side. Torches were flickering again, and a wild chorus of yells echoed up the walls of this narrow gorge as though all the devils were let loose below. The cavaliers and guards, reinforced, knowing only two men ahead of them, rallied and came up the steep incline in a burst of baffled fury.

Now Domont, aided by the rising glare of torches, found the thing he had sought—a great boulder, left in one corner of the walls and serving to uphold an end of the wooden bench where men might sit and rest midway of their ascent. Putting out his strength, Domont tore away the bench and then tugged at the boulder. It gave a little, rocked and settled back again. Desperately, frantically, Domont leaned to it, gathered his strength, braced himself against the wall behind, put forth every muscle and heaved.

The boulder was overbalanced. It rumbled a moment across the stones, jumped a little and crashed down, gathering fearful momentum—then it drove away with a mighty crash, leaped into the air, thundered. One hideous yell of stark terror went shrilling up from the men below, a yell echoed and sounded back a thousandfold by the dark walls, eddying up and up like a shriek of doom; with a deep reverberation, the boulder raked a way for itself, smote a buttress, ricocheted across the narrow way, leaped again and burst in a shower of flinders.

From this terrible scattering, the men below were slow to recover; groans and cries filled all the darkness, and the screaming of a back-broken guard. Presently a smoking torch was picked up and fanned into flame. An officer of the *maréchaussée* shoved his way forward and took charge,

ordered the cavaliers to advance, and wakened new echoes with the smashing report of his pistolet, fired at random.

By this time strongly reinforced anew, the throng swept past the body of de Lussan and pressed up the steep way beyond. As the torches glimmered higher, two figures were seen ahead, dragging themselves toward the last rise to the south platform, whence Brother Simon had gone to his death—the very crest of the Inner Degree. None of the monks had appeared from above. Most of the brethren were probably not yet awake, for their dormitory lay on the other side of the abbey.

The shrill yells pealed up afresh for an instant, as the two figures ahead staggered to the crest, and then fell together in a heap at the top. The rushing noise of booted feet resounded from the high walls, oaths and yells for vengeance flew up the towering spires of granite overhead. Seeing the two fugitives fallen prostrate and exhausted, the blood-lust of the hunt came upon the pack below; they howled, brandished weapons in the torchlight, came rushing onward with a burst of ferocity.

This eagerness was suddenly halted.

Above them uprose St. Martin, laughing terribly, blood dark on his side, and his hand whipped back, then forward. Across the lane of red lights flickered that little hand-axe of his; the officer who headed the rout pitched headlong, with his skull split. Beside St. Martin uprose the shape of Domont, and came down headlong among the stumbling men, rapier plunging here and there, his face set in a mask and his red hair flying.

Once more the crowd broke back, appalled, and were slow to gather heart. Up above, they saw the two fugitives reel across the platform and vanish in the south entrance to the church. At this, they took courage. There was now no escape for those two men, no way out except over the battlements, no other place to flee except the sacred precincts—sanctuary or not, they were lost!

And so the throng went surging upward, gained the platform, streamed across it and broke in upon the great church. By the torchlight, the foremost among them saw the west doors slammed shut, heard the rasp of a turned key—fell vainly to thundering at those massive doors. The fugitives were on the west platform! Above the doors hammered the crowd of maddened men, until some of the guards, who knew the place, shouted above the din, showed the way out through the cloister and thus around to the platform. They streamed along, torches flaring, passed a huddle of frightened monks in the cloister, and then came bursting out into the clear night air on the west platform—the great open platform which seemed to overhang eternity.

And this platform was empty.

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT IS WRITTEN, IS WRITTEN

GUIDED by the hand of the Mole, aiding the spent St. Martin with his other arm, Domont reeled blindly across the west platform. His lungs were afire, his calves and thighs were one intolerable ache. He had a vision of the great gulf below, and then found himself shoved at a tiny black opening.

“To the stairs—be careful!” cried the Mole’s voice, thin with excitement. A stone scraped, and sudden blackness closed them all in.

St. Martin recovered himself a little, but a moment afterward lost his footing, and only Domont’s arm saved him from plunging down. Utterly spent and exhausted, Domont himself felt at the point of collapse when suddenly he turned an elbow of the steep little secret stairway, and discerned a glimmer of light below. Here, upon a level landing, stood Mary Suffolk and the patriarch, who held a lantern.

St. Martin got as far as the foot of the stairway, before his strength deserted him, though not his senses, and he went down in a limp heap. Domont uttered a low groan, and was shoved aside by the Mole, who knelt over the Canadian.

“Rest, both of you. I’ll see to this hurt—ah! Not dead, and nowhere near it! A bandage, a cloth!”

Mary Suffolk jerked away her hooded cape, and the strong, large hands of the Mole swiftly ripped it asunder. In two minutes St. Martin was firmly bandaged about his hurt side, and sat propped against the wall. The Mole came to his feet, and his brown eyes were wide and anxious as they sought those of Domont.

“We’ve no time to lose! They’ll search everywhere, and will certainly discover that boat if we don’t reach it first—men will be sent around the island on all sides. We must reach the staircase and the wood ahead of any who come from above. What, your sword gone—both swords gone! Well, the patriarch here has another, though he can’t use it. Come, on our way! Having come up, we must now go down. St. Martin, cling to me—up with you! Death’s no worse met on your feet than if you lie here——”

Under that desperately encouraging voice, and the strong hands, St. Martin staggered doggedly to his feet. Domont met the wide and frightened gaze of the girl, caught and held her extended hand, and managed a smile.

“So you’re not hurt?” she exclaimed.

“No. All well here?”

Domont turned to the patriarch, and saw all was very far from being well. The man was failing where he stood, and the bearded countenance was pallid, sweat-bedewed. The brilliant, proud dark eyes rested on Domont with an expression of unutterable anguish; then, with a little gesture as though to say he would do his best, the Nameless Exile lifted his lantern and passed on after the Mole, his step weak and uncertain.

“He’s ill,” said the girl, and followed.

Domont got the Canadian’s arm about his neck, and they brought up the rear. Save for the shuffling of footsteps, the musty silence over them all was unbroken and heavily oppressive.

Presently they came to more stairs, steep and narrow, interminably winding, and St. Martin groaned out curses as he repeatedly lost his footing and fell against the narrow walls, to the hurt of his wounded side. Both men had been far sapped of vitality by the mad flight up the steep hillside, followed by the steeper climb up the Inner Degree, with all its accompaniment of bloody work. Domont was far enough gone himself to realize the condition of the Canadian, aggravated as it was by hurts and loss of blood.

They reached another landing, and more stairs. Ahead, Domont saw Mary Suffolk take the lantern from the trembling hand of Avedis Vertabed, take from him a sword also, and in the glimmer of light the figure of the Mole was disclosed far below, face upturned toward them.

“Hide the light!” came his guarded voice. “Hide it, but do not extinguish it!”

The girl thrust it under her cloak.

So at last was accomplished the painful descent, and all of them stood beside the Mole in an opening where the clear night air beat gratefully into their lungs. From far overhead, half shut out by towering walls, sounded a tumultuous din, and Domont was swift to realize their position. Out before them dropped the terraced wood, and they stood in a corner of the garden; just to their right was the staircase that led from the little tower and the door of the Montgommeries down across and through the wood to the Fount of St. Aubert. So clear was the starry moonlit night, Domont fancied he could even see the dark shape of the boat down there beyond the blotch that meant the Fount and its landing.

The confused din up above grew and increased rapidly, until suddenly arose upon the night a wild jangle of bells, great and small, sending their alarm-peal far and wide. The patriarch tottered, leaned back faintly against

the wall, and signed them to go on without him, but at this the Mole spoke in frantic desperation.

“Bring him, Rodomont, bring him—I’ll help St. Martin! If we don’t gain the stairway, we’ll be cut off yet. Those bells will bring men from every direction, and the fishermen will be afraid of their necks and will tell about the boat—perhaps they’ve done so already! Get him to the stairway at all costs, let him rest there until his weakness is past——”

“Right. Put out that lantern; it’s useless now, for the lugger can’t come in at low tide,” said Domont. “I’ll bring our friend here.”

“And I’ll help,” said the girl quietly.

The Mole drew the Canadian’s arm about his neck and disappeared along the base of the mighty wall to their right. Blowing out the lantern, Mary Suffolk abandoned it and took one arm of the patriarch, Domont the other. They endeavored to make him comprehend that he could rest after they reached this long and curious stairway; whether or not he understood, Avedis Vertabed drew a deep breath, collected his strength, and assented to their insistent urging.

In another three minutes, they gained the head of the stairway by the path from the garden; Domont pressed his companions on, resolved not to halt unless necessary. Ahead, the Mole and St. Martin were descending toward the water. Then, as the trees rose to right and left of them, Domont felt the patriarch tremble and quiver. He paused, signed him to sit and rest, and looked around at the Mont.

The wild clangor of bells was silent, but that of voices had become a faint roar. In the town on the other side of the mount, a single bell was madly clamoring. Lights were springing to the windows of the church and the hostelry above the wood, while the glow of torches and cressets was reflected upon the spires of the Marvel, high above. Obviously, every nook and corner of the place was being searched.

“There’s signal enough to your lugger!” said Domont, and laughed a little. Then the girl seized his arm quickly, wrenched him around.

“Look! That little green star—you see? To the left of Tombelaine, this way!”

Following her pointing hand, Domont in a moment made it out. A tiny speck of green light, a pin-point that danced and flickered to seaward of the dark mass where Tombelaine’s rock crouched.

“The lugger—thank heaven! Then everything’s won, dear girl—everything!”

His sudden surge of relief was tremendous. Catching sight of the sword in her grasp, he reached down to take it from her; instead, their fingers met and held—and all abruptly, Domont found her clinging to him, as his arm went around her.

“Everything?” she exclaimed, her face upraised to him in the starlight, a laugh of excited happiness on her lips. “Everything?”

“Aye, if you’ll have it so!” Domont cried impetuously. “Will you come to the New World with me, dear girl? Will you take my love, now I can ask you to share it, and let me fend for you and shelter you?”

For answer she held up her lips and kissed him, and again. Both of them had quite forgotten the tall shape sitting on the steps beside them and leaning faintly against the half-ruined stone parapet.

“Mary Suffolk, you’ll marry me?” exclaimed Domont after a moment, holding her at arm’s length and wondering at the sheer beauty of her. “You mean it? But it can’t be true—it’s too great——”

“Hush, silly man! Don’t I love you? Yes, of course I’ll marry you—here, this very moment, if you like!”

“Eh? But how——”

She gestured, and suddenly Domont understood. A great laugh broke from him and he swung the girl around so that they faced the drooping man at their side. A touch on the arm, and the patriarch looked up.

He was slow to get the gist of their intent, until suddenly his white teeth showed in a flash through his beard, and he dragged himself to his feet. Then, gesturing them to kneel, he spoke rapidly; if the meaning of his words was unknown, their purport could be clearly guessed. Presently, a hand on each head, he stooped and kissed them both, made the sign of benediction—and caught at the parapet for support.

“Rodomont!” rose the voice of the Mole, thin and faint, from below. “Rodomont!”

Startled into sudden realization of their madness to have paused at such a moment, Domont caught up the sword at his feet, gave Mary Suffolk one swift kiss then pushed her gently downward.

“On with you, friend wife!” he exclaimed gaily, exultantly. “On, and get aboard. I’ll follow with him. We’ve won the game!”

In a tumult of riotous emotion, triumph firing his very soul, Domont lifted the arm of the patriarch about his neck and began the descent anew. They continued, slowly but steadily, down the precipitous stairway, not built for ease but for utility. From far out along the sands sounded a hollow booming roar that ran off into the distance, and where a moment before had

been a vast expanse of wind-dried sand beneath the thin moon, now leaped a snowy sheet of foam—racing swiftly, swiftly, almost faster than eye could discern it, foam that whirled and roared and swirled into ripples and eddies, and then became water again, a limpid sea of it. So the tide had come in upon the Mont, after its fashion, and the saints help any souls caught on those sands!

They were half way down, now, the trees of the wood rising thick to right and left, cloaking them with darkness. Domont glanced back at the illuminated spires high above, and laughed again—the lugger would be on the alert now, without mistake! A tug at his arm, a low groan, and the patriarch halted, leaning against the parapet.

To halt here, however, were madness. Domont waited a moment, then made an imperative gesture. Avedis Vertabed motioned him to go on alone, but he dissented curtly and caught the older man's arm, helping him forward, aiding him down the steps. And little by little they made it, though the patriarch stumbled and swayed as he went, until they were a scant hundred feet from the square building and the landing below. Then, abruptly, the patriarch went limp as a rag and pitched sideways. Domont caught him, barely in time to save the unconscious man a nasty fall.

At the same instant, a woman's scream of startled terror rang out from the landing—a scream immediately cut short. The voice of the Mole followed in alarm.

Hesitating the fraction of a second, Domont left the Armenian where he lay and plunged down the remainder of the way, baring the sword as he leaped the steps two at a time. A low call guided him to the right of the tiny building; as he darted around the side of this, he saw the boat lying at a platform of half-shattered masonry. She was nearly level with the edge of this platform.

“Swiftly!” called the Mole, his voice urgent.

Domont sprang to his side, saw the little man supporting the figure of Mary Suffolk with one hand and with the other fending off the boat from crushing the girl against the masonry. Domont swiftly stooped, caught her beneath the arms, and drew her clear.

“I missed—my footing,” she cried. “It's all right—where's St. Martin?”

“In the boat; senseless.” The Mole stood erect. “Rodomont! You've not left him?”

“He's gone to pieces, a little way back.” Domont, as he spoke, helped the dripping girl into the boat. “I'll get him. All clear here?”

“Run up these sails first—they may be upon us at any moment.” The Mole sprang aboard, and Domont came to his help. In two minutes they had run up the little foresail and the big brown mainsail. Under the west wind, which was blowing strongly, she leaned over and tugged at her two mooring lines.

On the landing again, the Mole seized Domont’s sword and slashed at the bow line, until it parted. He caught up the other rope, unwound it from a jagged bit of granite, and stood holding it. This line alone held the boat to the landing.

“Go and get him—quickly!” he exclaimed, and Domont departed at a run. As he went, he heard the girl’s voice from behind.

“I’ll take the tiller; I can handle a boat perfectly——”

A laugh broke upon Domont’s lips, as he dashed up the stairs. What a woman he had won this night! The laugh died out, suddenly, as from up above broke a red flare of torches, and he saw men descending the upper portion of the staircase.

In frantic desperation he quickened his pace, reached the dark figure of Bishop Avedis, found the latter still senseless. Domont stooped, heard a wild cry from the Mole below, and with a mighty effort heaved up the body of the patriarch and shouldered it. He staggered, nearly lost his footing, blood surged with a rush into his brain—then he came erect, balanced himself, and started the descent.

This unforeseen crisis drew a groan from him. Up above, he could hear the leaping outbursts of yells telling he had been sighted. If only he had not stayed to get those sails up! If only he and Mary Suffolk had not—He choked back this thought, and reeled on down the stairs, while the chase became hotter up above. A pistolet barked out, and the ball flew close. The ruddy torchlight was drawing nearer, lighting everything with distinctness. Below, he glimpsed the grotesque figure of the Mole dancing on the landing, signaling him to hurry. Then, at the very bottom step, Domont lost his footing and his balance together, and came crashing down with his burden.

Maddened by this desperate mischance, he scrambled up and once more stooped to his load. Sparks of fire were glimmering before his eyes, a terrible weariness weighed upon him, but he rose with the inert figure in his arms, and went stumbling onward. As he turned the corner of the little building, he heard one sharp, frightful scream from the Mole. A tall figure leaped up, dashed aside the little man, seized upon the rope, and from all sides came other figures scrambling over the platform.

Caught! Even now, Domont made one tortured effort to break through and reach the boat, but it was useless. A man caromed against him, the limp body of the patriarch went slipping from his arms, he himself tottered blindly. The man with the ropes hauled out a pistolet and fired pointblank. With a low cry, Domont put both hands to his head at the stab of pain, then his senses fled and he fell headlong from the edge of the landing into the boat, and lay quiet.

“We have them!” shouted the man with the rope, and tossed away his pistolet. “We have them! Come——”

His words ended in a deathly gurgle, and he sank backward. In his place rose the Mole again, holding the forgotten sword Domont had left on the landing. One shrill cry wailed from his lips.

“Punishment, punishment! Get away while you can——”

With his foot, the Mole kicked aside the end of the fallen rope, and hurled himself upon the two men who gripped the boat to the landing. One of them he ran through. The other rose and grappled him, bore him backward. Others leaped upon him at once. From the surging pile of bodies arose a low, mournful cry.

“Punishment!”

The cry died away into a strangled sob. The boat, heeling to the wind, darted away and was gone across the starlight, toward a glimmer of green hanging low on the horizon.

CHAPTER XV

THE LIE

WITH a stiff breeze bowling her well over and the Chausey archipelago behind on the horizon, the lugger smashed through the water at a rousing clip. Sunrise reddened on her canvas, found her well out of danger and speeding out for the channel and the English shores, with no pursuing speck on the seas.

Domont, his head bandaged where the pistolet's lead had smitten him sat under the weather rail as he had been sitting for hours, and stared blankly out at the thin purple line marking the cliffs of Normandy. Speaking to none, he had silently sat there through the darkness and dawn, blind and deaf to everything passing around him. If tears had furrowed his cheek at thought of the little Mole whose supreme sacrifice bought escape, they were dry now; yet the dull despair in his heart was clearly mirrored in his haggard countenance.

“Rodomont!”

Domont glanced around. St. Martin was coming toward him, painfully clawing his way along the rail, a seaman's jacket buttoned over his bandaged chest and shoulders. The lugger's captain and one of his men stood beside the helm, watching both passengers with very curious eyes, but St. Martin ignored them. He looked more dark and fiercely stern than ever, and as he gained Domont's side, letting himself to the deck, a savage oath of pain was wrenched from his lips.

“We're here.” St. Martin took out his pipe and began to shred tobacco into it. “Still thinking of the Mole, comrade?”

“I'll think of him a long while,” said Domont slowly, with indescribable bitterness in his face and voice. “Won't you?”

St. Martin quivered a little as those words bit into him, but his dark gaze lifted firmly to that of Domont.

“No need of such a thrust, comrade,” he said, and then, despite his words, furtively signed himself. “I don't believe in it—yet didn't he say there'd be punishment for what had happened? Well, it may be he was right. Rodomont, I'd give my own life gladly to undo what my folly caused last night——”

“You might well say so,” said Domont in an even, terrible tone, staring into the eyes of the other man without flinching. “You caused it.”

St. Martin paled a little.

“Yes. But for my drunken folly, we’d have slipped away from that accursed place with no trouble. Well, it can’t be undone now, and this only makes it the more bitter to the taste. Comrade, do you think the Mohawk stake can be half so bad as the mortal hurt of vain regret—do you think the pains of hell itself would be worse than what gnaws at me this minute?”

Suddenly Domont saw behind the steady, imperturbable mien of the man to the hurt and writhing spirit, tortured by a remorse that could not be quelled. And then St. Martin looked into his eyes and spoke quietly, curtly.

“Comrade, will you forgive me?”

Domont reached out and caught the brown, hard hand. “Ah, St. Martin, I’ve nothing to forgive! It’s you who must forgive my reproach.”

The captain of the lugger left the helm, saluted the two as he passed, and strode on forward. Domont paid him no heed.

“You have much to forgive,” said St. Martin. “You’ve a letter to further that girl’s cause, where you might have had a man; and all my fault. You’re hurt, hurt in body and spirit, and that’s my fault too. You’ve lost twenty thousand pounds——”

“Oh, silence! Damnation take the twenty thousand pounds!” cried out Domont in a tortured, anguished voice. “Do you think I care about that accursed blood-money? Did I want it for myself? God knows, if I had it in my pocket this minute, and could barter it for the Mole’s life, how gladly I’d do it!”

Then a voice spoke from behind him.

“Rodomont, would you barter your wife also?”

Domont started, turned around, saw her standing there looking at him, and pulled himself to his feet. He took her hand and bowed over it, and as he met her half-smiling gaze, the gayness of it brought a welter of accusation into his eyes, until they burned against the pallor of his face.

“What do you mean?” he demanded harshly. “Is it a thing to jest with?”

Then, to his quick astonishment and shame, he perceived how bravely false had been this smiling greeting, for her hands gripped tightly on his, and tears were springing to her blue eyes, and her lips were quivering.

“Ah, I know how you feel, dear man!” she exclaimed, unsteadily. “I know, and I share all your helpless grieving. But listen—there’s a time for all things, and now I must ask you something, Rodomont. Were we really married last night?”

Domont met her gaze, and found it unreadable behind the brimming tears.

“Yes.” He nodded slowly as he spoke. “Yes, I believe we were, poor girl!”

“Are you sorry?” she demanded.

“I am sorry,” he returned, unflinching. “Oh, if I’d but known, if I’d but guessed—fool that I was, to think all so safe and certain! And now what have you to face, poor Mary who loved me? Marriage to a penniless beggar, a man who can hope at best to find some employment as a ship-captain, a man who can barely get you home again with what little money he has left! And once we get home overseas, what’s to face? The grinding bitterness of poverty. I can’t have you face it for love of me.”

He broke off abruptly, his lips clenched, a gulp in his throat. Mary Suffolk smiled a little, and her fingers closed more tightly on his.

“Let that pass; even if it were true, I’d be glad of it for love of you, Rodomont,” she returned. “And that’s what I meant by bartering you. For, consider, dear man! It was the Mole gave us to each other after all, and his sacrifice now lets us stand here hand in hand today!

“Ah, Rodomont!” Her voice was very tender now. “You’re a poor lonely man, and won’t you let me take you to my heart and comfort you with love? Won’t you stand hand in hand with me and face the years, and all that must come of good and ill—if I’m willing and glad? Aye, even if the worst you fear were true, if you were a beggar as you say, I’d be so glad, so glad——”

Domont blinked, and bit fiercely at his lip. Then his head fell forward, and for a moment he folded the girl in his arms. The helmsman, who had caught all this, grinned widely and looked at St. Martin; but when he met the eyes of the Canadian he lost his grin of a sudden, and turned to look at the canvas above. Domont gently released the girl, held her off at arm’s length, and regarded her with a steady glow of warmth in his eyes.

“Ah, true heart!” he said gently. “Yes, what’s the money after all? It was only for your sake I wanted it—and if it’s lost, I can get it again.”

“You can get it again,” she repeated, and a swift little glint of laughter danced in her misty eyes. “And now, Rodomont, will you have the captain marry us once more? And again a priest when we get to England—oh, I want to be sure of you, very sure of you, triply sure! I must be sure!”

“I’ll do whatever you wish,” he responded. “But why must you be so sure of me—how can you be ever more certain than you are now, Mary Suffolk?”

“Because, as I told you one day, I lied to you!” she exclaimed. “I told you a lie, and now I’m frightened and shamed to think of your discovering it _____”

Domont laughed out suddenly.

“If you’d told me ten thousand lies, my heart, would I not love you the more? Nay, say no more about it. If you wish further bonds, we’ll marry here with the captain, and again in London, and again in Boston town, and a dozen times more! As for the lie, let it go, whatever it was it matters nothing.”

“But it does,” she insisted gently. “Will you marry me now, Rodomont, and afterward hear my confession?”

“Aye, and give you absolution beforehand.”

“On your word of honor? It will make no difference to you and me, or our love?”

“On my word of honor.” Domont glanced around whimsically. “St. Martin, for the love of heaven go get the captain, will you?”

St. Martin grinned, hauled himself up, and started forward. He was not certain what it was all about, but the remorse and bitter grief had been lifted from Domont, and momentarily from his own soul as well. He found the captain on the deck forward, and addressed him.

“Come along aft,” he said. “They want you to marry them. They seem to be married already, and must have a passion for the ceremony—but they’re to be humored.”

The captain laughed. “Married, eh? Ah, but he’s a lucky dog. Stop me if there won’t be tall talk from London to Bath over this! Why, I don’t know if I have the right—still, if they wish it, let them have it! But mark me, there’ll be talk.”

“What the devil do you mean by all this?” demanded St. Martin, half angrily. “My friend, I don’t relish your words by a good deal. You may be a captain in the king’s navy and a cursed fine gentleman to boot—but Rodomont’s my friend. What mean you?”

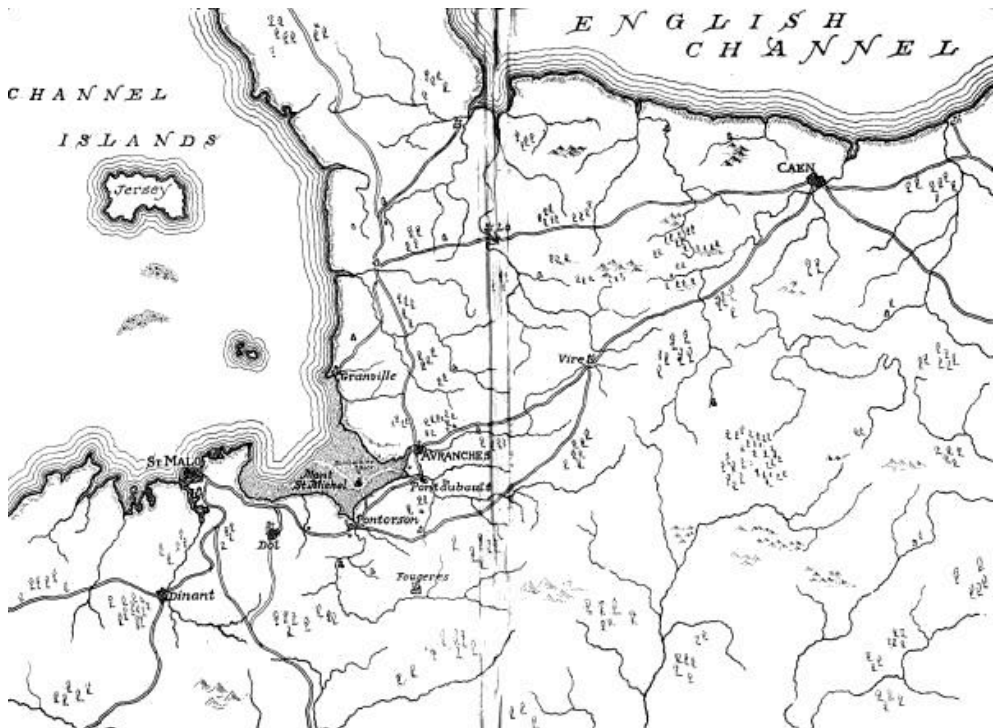
“Pox take me, man, I meant no offense!” exclaimed the other, with a laugh. “But you know, surely, that Lady Mary——”

“Eh? Who’s Lady Mary?”

“Lady Mary Suffolk—she who came aboard with you, and who’s standing there aft to be married! Isn’t she one of the queen’s ladies, and said to own a tenth of the land in all west London, besides broad estates in Norfolk and elsewhere? Why, she’s the biggest catch ever was——”

“Oh!” St. Martin’s jaw fell. He stared at the captain, then turned about to stare at the two standing arm in arm on the afterdeck, and his eyes bulged. Suddenly he recovered himself, and caught the captain by the arm, swinging him around.

“For the love of the saints, go and marry them before he finds it out, or I’ll put my knife into you!” he cried.



TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Rodomont* by Henry Bedford-Jones]