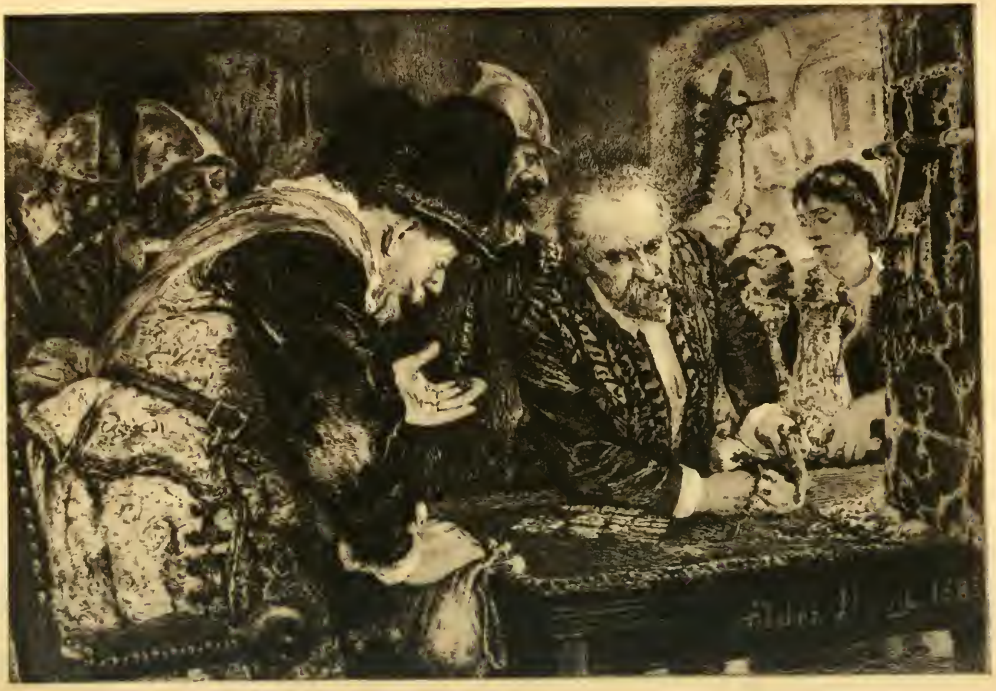
CLASSIC TALES BY
FAMOUS AUTHORS

COMPLETE IN

TWENTY VOLUMES

VOLUME XI



A Forced Contribution

Photogravure. From a Painting by Adolph Menzel

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Classic Tales
by
Famous Authors

CONTAINING COMPLETE SELECTIONS FROM THE WORLD'S BEST AUTHORS WITH PREFATORY BIOGRAPHICAL AND SYNOPTICAL NOTES

Edited and Arranged by
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With a General Introduction by
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François Villon, man-of-letters, poet, vagabond, and thief, becomes involved in a tavern brawl, where murder is done. Terror-stricken and penniless, he flies into the winter streets of Paris, dreading pursuit and seeking shelter. Perishing with cold and hunger, he knocks at a house where a light is shining, and craves succor. An old knight admits him, warms him and feeds him, and discourses with him curiously upon poverty and honor, the distinction between soldiers and thieves, until the vagabond poet's impudence and effrontery so excite the ire of the old noble that he turns out the shameless one.

The House of the Wolf: By Stanley J. Weyman.

Warned of the impending massacre of St. Bartholomew, three young cadets of the house of Caylus journey in haste to Paris to tell their friend, Louis de Pavannes, of his peril. He is the lover of their cousin, also beloved by the Vidame de Bezers—"the Wolf"—a malevolent and powerful Catholic noble, who hates his Huguenot rival, Pavannes, with the bitter rancor of jealousy and religious bigotry. The terror-stricken boys fall into his hands and look for death. De Pavannes likewise becomes his prisoner. He upbraids de Pavannes with bitter revilings, sends him to execution, and then, with scornful words, gives him life and liberty, that he may owe existence, love and happiness to "the Wolf," his implacable enemy.

The Sire de Maletroit's Door: By Robert Louis Stevenson:

This is a story of fifteenth century France. Denis

de Beaulieu, groping through dark streets, and in dread of a brawl with a drunken patrol, slips inside a doorway to avoid the watch; the door yields, opens, and he enters and closes the door behind him. To his surprise, it cannot be opened from within, and he is a prisoner. He enters the house and finds there the Sire de Malétroit and his niece, Blanche. De Malétroit believes Denis to be a cavalier who has corresponded with his niece and for whom he has prepared the trap, that he may find the man and force him to espouse the damsel. Jeering at Denis's protestations that never before had he beheld the girl, the grim old lord gives him the choice of marrying the demoiselle before morning or being hanged from a window of the courtyard. His honor and his reluctance to force himself on a girl who cannot resist make the struggle a painful one, but at last an understanding is reached; and it may be presumed that they lived happily ever after. EDITOR.

BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF AUTHORS

BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF AUTHORS

STEVENSON, ROBERT LOUIS: (For Biographical Note, see Vol. V., "Famous Weird Tales."

WEYMAN, STANLEY J.: The historical romances of Stanley J. Weyman are full of interest and local color that is not often found in stories of past times. His novels are, for the most part, tales of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and are interwoven with historic events and personages of France, Germany and England.

He was born at Ludlow, England, in 1855, and was educated at Shrewsbury, and later at Oxford, where he took his degree as a bachelor of arts. From 1881 to 1890 he practiced as barrister at law, but gave it up to follow a literary career.

His first book was the "House of the Wolf," which he published in 1890. He has also written "A Gentleman of France," "The Story of Francis Cludde," "My Lady Rotha," "Memoirs of a Minister of France," "The Red Cockade," "Sophia," "The Castle Inn," "Simon Dale" and "Shrewsbury," as well as several others. EDITOR.

THE HOUSE OF THE WOLF

Portrait of Stanley J. Weyman

Portrait of Stanley J. Weyman

THE HOUSE OF THE WOLF

Stanley J. Weyman

CHAPTER I

WARE WOLF

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I had afterward such good reason to look back upon and remember the events of that afternoon, that Catherine's voice seems to ring in my brain even now. I can shut my eyes and see again, after all these years, what I saw then—just the blue summer sky, and one gray angle of the keep, from which a fleecy cloud was trailing like the smoke from a chimney. I could see no more because I was lying on my back, my head resting on my hands. Marie and Croisette, my brothers, were lying by me in exactly the same posture, and a few yards away on the terrace, Catherine was sitting on a stool Gil had brought out for her. It was the second Thursday in August, and hot. Even the jackdaws were silent. I had almost fallen asleep, watching my cloud grow longer and longer, and thinner and thinner, when Croisette, who cared for heat no more than a lizard, spoke up sharply. "Mademoiselle," he said, "why are you watching the Cahors road?"

I had not noticed that she was doing so. But something in the keenness of Croisette's tone, taken perhaps with the fact that Catherine did not at once answer him, aroused me; and I turned to her. And lo!

she was blushing in the most heavenly way, and her eyes were full of tears, and she looked at us adorably. And we all three sat up on our elbows, like three puppy dogs, and looked at her. And there was a long silence. And then she said quite simply to us, "Boys, I am going to be married to M. de Pavannes."

I fell flat on my back and spread out my arms. "Oh, mademoiselle!" I cried, reproachfully.

"Oh, mademoiselle!" cried Marie. And he fell flat on his back, and spread out his arms and moaned. He was a good brother, was Marie, and obedient.

And Croisette cried, "Oh, mademoiselle!" too. But he was always ridiculous in his ways. He fell flat on his back, and flopped his arms and squealed like a pig.

Yet he was sharp. It was he who first remembered our duty, and went to Catherine, cap in hand, where she sat half angry and half confused, and said with a fine redness in his cheeks, "Mademoiselle de Caylus, our cousin, we give you joy, and wish you long life, and are your servants, and the good friends and aiders of M. de Pavannes in all quarrels, as——"

But I could not stand that. "Not so fast, St. Croix de Caylus," I said, pushing him aside—he was ever getting before me in those days—and taking his place. Then with my best bow I began, "Mademoiselle, we give you joy and long life, and are your servants and the good friends and aiders of M. de Pavannes in all quarrels, as—as——"

"As becomes the cadets of your house," suggested Croisette, softly.

"As becomes the cadets of your house," I repeated. And then Catherine stood up and made me a low bow, and we all kissed her hand in turn, beginning with me and ending with Croisette, as was becoming. Afterward Catherine threw her handkerchief over her face—she was crying—and we three sat down, Turkish fash-

ion, just where we were, and said, "Oh, Kit!" very softly.

But presently Croisette had something to add. "What will the Wolf say?" he whispered to me.

"Ah! to be sure!" I exclaimed aloud. I had been thinking of myself before, but this opened quite another window. "What will the vidame say, Kit?"

She dropped her kerchief from her face and turned so pale that I was sorry I had spoken—apart from the kick Croisette gave me. "Is M. de Bezers at his house?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes," Croisette answered. "He came in last night from St. Antonin, with very small attendance."

The news seemed to set her fears at rest instead of augmenting them, as I should have expected. I suppose they were rather for Louis de Pavannes than for herself. Not unnaturally, too, for even the Wolf could scarcely have found it in his heart to hurt our cousin. Her slight willowy figure, her pale oval face and gentle brown eyes, her pleasant voice, her kindness, seemed to us boys, in those days, to sum up all that was womanly. We could not remember—not even Croisette, the youngest of us, who was seventeen, a year junior to Marie and myself (we were twins)—the time when we had not been in love with her.

But let me explain how we four, whose united ages scare exceeded seventy years, came to be lounging on the terrace in the holiday stillness of that afternoon. It was the summer of 1572. The great peace, it will be remembered, between the Catholics and the Huguenots had not long been declared; the peace which in a day or two was to be solemnized and, as most Frenchmen hoped, to be cemented by the marriage of Henry of Navarre with Margaret of Valois, the king's sister. The Vicomte de Caylus, Catherine's father and our guardian, was one of the governors appointed to see

the peace enforced, the respect in which he was held by both parties—he was a Catholic but no bigot, God rest his soul!—recommending him for this employment. He had therefore gone a week or two before to Bayonne, his province. Most of our neighbors in Quercy were likewise from home, having gone to Paris to be witnesses on one side or the other of the royal wedding. And consequently we young people, not greatly checked by the presence of good-natured, sleepy Madame Claude, Catherine's duenna, were disposed to make the most of our liberty, and to celebrate the peace in our own fashion.

We were country folk. Not one of us had been to Pau, much less to Paris. The vicomte held stricter views than were common then, upon young people's education; and though we had learned to ride and shoot, to use our swords and toss a hawk, and to read and write, we knew little more than Catherine herself of the world; little more of the pleasures and sins of court life, and not one-tenth as much as she did of its graces. Still she had taught us to dance and make a bow. Her presence had softened our manners, and of late we had gained something from the frank companionship of Louis de Pavannes, a Huguenot whom the vicomte had taken prisoner at Moncontour and held to ransom. We were not, I think, mere clownish yokels.

But we were shy. We disliked and shunned strangers. And when old Gil appeared suddenly, while we were still chewing the melancholy cud of Kit's announcement, and cried sepulchrally, "M. le Vidame de Bezers to pay his respects to mademoiselle!"—well, there was something like a panic, I confess!

We scrambled to our feet, muttering, "The Wolf!" The entrance at Caylus is by a ramp rising from the gateway to the level of the terrace. This sunken way is fenced by low walls so that one may not—when walk-

ing on the terrace—fall into it. Gil had spoken before his head had well risen to view, and this gave us a moment, just a moment. Croisette made a rush for the doorway into the house, but failed to gain it, and drew himself up behind a buttress of the tower, his finger on his lip. I am slow sometimes, and Marie waited for me, so that we had barely got to our legs—looking, I dare say, awkward and ungainly enough—before the vidame's shadow fell darkly on the ground at Catherine's feet.

"Mademoiselle!" he said, advancing to her through the sunshine, and bending over her slender hand with a magnificent grace that was born of his size and manner combined, "I rode in late last night from Toulouse, and I go to-morrow to Paris. I have but rested and washed off the stains of travel that I may lay my—ah!"

He seemed to see us for the first time and negligently broke off in his compliment, raising himself and saluting us. "Ah," he continued, indolently, "two of the maidens of Caylus, I see. With an odd pair of hands apiece, unless I am mistaken. Why do you not set them spinning, mademoiselle?" and he regarded us with that smile which—with other things as evil—had made him famous.

Croisette pulled horrible faces behind his back. We looked hotly at him, but could find nothing to say.

"You grow red!" he went on, pleasantly—the wretch! —playing with us as a cat does with mice. "It offends your dignity, perhaps, that I bid mademoiselle set you spinning? I now would spin at mademoiselle's bidding, and think it happiness!"

"We are not girls!" I blurted out, with the flush and tremor of a boy's passion. "You had not called my godfather, Anne de Montmorenci, a girl, M. le Vidame!" For though we counted it a joke among our-

selves that we all bore girls' names, we were young enough to be sensitive about it.

He shrugged his shoulders. And how he dwarfed us all as he stood there dominating our terrace! "M. de Montmorenci was a man," he said, scornfully. "M. Anne de Caylus is——"

And the villain deliberately turned his great back upon us, taking his seat on the low wall near Catherine's chair. It was clear, even to our vanity, that he did not think us worth another word—that we had passed absolutely from his mind. Madame Claude came waddling out at the same moment, Gil carrying a chair behind her; and we—well we slunk away and sat on the other side of the terrace, whence we could still glower at the offender.

Yet who were we to glower at him? To this day I shake at the thought of him. It was not so much his height and bulk, though he was so big that the clipped pointed fashion of his beard—a fashion then new at court—seemed on him incongruous and effeminate; nor so much the sinister glance of his gray eyes—he had a slight cast in them; nor the grim suavity of his manner, and the harsh threatening voice that permitted of no disguise. It was the sum of these things, the great brutal presence of the man—that was overpowering—that made the great falter and the poor crouch. And then his reputation! Though we knew little of the world's wickedness, all we did know had come to us linked with his name. We had heard of him as a duellist, as a bully, an employer of bravos. At Jarnac he had been the last to turn from the shambles. Men called him cruel and vengeful even for those days—gone by now, thank God!—and whispered his name when they spoke of assassinations, saying commonly of him that he would not blench before a Guise, nor blush before the Virgin.

Such was our visitor and neighbor, Raoul de Mar, Vidame de Bezers. As he sat on the terrace, now eying us askance, and now paying Catherine a compliment, I likened him to a great cat before which a butterfly has all unwittingly flirted her prettiness. Poor Catherine! No doubt she had her own reasons for uneasiness, more reasons I fancy than I then guessed; for she seemed to have lost her voice. She stammered and made but poor replies, and Madame Claude being deaf and stupid, and we boys too timid after the rebuff we had experienced to fill the gap, the conversation languished. The vidame was not for his part the man to put himself out on a hot day.

It was after one of these pauses—not the first but the longest—that I started on finding his eyes fixed on mine. More, I shivered. It is hard to describe, but there was a look in the vidame's eyes at that moment which I had never seen before, a look of pain almost; of dumb savage alarm, at any rate. From me they passed slowly to Marie and mutely interrogated him. Then the vidame's glance traveled back to Catherine, and settled on her.

Only a moment before she had been but too conscious of his presence. Now, as it chanced by bad luck, or in the course of Providence, something had drawn her attention elsewhere. She was unconscious of his regard. Her own eyes were fixed in a far-away gaze. Her color was high, her lips were parted, her bosom heaved gently.

The shadow deepened on the vidame's face. Slowly he took his eyes from hers, and looked northward also.

Caylus Castle stands on a rock in the middle of the narrow valley of that name. The town clusters about the ledges of the rock so closely that when I was a boy I could fling a stone clear of the houses. The hills are

scarcely five hundred yards distant on either side, rising in tamer colors from the green fields about the brook. It is possible from the terrace to see the whole valley, and the road which passes through it lengthwise. Catherine's eyes were on the northern extremity of the defile, where the highway from Cahors descends from the uplands. She had been sitting with her face turned that way all the afternoon.

I looked that way too. A solitary horseman was descending the steep track from the hills.

"Mademoiselle!" cried the vidame, suddenly. We all looked up. His tone was such that the color fled from Kit's face. There was something in his voice she had never heard in any voice before—something that to a woman was like a blow. "Mademoiselle," he snarled, "is expecting news from Cahors, from her lover. I have the honor to congratulate M. de Pavannes on his conquest."

Ah! he had guessed it! As the words fell on the sleepy silence, an insult in themselves, I sprang to my feet, amazed and angry, yet astounded by his quickness of sight and wit. He must have recognized the Pavannes badge at that distance. "M. le Vidame," I said indignantly—Catherine was white and voiceless—"M. le Vidame—" but there I stopped and faltered, stammering; for behind him I could see Croisette, and Croisette gave me no sign of encouragement or support.

So we stood face to face for a moment; the boy and the man of the world, the stripling and the roué. Then the vidame bowed to me in quite a new fashion. "M. Anne de Caylus desires to answer for M. de Pavannes?" he asked, smoothly, with a mocking smoothness.

I understood what he meant; but something prompted me—Croisette said afterward that it was a happy thought, though now I know the crisis to have been

less serious than he fancied—to answer, "Nay, not for M. de Pavannes. Rather for my cousin." And I bowed. "I have the honor on her behalf to acknowledge your congratulations, M. le Vidame. It pleases her that our nearest neighbor should also be the first outside the family to wish her well. You have divined truly in supposing that she will shortly be united to M. de Pavannes."

I suppose—for I saw the giant's color change and his lip quiver as I spoke—that his previous words had been only a guess. For a moment the devil seemed to be glaring through his eyes, and he looked at Marie and me as a wild animal at its keepers. Yet he maintained his cynical politeness in part. "Mademoiselle desires my congratulations?" he said, slowly, laboring with each word, it seemed. "She shall have them on the happy day. She shall certainly have them then. But these are troublous times. And mademoiselle's betrothed is, I think, a Huguenot, and has gone to Paris. Paris—well, the air of Paris is not good for Huguenots, I am told."

I saw Catherine shiver; indeed she was on the point of fainting. I broke in rudely, my passion getting the better of my fears. "M. de Pavannes can take care of himself, believe me," I said brusquely.

"Perhaps so," Bezers answered, his voice like the grating of steel on steel. "But at any rate this will be a memorable day for mademoiselle, the day on which she receives her first congratulations—she will remember it as long as she lives! Oh, yes, I will answer for that, M. Anne," he said, looking brightly at one and another of us, his eyes more oblique than ever; "Mademoiselle will remember it, I am sure!"

It would be impossible to describe the devilish glance he flung at the poor sinking girl as he withdrew, the horrid emphasis he threw into those last words, the

covert deadly threat they conveyed to the dullest ears. That he went then was small mercy. He had done all the evil he could do at present. If his desire had been to leave fear behind him, he had certainly succeeded.

Kit, crying softly, went into the house, her innocent coquetry more than sufficiently punished already. And we three looked at one another with blank faces. It was clear that we had made a dangerous enemy, and an enemy at our own gates. As the vidame had said, these were troublous times when things were done to men—ay, and to women and children—which we scarce dare to speak of now. "I wish the vicomte were here," Croisette said, uneasily, after we had discusssed several unpleasant contingencies.

"Or even Malines, the steward," I suggested.

"He would not be much good," replied Croisette, "and he is at St. Antonin, and will not be back this week. Father Pierre, too, is at Albi."

"You do not think," said Marie, "that he will attack us?"

"Certainly not!" Croisette retorted, with contempt. "Even the vidame would not dare to do that in time of peace. Besides, he has not half a score of men here," continued the lad, shrewdly, "and counting old Gil and ourselves, we have as many. And Pavannes always said that three men could hold the gates at the bottom of the ramp against a score. Oh, he will not try that!"

"Certainly not!" I agreed. And so we crushed Marie. "But for Louis de Pavannes——"

Catherine interrupted me. She came out quickly, looking a different person, her face flushed with anger, her tears dried.

"Anne!" she cried, imperiously, "what is the matter down below—will you see?"

I had no difficulty in doing that. All the sounds of town life came up to us on the terrace. Lounging there we could hear the chaffering over the wheat measures in the cloisters of the market-square, the yell of a dog, the voice of a scold, the church bell, the watchman's cry. I had only to step to the wall to overlook it all. On this summer afternoon the town had been for the most part very quiet. If we had not been engaged in our own affairs we should have taken the alarm before, remarking in the silence the first beginnings of what was now a very respectable tumult. It swelled louder even as we stepped to the wall.

We could see—a bend in the street laying it open—part of the vidame's house, the gloomy square hold which had come to him from his mother. His own chateau of Bezers lay far away in Franche Comte, but of late he had shown a preference—Catherine could best account for it, perhaps—for this mean house in Caylus. It was the only house in the town which did not belong to us. It was known as the House of the Wolf, and was a grim stone building surrounding a courtyard. Rows of wolves' heads carved in stone flanked the windows, whence their bare fangs grinned day and night at the church porch opposite.

The noise drew our eyes in this direction, and there, lolling in a window over the door, looking out on the street with a laughing eye, was Bezers himself. The cause of his merriment—we had not far to look for it—was a horseman who was riding up the street under difficulties. He was reining in his steed—no easy task on that steep, greasy pavement—so as to present some front to a score or so of ragged knaves who were following close at his heels, hooting and throwing mud and pebbles at him. The man had drawn his sword, and his oaths came up to us, mingled with shrill cries of "Vive la messe!" and half-drowned by the clattering

of the horse's hoofs. We saw a stone strike him in the face, and draw blood, and heard him swear louder than before.

"Oh!" cried Catherine, clasping her hands with a sudden shriek of indignation, "my letter! They will get my letter!"

"Death!" exclaimed Croisette. "She is right! It is M. de Pavannes' courier! This must be stopped! We cannot stand this, Anne!"

"They shall pay dearly for it, by our Lady!" I cried, swearing myself. "And in peace time, too—the villains! Gil! Francis!" I shouted, "where are you?"

And I looked round for my fowling-piece, while Croisette jumped on the wall, and forming a trumpet with his hands, shrieked at the top of his voice, "Back! he bears a letter from the vicomte!"

But the device did not succeed, and I could not find my gun. For a moment we were helpless, and before I could have fetched the gun from the house, the horseman and the hooting rabble at his heels had turned a corner and were hidden by the roofs.

Another turn, however, would bring them out in front of the gateway, and seeing this we hurried down the ramp to meet them. I stayed a moment to tell Gil to collect the servants, and this keeping me, Croisette reached the narrow street outside before me. As I followed him I was nearly knocked down by the rider, whose face was covered with dirt and blood, while fright had rendered his horse unmanageable. Darting aside I let him pass—he was blinded and could not see me—and then found that Croisette, brave lad, had collared the foremost of the ruffians and was beating him with his sheathed sword, while the rest of the rabble stood back, ashamed, yet sullen, and with anger in their eyes. A dangerous crew, I thought; not townsmen, most of them.

"Down with the Huguenots!" cried one, as I appeared, one bolder than the rest.

"Down with the canaille!" I retorted, sternly eying the ill-looking ring. "Will you set yourselves above the king's peace, dirt that you are? Go back to your kennels!"

The words were scarcely out of my mouth before I saw that the fellow whom Croisette was punishing had got hold of a dagger. I shouted a warning, but it came too late. The blade fell, and, thanks to God, striking the buckle of the lad's belt, glanced off harmless. I saw the steel flash up again—saw the spite in the man's eyes; but this time I was a step nearer, and before the weapon fell I passed my sword clean through the wretch's body. He went down like a log, Croisette falling with him, held fast by his stiffening fingers.

I had never killed a man before, nor seen a man die, and if I had stayed to think about it I should have fallen sick perhaps. But it was no time for thought, no time for sickness. The crowd were close upon us, a line of flushed threatening faces from wall to wall. A single glance downward told me that the man was dead, and I set my foot upon his neck. "Hounds! Beasts!" I cried, not loudly this time, for though I was like one possessed with rage, it was inward rage. "Go to your kennels! Will you dare to raise a hand against a Caylus? Go! or when the vicomte returns a dozen of you shall hang in the market-place!"

I suppose I looked fierce enough—I know I felt no fear, only a strange exaltation—for they slunk away. Unwillingly, but with little delay, the group melted, Bezers' following—of whom I knew the dead man was one—the last to go. While I still glared at them, lo! the street was empty; the last had disappeared round the bend. I turned to find Gil and half a dozen servants standing with pale faces at my back. Croisette

seized my hand with a sob. "Oh, my lord," cried Gil, quaveringly. But I shook one off, I frowned at the other.

"Take up this carrion!" I said, touching it with my foot, "and hang it from the justice-elm. And then close the gates. See to it, knaves, and lose no time."

De Pavannes and Catherine

De Payarnes and Catherine

CHAPTER II

THE VIDAME'S THREAT

Croisette used to tell a story of the facts, of which I have no remembrance save as a bad dream. He would have it that I left my pallet that night—I had one to myself in the summer, being the eldest, while he and Marie slept on another in the same room—and came to him and awoke him, sobbing and shaking and clutching him, and begging him in a fit of terror not to let me go; and that so I slept in his arms until morning. But as I have said, I do not remember anything of this, only that I had an ugly dream that night, and that when I awoke I was lying with him and Marie, so I can not say whether it really happened.

At any rate, if I had any feeling of the kind it did not last long; on the contrary—it would be idle to deny it—I was flattered by the sudden respect Gil and the servants showed me. What Catherine thought of the matter I could not tell. She had her letter and apparently found it satisfactory. At any rate we saw nothing of her. Madame Claude was busy boiling simples, and tending the messenger's hurts. And it seemed natural that I should take command.

There could be no doubt—at any rate we had none—that the assault on the courier had taken place at the vidame's instance. The only wonder was that he had not simply cut his throat and taken the letter. But looking back now it seems to me that grown men mingled some childishness with their cruelty in those days

—days when the religious wars had aroused our worst passions. It was not enough to kill an enemy. It pleased people to make—I speak literally—a football of his head, to throw his heart to the dogs. And no doubt it had fallen in with the vidame's grim humor that the bearer of Pavannes' first love lettter should enter his mistress's presence bleeding and plastered with mud. And that the riff-raff about our own gates should have part in the insult.

Bezers' wrath would be little abated by the issue of the affair, or the justice I had done on one of his men. So we looked well to bolts, and bars, and windows, although the castle is well nigh impregnable, the smooth rock falling twenty feet at least on every side from the base of the walls. The gate house, Pavannes had shown us, might be blown up with gunpowder indeed, but we prepared to close the iron grating which barred the way half-way up the ramp. This done, even if the enemy should succeed in forcing an entrance he would only find himself caught in a trap—in a steep, narrow way exposed to a fire from the top of the flanking walls, as well as from the front. We had a couple of culverins, which the vicomte had got twenty years before, at the time of the battle of St. Quentin. We fixed one of these at the head of the ramp, and placed the other on the terrace, where, by moving it a few paces forward, we could train it on Bezers' house, which thus lay at our mercy.

Not that we really expected an attack, but we did not know what to expect or what to fear. We had not ten servants, the vicomte having taken a score of the sturdiest lackeys and keepers to attend him at Bayonne. And we felt immensely responsible. Our main hope was that the vidame would at once go on to Paris, and postpone his vengeance. So again and again we cast

longing glances at the House of the Wolf, hoping that each symptom of bustle heralded his departure.

Consequently it was a shock to me, and a great downfall of hopes, when Gil with a grave face came to me on the terrace and announced that M. le Vidame was at the gate, asking to see mademoiselle.

"It is out of the question that he should see her," the old servant added, scratching his head in grave perplexity.

"Most certainly. I will see him instead," I answered stoutly. "Do you leave Francis and another at the gate, Gil. Marie, keep within sight, lad. And let Croisette stay with me."

These preparations made—and they took up scarcely a moment—I met the vidame at the head of the ramp. "Mademoiselle de Caylus," I said, bowing, "is, I regret to say, indisposed to-day, Vidame."

"She will not see me?" he asked, eying me very unpleasantly.

"Her indisposition deprives her of the pleasure," I answered with an effort. He was certainly a wonderful man, for at sight of him three-fourths of my courage, and all my importance, oozed out at the heels of my boots.

"She will not see me. Very well," he replied, as if I had not spoken. And the simple words sounded like a sentence of death. "Then, M. Anne, I have a crow to pick with you. What compensation do you propose to make for the death of my servant? A decent, quiet fellow, whom you killed yesterday, poor man, because his enthusiasm for the true faith carried him away a little."

"Whom I killed because he drew a dagger on M. St. Croix de Caylus at the vicomte's gate," I answered, steadily. I had thought about this, of course, and was ready for it. "You are aware, M. de Bezers," I con-

tinued, "that the vicomte has jurisdiction extending to life and death over all persons within the valley?"

"My household excepted," he rejoined, quietly.

"Precisely; while they are within the curtilage of your house," I retorted. "However, as the punishment was summary, and the man had no time to confess himself, I am willing to——"

"Well?"

"To pay Father Pierre to say ten masses for his soul."

The way the vidame received this surprised me. He broke into boisterous laughter. "By our Lady, my friend," he cried, with rough merriment, "but you are a joker! You are indeed. Masses! Why the man was a Protestant!"

And that startled me more than anything which had gone before; more indeed than I can explain. For it seemed to prove that this man, laughing his unholy laugh, was not like other men. He did not pick and choose his servants for their religion. He was sure that the Huguenot would stone his fellow at his bidding; the Catholic cry "Vive Coligny!" I was so completely taken aback that I found no words to answer him, and it was Croisette who said, smartly, "Then how about his enthusiasm for the true faith, M. le Vidame?"

"The true faith," he answered, "for my servants is my faith." Then a thought seeemed to strike him. "What is more," he continued, slowly, "that it is the true and only faith for all, thousands will learn before the world is ten days older. Bear my words in mind, boy! They will come back to you. And now hear me," he went on in his usual tone. "I am anxious to accommodate a neighbor. It goes without saying that I would not think of putting you, M. Anne, to any trouble for the sake of that rascal of mine; but my

people will expect something. Let the plaguey fellow who caused all this disturbance be given up to me, that I may hang him, and let us cry quits."

"That is impossible!" I answered, coolly. I had no need to ask what he meant. Give up Pavannes' messenger indeed! Never!

He regarded me—unmoved by my refusal—with a smile, under which I chafed, while I was impotent to resent it. "Do not build too much on a single blow, young gentleman," he said, shaking his head waggishly. "I had fought a dozen times when I was your age. However, I understand that you refuse to give me satisfaction?"

"In the mode you mention, certainly," I replied. "But——"

"Bah!" he exclaimed with a sneer; "business first and pleasure afterward! Bezers will obtain satisfaction in his own way, I promise you that! And at his own time. And it will not be on unfledged bantlings like you. But what is this for?" And he rudely kicked the culverin, which apparently he had not noticed before. "So! so! understand," he continued, casting a sharp glance at one and another of us. "You looked to be besieged! Why, you booby, there is the shoot of your kitchen midden, twenty feet above the roof of old Fretis' store! And open, I will be sworn! Do you think that I should have come this way while there was a ladder in Caylus? Did you take the wolf for a sheep?"

With that he turned on his heel, swaggering away in the full enjoyment of his triumph, for a triumph it was. We stood stunned, ashamed to look one another in the face. Of course the shoot was open. We remembered now that it was, and we were so sorely mortified by his knowledge and our folly that I failed in

my courtesy, and did not see him to the gate, as I should have done. We paid for that later.

"He is the devil in person!" I exclaimed, angrily, shaking my fist at the House of the Wolf, as I strode up and down impatiently. "I hate him worse!"

"So do I!" said Croisette, mildly. "But that he hates us is a matter of more importance. At any rate we will close the shoot."

"Wait a moment!" I replied, as after another volley of complaints directed at our visitor, the lad was moving off to see to it. "What is going on down there?"

"Upon my word, I believe he is leaving us!" Croisette rejoined, sharply.

For there was a noise of hoofs below us, clattering on the pavement. Half a dozen horsemen were issuing from the House of the Wolf, the ring of their bridles and the sound of their careless voices coming up to us through the clear morning air. Bezers' valet, whom we knew by sight, was the last of them. He had a pair of great saddle-bags before him, and at sight of these we uttered a glad exclamation. "He is going!" I murmured, hardly able to believe my eyes. "He is going, after all!"

"Wait!" Croisette answered, dryly.

But I was right. We had not to wait long. He was going. In another moment he came out himself, riding a strong iron-gray horse, and we could see that he had holsters to his saddle. His steward was running beside him, to take, I suppose, his last orders. A cripple, whom the bustle had attracted from his usual haunt, the church porch, held up his hand for alms. The vidame, as he passed, cut him savagely across the face with his whip, and cursed him audibly.

"May the devil take him!" exclaimed Croisette in just rage. But I said nothing, remembering that the cripple was a particular pet of Catherine's. I thought

instead of an occasion not so very long ago, when the vicomte being at home, we had had a great hawking party. Bezers and Catherine had ridden up the street together, and Catherine giving the cripple a piece of money, Bezers had flung to him all his share of the game. And my heart sank.

Only for a moment, however. The man was gone, or was going, at any rate. We stood silent and motionless, all watching, until, after what seemed a long interval, the little party of seven became visible on the white road far below us—to the northward, and moving in that direction. Still we watched them, muttering a word to one another, now and again, until presently the riders slackened their pace, and began to ascend the winding track that led to the hills and Cahors, and to Paris also, if one went far enough.

Then at length with a loud "Whoop!" we dashed across the terrace, Croisette leading, and so through the courtyard to the parlor, where we arrived breathless. "He is off!" Croisette cried, shrilly. "He has started for Paris! And bad luck go with him!" And we all flung up our caps and shouted.

But no answer, such as we expected, came from the women folk. When we picked up our caps and looked at Catherine, feeling rather foolish, she was staring at us with a white face and great scornful eyes. "Fools!" she said. "Fools!"

And that was all. But it was enough to take me aback. I had looked to see her face lighten at our news; instead it wore an expression I had never seen on it before. Catherine, so kind and gentle, calling us fools! And without cause! I did not understand it. I turned confusedly to Croisette. He was looking at her, and I saw that he was frightened. As for Madame Claude, she was crying in the corner. A presenti-

ment of evil made my heart sink like lead. What had happened?

"Fools!" my cousin repeated with exceeding bitterness, her foot tapping the parquet unceasingly. "Do you think he would have stooped to avenge himself on you? On you! Or that he could hurt me one-hundredth part as much here—as——" She broke off stammering. Her scorn faltered for an instant. "Bah! he is a man! He knows!" she exclaimed, superbly, her chin in the air; "but you are boys. You do not understand!"

I looked amazedly at this angry woman. I had a difficulty in associating her with my cousin. As for Croisette, he stepped forward abruptly, and picked up a white object which was lying at her feet.

"Yes, read it!" she cried, "read it! Ah!" and she clinched her little hand, and in her passion struck the oak table beside her, so that a stain of blood sprang out of her knuckles. "Why did you not kill him? Why did you not do it when you had the chance? You were three to one," she hissed. "You had him in your power! You could have killed him, and you did not! Now he will kill me!"

Madame Claude muttered something tearfully; something about Pavannes and the saints. I looked over Croisette's shoulder and read the letter. It began abruptly without any term of address, and ran thus: "I have a mission in Paris, mademoiselle, which admits of no delay, your mission as well as my own—to see Pavannes. You have won his heart. It is yours, and I will bring it you, or his right hand in token that he has yielded up his claim to yours. And to this I pledge myself."

The thing bore no signature. It was written in some red fluid—blood, perhaps—a mean and sorry trick! On the outside was scrawled a direction to Mademoi-

selle de Caylus. And the packet was sealed with the vidame's crest, a wolf's head.

"The coward! The miserable coward!" Croisette cried. He was the first to read the meaning of the thing. And his eyes were full of tears—tears of rage.

For me, I was angry exceedingly. My veins seemed full of fire, as I comprehended the mean cruelty which could thus torture a girl.

"Who delivered this?" I thundered. "Who gave it to mademoiselle? How did it reach her hands? Speak, some of you!"

A maid, whimpering in the background, said that Francis had given it to her to hand to mademoiselle.

I ground my teeth together, while Marie, unbidden, left the room to seek Francis—and a stirrup leather. The vidame had brought the note in his pocket, no doubt, rightly expecting that he would not get an audience of my cousin. Returning to the gate alone he had seen his opportunity, and given the note to Francis, probably with a small fee to secure its transmission.

Croisette and I looked at one another, apprehending all this. "He will sleep at Cahors to-night," I said, sullenly.

The lad shook his head, and answered in a low voice, "I am afraid not. His horses are fresh. I think he will push on. He always travels quickly. And now you know——"

I nodded, understanding only too well.

Catherine had flung herself into a chair. Her arms lay nerveless on the table. Her face was hidden in them. But now, overhearing us, or stung by some fresh thought, she sprang to her feet in anguish. Her face twitched, her form seemed to stiffen, as she drew herself up like one in physical pain. "Oh, I cannot bear it!" she cried to us in dreadful tones. "Oh, will

no one do anything? I will go to him! I will tell him I will give him up! I will do whatever he wishes if he will only spare him!"

Croisette went from the room crying. It was a dreadful sight for us—this girl in agony. And it was impossible to reassure her! Not one of us doubted the horrible meaning of the note, its covert threat. Civil wars and religious hatred, and I fancy Italian modes of thought, had for the time changed our countrymen to beasts. Far more dreadful things were done then than this which Bezers threatened—even if he meant it literally—far more dreadful things were suffered. But in the fiendish ingenuity of his vengeance on her, the helpless, loving woman, I thought Raoul de Bezers stood alone. Alas! it fares ill with the butterfly when the cat has struck it down. Ill indeed!

Madame Claude rose and put her arms round the girl, dismissing me by a gesture. I went out, passing two or three scared servants, and made at once for the terrace. I felt as if I could only breathe there. I found Marie and St. Croix together, silent, the marks of tears on their faces. Our eyes met and they told one tale.

We all spoke at the same time. "When?" we said. But the others looked to me for an answer.

I was somewhat sobered by that, and paused to consider before I replied. "At daybreak to-morrow," I decided presently. "It is an hour after noon already. We want money and the horses are out. It will take an hour to bring them in. After that we might still reach Cahors to-night, perhaps; but more haste less speed, you know. No. At daybreak to-morrow we will start."

They nodded assent.

It was a great thing we meditated. No less than to go to Paris—the unknown city so far beyond the

hills—and seek out M. de Pavannes, and warn him. It would be a race between the vidame and ourselves; a race for the life of Kit's suitor. Could we reach Paris first, or even within twenty-four hours of Bezer's arrival, we should in all probability be in time, and be able to put Pavannes on his guard. It had been the first thought of all of us to take such men as we could get together and fall upon Bezers wherever we found him, making it our simple object to kill him. But the lackeys M. le Vicomte had left with us, the times being peaceful and the neighbors friendly, were poor-spirited fellows. Bezers' handful, on the contrary, were reckless Swiss riders—like master, like men. We decided that it would be wiser simply to warn Pavannes, and then stand by him if necessary.

We might have dispatched a messenger. But our servants—Gil excepted, and he was too old to bear the journey—were ignorant of Paris. Nor could any one of them be trusted with a mission so delicate. We thought of Pavannes' courier indeed. But he was a Rochellois, and a stranger to the capital. There was nothing for it but to go ourselves.

Yet we did not determine on this adventure with light hearts, I remember. Paris loomed big and awesome in the eyes of all of us. The glamour of the court rather frightened than allured us. We felt that shrinking from contact with the world which a country life engenders, as well as that dread of seeming unlike other people which is peculiar to youth. It was a great plunge, and a dangerous one, which we meditated. And we trembled. If we had known more, especially of the future, we should have trembled more.

But we were young, and with our fears mingled a delicious excitement. We were going on an adventure of knight-errantry, in which we might win our spurs.

We were going to see the world and play men's parts in it; to save a friend and make our mistress happy!

We gave our orders, but we said nothing to Catherine or Madame Claude, merely bidding Gil tell them after our departure. We arranged for the immediate dispatch of a message to the vicomte at Bayonne, and charged Gil until he should hear from him to keep the gates closed, and look well to the shoot of the kitchen midden. Then, when all was ready, we went to our pallets, but it was with hearts throbbing with excitement and wakeful eyes.

"Anne! Anne!" said Croisette, rising on his elbow and speaking to me some three hours later, "what do you think the vidame meant this morning when he said that about the ten days?"

"What about the ten days?" I asked, peevishly. He had roused me just when I was at last falling asleep.

"About the world seeing that his was the true faith—in ten days!"

"I am sure I do not know. For goodness' sake let us go to sleep," I replied, for I had no patience with Croisette, talking such nonsense, when we had our own business to think about.

Morning after St. Bartholomew

Morning after St. Bartholomew

CHAPTER III

THE ROAD TO PARIS

The sun had not yet risen above the hills when we three with a single servant behind us drew rein at the end of the valley, and easing our horses on the ascent, turned in the saddle to take a last look at Caylus—at the huddled gray town and the towers above it. A little thoughtful we all were, I think. The times were rough and our errand was serious. But youth and early morning are fine dispellers of care, and once on the uplands we trotted gaily forward, now passing through wide glades in the sparse oak forest, where the trees all leaned one way, now over bare, wide-swept downs, or once and again descending into a chalky bottom, where the stream bubbled through deep beds of fern, and a lonely farmhouse nestled amid orchards.

Four hours riding, and we saw below us Cahors, filling the bend of the river. We cantered over the Vallandre Bridge, which there crosses the Lot, and so to my uncle's house of call in the square. Here we ordered breakfast, and announced with pride that we were going to Paris.

Our host raised his hands. "Now there!" he exclaimed, regret in his voice. "And if you had arrived yesterday you could have traveled up with the Vidame de Bezers! And you a small party—saving your lordships' presence—and the roads but so-so!"

"But the vidame was riding with only half-a-dozen

attendants also!" I answered, flicking my boot in a careless way.

The landlord shook his head. "Ah, M. le Vidame knows the world!" he answered, shrewdly. "He is not to be taken off his guard, not he! One of his men whispered me that twenty staunch fellows would join him at Chateauroux. They say the wars are over, but"—and the good man, shrugging his shoulders, cast an expressive glance at some fine flitches of bacon which were hanging in his chimney. "However, your lordships know better than I do," he added, briskly. "I am a poor man. I only wish to live at peace with my neighbors, whether they go to mass or sermon."

This was a sentiment so common in those days and so heartily echoed by most men of substance, both in town and country, that we did not stay to assent to it; but having received from the worthy fellow a token which would insure our obtaining fresh cattle at Limoges, we took to the road again, refreshed in body and with some food for thought.

Five-and-twenty attendants were more than even such a man as Bezers, who had many enemies, traveled with in those days, unless accompanied by ladies. That the vidame had provided such a reinforcement seemed to point to a wider scheme than the one with which we had credited him. But we could not guess what his plans were, since he must have ordered his people before he heard of Catherine's engagement. Either his jealousy therefore had put him on the alert earlier, or his threatened attack on Pavannes was only a part of a larger plot. In either case our errand seemed more urgent, but scarcely more hopeful.

The varied sights and sounds, however, of the road —many of them new to us—kept us from dwelling overmuch on this. Our eyes were young, and whether it was a pretty girl lingering behind a troop of gipsies,

or a pair of strollers from Valencia—jongleurs, they still called themselves—singing in the old dialect of Provence, or a Norman horse-dealer with his string of cattle tied head and tail, or the Puy de Dome to the eastward over the Auvergne hills, or a tattered old soldier wounded in the wars—fighting for either side, according as their lordships inclined—we were pleased with all.

Yet we never forgot our errand. We never, I think, rose in the morning—too often stiff and sore—without thinking, "To-day, or to-morrow, or the next day," as the case might be, "we shall make all right for Kit!" For Kit! Perhaps it was the purest enthusiasm we were ever to feel, the least selfish aim we were ever to pursue. For Kit!

Meanwhile we met few travelers of rank on the road. Half the nobility of France were still in Paris enjoying the festivities which were being held to mark the royal marriage. We obtained horses where we needed them without difficulty. And though we had heard much of the dangers of the way, infested as it was said to be by disbanded troopers, we were not once stopped or annoyed.

But it is not my intention to chronicle all the events of this my first journey, though I dwell on them with pleasure; or to say what I thought of the towns, all new and strange to me, through which we passed. Enough that we went by way of Limoges, Chateauroux, and Orleans, and that at Chateauroux we learned the failure of one hope we had formed. We had thought that Bezers when joined there by his troopers would not be able to get relays; and that on this account we might, by traveling post, overtake him; and possibly slip by him between that place and Paris. But we learned at Chateauroux that his troop had received fresh orders to go to Orleans and await him there, the result

being that he was able to push forward with relays so far. He was evidently in hot haste. For leaving there with his horses fresh he passed through Angerville, forty miles short of Paris, at noon, whereas we reached it on the evening of the same day—the sixth after leaving Caylus.

We rode into the yard of the inn—a large place, seeming larger in the dusk—so tired that we could scarcely slip from our saddles. Jean, our servant, took the four horses, and led them across to the stables, the poor beasts hanging their heads, and following meekly. We stood a moment stamping our feet and stretching our legs. The place seemed in a bustle, the clatter of pans and dishes proceeding from the windows over the entrance, with a glow of light and the sound of feet hurrying in the passages. There were men, too, half a dozen or so, standing at the doors of the stable, while others leaned from the windows. One or two lanterns just kindled glimmered here and there in the semi-darkness, and in a corner two smiths were shoeing a horse.

We were turning from all this to go in, when we heard Jean's voice raised in altercation, and thinking our rustic servant had fallen into trouble, we walked across to the stables near which he and the horses were still lingering. "Well, what is it?" I said, sharply.

"They say that there is no room for the horses," Jean answered querulously, scratching his head, half-sullen, half-cowed, a country servant all over.

"And there is not!" cried the foremost of the gang about the door, hastening to confront us in turn. His tone was insolent, and it needed but half an eye to see that his fellows were inclined to back him up. He stuck his arms akimbo and faced us with an impudent smile. A lantern on the ground beside him throwing

an uncertain light on the group, I saw that they all wore the same badge.

"Come," I said, sternly, "the stables are large, and your horses cannot fill them. Some room must be found for mine."

"To be sure! Make way for the king!" he retorted. While one jeered "Vive le roi!" and the rest laughed. Not good-humoredly, but with a touch of spitefulness.

Quarrels between gentlemen's servants were as common then as they are to-day. But the masters seldom condescended to interfere. "Let the fellows fight it out," was the general sentiment. Here, however, poor Jean was overmatched, and we had no choice but to see to it ourselves.

"Come, men, have a care that you do not get into trouble," I urged, restraining Croisette by a touch, for I by no means wished to have a repetition of the catastrophe which had happened at Caylus. "These horses belong to the Vicomte de Caylus. If your master be a friend of his, as may very probably be the case, you will run the risk of getting into trouble."

I thought I heard, as I stopped speaking, a subdued muttering, and fancied I caught the words, "Papegot! Down with the Guises!" But the spokesman's only answer aloud was "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" he repeated, flapping his arms in defiance. "Here is a cock of a fine hackle!" And so on, and so forth, while he turned grinning to his companions, looking for their applause.

I was itching to chastise him, and yet hesitating, lest the thing should have its serious side, when a new actor appeared. "Shame, you brutes!" cried a shrill voice above us—in the clouds it seemed. I looked up and saw two girls, coarse and handsome, standing at a window over the stable, a light between them. "For

shame! Don't you see that they are mere children? Let them be," cried one.

The men laughed louder than ever; and for me, I could not stand by and be called a child. "Come here," I said, beckoning to the man in the doorway. "Come here, you rascal, and I will give you the thrashing you deserve for speaking to a gentleman!"

He lounged forward, a heavy fellow, taller than myself and six inches wider at the shoulders. My heart failed me a little as I measured him. But the thing had to be done. If I was slight I was wiry as a hound, and in the excitement had forgotten my fatigue. I snatched from Marie a loaded riding-whip he carried, and stepped forward.

"Have a care, little man!" cried the girl, gaily—yet half in pity, I think! "or that fat pig will kill you!"

My antagonist did not join in the laugh this time. Indeed it struck me that his eye wandered, and that he was not so ready to enter the ring as his mates were to form it. But before I could try his mettle a hand was laid on my shoulder. A man appearing from I do not know where—from the dark fringe of the group, I suppose—pushed me aside, roughly, but not discourteously.

"Leave this to me," he said, coolly stepping before me. "Do not dirty your hands with the knave, master. I am pining for work, and the job will just suit me! I will fit him for the worms before the nuns above can say an Ave!"

I looked at the newcomer. He was a stout fellow; not over-tall nor over-big; swarthy, with prominent features. The plume of his bonnet was broken, but he wore it in a rakish fashion, and altogether he swaggered with so dare-devil an air, clinking his spurs and swinging out his long sword recklessly, that it was no wonder three or four of the nearest fellows gave back a foot.

"Come on!" he cried, boisterously, forming a ring by the simple process of sweeping his blade from side to side, while he made the dagger in his left hand flash round his head. "Who is for the game? Who will strike a blow for the little admiral? Will you come one, two, three at once, or all together? Anyway, come on, you—" And he closed his challenge with a volley of frightful oaths, directed at the group opposite.

"It is no quarrel of yours," said the big man, sulkily, making no show of drawing his sword, but rather drawing back himself.

"All quarrels are my quarrels, and no quarrels are your quarrels. That is about the truth, I fancy!" was the smart retort, which our champion rendered more emphatic by a playful lunge that caused the big bully to skip again.

There was a loud laugh at this, even among the enemy's backers. "Bah, the great pig!" ejaculated the girl above. "Spit him!" and she spat down on the whilom Hector, who made no great figure now.

"Shall I bring you a slice of ham, my dear!" asked my rakehelly friend, looking up and making his sword play round the shrinking wretch. "Just a titbit, my love!" he added, persuasively. "A mouthful of white liver and caper sauce?"

"Not for me, the beast!" the girl cried, amid the laughter of the yard.

"Not a bit? If I warrant him tender? Ladies, meat?"

"Bah! No!" and she stolidly spat down again.

"Do you hear? The lady has no taste for you," the tormentor cried. "Pig of a Gascon!" And deftly sheathing his dagger, he seized the big coward by the ear, and turning him round, gave him a heavy kick which sent him spinning over a bucket, and down against the wall. There the bully remained, swearing

and rubbing himself by turns, while the victor cried boastfully, "Enough of him. If any one wants to take up his quarrel, Blaise Buré is his man. If not, let us have an end of it. Let some one find stalls for the gentleman's horses before they catch a chill, and have done with it. As for me," he added, and then he turned to us and removed his hat with an exaggerated flourish, "I am your lordship's servant to command."

I thanked him with a heartiness half-earnest, half-assumed. His cloak was ragged, his trunk hose, which had once been fine enough, were stained and almost pointless. He swaggered inimitably, and had led-captain written large upon him. But he had done us a service, for Jean had no further trouble about the horses. And besides one has a natural liking for a brave man, and this man was brave beyond question.

"You are from Orleans," he said, respectfully enough, but as one asserting a fact, not asking a question.

"Yes," I answered, somewhat astonished. "Did you see us come in?"

"No, but I looked at your boots, gentlemen," he replied. "White dust, north; red dust, south. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see," I said, with admiration. "You must have been brought up in a sharp school, M. Burè."

"Sharp masters make sharp scholars," he replied, grinning. And that answer I had occasion to remember afterward.

"You are from Orleans, also?" I asked, as we prepared to go in.

"Yes, from Orleans, too, gentlemen; but earlier in the day. With letters—letters of importance!" And bestowing something like a wink of confidence on us, he drew himself up, looked sternly at the stable-folk, patted himself twice on the chest, and finally twirled his

moustache, and smirked at the girl above, who was chewing straws.

I thought it likely enough that we might find it hard to get rid of him, but this was not so. After listening with gratification to our repeated thanks, he bowed with the same grotesque flourish, and marched off as grave as a Spaniard, humming:

"Ce petit homme tant joli!
Qui toujours cause et toujours rit,
Qui toujours baise sa mignonne,
Dieu gard' de mal ce petit homme!"

On our going in, the landlord met us politely, but with curiosity, and a simmering of excitement also in his manner. "From Paris, my lords?" he asked, rubbing his hands and bowing low, "or from the south?"

"From the south," I answered. "From Orleans, and hungry and tired, Master Host."

"Ah!" he replied, disregarding the latter part of my answer, while his little eyes twinkled with satisfaction. "Then I dare swear, my lords, you have not heard the news?" He halted in the narrow passage, and lifting the candle he carried, scanned our faces closely, as if he wished to learn something about us before he spoke.

"News!" I answered, brusquely, being both tired, and as I had told him, hungry. "We have heard none, and the best you can give us will be that our supper is ready to be served."

But even this snub did not check his eagerness to tell his news. "The Admiral de Coligny," he said, breathlessly, "you have not heard what has happened to him?"

"To the admiral? No, what?" I inquired rapidly. I was interested at last.

For a moment let me digress. The few of my age will remember, and the many younger will have been told, that at this time the Italian queen-mother was the ruling power in France. It was Catherine de' Medici's first object to maintain her influence over Charles the IX., her son, who, rickety, weak, and passionate, was already doomed to an early grave. Her second, to support the royal power by balancing the extreme Catholics against the Huguenots. For the latter purpose she would coquet first with one party, then with the other. At the present moment she had committed herself more deeply than was her wont to the Huguenots. Their leaders, the Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, the King of Navarre, and the Prince of Condé, were supposed to be high in favor, while the chiefs of the other party, the Duke of Guise, and the two Cardinals of his house, the Cardinal of Lorraine and the Cardinal of Guise, were in disgrace; which, as it seemed, even their friend at court, the queen's favorite son, Henry of Anjou, was unable to overcome.

Such was the outward aspect of things in August, 1572, but there was not wanting rumors that already Coligny, taking advantage of the footing given him, had gained an influence over the young king which threatened Catherine de' Medici herself. The admiral, therefore, to whom the Huguenot half of France had long looked as its leader was now the object of the closest interest to all, the Guise faction hating him, as the alleged assassin of the Duke of Guise, with an intensity which probably was not to be found in the affection of his friends, popular with the latter as he was.

Still, many who were not Huguenots had a regard for him as a great Frenchman and a gallant soldier. We—though we were of the old faith, and the other side—had heard much of him, and much good. The

vicomte had spoken of him always as a great man, a man mistaken, but brave, honest, and capable in his error. Therefore it was that, when the landlord mentioned him, I forgot even my hunger.

"He was shot, my lords, as he passed through the Rue des Fosses, yesterday," the man declared with bated breath. "It is not known whether he will live or die. Paris is in an uproar, and there are some who fear the worst."

"But," I said, doubtfully, "who has dared to do this? He had a safe conduct from the king himself."

Our host did not answer; shrugging his shoulders instead, he opened the door and ushered us into the eating-room.

Some preparations for our meal had already been made at one end of the long board. At the other was seated a man past middle age, richly but simply dressed. His gray hair, cut short about a massive head, and his grave, resolute face, square-jawed and deeply-lined, marked him as one to whom respect was due apart from his clothes. We bowed to him as we took our seats.

He acknowledged the salute, fixing us a moment with a penetrating glance, and then resumed his meal. I noticed that his sword and belt were propped against a chair at his elbow, and a dag, apparently loaded, lay close to his hand by the candlestick. Two lackeys waited behind his chair, wearing the badge we had remarked in the inn yard.

We began to talk, speaking in low tones that we might not disturb him. The attack on Coligny had, if true, its bearing on our own business. For if a Huguenot so great and famous and enjoying the king's special favor still went in Paris in danger of his life, what must be the risk that such an one as Pavannes ran? We had hoped to find the city quiet. If instead it should be in a state of turmoil Bezers' chances were so much the

better; and ours—and Kit's, poor Kit's—so much the worse.

Our companion had by this time finished his supper. But he still sat at the table, and seemed to be regarding us with some curiosity. At length he spoke. "Are you going to Paris, young gentlemen?" he asked, his tone harsh and high-pitched.

We answered in the affirmative.

"To-morrow?" he questioned.

"Yes," we answered, and expected him to continue the conversation. But instead he became silent, gazing abstractedly at the table; and what with our meal and our own talk, we had almost forgotten him again, when looking up, I found him at my elbow, holding out in silence a small piece of paper.

I started, his face was so grave. But seeing that there were half a dozen guests of a meaner sort at another table close by, I guessed that he merely wished to make a private communication to us; and hastened to take the paper and read it. It contained a scrawl of four words only:

"Va chasser l'Idole."

No more. I looked at him puzzled, able to make nothing out of it. St. Croix wrinkled his brow over it with the same result. It was no good handing it to Marie, therefore.

"You do not understand?" the stranger continued, as he put the scrap of paper back in his pouch.

"No," I answered, shaking my head. We had all risen out of respect to him, and were standing a little group about him.

"Just so; it is all right then," he answered, looking at us as it seemed to me with grave good-nature. "It is nothing. Go your way. But I have a son yonder, not much younger than you, young gentlemen. And

if you had understood, I should have said to you, 'Do not go! There are enough sheep for the shearer.' "

He was turning away with this oracular saying when Croisette touched his sleeve. "Pray can you tell us if it be true," the lad said, eagerly, "that the Admiral de Coligny was wounded yesterday?"

"It is true," the other answered, turning his grave eyes on his questioner, while for a moment his stern look failed him. "It is true, my boy," he added with an air of strange solemnity. "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth. And, God forgive me for saying it, whom he would destroy he first maketh mad."

He had gazed with peculiar favor at Croisette's girlish face, I thought; Marie and I were dark and ugly by the side of the boy. But he turned from him now with a queer, excited gesture, thumping his gold-headed cane on the floor. He called his servants in a loud, rasping voice, and left the room in seeming anger, driving them before him, the one carrying his bag, and the other two candles.

When I came down early next morning the first person I met was Blaise Buré. He looked rather fiercer and more shabby by daylight than candlelight. But he saluted me respectfully, and this, since it was clear that he did not respect many people, inclined me to regard him with favor. It is always so, the more savage the dog the more highly we prize its attentions. I asked him who the Huguenot noble was who had supped with us, for a Huguenot we knew he must be.

"The Baron de Rosny," he answered, adding with a sneer, "He is a careful man! If they were all like him, with eyes on both sides of his head and a dag by his candle—well, my lord, there would be one more king in France, or one less! But they are a blind lot, as blind at bats." He muttered something further in which I

caught the word "to-night." But I did not hear it all, or understand any of it.

"Your lordships are going to Paris?" he resumed, in a different tone. When I said that we were, he looked at me in a shamefaced way, half-timid, half-arrogant. "I have a small favor to ask of you then," he said. "I am going to Paris myself. I am not afraid of odds, as you have seen. But the roads will be in a queer state if there be anything on foot in the city, and—well, I would rather ride with you gentlemen than alone."

"You are welcome to join us," I said. "But we start in half an hour. Do you know Paris well?" "As well as my sword hilt," he replied briskly, relieved, I thought, by my acquiescence; "and I have known that from my breeching. If you want a game at *paume*, or a pretty girl to kiss, I can put you in the way for the one or the other."

The half-rustic shrinking from the great city which I felt, suggested to me that our swash-buckling friend might help us if he would. "Do you know M. de Pavannes?" I asked, impulsively. "Where he lives in Paris, I mean?"

"M. Louis de Pavannes?" quoth he.

"Yes."

"I know," he replied, slowly, rubbing his chin and looking at the ground in thought, "where he had his lodgings in town a while ago, before—Ah! I do know! I remember," he added, slapping his thigh, "when I was in Paris a fortnight ago I was told that his steward had taken lodgings for him in the Rue St. Antoine."

"Good!" I answered, overjoyed. "Then we want to dismount there, if you can guide us straight to the house."

"I can," he replied, simply. "And you will not be the worse for my company. Paris is a queer place when

there is trouble to the fore, but your lordships have got the right man to pilot you through it."

I did not ask him what trouble he meant, but ran indoors to buckle on my sword and tell Marie and Croisette of the ally I had secured. They were much pleased, as was natural, so that we took the road in excellent spirits, intending to reach the city in the afternoon. But Marie's horse cast a shoe, and it was some time before we could find a smith. Then at Etampes, where we stopped to lunch, we were kept an unconscionable time waiting for it. And so we approached Paris for the first time at sunset. A ruddy glow was at the moment warming the eastern heights, and picking out with flame the twin towers of Notre Dame, and the one tall tower of St. Jacques la Boucherie. A dozen roofs higher than their neighbors shone hotly, and a great bank of cloud, which lay north and south, and looked like a man's hand stretched over the city, changed gradually from blood-red to violet, and from violet to black, as evening fell.

Passing within the gates and across first one bridge and then another, we were astonished and utterly confused by the noise and hubbub through which we rode. Hundreds seemed to be moving this way and that in the narrow streets. Women screamed to one another from window to window. The bells of half a dozen churches rang the curfew. Our country ears were deafened. Still our eyes had leisure to take in the tall houses, with their high-pitched roofs, and here and there a tower built into the wall; the quaint churches, and the groups of townsfolk—sullen fellows some of them, with a fierce gleam in their eyes—who, standing in the mouths of reeking alleys, watched us go by.

But presently we had to stop. A crowd had gathered to watch a little cavalcade of six gentlemen pass across our path. They were riding two and two, lounging in

their saddles and chatting to one another, disdainfully unconscious of the people about them, or the remarks they excited. Their graceful bearing and the richness of their dress and equipment surpassed anything I had ever seen. A dozen pages and lackeys were attending them on foot, and the sound of their jests and laughter came to us over the heads of the crowd.

While I was gazing at them, some movement of the throng drove back Buré's horse against mine. Buré himself uttered a savage oath, uncalled for, so far as I could see. But my attention was arrested the next moment by Croisette, who tapped my arm with his riding whip. "Look!" he cried in some excitement, "is not that he?"

I followed the direction of the lad's finger—as well as I could for the plunging of my horse which Buré's had frightened—and scrutinized the last pair of the troop. They were crossing the street in which we stood, and I had only a side view of them, or rather of the nearer rider. He was a singularly handsome man, in age about twenty-two or twenty-three, with long lovelocks falling on his lace collar and cloak of orange silk. His face was sweet and kindly, and gracious to a marvel. But he was a stranger to me.

"I could have sworn," exclaimed Croisette, "that that was Louis himself—M. de Pavannes!"

"That?" I answered, as we began to move again, the crowd melting before us. "Oh, dear, no!"

"No! no! The farther man!" he explained.

But I had not been able to get a look at the farther of the two. We turned in our saddles and peered after him. His back in the dusk certainly reminded me of Louis. Buré, however, who said he knew M. de Pavannes by sight, laughed at the idea. "Your friend," he said, "is a wider man than that!" And I thought he was right there—but then it might be the cut of the

clothes. "They have been at the Louvre playing *paume*, I'll be sworn!" he went on. "So the admiral must be better. The one next us was M. de Teligny, the admiral's son-in-law. And the other, whom you mean, was the Comte de la Rochefoucault."

We turned, as he spoke, into a narrow street near the river, and could see not far from us a mass of dark buildings, which Buré told us was the Louvre, the king's residence. Out of the street we turned into a short one, and here Buré drew rein and rapped loudly at some heavy gates. It was so dark that when, these being opened, he led the way into a courtyard, we could see little more than a tall, sharp-gabled house, projecting over us against a pale sky, and a group of men and horses in one corner. Buré spoke to one of the men, and begging us to dismount, said the footman would show us to M. de Pavannes.

The thought that we were at the end of our long journey, and in time to warn Louis of his danger, made us forget all our exertions, our fatigue and stiffness. Gladly throwing the bridles to Jean, we ran up the steps after the servant. The thing was done. Hurrah! the thing was done!

The house—as we passed through a long passage and up some steps—seemed full of people. We heard voices and the ring of arms more than once. But our guide, without pausing, led us to a small room lighted by a hanging lamp. "I will inform M. de Pavannes of your arrival," he said, respectfully, and passed behind a curtain, which seemed to hide the door of an inner apartment. As he did so the clink of glasses and the hum of conversation reached us.

"He has company supping with him," I said, nervously. I tried to flip some of the dust from my boots with my whip. I remembered that this was Paris.

"He will be surprised to see us," quoth Croisette.

laughing—a little shyly, too, I think. And so we stood waiting.

I began to wonder as minutes passed by—the gay company we had seen putting it in my mind, I suppose—whether M. de Pavannes of Paris might not turn out to be a very different person from Louis de Pavannes of Caylus; whether the king's courtier would be as friendly as Kit's lover. And I was still thinking of this without having settled the point to my satisfaction, when the curtain was thrust aside again. A very tall man, wearing a splendid suit of black and silver and a stiff trencher-like ruff, came quickly in and stood smiling at us, a little dog in his arms. The little dog sat up and snarled, and Croisette gasped. It was not our old friend Louis certainly! It was not Louis de Pavannes at all. It was no old friend at all. It was the Vidame de Bezers!

"Welcome, gentlemen!" he said, smiling at us—and never had the cast been so apparent in his eyes. "Welcome to Paris, M. Anne!"

CHAPTER IV

ENTRAPPED!

There was a long silence. We stood glaring at him, and he smiled upon us—as a cat smiles. Croisette told me afterwards that he could have died of mortification —of shame and anger that we had been so outwitted. For myself I did not at once grasp the position. I did not understand. I could not disentangle myself in a moment from the belief in which I had entered the house—that it was Louis de Pavannes' house. But I seemed vaguely to suspect that Bezers had swept him aside and taken his place. My first impulse therefore—obeyed on the instant—was to stride to the vidame's side and grasp his arm. "What have you done?" I cried, my voice sounding hoarsely, even in my own ears. "What have you done with M. de Pavannes? Answer me!"

He showed just a little more of his sharp white teeth, as he looked down at my face—a flushed and troubled face doubtless. "Nothing—yet," he replied, very mildly. And he shook me off.

"Then," I retorted, "how do you come here?"

He glanced at Croisette and shrugged his shoulders, as if I had been a spoiled child. "M. Anne does not seem to understand," he said, with mock courtesy, "that I have the honor to welcome him to my house, the Hôtel Bezers, Rue de Platrière."

"The Hôtel Bezers! Rue de Platrière!" I cried, con-

fusedly. "But Blaise Buré told us that this was the Rue St. Antoine!"

"Ah!" he replied, as if slowly enlightened, the hypocrite! "Ah! I see!" and he smiled grimly. "So you have made the acquaintance of Blaise Buré, my excellent master of the horse! Worthy Blaise! Indeed, indeed; now I understand. And you thought, you whelps," he continued, and as he spoke his tone changed strangely, and he fixed us suddenly with angry eyes, "to play a rubber with me! With me, you imbeciles! You thought the wolf of Bezers could be hunted down like any hare! Then listen, and I will tell you the end of it. You are now in my house and absolutely at my mercy. I have two-score men within call who would cut the throats of three babes at the breast, if I bade them! Ay," he added, a wicked exultation shinning in his eyes, "they would, and like the job!"

He was going on to say more, but I interrupted him. The rage I felt, caused as much by the thought of our folly as by his arrogance, would let me be silent no longer. "First, M. de Bezers, first," I broke out fiercely, my words leaping over one another in my haste, "a word with you! Let me tell you what I think of you! You are a treacherous hound, vidame! A cur! a beast! and I spit upon you! Traitor and assassin!" I shouted, "is that not enough? Will nothing provoke you? If you call yourself a gentleman, draw!"

He shook his head; he was still smiling, still unmoved. "I do not do my own dirty work," he said, quietly, "nor stint my footmen of their sport, boy."

"Very well!" I retorted. And with the words I drew my sword, and sprang as quick as lightning to the curtain by which he had entered. "Very well, we will kill you first!" I cried wrathfully, my eye on his eye, and every savage passion in my breast aroused, "and

take our chance with the lackeys afterward! Marie! Croisette!" I cried, shrilly, "on him, lads!"

But they did not answer! They did not move or draw. For the moment indeed the man was in my power. My wrist was raised, and I had my point at his breast. I could have run him through by a single thrust. And I hated him. Oh, how I hated him! But he did not stir. Had he spoken, had he moved so much as an eyelid, or drawn back his foot, or laid his hand on his hilt, I should have killed him there. But he did not stir and I could not do it. My hand dropped. "Cowards!" I cried, glancing bitterly from him to them—they had never failed me before—"Cowards!" I muttered, seeming to shrink into myself as I said the word. And I flung my sword clattering on the floor.

"That is better!" he drawled, quite unmoved, as if nothing more than words had passed, as if he had not been in peril at all. "It was what I was going to ask you to do. If the other young gentlemen will follow your example, I shall be obliged. Thank you. Thank you."

Croisette, and a minute later Marie, obeyed him to the letter! I could not understand it. I folded my arms and gave up the game in despair, and but for very shame I could have put my hands to my face and cried. He stood in the middle under the lamp, a head taller than the tallest of us, our master. And we stood round him trapped, beaten, for all the world like children. Oh, I could have cried! This was the end of our long ride, our aspirations, our knight-errantry!

"Now perhaps you will listen to me," he went on smoothly, "and hear what I am going to do. I shall keep you here, young gentlemen, until you can serve me by carrying to mademoiselle, your cousin, some news of her betrothed. Oh, I shall not detain you

long," he added, with an evil smile. "You have arrived in Paris at a fortunate moment. There is going to be a—well, there is a little scheme on foot appointed for to-night—singularly lucky you are!—for removing some objectionable people, some friends of ours perhaps among them, M. Anne. That is all. You will hear shots, cries, perhaps screams. Take no notice. You will be in no danger. For M. de Pavannes," he continued, his voice sinking, "I think that by morning I shall be able to give you a—a more particular account of him to take to Caylus—to mademoiselle, you understand."

For a moment the mask was off. His face took a somber brightness. He moistened his lips with his tongue as though he saw his vengeance worked out then and there before him, and was gloating over the picture. The idea that this was so took such a hold upon me that I shrank back, shuddering, reading too in Croisette's face the same thought—and a late repentance. Nay, the malignity of Bezers' tone, the savage gleam of joy in his eyes, appalled me to such an extent that I fancied for a moment I saw in him the devil incarnate.

He recovered his composure very quickly, however, and turned carelessly toward the door. "If you will follow me," he said, "I will see you disposed of. You may have to complain of your lodging—I have other things to think of to-night than hospitality. But you shall not need to complain of your supper."

He drew aside the curtain as he spoke, and passed into the next room before us, not giving a thought apparently to the possibility that we might strike him from behind. There certainly was an odd quality apparent in him at times which seemed to contradict what we knew of him.

The room we entered was rather long than wide,

hung with tapestry, and lighted by silver lamps. Rich plate, embossed, I afterward learned, by Cellini the Florentine—who died that year, I remember—and richer glass from Venice, with a crowd of meaner vessels filled with meats and drinks, covered the table, disordered as by the attacks of a numerous party. But save a servant or two by the distant dresser, and an ecclesiastic at the far end of the table, the room was empty.

The priest rose as we entered, the vidame saluting him as if they had not met that day. "You are welcome, M. le Coadjuteur," he said, saying it coldly, however, I thought. And the two eyed one another with little favor; rather as birds of prey about to quarrel over the spoil than as host and guest. Perhaps the coadjutor's glittering eyes and great beak-like nose made me think of this.

"Ho! ho!" he said, looking piercingly at us, and no doubt we must have seemed a miserable and dejected crew enough. "Who are these? Not the first fruits of the night, eh?"

The vidame looked darkly at him. "No," he answered, brusquely. "They are not. I am not particular out of doors, Coadjutor, as you know, but this is my house, and we are going to supper. Perhaps you do not comprehend the distinction. Still it exists—for me," with a sneer.

This was as good as Greek to us. But I so shrank from the priest's malignant eyes, which would not quit us, and felt so much disgust mingled with my anger that when Bezers by a gesture invited me to sit down, I drew back. "I will not eat with you," I said, sullenly, speaking out of a kind of dull obstinacy, or perhaps a childish petulance.

It did not occur to me that this would pierce the vidame's armor. Yet a dull red showed for an instant

in his cheek, and he eyed me with a look that was not all ferocity, though the veins in his great temples swelled. A moment, nevertheless, and he was himself again. "Armand," he said quietly to the servant, "these gentlemen will not sup with me. Lay for them at the other end."

Men are odd. The moment he gave way to me I repented of my words. It was almost with reluctance that I followed the servant to the lower part of the table. More than this, mingled with the hatred I felt for the vidame, there was now a strange sentiment toward him, almost of admiration, that had its birth, I think, in the moment when I held his life in my hand and he had not flinched.

We ate in silence; even after Croisette, by grasping my hand under the table, had begged me not to judge him hastily. The two at the upper end talked fast, and from the little that reached us I judged that the priest was pressing some course on his host, which the latter declined to take.

Once Bezers raised his voice. "I have my own ends to serve!" he broke out angrily, adding a fierce oath which the priest did not rebuke, "and I shall serve them. But there I stop. You have your own. Well, serve them, but do not talk to me of the cause! The cause! To hell with the cause! I have my cause, and you have yours, and my lord of Guise has his! And you will not make me believe that there is any other!"

"The king's?" suggested the priest, smiling sourly.

"Say rather the Italian woman's," the vidame answered recklessly, meaning the queen-mother, Catherine de' Medici, I supposed.

"Well, then, the cause of the church?" the priest persisted.

"Bah! The church? It is you, my friend!" Bezers rejoined, rudely tapping his companion—at that mo-

ment in the act of crossing himself—on the chest. "The church?" he continued. "No, no, my friend. I will tell you what you are doing. You want me to help you to get rid of your branch, and you offer in return to aid me with mine, and then, say you, there will be no stick left to beat either of us. But you may understand once for all"—and the vidame struck his hand heavily down among the glasses—"that I will have no interference with my work, master Clerk! None! Do you hear? And as for yours, it is no business of mine. That is plain speaking, is it not?"

The priest's hand shook as he raised a full glass to his lips, but he made no rejoinder, and the vidame, seeing we had finished, rose. "Armand!" he cried, his face still dark, "take these gentlemen to their chamber. You understand!"

We stiffly acknowledged his salute—the priest taking no notice of us—and followed the servant from the room, going along a corridor and up a steep flight of stairs, and seeing enough by the way to be sure that resistance was hopeless. Doors opened silently as we passed, and grim fellows, in corselets and padded coats, peered out. The clank of arms and murmur of voices sounded continuously about us; and as we passed a window the jingle of bits, and the hollow clang of a restless hoof on the flags below, told us that the great house was for the time a fortress. I wondered much. For this was Paris, a city with gates and guards; the night a short August night. Yet the loneliest manor in Quercy could scarcely have bristled with more pikes and musquetoons on a winter's night and in time of war.

No doubt these signs impressed us all, and Croisette not least. For suddenly I heard him stop, as he followed us up the narrow staircase, and begin without warning to stumble down again as fast as he could. I

did not know what he was about; but muttering something to Marie, I followed the lad to see. At the foot of the flight of stairs I looked back. Marie and the servant were standing in suspense, where I had left them. I heard the latter bid us angrily to return.

But by this time Croisette was at the end of the corridor; and reassuring the fellow by a gesture I hurried on, until brought to a standstill by a man opening a door in my face. He had heard our returning footsteps, and eyed me suspiciously, but gave way after a moment with a grunt of doubt. I hastened on, reaching the door of the room in which we had supped in time to see something which filled me with grim astonishment, so much so that I stood rooted where I was, too proud at any rate to interfere.

Bezers was standing, the leering priest at his elbow, and Croisette was stooping forward, his hands stretched out in an attitude of supplication.

"Nay, but M. le Vidame," the lad cried, as I stood, the door in my hand, "it were better to stab her at once than break her heart! Have pity on her! If you kill him, you kill her!"

The vidame was silent, seeming to glower on the boy. The priest sneered. "Hearts are soon mended, especially women's," he said.

"But not Kit's!" Croisette said, passionately, otherwise ignoring him. "Not Kit's! You do not know her, vidame! Indeed you do not!"

The remark was ill-timed. I saw a spasm of anger distort Bezers' face. "Get up, boy!" he snarled, "I wrote to mademoiselle what I would do, and that I shall do! A Bezers keeps his word. By the God above us—if there be a God, and in the devil's name I doubt it to-night!—I shall keep mine! Go!"

His great face was full of rage. He looked over Croisette's head as he spoke, as if appealing to the

Great Registrar of his vow, in the very moment in which he all but denied him. I turned and stole back the way I had come, and heard Croisette follow.

That little scene completed my misery. After that I seemed to take no heed of anything or anybody until I was aroused by the grating of our jailer's key in the lock, and became aware that he was gone, and that we were alone in a small room under the tiles. He had left the candle on the floor, and we three stood around it. Save for the long shadows we cast on the walls and two pallets hastily thrown down in one corner, the place was empty. I did not look much at it, and I would not look at the others. I flung myself on one of the pallets and turned my face to the wall, despairing. I thought bitterly of the failure we had made of it, and of the vidame's triumph. I cursed St. Croix especially for that last touch of humiliation he had set to it. Then forgetting myself as my anger abated, I thought of Kit so far away at Caylus—of Kit's pale, gentle face, and her sorrow. And little by little I forgave Croisette. After all he had not begged for us—he had not stooped for our sakes, but for hers.

I do not know how long I lay at see-saw between these two moods. Or whether during that time the others talked or were silent, moved about the room or lay still. But it was Croisette's hand on my shoulder, touching me with a quivering eagerness that instantly communicated itself to my limbs, which recalled me to the room and its shadows. "Anne!" he cried. "Anne! Are you awake?"

"What is it?" I asked, sitting up and looking at him.

"Marie," he began, "has——"

But there was no need for him to finish. I saw that Marie was standing at the far side of the room by the unglazed window, which, being in a sloping part of the roof, inclined slightly also. He had raised the shutter

which closed it, and on his tip-toes—for the sill was almost his own height from the floor—was peering out. I looked sharply at Croisette. "Is there a gutter outside?" I whispered, beginning to tingle all over as the thought of escape for the first time occurred to me.

"No," he answered in the same tone. "But Marie says he can see a beam below, which he thinks we can reach."

I sprang up, promptly displaced Marie, and looked out. When my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom I discerned a dark chaos of roofs and gables stretching as far as I could see before me. Nearer, immediately under the window, yawned a chasm, a narrow street. Beyond this was a house rather lower than that in which we were, the top of its roof not quite reaching the level of my eyes. "I see no beam," I said.

"Look below!" quoth Marie, stolidly.

I did so, and then saw that fifteen or sixteen feet below our window there was a narrow beam which ran from our house to the opposite one, for the support of both, as is common in towns. In the shadow near the far end of this—it was so directly under our window that I could only see the other end of it—I made out a casement, faintly illuminated from within.

I shook my head.

"We cannot get down to it," I said, measuring the distance to the beam and the depth below it, and shivering.

"Marie says we can, with a short rope," Croisette replied. His eyes were glistening with excitement.

"But we have no rope!" I retorted. I was dull, as usual. Marie made no answer. Surely he was the most stolid and silent of brothers. I turned to him. He was taking off his waistcoat and neckerchief.

"Good!" I cried. I began to see now. Off came our

scarfs and kerchiefs also, and fortunately they were of home make, long and strong. And Marie had a hank of four-ply yarn in his pocket, as it turned out, and I had some stout new garters, and two or three yards of thin cord, which I had brought to mend the girths, if need should arise. In five minutes we had fastened them cunningly together.

"I am the lightest," said Croisette.

"But Marie has the steadiest head," I objected. We had learned that long ago—that Marie could walk the coping-stones of the battlements with as little concern as we paced a plank set on the ground.

"True," Croisette had to admit. "But he must come last, because whoever does so will have to let himself down."

I had not thought of that, and I nodded. It seemed that the lead was passing out of my hands and I might resign myself. Still one thing I would have. As Marie was to come last, I would go first. My weight would best test the rope. And accordingly it was so decided.

There was no time to be lost. At any moment we might be interrupted. So the plan was no sooner conceived than carried out. The rope was made fast to my left wrist. Then I mounted on Marie's shoulders, and climbed—not without quavering—through the window, taking as little time over it as possible, for a bell was already proclaiming midnight.

All this I had done on the spur of the moment. But outside, hanging by my hands in the darkness, the strokes of the great bell in my ears, I had a moment in which to think. The sense of the vibrating depth below me, the airiness, the space and gloom around, frightened me. "Are you ready?" muttered Marie, perhaps with a little impatience. He had not a scrap of imagination, had Marie.

"No! wait a minute!" I blurted out, clinging to the

sill, and taking a last look at the bare room and the two dark figures between me and the light. "No!" I added, hurriedly. "Croisette—boys, I called you cowards just now. I take it back. I did not mean it. That is all," I gasped. "Let go!"

A warm touch on my hand. Something like a sob.

The next moment I felt myself sliding down the face of the house, down into the depth. The light shot up. My head turned giddily. I clung, oh, how I clung to that rope! Half-way down the thought struck me that in case of accident those above might not be strong enough to pull me up again. But it was too late to think of that, and in another second my feet touched the beam. I breathed again. Softly, very gingerly, I made good my footing on the slender bridge, and, disengaging the rope, let it go. Then, not without another qualm, I sat down astride of the beam and whistled in token of success. Success so far!

It was a strange position, and I have often dreamed of it since. In the darkness about me Paris lay to all seeming asleep. A veil, and not the veil of night only, was stretched between it and me; between me, a mere lad, and the strange secrets of a great city, stranger, grimmer, more deadly that night than ever before or since. How many men were watching under those dimly-seen roofs, with arms in their hands? How many sat with murder at heart? How many were waking, who at dawn would sleep forever, or sleeping, who would wake only at the knife's edge? These things I could not know, any more than I could picture how many boon companions were parting at that instant, just risen from the dice, one to go blindly—the other watching him—to his death? I could not imagine, thank heaven for it, these secrets, or a hundredth part of the treachery and cruelty and greed that lurked at my feet, ready to burst all bounds at a pistol shot. It

had no significance for me that the past day was the 23d of August, or that the morrow was St. Bartholomew's feast?

No. Yet mingled with the jubilation which the possibility of triumph over our enemy raised in my breast, there was certainly a foreboding. The vidame's hints, no less than his open boasts, had pointed to something to happen before morning—something wider than the mere murder of a single man. The warning also which the Baron de Rosny had given us at the inn occurred to me with new meaning. And I could not shake the feeling off. I fancied, as I sat in the darkness astride of my beam, that I could see, closing the narrow vista of the street, the heavy mass of the Louvre; and that the murmur of voices and the tramp of men assembling came from its courts, with now and again the stealthy challenge of a sentry, the restrained voice of an officer. Scarcely a wayfarer passed beneath me; so few, indeed, that I had no fear of being detected from below. And yet, unless I was mistaken, a furtive step, a subdued whisper, were borne to me on every breeze, from every quarter. And the night was full of phantoms.

Perhaps all this was mere nervousness, the outcome of my position. At any rate I felt no more of it when Croisette joined me. We had our daggers, and that gave me some comfort. If we could once gain entrance to the house opposite, we had only to beg, or in the last resort, force our way downstairs and out, and then to hasten with what speed we might to Pavannes' dwelling. Clearly it was a question of time only now, whether Bezers' band or we should first reach it. And struck by this I whispered Marie to be quick. He seemed to be long in coming.

He scrambled down hand over hand at last, and then I saw that he had not lingered above for nothing. He

had contrived, after getting out of the window, to let down the shutter. And more, he had at some risk lengthened our rope, and made a double line of it, so that it ran round a hinge of the shutter; and when he stood beside us, he took it by one end and disengaged it. Good, clever Marie!

"Bravo!" I said softly, clapping him on the back. "Now they will not know which way the birds have flown."

So there we all were, one of us, I confess, trembling. We slid easily enough along the beam to the opposite house. But once there in a row, one behind the other, with our faces to the wall, and the night air blowing slantwise—well I am nervous on a height and I gasped. The window was a good six feet above the beam. The casement—it was unglazed—was open, veiled by a thin curtain, and, alas! protected by three horizontal bars—stout bars they looked.

Yet we were bound to get up, and to get in; and I was preparing to rise to my feet on the giddy bridge as gingerly as I could, when Marie crawled quickly over us, and swung himself up to the narrow sill, much as I should mount a horse on the level. He held out his foot to me, and making an effort I reached the same dizzy perch. Croisette for the time remained below.

A narrow window-ledge sixty feet above the pavement, and three bars to cling to! I cowered to my holdfasts, envying even Croisette. My legs dangled airily, and the black chasm of the street seemed to yawn for me. For a moment I turned sick. I recovered from that to feel desperate. I remembered that go forward we must, bars or no bars. We could not regain our old prison if we would.

It was equally clear that we could not go forward if the inmates should object. On that narrow perch

even Marie was helpless. The bars of the window were close together. A woman, a child, could disengage our hands, and then—I turned sick again. I thought of the cruel stones. I glued my face to the bars, and pushing aside a corner of the curtain, looked in.

There was only one person in the room—a woman, who was moving about fully dressed, late as it was. The room was a mere attic, the counterpart of that we had left. A box-bed with a canopy roughly nailed over it stood in a corner. A couple of chairs were by the hearth, and all seemed to speak of poverty and bareness. Yet the woman whom we saw was richly dressed, though her silks and velvets were disordered. I saw a jewel gleam in her hair, and others on her hands. When she turned her face toward us—a wild, beautiful face, perplexed and tear-stained—I knew her instantly for a gentlewoman, and when she walked hastily to the door, and laid her hand upon it, and seemed to listen; when she shook the latch and dropped her hands in despair, and went back to the hearth, I made another discovery. I knew at once, seeing her there, that we were likely but to change one prison for another. Was every house in Paris then a dungeon? And did each roof cover its tragedy?

"Madame," I said, speaking softly, to attract her attention. "Madame!"

She started violently, not knowing whence the sound came, and looked round, at the door first. Then she moved toward the window, and with an affirighted gesture, drew the curtain rapidly aside.

Our eyes met. What if she screamed and aroused the house? What, indeed? "Madame," I said again, speaking hurriedly and striving to reassure her by the softness of my voice, "we implore your help! Unless you assist us we are lost."

"You! Who are you?" she cried, glaring at us wild-

ly, her hand to her head. And then she murmured to herself, "Mon Dieu! what will become of me?"

"We have been imprisoned in the house opposite," I hastened to explain, disjointedly I am afraid; "and we have escaped. We cannot get back if we would. Unless you let us enter your room and give us shelter—"

"We shall be dashed to pieces on the pavement," supplied Marie, with perfect calmness—nay, with apparent enjoyment.

"Let you in here?" she answered, starting back in new terror. "It is impossible."

She reminded me of our cousin, being, like her, pale and dark-haired. She wore her hair in a coronet, disordered now. But though she was still beautiful, she was older than Kit, and lacked her pliant grace. I saw all this, and judging her nature, I spoke out of my despair. "Madame," I said, piteously, "we are only boys. Croisette, come up!" Squeezing myself still more tightly into my corner of the ledge, I made room for him between us. "See, madame," I cried, craftily, "will you not have pity on three boys?"

St. Croix's boyish face and fair hair arrested her attention, as I had expected. Her expression grew softer, and she murmured, "Poor boy!"

I caught at the opportunity. "We do but seek a passage through your room," I said fervently. Good heavens! what had we not at stake? What if she should remain obdurate? "We are in trouble, in despair," I panted. "So, I believe, are you. We will help you, if you will first save us. We are boys, but we can fight for you."

"Whom am I to trust?" she exclaimed, with a shudder. "But, heaven forbid," she continued, her eyes on Croisette's face, "that, wanting help I should refuse to give it. Come in, if you will."

I poured out my thanks, and had forced my head

between the bars—at imminent risk of its remaining there—before the words were well out of her mouth. But to enter was no easy task after all. Croisette did, indeed, squeeze through at last, and then by force pulled first one and then the other of us after him. But only necessity and that chasm behind could have nerved us, I think, to go through a process so painful. When I stood at length on the floor, I seemed to be one great abrasion from head to foot. And before a lady, too!

But what a joy I felt, nevertheless. A fig for Bezers now. He had called us boys and we were boys; but he should yet find that we could thwart him. It could be scarcely half an hour after midnight; we might still be in time. I stretched myself and trod the level floor jubilantly, and then noticed, while doing so, that our hostess had retreated to the door and was eying us timidly, half-scared.

I advanced to her with my lowest bow, sadly missing my sword. "Madame," I said, "I am M. Anne de Caylus, and these are my brothers. And we are at your service."

"And I," she replied, smiling faintly—I do not know why—"am Madame de Pavannes. I gratefully accept your offers of service."

"De Pavannes!" I exclaimed, amazed and overjoyed. Madame de Pavannes! Why, she must be Louis' kinswoman! No doubt she could tell us where he was lodged, and so rid our task of half its difficulty. Could anything have fallen out more happily? "You know, then, M. Louis de Pavannes?" I continued, eagerly.

"Certainly," she answered, smiling with a rare, shy sweetness this time. "Very well indeed. He is my husband."

CHAPTER V

A PRIEST AND A WOMAN

"He is my husband!"

The statement was made in the purest innocence, yet never, as may well be imagined, did words fall with more stunning force. Not one of us answered or, I believe, moved so much as a limb or an eyelid. We only stared, wanting time to take in the astonishing meaning of the words, and then more time to think what they meant to us in particular.

Louis de Pavannes' wife! Louis de Pavannes married! If the statement were true—and we could not doubt, looking in her face, that at least she thought she was telling the truth—it meant that we had been fooled indeed! That we had had this journey for nothing, and run this risk for a villain. It meant that the Louis de Pavannes who had won our boyish admiration was the meanest, the vilest of court-gallants; that Mademoiselle de Caylus had been his sport and plaything; and that we, in trying to be beforehand with Bezers, had been striving to save a scoundrel from his due. It meant all that, as soon as we grasped it in the least.

"Madame," said Croisette, gravely, after a pause so prolonged that her smile faded pitifully from her face, scared by our strange looks, "your husband has been some time away from you? He only returned, I think, a week or two ago?"

"That is so," she answered, naively, and our last hope vanished. "But what of that? He was back

with me again, and only yesterday—only yesterday!" she continued, clasping her hands, "we were so happy."

"And now, madame?"

She looked at me, not comprehending.

"I mean," I hastened to explain, "we do not understand how you come to be here. And a prisoner." I was really thinking that her story might throw some light upon ours.

"I do not know, myself," she said. "Yesterday, in the afternoon, I paid a visit to the abbess of the Ursulines."

"Pardon me," Croisette interposed quickly, "but are you not of the new faith? A Huguenot?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, eagerly. "But the abbess is a very dear friend of mine, and no bigot. Oh, nothing of that kind, I assure you. When I am in Paris I visit her once a week. Yesterday, when I left her, she begged me to call here and deliver a message."

"Then," I said, "you know this house?"

"Very well, indeed," she replied. "It is the sign of the 'Hand and Glove,' one door out of the Rue Platrière. I have been in Master Mirepoix's shop more than once before. I came here yesterday to deliver the message, leaving my maid in the street, and I was asked to come upstairs, and still up until I reached this room. Asked to wait a moment, I began to think it strange that I should be brought to so wretched a place, when I had merely a message for Mirepoix's ear about some gauntlets. I tried the door; I found it locked. Then I was terrified, and made a noise."

We all nodded. We were busy building up theories—or it might be one and the same theory—to explain this. "Yes," I said, eagerly.

"Mirepoix came to me then. 'What does this mean?' I demanded. He looked ashamed of himself, but he barred my way. 'Only this,' he said, at last, 'that your

ladyship must remain here a few hours—two days at most. No harm whatever is intended to you. My wife will wait upon you, and, when you leave us, all shall be explained.' He would say no more, and it was in vain I asked him if he did not take me for someone else; if he thought I was mad. To all he answered, 'No.' And when I dared him to detain me, he threatened force. Then I succumbed. I have been here since, suspecting I know not what, but fearing everything."

"That is ended, madame," I answered, my hand on my breast, my soul in arms for her. Here, unless I was mistaken, was one more unhappy and more deeply wronged even that Kit; one, too, who owed her misery to the same villain. "Were there nine glovers on the stairs," I declared, roundly, "we would take you out and take you home! Where are your husband's apartments?"

"In the Rue de Saint Merri," close to the church. We have a house there."

"M. de Pavannes," I suggested, cunningly, "is doubtless distracted by your disappearance."

"Oh, surely," she answered, with earnest simplicity, while the tears sprang to her eyes. Her innocence—she had not the germ of a suspicion—made me grind my teeth with wrath. Oh, the base wretch! The miserable rascal! What did the women see, I wondered—what had we all seen in this man, this Pavannes, that won for him our hearts, when he had only a stone to give in return?

I drew Croisette and Marie aside, apparently to consider how we might force the door. "What is the meaning of this?" I said, softly, glancing at the unfortunate lady. "What do you think, Croisette?"

I knew well what the answer would be.

"Think!" he cried, with fiery impatience, "What

can any one think except that that villain Pavannes has himself planned his wife's abduction? Of course it is so. His wife out of the way he is free to follow up his intrigues at Caylus. He may then marry Kit or——curse him!"

"No," I said, sternly, "cursing is no good. We must do something more. And yet—we have promised Kit, you see. that we would save him—we must keep our word. We must save him from Bezers at least."

Marie groaned.

But Croisette took up the thought with ardor. "From Bezers?" he cried, his face aglow. "Ay, true! So we must! But then we will draw lots who shall fight him and kill him."

I extinguished him by a look. "We shall fight him in turn," I said, "until one of us kill him. There you are right. But your turn comes last. Lots, indeed! We have no need of lots to learn which is the eldest."

I was turning from him—having very properly crushed him—to look for something which we could use to force the door, when he held up his hand to arrest my attention. We listened, looking at one another. Through the window came unmistakeable sounds of voices. "They have discovered our flight," I said, my heart sinking.

Luckily we had had the forethought to draw the curtain across the casement. Bezers' people could therefore, from their window, see no more than ours, dimly lighted and indistinct. Yet they would no doubt guess the way we had escaped, and hasten to cut off our retreat below. For a moment I looked at the door of our room, half minded to attack it and fight our way out, taking the chance of reaching the street before Bezers' folk should have recovered from their surprise and gone down. But then I looked at madame. How

could we insure her safety in the struggle? While I hesitated the choice was taken from us. We heard voices in the house below, and heavy feet on the stairs.

We were between two fires. I glanced irresolutely round the bare garret, with its sloping roof, searching for a better weapon. I had only my dagger. But in vain. I saw nothing that would serve. "What will you do?" Madame de Pavannes murmured, standing pale and trembling by the hearth, and looking from one to another. Croisette plucked my sleeve before I could answer, and pointed to the box-bed with its scanty curtains. "If they see us in the room," he urged softly, "while they are half in and half out, they will give the alarm. Let us hide ourselves yonder. When they are inside—you understand?"

He laid his hand on his dagger. The muscles of the lad's face grew tense. I did understand him. "Madame," I said, quickly, "you will not betray us?"

She shook her head. The color returned to her cheeks and the brightness to her eyes. She was a true woman. The sense that she was protecting others deprived her of fear for herself.

The footsteps were on the topmost stair now, and a key was thrust with a rasping sound into the lock. But before it could be turned—it fortunately fitted ill—we three had jumped on the bed and were crouching in a row at the head of it, where the curtains of the alcove concealed, and only just concealed, us from any one standing at the end of the room near the door.

I was the outermost, and through a chink could see what passed. One, two, three people came in, and the door was closed behind them. Three people, and one of them a woman! My heart, which had been in my mouth, returned to its place, for the vidame was not one. I breathed freely; only I dared not communicate

my relief to the others, lest my voice should be heard. The first to come in was the woman closely cloaked and hooded. Madame de Pavannes cast on her a single doubtful glance, and then to my astonishment threw herself into her arms, mingling her sobs with little joyous cries of "Oh, Diane! Oh, Diane!"

"My poor little one!" the newcomer exclaimed, soothing her with tender touches on hair and shoulder. "You are safe now! Quite safe!"

"You have come to take me away?"

"Of course we have!" Diane answered, cheerfully, still caressing her. "We have come to take you to your husband. He has been searching for you everywhere. He is distracted with grief, little one."

"Poor Louis!" ejaculated the wife.

"Poor Louis, indeed!" the rescuer answered. "But you will see him soon. We only learned at midnight where you were. You have to thank M. le Coadjuteur here for that. He brought me the news, and at once escorted me here to fetch you."

"And to restore one sister to another," said the priest, silkily, as he advanced a step. He was the very same priest whom I had seen two hours before with Bezers, and had so greatly disliked. I hated his pale face as much now as I had then. Even the errand of good on which he had come could not blind me to his thin-lipped mouth, to his mock humility and crafty eyes. "I have had no task so pleasant for many days," added he with every appearance of a desire to propitiate.

But, seemingly, Madame de Pavannes had something of the same feeling toward him which I had myself, for she started at the sound of his voice, and disengaging herself from her sister's arms—it seemed it was her sister—shrank back from the pair. She bowed indeed in acknowledgment of his words. But there was little gratitude in the movement, and less warmth.

I saw the sister's face—a brilliantly beautiful face it was—brighter eyes and lips and more lovely auburn hair I have never seen—even Kit would have been plain and dowdy beside her—I saw it harden strangely. A moment before the two had been in one another's arms. Now they stood apart, somehow chilled and disillusioned. The shadow of the priest had fallen upon them—had come between them.

At this crisis the fourth person present asserted himself. Hitherto he had stood silent just within the door; a plain man, plainly dressed, somewhat over sixty and gray-haired. He looked disconcerted and embarrassed, and I took him for Mirepoix—rightly, as it turned out.

"I am sure," he now exclaimed, his voice trembling with anxiety, or it might be with fear, "your ladyship will regret leaving here. You will indeed. No harm would have happened to you. Madame d'O does not know what she is doing, or she would not take you away. She does not know what she is doing!" he repeated, earnestly.

"Madame d'O!" cried the beautiful Diane, her brown eyes darting fire at the unlucky culprit, her voice full of angry disdain. "How dare you—such as you—mention my name? Wretch!"

She flung the last word at him, and the priest took it up. "Ay, wretch! Wretched man, indeed!" he repeated, slowly, stretching out his long, thin hand and laying it like the claw of some bird of prey on the tradesman's shoulder, which flinched, I saw, under the touch. "How dare you—such as you—meddle with matters of the nobility? Matters that do not concern you? Trouble! I see trouble hanging over this house, Mirepoix! Much trouble!"

The miserable fellow trembled visibly under the covert threat. His face grew pale. His lips quivered. He

seemed fascinated by the priest's gaze. "I am a faithful son of the church," he muttered; but his voice shook so that the words were scarcely audible. "I am known to be such! None better known in Paris, M. le Coadjuteur."

"Men are known by their works!" the priest retorted. "Now, now," he continued, abruptly raising his voice, and lifting his hand in a kind of exaltation, real or feigned, "is the appointed time! And now is the day of salvation! And woe, Mirepoix, woe! woe! to the backslider, and to him that putteth his hand to the plow and looketh back to-night!"

The layman cowered and shrank before his fierce denunciation, while Madame de Pavannes gazed from one to the other as if her dislike for the priest was so great, that seeing the two thus quarrelling she almost forgave Mirepoix his offense. "Mirepoix said he could explain," she murmured, irresolutely.

The coadjutor fixed his baleful eyes on him. "Mirepoix," he said, grimly, "can explain nothing! Nothing! I dare him to explain!"

And certainly Mirepoix thus challenged was silent. "Come," the priest continued peremptorily, turning to the lady who had entered with him, "your sister must leave with us at once. We have no time to lose."

"But what—what does it mean?" Madame de Pavannes said, as though she hesitated even now. "Is there danger still?"

"Danger!" the priest exclaimed, his form seeming to swell, and the exaltation I had before read in his voice and manner again asserting itself. "I put myself at your service, madame, and danger disappears. I am as God to-night, with powers of life and death! You do not understand me? Presently, you shall. But you are ready. We will go then. Out of the way, fellow!" he thundered, advancing upon the door.

But Mirepoix, who had placed himself with his back to it, to my astonishment did not give way. His full bourgeois face was pale; yet peeping through my chink I read in it a desperate resolution. And oddly—very oddly, because I knew that in keeping Madame de Pavannes a prisoner he must be in the wrong—I sympathized with him. Low-bred trader, tool of Pavannes though he was, I sympathized with him, when he said firmly:

"She shall not go!"

"I say she shall!" the priest shrieked, losing all control over himself. "Fool! Madman! You know not what you do!" As the words passed his lips he made an adroit forward movement, surprised the other, clutched him by the arms, and with a strength I should never have thought lay in his meagre frame, flung him some paces into the room. "Fool!" he hissed, shaking his crooked fingers at him in malignant triumph. "There is no man in Paris, do you hear—or woman either—shall thwart me to-night!"

"Is that so? Indeed?"

The words and the cold, cynical voice were not those of Mirepoix; they came from behind. The priest wheeled round as if he had been stabbed in the back. I clutched Croisette, and arrested the cramped limb I was moving under cover of the noise. The speaker was Bezers! He stood in the open doorway, his great form filling it from post to post, the old gibing smile on his face. We had been so taken up, actors and audience alike, with the altercation, that no one had heard him ascend the stairs. He still wore the black and silver suit, but it was half-hidden now under a dark riding cloak which just disclosed the glitter of his weapons. He was booted and spurred and gloved as for a journey.

"It that so?" he repeated, mockingly, as his gaze

rested in turn on each of the four, and then traveled sharply round the room. "So you will not be thwarted by any man in Paris to-night, eh? Have you considered, my dear coadjutor, what a large number of people there are in Paris? It would amuse me very greatly now—and I'm sure it would the ladies, too, who must pardon my abrupt entrance—to see you put to the test; pitted against—shall we say the Duke of Anjou? Or Monsieur de Guise, our great man? Or the admiral? Say the admiral, foot to foot?"

Rage and fear—rage at the intrusion, fear of the intruder—struggled in the priest's face. "How do you come here, and what do you want?" he inquired, hoarsely. If looks and tones could kill, we three, trembling behind our flimsy screen, had been freed at that moment from our enemy.

"I have come in search of the young birds whose necks you were for stretching, my friend!" was Bezers' answer. "They have vanished. Birds they must be, for unless they have come into this house by that window, they have flown away with wings."

"They have not passed this way," the priest declared, stoutly, eager only to get rid of the other—and I blessed him for the words. "I have been here since I left you."

But the vidame was not one to accept any man's statement. "Thank you; I think I will see for myself," he answered, coolly. "Madame," he continued, speaking to Madame de Pavannes, as he passed her, "permit me."

He did not look at her, or see her emotion, or I think he must have divined our presence. And happily the others did not suspect her of knowing more than they did. He crossed the floor at his leisure, and sauntered to the window, watched by them with impatience. He drew aside the curtain, and tried each of the

bars, and peered through the opening both up and down. An oath and an expression of wonder escaped him. The bars were standing, and firm and strong; and it did not occur to him that we could have passed between them. I am afraid to say how few inches they were apart.

As he turned, he cast a casual glance at the bed—at us, and hesitated. He had the candle in his hand, having taken it to the window the better to examine the bars, and it obscured his sight. He did not see us. The three crouching forms, the strained white faces, the staring eyes, that lurked in the shadow of the curtain escaped him. The wild beating of our hearts did not reach his ears. And it was well for him that it was so. If he had come up to the bed I think that we should have killed him; I know that we should have tried. All the blood in me had gone to my head, and I saw him through a haze—larger than life. The exact spot near the buckle of his cloak where I would strike him, downward and inward, an inch above the collar-bone—this only I saw clearly. I could not have missed it. But he turned away, his face darkening, and went back to the group near the door, and never knew the risk he had run.

CHAPTER VI

MADAME'S FRIGHT

And we breathed again. The agony of suspense which Bezers' pause had created passed away. But the night already seemed to us as a week of nights; an age of experience, an æon of adventures cut us off—as we lay shaking behind the curtain—from Caylus and its life. Paris had proved itself more treacherous than we had even expected to find it. Everything and everyone shifted, and wore one face one minute and one another. We had come to save Pavannes' life at the risk of our own; we found him to be a villain! Here was Mirepoix owning himself a treacherous wretch, a conspirator against a woman; we sympathized with him. The priest had come upon a work of charity and rescue; we loathed the sound of his voice, and shrank from him, we knew not why, seeming only to read a dark secret, a gloomy threat in each doubtful word he uttered. He was the strangest enigma of all. Why did we fear him? Why did Madame de Pavannes, who apparently had known him before, shudder at the touch of his hand? Why did his shadow come, even between her and her sister, and estrange them, so that from the moment Pavannes' wife saw him standing by Diane's side, she forgot that the latter had come to save, and looked on her in doubt and sorrow, almost with repugnance.

We left the vidame going back to the fireplace. He stooped to set down the candle by the hearth. "They

are not here," he said, as he straightened himself again, and looked curiously at his companions. He had apparently been too much taken up with the pursuit to notice them before. "That is certain, so I have the less time to lose," he continued. "But I would—yes, my dear coadjutor, I certainly would like to know before I go, what you are doing here? Mirepoix—Mirepoix is an honest man. I did not expect to find you in *his* house. And two ladies? Two! Fie, Coadjutor! Ha! Madame d'O, is it? My dear lady," he continued, addressing her in a whimsical tone, "do not start at the sound of your own name! It would take a hundred hoods to hide your eyes, or bleach your lips to the common color. I should have known you at once had I looked at you. And your companion? Phew!"

He broke off, whistling softly. It was clear that he recognized Madame de Pavannes, and recognized her with astonishment. The bed creaked as I craned my neck to see what would follow. Even the priest seemed to think that some explanation was necessary, for he did not wait to be questioned.

"Madame de Pavannes," he said in a dry, husky voice, and without looking up, "was spirited hither yesterday, and detained against her will by this good man, who will have to answer for it. Madame d'O discovered her whereabouts, and asked me to escort her here without loss of time, to enforce her sister's release."

"And her restoration to her distracted husband?"

"Just so," the priest assented, acquiring confidence, I thought.

"'And madame desires to go?"

"Surely! Why not?"

"Well," the vidame drawled, his manner such as to bring the blood to Madame de Pavannes' cheek, "it depends on the person who—to use your phrase, M. le Coadjuteur—spirited her hither."

"And that," Madame herself retorted, raising her head, while her voice quivered with indignation and anger, "was the Abbess of the Ursulines. Your suspicions are base, worthy of you and unworthy of me, M. le Vidame! Diane!" she continued, sharply, taking her sister's arm, and casting a disdainful glance at Bezers, "let us go. I want to be with my husband. I am stifled in this room."

"We are going, little one," Diane murmured, reassuringly. But I noticed that the speaker's animation, which had been as a soul to her beauty when she entered the room, was gone. A strange stillness—was it fear of the vidame?—had taken its place.

"The Abbess of the Ursulines?" Bezers continued, thoughtfully. "*She* brought you here, did she?" There was surprise, genuine surprise, in his voice. "A good soul, and, I think I have heard, a friend of yours. Umph!"

"A very dear friend," madame answered, stiffly. "Now, Diane!"

"A dear friend! And she spirited you hither yesterday!" commented the vidame, with the air of one solving an anagram. "And Mirepoix detained you; respectable Mirepoix, who is said to have a well-filled stocking under his pallet, and stands well with the bourgeois. He is in the plot. Then at a very late hour, your affectionate sister, and my good friend the coadjutor, enter to save you. From what?"

No one spoke. The priest looked down, his cheeks livid with anger.

"From what?" Bezers continued, with grim playfulness. "There is the mystery. From the clutches of this profligate Mirepoix, I suppose. From the dangerous Mirepoix. Upon my honor," with a sudden ring of resolution in his tone, "I think you are safer here; I

think you had better stay where you are, madame, until morning! And risk Mirepoix!"

"Oh, no! no!" Madame cried, vehemently.

"Oh, yes! yes!" he replied. "What do you say, Co-adjutor? Do you not think so?"

The priest looked down sullenly. His voice shook as he murmured in answer, "Madame will please herself. She has a character, M. le Vidame. But if she prefer to stay here—well!"

"Oh, she has a character, has she?" rejoined the giant, his eyes twinkling with evil mirth, "and she should go home with you, and my old friend Madame d'O, to save it! That is it, is it? No, no," he continued when he had had his silent laugh out, "Madame de Pavannes will do very well here—very well here until morning. We have work to do. Come. Let us go and do it."

"Do you mean it?" said the priest, starting and looking up with a subtle challenge—almost a threat—in his tone.

"Yes, I do."

Their eyes met, and seeing their looks, I chuckled, nudging Croisette. No fear of their discovering us now. I recalled the old proverb which says that when thieves fall out, honest men come by their own, and speculated on the chance of the priest freeing us once for all from M. de Bezers.

But the two were ill-matched. The vidame could have taken up the other with one hand and dashed his head on the floor. And it did not end there. I doubt if in craft the priest was his equal. Behind a frank brutality Bezers—unless his reputation belied him—concealed an Italian intellect. Under a cynical recklessness he veiled a rare cunning and a constant suspicion; enjoying in that respect a combination of apparently opposite qualities, which I have known no other man

to possess in an equal degree, unless it might be his late majesty, Henry the Great. A child would have suspected the priest; a veteran might have been taken in by the vidame.

And indeed the priest's eyes presently sank. "Our bargain is to go for nothing?" he muttered, sullenly.

"I know of no bargain," quoth the vidame. "And I have no time to lose, splitting hairs here. Set it down to what you like. Say it is a whim of mine, a fad, a caprice. Only understand that Madame de Pavannes stays. We go. And—" he added this, as a sudden thought seemed to strike him, "though I would not willingly use compulsion to a lady, I think Madame d'O had better come, too."

"You speak masterfully," the priest said with a sneer, forgetting the tone he had himself used a few minutes before to Mirepoix.

"Just so. I have forty horsemen over the way," was the dry answer. "For the moment, I am master of the legions, Coadjutor."

"That is true," Madame d'O said, so softly that I started. She had scarcely spoken since Bezers' entrance. As she spoke now, she shook back the hood from her face and disclosed the chestnut hair clinging about her temples—deep blots of color on the abnormal whiteness of her skin. "That is true, M. de Bezers," she said. "You have the legions; you have the power. But you will not use it, I think, against an old friend. You will not do us this hurt when I—But listen."

He would not. In the very middle of her appeal he cut her short—brute that he was! "No, madame!" he burst out violently, disregarding the beautiful face, the supplicating glance, that might have moved a stone, "that is just what I will not do. I will not listen! We know one another. Is not that enough?"

She looked at him fixedly. He returned her gaze, not

smiling now, but eying her with a curious watchfulness.

And after a long pause she turned from him. "Very well," she said, softly, and drew a deep, quivering breath, the sound of which reached us. "Then let us go." And without—strangest thing of all—bestowing a word or look on her sister, who was weeping bitterly in a chair, she turned to the door and led the way out, a shrug of her shoulders the last thing I marked.

The poor lady heard her departing step, however, and sprang up. It dawned upon her that she was being deserted. "Diane! Diane!" she cried, distractedly—and I had to put my hand on Croisette to keep him quiet, there was such fear and pain in her tone—"I will go! I will not be left behind in this dreadful place! Do you hear? Come back to me, Diane!"

It made my blood run wildly. But Diane did not come back. Strange! And Bezers too was unmoved. He stood between the poor woman and the door, and by a gesture bid Mirepoix and the priest pass out before him. "Madame," he said—and his voice, stern and hard as ever, expressed no jot of compassion for her, rather such an impatient contempt as a puling child might elicit—"you are safe here. And here you will stop! Weep if you please," he added, cynically, "you will have fewer tears to shed to-morrow."

His last words—they certainly were odd ones—arrested her attention. She checked her sobs, being frightened, I think, and looked up at him. Perhaps he had spoken with this in view, for while she still stood at gaze, her hands pressed to her bosom, he slipped quickly out and closed the door behind him. I heard a muttering for an instant ouside, and then the tramp of feet descending the stairs. They were gone, and we were still undiscovered.

For madame, she had clean forgotten our presence—

of that I am sure—and the chance of escape we might afford. On finding herself alone she gazed a short time in alarmed silence at the door, and then ran to the window and peered out, still trembling, terrified, silent. So she remained a while.

She had not noticed that Bezers on going out had omitted to lock the door behind him. I had. But I was unwilling to move hastily. Some one might return to see to it before the vidame left the house. And besides the door was not over strong, and if locked would be no obstacle to the three of us when we had only Mirepoix to deal with. So I kept the others where they were by a nudge and a pinch, and held my breath a moment, straining my ears to catch the closing of the door below. I did not hear that. But I did catch a sound that otherwise might have escaped me, but which now riveted my eyes to the door of our room. Some one, in the silence which followed the trampling on the stairs, had cautiously laid a hand on the latch.

The light in the room was dim. Mirepoix had taken one of the candles with him, and the other wanted snuffing. I could not see whether the latch moved; whether or no it was rising. But watching intently, I made out that the door was being opened—slowly, noiselessly. I saw some one enter—a furtive gliding shadow.

For a moment I felt nervous; then I recognized the dark hooded figure. It was only Madame d'O. Brave woman! She had evaded the vidame and slipped back to the rescue. Ha, ha! We would defeat the vidame yet! Things were going better.

But then something in her manner—as she stood holding the door and peering into the room—something in her bearing startled and frightened me. As she came forward her movements were so stealthy that her footsteps made no sound. Her dark shadow, mov-

ing ahead of her across the floor, was not more silent than she. An undefined desire to make a noise, to give the alarm, seized me.

Half-way across the room she stopped to listen, and looked around, startled herself, I think, by the silence. She could not see her sister, whose figure was blurred by the outlines of the curtain; and no doubt she was puzzled to think what had become of her. The suspense which I felt, but did not understand, was so great that at last I moved, and the bed creaked.

In a moment her face was turned our way, and she glided forward, her features still hidden by the hood of her cloak. She was close to us now, bending over us. She raised her hand to her head, to shade her eyes as she looked more closely, I suppose; and I was wondering whether she saw us—whether she took the shapelessness in the shadow of the curtain for her sister, or could not make it out. I was thinking how we could best apprise her of our presence without alarming her, when Croisette dashed my thoughts to the winds. Criosette, with a tremendous whoop and a crash, bounded over me on to the floor!

She uttered a gasping cry—a cry of intense, awful fear. I have the sound in my ears even now. With that she staggered back, clutching the air. I heard the metallic clang and ring of something falling on the floor. I heard an answering cry of alarm from the window; and then Madame de Pavannes ran forward and caught her in her arms.

It was strange to find the room lately so silent become at once alive with whispering forms, as we came hastily to light. I cursed Croisette for his folly, and was immeasurably angry with him; but I had no time to waste words on him then. I hurried to the door to guard it. I opened it a hand's breadth and listened. All was quiet below; the house still. I took the key out of

the lock and put it in my pocket and went back. Marie and Croisette were standing a little apart from Madame de Pavannes, who, hanging over her sister, was by turns bathing her face and explaining our presence.

In a very few minutes Madame d'O seemed to recover, and sat up. The first shock of deadly terror had passed, but she was still pale. She still trembled, and shrank from meeting our eyes, though I saw her, when our attention was apparently directed elsewhere, glance at one another of us with a strange intentness, a shuddering curiosity. No wonder, I thought. She must have had a terrible fright—one that might have killed a more timid woman.

"What on earth did you do that for?" I asked Croisette, presently, my anger certainly not decreasing the more I looked at her beautiful face. "You might have killed her!"

In charity I supposed his nerves had failed him, for he could not even now give me a straightforward answer. His only reply was, "Let us get away! Let us get away from this horrible house!" and this he kept repeating with a shudder, as he moved restlessly to and fro.

"With all my heart!" I answered, looking at him with some contempt. "That is exactly what we are going to do!"

But all the same his words reminded me of something which in the excitement of the scene I had momentarily forgotten, and that was our duty. Pavannes must still be saved, though not for Kit; rather to answer to us for his sins. But he must be saved. And now that the road was open, every minute lost was a reproach to us. "Yes," I added, roughly, my thoughts turned into a more rugged channel, "you are right. This is no time for nursing. We must be going. Madame de Pavannes," I went on, addressing myself

to her, "you know the way home from here—to your house?"

"Oh, yes," she cried.

"That is well," I answered. "Then we will start. Your sister is sufficiently recovered now, I think. And we will not risk any further delay."

I did not tell her of her husband's danger, or that we suspected him of wronging her, and being in fact the cause of her detention. I wanted her services as a guide. That was the main point, though I was glad to be able to put her in a place of safety at the same time that we fulfilled our own mission.

She rose eagerly. "You are sure that we can get out?" she said.

"Sure," I replied, with a brevity worthy of Bezers himself.

And I was right. We trooped downstairs, making as little noise as possible, with the result that Mirepoix only took the alarm and came upon us when we were at the outer door, bungling with the lock. Then I made short work of him, checking his scared words of remonstrance by flashing my dagger before his eyes. I induced him in the same fashion—he was fairly taken by surprise—to undo the fastenings himself; and so, bidding him follow us at his peril, we slipped out one by one. We softly closed the door behind us. And lo! we were at last free—free and in the streets of Paris, with the cool night air fanning our brows. A church hard by tolled the hour of two, and the strokes were echoed, before we had gone many steps along the ill-paved way, by the solemn tones of the bell of Notre Dame.

We were free and in the streets, with a guide who knew the way. If Bezers had not gone straight from us to his vengeance, we might thwart him yet. I strode along quickly, Madame d'O by my side, the

others a little way in front. Here and there an oil-lamp, swinging from a pulley in the middle of the road, enabled us to avoid some obstacle more foul than usual, or to leap over a pool which had formed in the kennel. Even in my excitement, my country-bred senses rebelled against the sights and smells, the noisome air and oppressive closeness of the streets.

The town was quiet, and very dark where the smoky lamps were not hanging. Yet I wondered if it ever slept, for more than once we had to stand aside to give passage to a party of men hurrying along with links and arms. Several times, too, especially toward the end of our walk, I was surprised by the flashing of bright lights in a courtyard, the door of which stood half-open to right or left. Once I saw the glow of torches reflected ruddily in the windows of a tall and splendid mansion, a little withdrawn from the street. The source of the light was in the fore-court, hidden from us by a low wall, but I caught the murmur of voices and stir of many feet. Once a gate was stealthily opened and two armed men looked out, the act and their manner of doing it reminding me on the instant of those who had peeped out to inspect us some hours before in Bezers' house. And once, nay twice, in the mouth of a narrow alley, I discerned a knot of men standing motionless in the gloom. There was an air of mystery abroad, a feeling as of solemn stir and preparation going on under cover of the darkness, which awed and unnerved me.

But I said nothing of this, and Madame d'O was equally silent. Like most countrymen I was ready to believe in any exaggeration of the city's late hours, the more as she made no remark. I supposed, shaking off the momentary impression, that what I saw was innocent and normal. Besides, I was thinking what I should say to Pavannes when I saw him, in what

terms I should warn him of his peril, and cast his perfidy in his teeth.

We had hurried along in this way, and in absolute silence, save when some obstacle or pitfall drew from us an exclamation, for about a quarter of a mile, when my companion, turning into a slightly wider street, slackened her speed, and indicated by a gesture that we had arrived. A lamp hung over the porch, to which she pointed, and showed the small side gate half open. We were close behind the other three now. I saw Croisette stoop to enter, and as quickly fall back a pace. Why?

In a moment it flashed across my mind that we were too late—that the vidame had been before us.

And yet how quiet it all was!

Then I breathed freely again. I saw that Croisette had only stepped back to avoid some one who was coming out—the coadjutor in fact. The moment the entrance was clear the lad shot in, and the others after him, the priest taking no notice of them, nor they of him.

I was for going in, too, when I felt Madame d'O's hand tighten suddenly on my arm, and then fall from it. Apprised of something by this, I glanced at the priest's face, catching sight of it by chance, just as his eyes met hers. His face was white—nay, it was ugly with disappointment and rage—bitter, snarling rage, that was hardly human. He grasped her by the arm roughly and twisted her round without ceremony, so as to draw her a few paces aside, yet not so far that I could not hear what they said.

"He is not here!" he hissed. "Do you understand? He crossed the river to the Faubourg St. Germain at nightfall—searching for her. And he has not come back! He is on the other side of the water, and midnight has struck this hour past!"

She stood silent for a moment, as if she had received a blow—silent and dismayed. Something serious had happened. I could see that.

"He cannot recross the river now?" she said, after a time. "The gates——"

"Shut!" he replied, briefly. "The keys are at the Louvre."

"And the boats are on this side?"

"Every boat!" he answered, striking his one hand on the other with violence. "Every boat! No one may cross until it is over."

"And the Faubourg St. Germain?" she said, in a lower voice.

"There will be nothing done there. Nothing."

CHAPTER VII

A YOUNG KNIGHT-ERRANT

I would gladly have left the two together and gone straight into the house. I was eager now to discharge the errand on which I had come so far; and apart from this I had no liking for the priest or wish to overhear his talk. His anger, however, was so patent, and the rudeness with which he treated Madame d'O so pronounced, that I felt I could not leave her with him unless she should dismiss me. So I stood patiently enough—and awkwardly enough too, I dare say—by the door while they talked on in subdued tones. Nevertheless, I felt heartily glad when at length, the discussion ending, madame came back to me. I offered her my arm to help her over the wooden foot of the side gate. She laid her hand on it, but she stood still.

"M. de Caylus," she said, and at that stopped. Naturally I looked at her, and our eyes met. Hers brown and beautiful, shining in the light of the lamp overhead, looked into mine. Her lips were half parted, and one fair tress of hair had escaped from her hood. "M. de Caylus, will you do me a favor," she resumed, softly, "a favor for which I shall always be grateful?"

I sighed. "Madame," I said, earnestly, for I felt the solemnity of the occasion, "I swear that in ten minutes, if the task I now have in hand be finished I will devote my life to your service. For the present——"

"Well, for the present? But it is the present I want, Master Discretion."

"I must see M. de Pavannes! I am pledged to it," I ejaculated.

"To see M. de Pavannes?"

"Yes."

I was conscious that she was looking at me with eyes of doubt, almost of suspicion.

"Why? why?" she asked with evident surprise. "You have restored—and nearly frightened me to death in doing it—his wife to her home; what more do you want with him, most valiant knight-errant?"

"I must see him," I said, firmly. I would have told her all and been thankful, but the priest was within hearing, or barely out of it; and I had seen too much pass between him and Bezers to be willing to say anything before him.

"You must see M. de Pavannes?" she repeated, gazing at me.

"I must," I replied with decision.

"Then you shall. That is exactly what I am going to help you to do!" she exclaimed . "He is not here. That is what is the matter. He went out at nightfall seeking news of his wife, and crossed the river, the coadjutor says, to the Faubourg St. Germain. Now it is of the utmost importance that he should return before morning—return here."

"But is he not here?" I said, finding all my calculations at fault. "You are sure of it, madame?"

"Quite sure," she answered, rapidly. "Your brothers will have by this time discovered the fact. Now, M. de Caylus, Pavannes must be brought here before morning, not only for his wife's sake—though she will be wild with anxiety—but also——"

"I know," I said, eagerly interrupting her, "for his own, too: There is a danger threatening him."

She turned swiftly, as if startled, and I turned, and we looked at the priest. I thought we understood one another. "There is," she answered, softly, "and I would save him from that danger; but he will only be safe, as I happen to know, here! Here, you understand! He must be brought here before daybreak, M. de Caylus. He must! He must!" she exclaimed, her beautiful features hardening with the earnestness of her feelings. "And the coadjutor cannot go. I cannot go. There is only one who can save him, and that is yourself. There is, above all, not a moment to be lost."

My thoughts were in a whirl. Even as she spoke she began to walk back the way we had come, her hand on my arm; and I, doubtful, and in a confused way unwilling, went with her. I did not clearly understand the position. I would have wished to go in and confer with Marie and Croisette, but the juncture had occurred so quickly, and it might be that time was as valuable as she said, and—well, it was hard for me, a lad, to refuse her anything when she looked at me with appeal in her eyes. I did manage to stammer, "But I do not know Paris. I could not find my way, I am afraid; and it is night, madame."

She released my arm and stopped. "Night!" she cried, with a scornful ring in her voice. "Night! I thought you were a man, not a boy! You are afraid!"

"Afraid," I said, hotly, "we Cayluses are never afraid."

"Then I can tell you the way, if that be your only difficulty. We turn here. Now, come in with me a moment," she continued, "and I will give you something you will need—and your directions."

She had stopped at the door of a tall, narrow house, standing between larger ones, in a street which appeared to me to be more airy and important than any I had yet seen. As she spoke, she rang the bell once,

twice, thrice. The silvery tinkle had scarcely died away the third time before the door opened silently. I saw no one, but she drew me into a narrow hall or passage. A taper in an embossed holder was burning on a chest. She took it up, and telling me to follow her led the way lightly up the stairs and into a room, half-parlor, half-bedroom—such a room as I had never seen before. It was richly hung from ceiling to floor with blue silk, and lighted by the soft rays of lamps shaded by Venetian globes of delicate hues. The scent of cedar wood was in the air, and on the hearth, in a velvet tray, were some tiny puppies. A dainty disorder reigned everywhere. On one table a jewel case stood open, on another lay some lace garments, two or three masks, and a fan. A gemmed riding-whip and a silver-hilted poniard hung on the same peg. And, strangest of all, huddled away behind the door, I espied a plain, black-sheathed sword, and a man's gauntlets.

She did not wait a moment, but went at once to the jewel-case. She took from it a gold ring—a heavy seal ring. She held this out to me in the most matter-of-fact way, scarcely turning, in fact. "Put it on your finger," she said, hurriedly. "If you are stopped by soldiers, or if they will not give you a boat to cross the river, say boldly that you are on the king's service. Call for the officer and show that ring. Play the man. Bid him stop you at his peril!"

I hastily muttered my thanks, and she as hastily took something from a drawer and tore it into strips. Before I knew what she was doing she was on her knees by me, fastening a white band of linen round my left sleeve. Then she took my cap, and with the same precipitation fixed a fragment of the stuff in it, in the form of a rough cross.

"There," she said. "Now, listen, M. de Caylus. There is more afoot to-night than you know of. Those

badges will help you across to St. Germain, but the moment you land tear them off. Tear them off, remember. They will help you no longer. You will come back by the same boat, and will not need them. If you are seen to wear them as you return, they will command no respect, but, on the contrary, will bring you—and perhaps me—into trouble."

"I understand," I said, "but——"

"You must ask no questions," she retorted, waving one snowy finger before my eyes. "My knight-errant must have faith in me, as I have in him, or he would not be here at this time of night, and alone with me. But remember this also. When you meet Pavannes do not say you come from me. Keep that in your mind; I will explain the reason afterward. Say merely that his wife is found, and is wild with anxiety about him. If you say anything as to his danger he may refuse to come. Men are obstinate."

I nodded a smiling assent, thinking I understood. At the same time I permitted myself in my own mind a little discretion. Pavannes was not a fool, and the name of the vidame—but, however, I should see. I had more to say to him than she knew of. Meanwhile she explained very carefully the three turnings I had to take to reach the river, and the wharf where boats most commonly lay, and the name of the house in which I should find M. de Pavannes.

"He is at the Hôtel de Bailli," she said. "And there, I think that is all."

"No, not all," I said, hardily. "There is one thing I have not got. And that is a sword!"

She followed the direction of my eyes, started, and laughed—a little oddly. But she fetched the weapon. "Take it, and do not," she urged, "do not lose time. Do not mention me to Pavannes. Do not let the white badges be seen as you return. That is really all. And

now good luck!" She gave me her hand to kiss. "Good luck, my knight-errant, good luck—and come back to me soon!"

She smiled divinely, it seemed to me, as she said these last words, and the same smile followed me downstairs; for she leaned over the stair-head with one of the lamps in her hand and directed me how to draw the bolts. I took one backward glance as I did so at the fair stooping figure above me, the shining eyes and tiny outstretched hand, and then darting into the gloom I hurried on my way.

I was in a strange mood. A few minutes before I had been at Pavannes' door, at the end of our journey; on the verge of success. I had been within an ace, as I supposed at least, of executing my errand. I had held the cup of success in my hand. And it had slipped. Now the conflict had to be fought over again; the danger to be faced. It would have been no more than natural if I had felt the disappointment keenly; if I had almost despaired.

But it was otherwise—far otherwise. Never had my heart beat higher or more proudly than as I now hurried through the streets, avoiding such groups as were abroad in them, and intent only on observing the proper turnings. Never in any moment of triumph in after days, in love or war, did anything like the exhilaration, the energy, the spirit, of those minutes come back to me. I had a woman's badge in my cap—for the first time—the music of her voice in my ears. I had a magic ring on my finger, a talisman on my arm. My sword was at my side again. All round me lay a misty city of adventures, of danger and romance, full of the richest and most beautiful possibilities; a city of real witchery, such as I had read of in stories, through which those fairy gifts and my right hand should guide me safely. I did not even regret my brothers, or our

separation. I was the eldest. It was fitting that the cream of the enterprise should be reserved for me, Anne de Caylus. And to what might it not lead? In fancy I saw myself already a duke and peer of France; already I held the baton.

Yet while I exulted boyishly, I did not forget what I was about. I kept my eyes open, and soon remarked that the number of people passing to and fro in the dark streets had much increased within the last half-hour. The silence in which in groups or singly these figures stole by me was very striking. I heard no brawling, fighting or singing; yet if it were too late for these things, why were so many people up and about? I began to count presently, and found that at least half of those I met wore badges in their hats and on their arms, similar to mine, and that they all moved with a business-like air, as if bound for some rendezvous.

I was not a fool, though I was young, and in some matters less quick than Croisette. The hints which had been dropped by so many had not been lost on me. "There is more afoot to-night than you know of," Madame d'O had said. And having eyes as well as ears, I fully believed it. Something was afoot. Something was going to happen in Paris before morning. But what, I wondered. Could it be that a rebellion was about to break out? If so I was on the king's service, and all was well. I might even be going—and only eighteen—to make history! Or was it only a brawl on a great scale between two parties of nobles? I had heard of such things happening in Paris. Then —well, I did not see how I could act in that case. I must be guided by events.

I did not imagine anything else which it could be. That is the truth, though it may need explanation. I was accustomed only to the milder religious differences,

the more evenly balanced parties of Quercy, where the peace between the Catholics and Huguenots had been welcome to all save a very few. I could not gauge, therefore, the fanaticism of the Parisian populace, and lost count of the factor which made possible that which was going to happen—was going to happen in Paris before daylight as surely as the sun was going to rise! I knew that the Huguenot nobles were present in the city in great numbers, but it did not occur to me that they could as a body be in danger. They were many and powerful, and as was said, in favor with the king. They were under the protection of the King of Navarre—France's brother-in-law of a week, and the Prince of Condé; and though these princes were young, Coligny, the sagacious admiral, was old, and not much the worse, I had learned, for his wound. He at least was high in royal favor, a trusted counselor. Had not the king visited him on his sick bed and sat by him for an hour together?

Surely, I thought, if there were danger, these men would know of it. And then the Huguenots' main enemy, Henri le Balafré, the splendid Duke of Guise, "our great man," and "Lorraine," as the crowd called him—he, it was rumored, was in disgrace at court. In a word, these things, to say nothing of the peaceful and joyous occasion which had brought the Huguenots to Paris, and which seemed to put treachery out of the question, were more than enough to prevent me forecasting the event.

If for a moment, indeed, as I hurried along toward the river, anything like the truth occurred to me, I put it from me. I say with pride, I put it from me as a thing impossible. For, God forbid—one may speak out the truth these forty years back—God forbid, say I, that all Frenchmen should bear the blood-guiltiness

which came of other than French brains, though French were the hands that did the work.

I was not greatly troubled by my forebodings therefore; and the state of exaltation to which Madame d'O's confidence had raised my spirits lasted until one of the narrow streets by the Louvre brought me suddenly within sight of the river. Here faint moonlight, bursting momentarily through the clouds, was shining on the placid surface of the water. The fresh air played upon, and cooled my temples. And this was the quiet scene so abruptly presented to me, gave check to my thoughts, and somewhat sobered me.

At some distance to my left I could distinguish in the middle of the river the pile of buildings which crowd the Ile de la Cité, and could follow the nearer arm of the stream as it swept landward of these, closely hemmed in by houses, but unbroken as yet by the arches of the Pont Neuf, which I have lived to see built. Not far from me, on my right—indeed, within a stone's throw—the bulky mass of the Louvre rose dark and shapeless against the sky. Only a narrow open space—the foreshore—separated me from the water, beyond which I could see an irregular line of buildings, that no doubt formed the Faubourg St. Germain.

I had been told that I should find stairs leading down to the water, and boats moored at the foot of them, at this point. Accordingly, I walked quickly across the open space to a spot where I made out a couple of posts set up on the brink—doubtless to mark the landing place.

I had not gone ten paces, however, out of the shadow, before I chanced to look around, and discerned, with an unpleasant feeling, three figures detach themselves from it and advance in a row behind me, so as the better to cut off my retreat. I was not to succeed in

my enterprise too easily, then. That was clear. Still I thought it better to act as if I had not seen my followers, and, collecting myself, I walked as quickly as I could down to the steps. The three were by that time close upon me—within striking distance almost. I turned abruptly and confronted them.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" I said, eying them warily, my hand on my sword.

They did not answer, but separated more widely so as to form a half-circle, and one of them whistled. On the instant a knot of men started out of the line of houses, and came quickly across the strip of light toward us.

The position seemed serious. If I could have run indeed—but I glanced round, and found escape in that fashion impossible. There were men crouching on the steps behind me, between me and the river. I had fallen into a trap. Indeed, there was nothing for it now but to do as madame had bidden me, and play the man boldly. I had the words still ringing in my ears. I had enough of the excitement I had lately felt still bounding in my veins, to give nerve and daring. I folded my arms and drew myself up.

"Knaves!" I said, with as much quiet contempt as I could muster, "you mistake me. You do not know whom you have to deal with. Get me a boat, and let two of you row me across. Hinder me, and your necks shall answer for it—or your backs!"

A laugh and an oath of derision formed the only response, and before I could add more, the larger group arrived and joined the three.

"Who is it, Pierre?" asked one of these in a matter-of-fact way, which showed I had not fallen among mere thieves.

The speaker seemed to be the leader of the band. He had a feather in his bonnet, and I saw a steel

corselet gleam under his cloak when some one held up a lantern to examine me the better. His trunk-hose were striped with black, white, and green—the livery, as I learned afterwards, of Monsieur the King's brother, the Duke of Anjou, afterward Henry the Third; then a close friend of the Duke of Guise, and later his murderer. The captain spoke with a foreign accent, and his complexion was dark to swarthiness. His eyes sparkled and flashed like black beads. It was easy to see that he was an Italian.

"A gallant young cock, enough," the soldier who had whistled answered; "and not quite of the breed we expected." He held his lantern toward me and pointed to the white badge on my sleeve. "It strikes me we have caught a crow instead of a pigeon!"

"How comes this?" the Italian asked, harshly, addressing me. "Who are you? And why do you wish to cross the river at this time of night, young sir?"

I acted on the inspiration of the moment. "Play the man boldly," madame had said. I would, and I did with a vengeance. I sprang forward and, seizing the captain by the clasp of his cloak, shook him violently, and flung him off with all my force, so that he reeled. "Dog!" I exclaimed, advancing as if I would seize him again. "Learn how to speak to your betters! Am I to be stopped by such sweepings as you? Hark ye, I am on the king's service!"

He fairly spluttered with rage. "More like the devil's!" he exclaimed, pronouncing his words abominably, and fumbling vainly for his weapon. "King's service or no service, you do not insult Andrea Pallavicini!"

I could only vindicate my daring by greater daring, and I saw this even as, death staring me in the face, my heart seemed to stop. The man had his mouth open and his hand raised to give an order which would

certainly have sent Anne de Caylus from the world, when I cried passionately—it was my last chance, and I never wished to live more strongly than at that moment—I cried passionately, "Andrea Pallavicini, if such be your name, look at that! Look at that!" I repeated, shaking my open hand with the ring on it before his face, "and then hinder me if you dare! To-morrow if you have quarterings enough, I will see to your quarrel! Now send me on my way, or your fate be on your own head! Disobey—ay, do but hesitate—and I will call on these very men of yours to cut you down!"

It was a bold throw, for I staked all on a talisman of which I did not know the value! To me it was the turn of a die, for I had had no leisure to look at the ring, and knew no more than a babe whose it was. But the venture was as happy as desperate.

Andrea Pallavicini's expression—no pleasant one at the best of times—changed on the instant. His face fell as he seized my hand and peered at the ring long and intently. Then he cast a quick glance of suspicion at his men, of hatred at me. But I cared nothing for his glance, or his hatred. I saw already that he had made up his mind to obey the charm, and that for me was everything. "If you had shown that to me a little earlier, young sir, it would, may be, have been better for both of us," he said, a surly menace in his tone. And cursing his men for their stupidity, he ordered two of them to unmoor a boat.

Apparently the craft had been secured with more care than skill, for to loosen it seemed to be a work of time. Meanwhile I stood waiting in the midst of the group, anxious and yet exultant; an object of curiosity, and yet curious myself. I heard the guards whisper together, and caught such phrases as, "It is the Duc d'Aumule."

"No, it is not D'Aumale. It is nothing like him."

"Well, he has the duke's ring, fool!"

"The duke's?"

"Ay."

"Then it is all right, God bless him!" This last was uttered with extreme fervor.

I was conscious too of being the object of many respectful glances; and had just bidden the men on the steps below me to be quick, when I discovered with alarm three figures moving across the open space toward us, and coming apparently from the same point from which Pallavicini and his men had emerged.

In a moment I foresaw danger. "Now be quick there!" I cried again. But scarcely had I spoken before I saw that it was impossible to get afloat before these others came up, and I prepared to stand my ground resolutely.

The first words, however, with which Pallavicini saluted the newcomers scattered my fears. "Well, what the foul fiend do you want?" he exclaimed, rudely; and he rapped out half a dozen corpos before they could answer him. "What have you brought him here for, when I left him in the guardhouse? Imbeciles!"

"Captain Pallavicini," interposed the midmost of the three, speaking with patience—he was a man of about thirty, dressed with some richness, though his clothes were now disordered as though by a struggle—"I have induced these good men to bring me down—"

"Then," cried the captain, brutally interrupting him, "you have lost your labor, monsieur."

"You do not know me," replied the prisoner with sternness—a prisoner he seemed to be. "You do not understand that I am a friend of the Prince of Conde, and that—"

He would have said more, but the Italian again cut him short. "A fig for the Prince of Conde!" he cried; "I understand my duty. You may as well take things

easily. You cannot cross, and you cannot go home, and you cannot have any explanation; except that it is the king's will! Explanation," he grumbled, in a lower tone, "you will get it soon enough, I warrant! Before you want it!"

"But there is a boat going to cross," said the other, controlling his temper by an effort and speaking with dignity. "You told me that by the king's order no one could cross, and you arrested me because, having urgent need to visit St. Germain, I persisted. Now what does this mean, Captain Pallavicini? Others are crossing. I ask what this means?"

"Whatever you please, M. de Pavannes," the Italian retorted contemptuously. "Explain it for yourself."

I started as the name struck my ear, and at once cried out in surprise, "M. de Pavannes!" Had I heard aright?

Apparently I had, for the prisoner turned to me with a bow. "Yes, sir," he said, with dignity, "I am M. de Pavannes. I have not the honor of knowing you, but you seem to be a gentleman." He cast a withering glance at the captain as he said this. "Perhaps you will explain to me why this violence has been done to me. If you can, I shall consider it a favor; if not, pardon me."

I did not answer him at once, for a good reason—that every faculty I had was bent on a close scrutiny of the man himself. He was fair, and of a ruddy complexion. His beard was cut in the sharp pointed fashion of the court; and in these respects he bore a kind of likeness, a curious likeness, to Louis de Pavannes. But his figure was shorter and stouter. He was less martial in bearing, with more of the air of a scholar than a soldier. "You are related to M. Louis de Pavannes?" I said, my heart beginning to beat with an odd excitement. I think I foresaw already what was coming.

"I am Louis de Pavannes," he replied with impatience.

I stared at him in silence, thinking—thinking—thinking. And then I said, slowly, "You have a cousin of the same name?"

"I have."

"He fell prisoner to the Vicomte de Caylus at Moncontour?"

"He did," he answered, curtly. "But what of that, sir?"

Again I did not answer—at once. The murder was out. I remembered, in the dim fashion in which one remembers such things after the event, that I had heard Louis de Pavannes, when we first became acquainted with him, mention this cousin of the same name; the head of a younger branch. But our Louis living in Provence and the other in Normandy, the distance between their homes and the troubles of the times had loosened a tie which their common religion might have strengthened. They had scarcely ever seen one another. As Louis had spoken of his namesake but once during his long stay with us, and I had not foreseen the connection to be formed between our families, it was no wonder that in the course of months the chance word had passed out of my head, and I had clean forgotten the subject of it.

Here, however, he was before my eyes, and seeing him, I saw too what the discovery meant. It meant a most joyful thing—a most wonderful thing which I longed to tell Croisette and Marie. It meant that our Louis de Pavannes—my cheek burned for my want of faith in him—was no villain after all, but such a noble gentleman as we had always till this day thought him. It meant that he was no court gallant bent on breaking a country heart for sport, but Kit's own true lover! And—and it meant more—it meant that he was yet

in danger, and still ignorant of the vow that unchained fiend Bezers had taken to have his life! In pursuing his namesake we had been led astray, how sadly I only knew now. And had indeed lost most precious time.

"Your wife, M. de Pavannes—" I began in haste, seeing the necessity of explaining matters with the utmost quickness. "Your wife is——"

"Ah, my wife!" he cried, interrupting me, with anxiety in his tone. "What of her? You have seen her?"

"I have. She is safe at your house in the Rue de St. Merri."

"Thank heaven for that!" he replied fervently. Before he could say more Captain Andrea interrupted us. I could see that his suspicions were aroused afresh. He pushed rudely between us, and addressing me said, "Now, young sir, your boat is ready!"

"My boat?" I answered, while I rapidly considered the situation. Of course I did not want to cross the river now. No doubt Pavannes—this Pavannes—could guide me to Louis' address. "My boat?"

"Yes, it is waiting," the Italian replied, his black eyes roving from one to the other of us.

"Then let it wait," I answered haughtily, speaking with an assumption of anger. "Plague upon you for interrupting us! I shall not cross the river now. This gentleman can give me the information I want. I shall take him back with me."

"To whom?"

"To whom? To those who sent me, sirrah!" I thundered. "You do not seem to be much in the duke's confidence, Captain," I went on. "Now take a word of advice from me! There is nothing so easily cast off as an over-officious servant! He goes too far—and he goes like an old glove. An old glove," I repeated, grimly, sneering in his face, "which saves the hand and

suffers itself. Beware of too much zeal, Captain Pallavicini! It is a dangerous thing!"

He turned pale with anger at being thus treated by a beardless boy. But he faltered all the same. What I said was unpleasant, but the bravo knew it was true.

I saw the impression I had made, and I turned to the soldiers standing round.

"Bring here, my friends," I said, "M. de Pavannes' sword."

One ran up to the guard-house and brought it at once. They were towns-folk, burgher guards, or such like, and for some reason betrayed so evident a respect for me, that I soberly believe they would have turned on their temporary leader at my bidding. Pavannes took his sword and placed it under his arm. We both bowed ceremoniously to Pallavicini, who scowled in response, and slowly, for I was afraid to show any signs of haste, we walked across the moonlit space to the bottom of the street by which I had come. There the gloom swallowed us up at once. Pavannes touched my sleeve and stopped in the darkness.

"I beg to be allowed to thank you for your aid," he said, with emotion, turning and facing me. "Whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"M. Anne de Caylus, a friend of your cousin," I replied.

"Indeed!" he said. "Well, I thank you most heartily," and we embraced with warmth.

"But I could have done little," I answered modestly, "on your behalf, if it had not been for this ring."

"And the virtue of the ring lies in——?"

"In—I am sure I cannot say in what," I confessed. And then, in the sympathy which the scene had naturally created between us, I forgot one portion of my lady's commands and I added impulsively, "All I

know is that Madame d'O gave it me; and that it has done all, and more than all, she said it would."

"Who gave it to you?" he asked, grasping my arm so tightly as to hurt me.

"Madame d'O," I repeated. It was too late to draw back now.

"That woman!" he ejaculated, in a strange, low whisper. "Is it possible? That woman gave it you?"

I wondered what on earth he meant, surprise, scorn, and dislike were so blended in his tone. It even seemed to me that he drew off from me somewhat. "Yes, M. de Pavannes," I replied, offended and indignant; "it is so far possible that it is the truth; and more, I think you would not so speak of this lady if you knew all, and that it was through her your wife was to-day freed from those who were detaining her, and taken safely home."

"Ha!" he cried, eagerly, "then where has my wife been?"

"At the house of Mirepoix, the glover," I answered. coldly, "in the Rue Platriére. Do you know him? You do? Well, she was kept there a prisoner until we helped her to escape an hour or so ago."

He did not seem to comprehend even then. I could see little of his face, but there was doubt and wonder in his tones when he spoke. "Mirepoix, the glover," he murmured. "He is an honest man enough, though a Catholic. She was kept there! Who kept her there?"

"The Abbess of the Ursulines seems to have been at the bottom of it," I explained, fretting with impatience. This wonder was misplaced, I thought, and time was passing. "Madame d'O found out where she was," I continued, "and took her home, and then sent me to fetch you, hearing you had crossed the river. That is the story in brief."

"That woman sent you to fetch me?" he repeated again.

"Yes," I answered, angrily. "She did, M. de Pavannes."

"Then," he said, slowly, and with an air of solemn conviction which could not but impress me, "there is a trap laid for me! She is the worst, the most wicked, the vilest of women! If she sent you, this is a trap! And my wife has fallen into it already! Heaven help her—and me—if it be so!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE PARISIAN MATINS

There are some statements for which it is impossible to be prepared: statements so strong and so startling that it is impossible to answer them except by action—by a blow. And this of M. de Pavannes was one of these. If there had been any one present, I think I should have given him the lie and drawn upon him. But alone with him at midnight, in the shadow near the bottom of the Rue des Fosses, with no witnesses, with every reason to feel friendly toward him, what was I to do?

As a fact, I did nothing. I stood, silent and stupefied, waiting to hear more. He did not keep me long.

"She is my wife's sister," he continued, grimly. "But I have no reason to shield her on that account. Shield her? Had you lived at court only a month I might shield her all I could, M. de Caylus, it would avail nothing. Not Madame de Sauves is better known. And I would not, if I could. I know well, though my wife will not believe it, that there is nothing so near Madame d'O's heart as to get rid of her sister and me—of both of us—that she may succeed to Madeleine's inheritance! Oh, yes, I had good grounds for being nervous yesterday, when my wife did not return," he added, excitedly.

"But there at least you wrong Madame d'O," I cried, shocked and horrified by an accusation, which seemed so much more dreadful in the silence and gloom

—and withal so much less preposterous than it might have seemed in the daylight. "There you certainly wrong her! For shame! M. de Pavannes."

He came a step nearer, and laying a hand on my sleeve, peered into my face. "Did you see a priest with her?" he asked, slowly. "A man called the coadjutor—a down-looking dog?"

I said—with a shiver of dread, a sudden revulsion of feeling, born of his manner—that I had. And I explained the part the priest had taken.

"Then," Pavannes rejoined. "I am right. There is a trap laid for me. The Abbess of the Ursulines! She abduct my wife? Why, she is her dearest friend, believe me. It is impossible. She would be more likely to save her from danger than to—umph! wait a minute." I did; I waited, dreading what he might discover, until he muttered, checking himself—"Can that be it? Can it be that the abbess did know of some danger threatening us, and would have put Madeleine in a safe retreat? I wonder!"

And I wondered; and then — well, thoughts are like gunpowder; the least spark will fire a train. His words were few, but they formed spark enough to raise such a flare in my brain as for a moment blinded me, and shook me so that I trembled. The shock over, I was left face to face with a possibility of wickedness such as I could never have suspected of myself. I remembered Mirepoix's distress and the priest's eagerness. I recalled the gruff warning Bezers—even Bezers, and there was something very odd in Bezers giving a warning!—had given Madame de Pavannes when he told her that she would be better where she was. I thought of the wakefulness which I had marked in the streets, the silent hurrying to and fro, the signs of coming strife, and contrasted these with the quietude and seeming safety of Mirepoix's house;

and I hastily asked Pavannes at what time he had been arrested.

"About an hour before midnight," he answered.

"Then you know nothing of what is happening?" I replied, quickly. "Why, even while we are loitering here—but listen!"

And with all speed, stammering indeed in my haste and anxiety, I told him what I had noticed in the streets, and the hints I had heard, and I showed him the badges with which madame had furnished me.

His manner when he had heard me out frightened me still more. He drew me on in a kind of fury to a house in the windows of which some lighted candles had appeared not a minute before. "The ring!" he cried, "let me see the ring! Whose is it?"

He held up my hand to this chance light and we looked at the ring. It was a heavy gold signet, with one curious characteristic; it had two facets. On one of these was engraved the letter "H," and above it a crown. On the other was an eagle with outstretched wings.

Pavannes let my hand drop and leaned against the wall in sudden despair. "It is the Duke of Guise's," he muttered. "It is the eagle of Lorraine."

"Ha!" said I, softly, seeing light. The duke was the idol then, as later, of the Parisian populace, and I understood now why the citizen soldiers had shown me such respect. They had taken me for the duke's envoy and confidant.

But I saw no farther. Pavannes did, and murmured bitterly, "We may say our prayers, we Huguenots. That is our death-warrant. To-morrow night there will not be one left in Paris, lad. Guise has his father's death to avenge, and these cursed Parisians will do his bidding like the wolves they are! The Baron de

Rosny warned us of this, word for word. I would to heaven we had taken his advice!"

"Stay!" I cried—he was going too fast for me—"stay!" His monstrous conception, though it marched some way with my own suspicions, outran them far. I saw no sufficient grounds for it. "The king—the king would not permit such a thing, M. de Pavannes," I argued.

"Boy, you are blind!" he rejoined, impatiently, for now he saw all and I nothing. "Yonder was the Duke of Anjou's captain—Monsieur's officer, the follower of France's brother, mark you! And he—he obeyed the duke's ring! The duke has a free hand to-night, and he hates us. And the river. Why are we not to cross the river? The king indeed! The king has undone us. He has sold us to his brother and the Guises. Va chasser l'Idole"—for the second time I heard the quaint phrase, which I learned afterward was an anagram of the king's name, Charles de Valois, used by the Protestants as a password—"Va chasser l'Idole has betrayed us! I remember the very words he used to the admiral, 'Now we have got you here we shall not let you go so easily!' Oh, the traitor! The wretched traitor!"

He leaned against the wall, overcome by the horror of the conviction which had burst upon him, and unnerved by the imminence of the peril. At all times he was an unready man, I fancy, more fit, courage apart, for the college than the field, and now he gave way to despair. Perhaps the thought of his wife unmanned him. Perhaps the excitement through which he had already gone tended to stupefy him, or the suddenness of the discovery.

At any rate, I was the first to gather my wits together, and my earliest impulse was to tear into two parts a white handkerchief I had in my pouch, and

fasten one to his sleeve, the other in his hat, in rough imitation of the badges I wore myself.

It will appear from this that I no longer trusted Madame d'O. I was not convinced, it is true, of her conscious guilt, still I did not trust her entirely. "Do not wear them on your return," she had said and that was odd; although I could not yet believe that she was such a siren as Father Pierre had warned us of, telling tales from old poets. Yet I doubted, shuddering as I did so. Her companionship with that vile priest, her strange eagerness to secure Pavannes' return her mysterious directions to me, her anxiety to take her sister home—home, where she would be exposed to danger, as being in a known Huguenot's house—these things pointed to but one conclusion, still that one was so horrible that I would not, even while I doubted and distrusted her, I would not, I could not accept it. I put it from me, and refused to believe it, although during the rest of that night it kept coming back to me and knocking for admission at my brain.

All this flashed through my mind while I was fixing on Pavannes' badges. Not that I lost time about it, for from the moment I grasped the position as he conceived it, every minute we had wasted on explanations seemed to me an hour. I reproached myself for having forgotten even for an instant that which had brought us to town—the rescue of Kit's lover. We had small chance now of reaching him in time, misled as we had been by this miserable mistake in identity. If my companion's fears were well-founded, Louis would fall in the general massacre of the Huguenots, probably before we could reach him. If ill-founded, still we had small reason to hope. Bezers' vengeance would not wait. I knew him too well to think it. A Guise might spare his foe, but the vidame—the vidame never! He had warned Madame de Pavannes it was true; but that ab-

normal exercise of benevolence could only, I cynically thought, have the more exasperated the devil within him, which now would be ravening like a dog disappointed of its victuals.

I glanced up at the line of sky visible between the tall houses, and lo! the dawn was coming. It wanted scarcely half an hour of daylight, though down in the dark streets about us the night still reigned. Yes, the morning was coming, bright and hopeful, and the city was quiet. There were no signs, no sounds of riot or disorder. Surely, I thought, surely Pavannes must be mistaken. Either the plot had never existed, that was most likely, or it had been abandoned, or perhaps—crack!

A pistol shot! Short, sharp, ominous it rang out on the instant, a solitary sound in the night! It was somewhere near us, and I stopped. I had been speaking to my companion at the moment. "Where was it?" I cried, looking behind me.

"Close to us. Near the Louvre," he answered, listening intently. "See! See! Ah, heavens!" he continued in a voice of despair, "it was a signal!"

It was. One, two, three! Before I could count so far, lights sprang into brightness in the windows of nine out of ten houses in the short street where we stood, as if lighted by a single hand. Before, too, I could count as many more, or ask him what this meant; before indeed we could speak or stir from the spot, or think what we should do, with a hurried clang and clash, as if brought into motion by furious, frenzied hands, a great bell just above our heads began to boom and whirr. It hurled its notes into space, it suddenly filled all the silence. It dashed its harsh sounds down upon the trembling city till the air heaved, and the houses about us rocked. It made in an instant a pandemonium of the quiet night.

We turned and hurried instinctively from the place, crouching and amazed, looking upward with bent shoulders and scared faces. "What is it? what is it?" I cried, half in resentment, half in terror. It deafened me.

"The bell of St. Germain l'Auxerrois!" he shouted in answer. "The church of the Louvre. It is as I said. We are doomed!"

"Doomed? No!" I replied fiercely, for my courage seemed to rise again on the wave of sound and excitement as if rebounding from the momentary shock. "Never! We wear the devil's livery, and he will look after his own. Draw, man, and let him that stops us look to himself. You know the way. Lead on!" I cried, savagely.

He caught the infection and drew his sword. So we started boldly, and the result justified my confidence. We looked, no doubt, as like murderers as any who were abroad that night. Moving in this desperate guise we hastened up that street and into another—still pursued by the din and clangor of the bell—and then a short distance along a third. We were not stopped or addressed by any one, though numbers, increasing each moment as door after door opened, and we drew nearer to the heart of the commotion, were hurrying in the same direction, side by side with us; and though in front, where now and again lights gleamed on a mass of weapons, or on white eager faces, filling some alley from wall to wall, we heard the roar of voices rising and falling like the murmur of an angry sea.

All was blurr, hurry, confusion, tumult. Yet I remember, as we pressed onward with the stream and part of it, certain sharp outlines. I caught here and there a glimpse of a pale scared face at a window, a half-clad form at a door, of the big, wondering eyes of a child held up to see us pass, of a Christ at a corner

ruddy in the smoky glare of a link, of a woman armed, and in man's clothes, who walked some distance side by side with us, and led off a ribald song. I retain a memory of these things; of brief bursts of light and long intervals of darkness, and always, as we tramped forward, my hand on Pavannes' sleeve, of an ever-growing tumult in front—an ever-rising flood of noise.

At last we came to a standstill where a side street ran out of ours. Into this the hurrying throng tried to wheel, and, unable to do so, halted, and pressed about the head of the street, which was already full to overflowing; and so fought with hungry eyes for places whence they might look down it. Pavannes and I struggled only to get through the crowd—to get on; but the efforts of those behind partly aiding and partly thwarting our own, presently forced us to a position whence we could not avoid seeing what was afoot.

The street—this side street—was ablaze with light. From end to end every gable, every hatchment was glowing, every window was flickering in the glare of torches. It was paved too with faces—human faces, yet scarcely human—all looking one way, all looking upward; and the noise, as from time to time this immense crowd groaned or howled in unison, like a wild beast in its fury, was so appalling, that I clutched Pavannes' arm and clung to him in momentary terror. I do not wonder now that I quailed, though sometimes I have heard that sound since. For there is nothing in the world so dreadful as that brute beast we call the canaille, when the chain is off and its cowardly soul is roused.

Near our end of the street a group of horsemen, rising island-like from the sea of heads, sat motionless in their saddles about a gateway. They were silent, taking no notice of the rioting fiends shouting at their girths, but watching in grim quiet what was passing within the

gates. They were handsomely dressed, although some wore corselets over their satin coats or lace above buff jerkins. I could even at that distance see the jewels gleam in the bonnet of one who seemed to be their leader. He was in the center of the band, a very young man, perhaps twenty or twenty-one, of most splendid presence, sitting his horse superbly. He wore a gray riding-coat, and was a head taller than any of his companions. There was pride in the very air with which his horse bore him.

I did not need to ask Pavannes who he was. I knew that he was the Duke of Guise, and that the house before which he stood was Coligny's. I knew what was being done there. And in the same moment I sickened with horror and rage. I had a vision of gray hairs and blood and fury scarcely human. And I rebelled. I battled with the rabble about me. I forced my way through them tooth and nail after Pavannes, intent only on escaping, only on getting away from there. And so we neither halted nor looked back until we were clear of the crowd, and had left the blaze of light and the work doing by it some way behind us.

We found ourselves then in the mouth of an obscure alley which my companion whispered would bring us to his house, and here we paused to take breath and look back. The sky was red behind us, the air full of the dash and din of the tocsin, and the flood of sounds which poured from every tower and steeple. From the eastward came the rattle of drums and random shots, and shrieks of "A bas Coligny!" "A bas les Huguenots!" Meanwhile the city was rising as one man, pale at this dread awakening. From every window men and women, frightened by the uproar, were craning their necks, asking or answering questions or hurriedly calling for and kindling tapers. But as yet the general

populace seemed to be taking no active part in the disorder.

Pavannes raised his hat an instant as we stood in the shadow of the houses. "The noblest man in France is dead," he said, softly and reverently. "God rest his soul! They have had their way with him, and killed him like a dog! He was an old man, and they did not spare him! A noble, and they have called in the canaille to tear him! But be sure, my friend," and as the speaker's tone changed, and grew full and proud, his form seemed to swell with it; "be sure the cruel shall not live out half their days! No. He that takes the knife shall perish by the knife! And go to his own place! I shall not see it, but you will!"

His words made no great impression on me then. My hardihood was returning. I was throbbing with fierce excitement, and tingling for the fight. But years afterward, when the two who stood highest in the group about Coligny's threshold died, the one at thirty-eight, the other at thirty-five—when Henry of Guise and Henry of Valois died within six months of one another by the assassin's knife—I remembered Pavannes' augury. And remembering it, I read the ways of Providence, and saw that the very audacity of which Guise took advantage to entrap Coligny led him too in his turn to trip, smiling and bowing, a comfit box in his hand, and the kisses of his mistress damp on his lips, into a king's closet, a king's closet at Blois! Led him to lift the curtain—ah! to lift the curtain, what Frenchman does not know the tale?—behind which stood the admiral!

To return to our own fortunes: After a hurried glance we resumed our way, and sped through the alley, holding a brief consultation as we went. Pavannes' first hasty instinct to seek shelter at home began to lose its force, and he to consider whether his return

would not endanger his wife. The mob might be expected to spare her, he argued. Her death would not benefit any private foes if he escaped. He was for keeping away therefore. But I would not agree to this. The priest's crew of desperadoes, assuming Pavannes' suspicions to be correct, would wait some time, no doubt to give the master of the house a chance to return, but would certainly attack sooner or later out of greed, if from no other motive. Then the lady's fate would at the best be uncertain. I was anxious myself to rejoin my brothers, and take all future chances, whether of saving our Louis, or escaping ourselves, with them. United we should be four good swords, and might at least protect Madame de Pavannes to a place of safety, if no opportunity of succoring Louis should present itself. We had too the duke's ring, and this might be of service at a pinch. "No," I urged, "let us get together. We two will slip in at the front gate, and bolt and bar it, and then we will all escape in a body at the back, while they are forcing the gateway."

"There is no door at the back," he answered, shaking his head.

"There are windows?"

"They are too strongly barred. We could not break out in the time," he explained, with a groan.

I paused at that, crestfallen. But danger quickened my wits. In a moment I had another plan, not so hopeful and more dangerous, yet worth trying I thought. I told him of it, and he agreed to it. As he nodded assent we emerged into a street, and I saw, for the gray light of morning was beginning to penetrate between the houses, that we were only a few yards from the gateway, and the small door by which I had seen my brothers enter. Were they still in the

house? Were they safe? I had been away an hour at least.

Anxious as I was about them, I looked around me very keenly as we flitted across the road, and knocked gently at the door. I thought it so likely that we should be fallen upon here, that I stood on my guard while we waited. But we were not molested. The street, being at some distance from the center of the commotion, was still and empty, with no signs of life apparent except the rows of heads poked through the windows—all possessing eyes which watched us heedfully and in perfect silence. Yes, the street was quite empty, except—except, ah! except, for that lurking figure, which, even as I espied it, shot round a distant angle of the wall, and was lost to sight.

"There!" I cried, reckless now who might hear me, "knock! knock louder! never mind the noise. The alarm is given. A score of people are watching us, and yonder spy has gone off to summon his friends."

The truth was my anger was rising. I could bear no longer the silent regards of all those eyes at the windows. I writhed under them—cruel, pitiless, eyes they were. I read in them a morbid curiosity, a patient anticipation that drove me wild. Those men and women gazing on us so stonily knew my companion's rank and faith. They had watched him riding in and out daily, one of the sights of their street, gay and gallant; and now with the same eyes they were watching greedily for the butchers to come. The very children took a fresh interest in him, as one doomed and dying; and waited panting for the show to begin. So I read them.

"Knock!" I repeated, angrily, losing all patience. Had I been foolish in bringing him back to this part of the town where every soul knew him? "Knock; we must get in, whether or no. They can not all have left the house!"

I kicked the door desperately, and my relief was great when it opened. A servant with a pale face stood before me, his knees visibly shaking. And behind him was Croisette.

I think we fell straightway into one another's arms.

"And Marie," I cried, "Marie!"

"Marie is within, and madame," he answered, joyfully; "we are together again and nothing matters. But oh, Anne, where have you been? And what is the matter? Is it a great fire? Or is the king dead? Or what is it?"

I told him. I hastily poured out some of the things which had happened to me, and some which I feared were in store for others. Naturally he was surprised and shocked by the latter, though his fears had already been aroused. But his joy and relief when he heard the mystery of Louis de Pavannes' marriage explained, were so great that they swallowed up all other feelings. He could not say enough about it. He pictured Louis again and again as Kit's lover, as our old friend, our companion; as true, stanch, brave without fear, without reproach; and it was long before his eyes ceased to sparkle, his tongue to run merrily, the color to mantle in his cheeks—long, that is, as time is counted by minutes. But presently the remembrance of Louis' danger and our own position returned more vividly. Our plan for rescuing him had failed—failed!

"No! no!" cried Croisette, stoutly. He would not hear of it. He would not have it at any price. "No, we will not give up hope! We will go shoulder to shoulder and find him. Louis is as brave as a lion and as quick as a weasel. We will find him in time yet. We will go when—I mean as soon as—"

He faltered and paused. His sudden silence, as he looked round the empty forecourt in which we stood, was eloquent. The cold light, faint and uncertain yet,

was stealing into the court, disclosing a row of stables on either side, and a tiny porter's hutch by the gates, and fronting us a noble house of four stories, tall, gray, grim-looking.

I assented; gloomily, however. "Yes," I said, "we will go when—"

And, I too, stopped. The same thought was in my mind. How could we leave these people? How could we leave madame in her danger and distress? How could we return her kindness by desertion? We could not. No, not for Kit's sake. Because after all Louis, our Louis, was a man, and must take his chance. He must take his chance. But I groaned.

So that was settled. I had already explained our plan to Croisette; and now, as we waited, he began to tell me a story, a long, confused story, about Madame d'O. I thought he was talking for the sake of talking —to keep up our spirits—and I did not attend much to him; so that he had not reached the gist of it, or at least I had not grasped it, when a noise without stayed his tongue. It was the tramp of footsteps, apparently of a large party in the street. It forced him to break off, and promptly drove us all to our posts.

But before we separated a slight figure, hardly noticeable in that dim, uncertain light, passed me quickly, laying for an instant a soft hand in mine as I stood waiting by the gates. I have said I scarcely saw the figure, though I did see the kind, timid eyes, and the pale cheeks under the hood; but I bent over the hand and kissed it, and felt, truth to tell, no more regret nor doubt where our duty lay. But stood, waiting patiently.

CHAPTER IX

THE HEAD OF ERASMUS

Waiting, and waiting alone! The gates were almost down now. The gang of ruffians without, reinforced each moment by volunteers eager for plunder, rained blows unceasingly on hinge and socket; and still hotter and faster through a dozen rifts in the timbers came the fire of their threats and curses. Many grew tired, but others replaced them. Tools broke, but they brought more and worked with savage energy. They had shown at first a measure of prudence, looking to be fired on, and to be resisted by men surprised, indeed, but desperate; and the bolder of them only had advanced. But now they pressed round unchecked, meeting no resistance. They would scarcely stand back to let the sledges have swing; but hallooed and ran in on the creaking beams and beat them with their fists whenever the gates swayed under a blow.

One stout iron bar still held its place. And this I watched as if fascinated. I was alone in the empty courtyard, standing a little aside, sheltered by one of the stone pillars from which the gates hung. Behind me the door of the house stood ajar. Candles, which the daylight rendered garish, still burned in the rooms on the first floor, of which the tall, narrow windows were open. On the wide stone sill of one of these stood Croisette, a boyish figure, looking silently down at me, his hand on the latticed shutter. He looked pale, and I nodded and smiled to him. I felt rather anger

than fear myself; remembering, as the fiendish cries half deafened me, old tales of the Jacquerie and its doings, and how we had trodden it out.

Suddenly the din and tumult flashed to a louder note; as when hounds on the scent give tongue at sight. I turned quickly from the house, recalled to a sense of the position and peril. The iron bar was yielding to the pressure. Slowly the left wing of the gate was sinking inward. Through the widening chasm I caught a glimpse of wild, grimy faces and bloodshot eyes, and heard above the noise a sharp cry from Croisette, a cry of terror. Then I turned and ran, with a defiant gesture and an answering yell, right across the forecourt and up the steps to the door.

I ran the faster for the sharp report of a pistol behind me, and the whirr of a ball past my ear. But I was not scared by it, and as my feet alighted with a bound on the topmost step, I glanced back. The dogs were half-way across the court. I made a bungling attempt to shut and lock the great door—failed in this; and heard behind me a roar of coarse triumph. I waited for no more. I darted up the oak staircase four steps at a time, and rushed into the great drawing-room on my left, banging the door behind me.

The once splendid room was in a state of strange disorder. Some of the rich tapestry had been hastily torn down. One window was closed and shuttered; no doubt Croisette had done it. The other two were open, as if there had not been time to close them, and the cold light which they admitted contrasted in ghastly fashion with the yellow rays of candles still burning in the sconces. The furniture had been huddled aside or piled into a barricade, a chevaux de frise of chairs and tables stretching across the width of the room, its interstices stuffed with and its weakness partly screened by the torn-down hangings. Behind this frail

defense, their backs to a door which seemed to lead to an inner room, stood Marie and Croisette, pale and defiant. The former had a long pike; the latter leveled a heavy, bell-mouthed arquebuse across the back of a chair, and blew up his match as I entered. Both had in addition procured swords. I darted like a rabbit through a little tunnel left on purpose for me in the rampart, and took my stand by them.

"Is all right?" ejaculated Croisette, turning to me nervously.

"All right, I think," I answered. I was breathless.

"You are not hurt?"

"Not touched!"

I had just time then to draw my sword before the assailants streamed into the room, a dozen ruffians, reeking and tattered, with flushed faces and greedy, staring eyes. Once inside, however, suddenly—so suddenly that an idle spectator might have found the change ludicrous—they came to a stop. Their wild cries ceased, and tumbling over one another with curses and oaths they halted, surveying us in muddled surprise; seeing what was before them, and not liking it. Their leader appeared to be a tall butcher, with a pole-axe on his half-naked shoulder, but there were among them two or three soldiers in the royal livery and carrying pikes. They had looked for victims only, having met with no resistance at the gate, and the foremost recoiled now on finding themselves confronted by the muzzle of the arquebuse and the lighted match.

I seized the occasion. I knew, indeed, that the pause presented our only chance, and I sprang on a chair and waved my hand for silence. The instinct of obedience for the moment asserted itself; there was a stillness in the room.

"Beware!" I cried, loudly—as loudly and confidently as I could, considering that there was a quaver at my

heart as I looked on those savage faces, which met and yet avoided my eye. "Beware of what you do! We are Catholics one and all like yourselves, and good sons of the church. Ay, and good subjects, too! Vive le roi, gentlemen! God save the king! I say." And I struck the barricade with my sword until the metal rang again. "God save the king!"

"Cry Vive la Messe!" shouted one.

"Certainly, gentlemen!" I replied, with politeness. "With all my heart. Vive la Messe! Vive la Messe!"

This took the butcher, who luckily was still sober, utterly aback. He had never thought of this. He stared at us as if the ox he had been about to fell had opened his mouth and spoken, and, grievously at a loss, he looked for help to his companions.

Later in the day, some Catholics were killed by the mob. But their deaths, as far as could be learned afterward, were due to private feuds. Save in such cases—and they were few—the cry of Vive la Messe! always obtained at least a respite; more easily of course in the earlier hours of the morning when the mob were scarce at ease in their liberty to kill, while killing still seemed murder, and men were not yet drunk with bloodshed.

I read the hesitation of the gang in their faces, and when one asked roughly who we were, I replied with greater boldness, "I am M. Anne de Caylus, nephew to the Vicomte de Caylus, governor, under the king, of Bayonne and the Landes!" This I said with what majesty I could. "And these," I continued, "are my brothers. You will harm us at your peril, gentlemen. The vicomte, believe me, will avenge every hair of our heads."

I can shut my eyes now and see the stupid wonder, the balked ferocity, of those gaping faces. Dull and savage as the men were, they were impressed; they

saw reason indeed, and all seemed going well for us when some one in the rear shouted, "Cursed whelps! Throw them over!"

I looked swiftly in the direction whence the voice came—the darkest corner of the room—the corner by the shuttered window. I thought I made out a slender figure, cloaked and masked, a woman's it might be, but I could not be certain, and beside it a couple of sturdy fellows, who kept apart from the herd and well behind their fugelman.

The speaker's courage arose no doubt from his position at the back of the room, for the foremost of the assailants seemed less determined. We were only three, and we must have gone down, barricade and all, before a rush. But three are three. And an arquebuse—Croisette's match burned splendidly—well loaded with slugs is an ugly weapon at five paces, and makes nasty wounds, besides scattering its charge famously. This a good many of them, and the leaders in particular, seemed to recognize. We might certainly take two or three lives, and life is valuable to its owner when plunder is afoot. Besides, most of them had common sense enough to remember that there were scores of Huguenots, genuine heretics, to be robbed for the killing; so why go out of the way, they reasoned, to cut a Catholic throat and perhaps get into trouble? Why risk Montfaucon for a whim, and offend a man of influence like the Vicomte de Caylus for nothing?

Unfortunately at this crisis their original design was recalled to their minds by the same voice behind crying out, "Pavannes! Where is Pavannes?"

"Ay!" shouted the butcher, grasping the idea and at the same time spitting on his hands and taking a fresh grip of the axe. "Show us the heretic dog, and go! Let us at him."

"M. de Pavannes," I said, coolly—but I could not

take my eyes off the shining blade of that man's axe, it was so very broad and sharp—"is not here!"

"That is a lie! He is in that room behind you!" the prudent gentleman in the background called out. "Give him up!"

"Ay, give him up!" echoed the man of the pole-axe almost good-naturedly, "or it will be the worse for you. Let us have at him and get you gone!"

This with an air of much reason, while a growl as of a chained beast ran through the crowd, mingled with cries of "A mort les Huguenots! Vive Lorraine!" cries which seemed to show that all did not approve of the indulgence offered us.

"Beware, gentlemen, beware," I urged; "I swear he is not here! I swear it; do you hear?"

A howl of impatience and then a sudden movement of the crowd as though the rush were coming, warned me to temporize no longer. "Stay! Stay!" I added, hastily. "One minute! Hear me! You are too many for us. Will you swear to let us go safe and untouched if we give you passage?"

A dozen voices shrieked assent. But I looked at the butcher only. He seemed to be an honest man out of his profession.

"Ay, I swear it!" he cried, with a nod.

"By the mass?"

"By the mass."

I twitched Croisette's sleeve, and he tore the fuse from his weapon and flung the gun—too heavy to be of use to us longer—to the ground. It was done in a moment. While the mob swept over the barricade and smashed the rich furniture of it in wanton malice, we filed aside and nimbly slipped under it one by one. Then we hurried single file to the end of the room, no one taking much notice of us. All were pressing on, intent on their prey. We gained the door as the butcher struck

his first blow on that which we had guarded—on that which we had given up. We sprang down the stairs with bounding hearts, heard as we reached the outer door the roar of many voices, but stayed not to look behind—paused indeed for nothing. Fear, to speak candidly, lent us wings. In three seconds we had leaped the prostrate gates and were in the street. A cripple, two or three dogs, a knot of women looking timidly yet curiously in, a horse tethered to the staple—we saw nothing else. No one stayed us. No one raised a hand, and in another minute we had turned a corner and were out of sight of the house.

"They will take a gentleman's word another time," I said, with a quiet smile, as I put up my sword.

"I would like to see her face at this moment," Croisette replied. "You saw Madame d'O?"

I shook my head, not answering. I was not sure, and I had a queer, sickening dread of the subject. If I had seen her, I had seen—oh! it was too horrible, too unnatural! Her own sister! Her own brother-in-law.

I hastened to change the subject. "The Pavannes," I made shift to say, "must have had five minutes' start."

"More," Croisette answered, "if madame and he got away at once. If all has gone well with them, and they have not been stopped in the streets they should be at Mirepoix's by now. They seemed to be pretty sure that he would take them in."

"Ah!" I sighed. "What fools we were to bring madame from that place! If we had not meddled with her affairs we might have reached Louis long ago—our Louis, I mean."

"True," Croisette answered softly, "but remember that then we should not have saved the other Louis, as I trust we have. He would still be in Pallavicini's hands. Come, Anne, let us think it is all for the best,"

he added, his face shining with a steady courage that shamed me. "To the rescue! Heaven will help us to be in time yet!"

"Ay, to the rescue!" I replied, catching his spirit. "First to the right, I think, second to the left, first on the right again. That was the direction given us, was it not? The house opposite a book-shop with the sign of the Head of Erasmus. Forward, boys! We may do it yet."

But before I pursue our fortunes farther, let me explain. The room we had guarded so jealously was empty! The plan had been mine and I was proud of it. For once Croisette had fallen into his right place. My flight from the gate, the vain attempt to close the house, the barricade before the inner door—these were all designed to draw the assailants to one spot. Pavannes and his wife—the latter hastily disguised as a boy—had hidden behind the door of the hutch by the gates—the porter's hutch, and had slipped out and fled in the first confusion of the attack.

Even the servants, as we learned afterward, who had hidden themselves in the lower parts of the house, got away in the same manner, though some of them—they were but few in all—were stopped as Huguenots and killed before the day ended. I had the more reason to hope that Pavannes and his wife would get clear off, inasmuch as I had given the duke's ring to him, thinking it might serve him in a strait, and believing that we should have little to fear ourselves, once clear of his house, unless we should meet the vidame indeed.

We did not meet him as it turned out, but before we had traversed a quarter of the distance we had to go we found that fears based on reason were not the only terrors we had to resist. Pavannes' house, where we had hitherto been, stood at some distance from the center of the blood-storm which was enwrapping un-

happy Paris that morning. It was several hundred paces from the Rue de Bethisy where the admiral lived, and what with this comparative remoteness and the excitement of our own little drama, we had not attended much to the fury of the bells, the shots and cries and uproar which proclaimed the state of the city. We had not pictured the scenes which were happening so near. Now in the streets the truth broke upon us, and drove the blood from our cheeks. A hundred yards, the turning of a corner, sufficed. We who but yesterday left the country, who only a week before were boys, careless as other boys, not recking of death at all, were plunged now into the midst of horrors I can not describe. And the awful contrast between the sky above and the things about us! Even now the lark was singing not far from us; the sunshine was striking the topmost stories of the houses; the fleecy clouds were passing overhead, the freshness of a summer morning was—

Ah! where was it? Not here in the narrow lanes surely, that echoed and re-echoed with shrieks and curses and frantic prayers; in which bands of furious men rushed up and down, and where archers of the guard and the more cruel rabble were breaking in doors and windows, and hurrying with bloody weapons from house to house, seeking, pursuing, and at last killing in some horrid corner, some place of darkness—killing with blow on blow dealt on writhing bodies! Not here, surely, where each minute a child, a woman died silently, a man snarling like a wolf—happy if he had snatched his weapon and got his back to the wall; where foul corpses dammed the very blood that ran down the kennel, and children—little children—played with them!

I was at Cahors in 1580 in the great street fight; and there women were killed. I was with Chatillon nine years later, when he rode through the Faubourgs of

Paris, with this very day and his father Coligny in his mind, and gave no quarter. I was at Courtas and Ivry, and more than once have seen prisoners led out to be piked in batches—ay, and by hundreds! But war is war, and these were its victims, dying for the most part under God's heaven with arms in their hands; not men and women fresh roused from their sleep. I felt on those occasions no such horror, I have never felt such burning pity and indignation as on the morning I am describing, that long-passed summer morning when I first saw the sun shining on the streets of Paris. Croisette clung to me, sick and white, shutting his eyes and ears, and letting me guide him as I would. Marie strode along on the other side of him, his lips closed, his eyes sinister. Once a soldier of the guard whose blood-stained hands betrayed the work he had done, came reeling—he was drunk, as were many of the butchers—across our path, and I gave way a little. Marie did not, but walked stolidly on as if he did not see him, as if the way were clear, and there were no ugly thing in God's image blocking it.

Only his hand went as if by accident to the haft of his dagger. The archer—fortunately for himself and for us, too—reeled clear of us. We escaped that danger. But to see women killed and pass by—it was horrible! So horrible that if in those moments I had had the wishing-cap, I would have asked but for five thousand riders, and leave to charge with them through the streets of Paris! I would have had the days of the Jacquerie back again, and my men-at-arms behind me!

For ourselves, though the orgy was at its height when we passed, we were not molested. We were stopped indeed three times—once in each of the streets we traversed—by different bands of murderers. But as we wore the same badges as themselves, and cried "Vive la Messe!" and gave our names, we were allowed

to proceed. I can give no idea of the confusion and uproar, and I scarcely believe myself now that we saw some of the things we witnessed. Once a man gaily dressed, and splendidly mounted, dashed past us, waving his naked sword and crying in a frenzied way, "Bleed them! Bleed them! Bleed in May, as good to-day!" and never ceased crying out the same words until he passed beyond our hearing. Once we came upon the bodies of a father and two sons, which lay piled together in the kennel; partly stripped already. The youngest boy could not have been more than thirteen. I mention this group, not as surpassing others in pathos, but because it is well known now that this boy, Jacques Nompar de Caumont, was not dead, but lives to-day, my friend the Marshal de la Force.

This reminds me, too, of the single act of kindness we were able to perform. We found ourselves suddenly, on turning a corner, amid a gang of seven or eight soldiers, who had stopped and surrounded a handsome boy, apparently about fourteen. He wore a scholar's gown, and had some books under his arm, to which he clung firmly—though only perhaps by instinct—notwithstanding the furious air of the men who were threatening him with death. They were loudly demanding his name as we paused opposite them. He either could not or would not give it, but said several times in his fright that he was going to the College of Burgundy. Was he a Catholic? they cried. He was silent. With an oath the man who had hold of his collar lifted up his pike, and naturally the lad raised the books to guard his face. A cry broke from Croisette. He rushed forward to stay the blow.

"See! see!" he exclaimed, loudly, his voice arresting the man's arm in the very act of falling. "He has a Mass Book! He has a Mass Book! He is not a heretic! He is a Catholic!"

The fellow lowered his weapon, and sullenly snatched the books. He looked at them stupidly with bloodshot wandering eyes, the red cross on the vellum bindings the only thing he understood. But it was enough for him; he bid the boy begone and released him with a cuff and an oath.

Croisette was not satisfied with this, though I did not understand his reason; only I saw him exchange a glance with the lad. "Come, come!" he said, lightly. "Give him his books! You do not want them!"

But on that the men turned savagely upon us. They did not thank us for the part we had already taken; and this they thought was going too far. They were half-drunk and quarrelsome, and being two to one, and two over, began to flourish their weapons in our faces. Mischief would certainly have been done, and very quickly, had not an unexpected ally appeared on our side.

"Put up! put up!" this gentleman cried in a boisterous voice—he was already in our midst. "What is all this about? What is the use of fighting among ourselves, when there is many a bonny throat to cut, and heaven to be gained by it! Put up, I say!"

"Who are you?" they roared in chorus.

"The Duke of Guise!" he answered, coolly. "Let the gentlemen go, and be hanged to you, you rascals!"

The man's bearing was a stronger argument than his words, for I am sure that a stouter or more reckless blade never swaggered in church or street. I knew him instantly, and even the crew of butchers seemed to see in him their master. They flung back a few curses at him, but having nothing to gain they yielded. They threw down the books with contempt —showing thereby their sense of true religion; and trooped off roaring, "Tuez! Tuez! Aux Huguenots!" at the top of their voices.

The newcomer thus left with us was Buré—Blaise Buré—the same who only yesterday, though it seemed months and months back, had lured us into Bezers' power. Since that moment we had not seen him. Now he had wiped off part of the debt, and we looked at him, uncertain whether to reproach him or not. He, however, was not one whit abashed, but returned our regards with a not unkindly leer.

"I bear no malice, young gentlemen," he said, impudently.

"No, I should think not," I answered.

"And besides, we are quits now," the knave continued.

"You are very kind," I said.

"To be sure. You did me a good turn once," he answered, much to my surprise. He seemed to be in earnest now. "You do not remember it, young gentleman, but it was you and your brother here," he pointed to Croisette, "did it! And by the Pope and the King of Spain I have not forgotten it!"

"I have," I said.

"What! You have forgotten spitting that fellow at Caylus ten days ago? Ca! sa! You remember. And very cleanly done, too! A pretty stroke! Well, M. Anne, that was a clever fellow, a very clever fellow. He thought so, and I thought so, and what was more to the purpose the most noble Raoul de Bezers thought so too. You understand!"

He leered at me and I did understand. I understood that unwittingly I had rid Blaise Buré of a rival. This accounted for the respectful, almost the kindly, way in which he had—well, deceived us.

"That is all," he said. "If you want as much done for you, let me know. For the present, gentlemen, farewell!"

He cocked his hat fiercely, and went off at speed the

way we had ourselves been going, humming as he went,

"Ce petit homme tant joli,
Qui toujours cause et toujours rit,
Qui toujours baise sa mignonne
Dieu gard' de mal ce petit homme!"

His reckless song came back to us on the summer breeze. We watched him make a playful pass at a corpse which some one had propped in ghastly fashion against a door, and miss it, and go on whistling the same air, and then a corner hid him from view.

We lingered only a moment ourselves, merely to speak to the boy we had befriended.

"Show the books if any one challenges you," said Croisette to him, shrewdly. Croisette was so much of a boy himself, with his fair hair like a halo about his white, excited face, that the picture of the two, one advising the other, seemed to me a strangely pretty one. "Show the books and point to the cross on them. And heaven send you safe to your college."

"I would like to know your name, if you please," said the boy. His coolness and dignity struck me as admirable under the circumstances. "I am Maximilian de Bethune, son of the Baron de Rosny."

"Then," said Croisette, briskly, "one good turn has deserved another. Your father yesterday at Etampes —no it was the day before, but we have not been in bed —warned us——"

He broke off suddenly; then cried, "Run! run!"

The boy needed no second warning indeed. He was off like the wind down the street, for we had seen, and so had he, the stealthy approach of two or three prowling rascals on the lookout for a victim. They caught sight of him and were strongly inclined to follow him, but we were their match in numbers. The

street was otherwise empty at the moment, and we showed them three excellent reasons why they should give him a clear start.

His after-adventures are well known, for he, too, lives. He was stopped twice after he left us. In each case he escaped by showing his book of offices. On reaching the college the porter refused to admit him, and he remained for some time in the open street exposed to constant danger of losing his life, and knowing not what to do. At length he induced the gatekeeper, by the present of some small pieces of money, to call the principal of the college, and this man humanely concealed him for three days. The massacre being then at an end, two armed men in his father's pay sought him out and restored him to his friends. So near was France to losing her greatest minister, the Duke de Sully.

To return to ourselves. The lad out of sight, we instantly resumed our purpose, and trying to shut our eyes and ears to the cruelty, and ribaldry, and uproar through which we had still to pass, we counted our turnings with a desperate exactness, intent only on one thing—to reach Louis de Pavannes, to reach the house opposite to the Head of Erasmus, as quickly as we could. We presently entered a long, narrow street. At the end of it the river was visible, gleaming and sparkling in the sunlight. The street was quiet; quiet and empty. There was no living soul to be seen from end to end of it, only a prowling dog. The noise of the tumult raging in other parts was softened here by distance and the intervening houses. We seemed to be able to breathe more freely.

"This should be our street," said Croisette.

I nodded. At the same moment I espied, halfway down it, the sign we needed and pointed to it. But ah! were we in time? Or too late? That was the

question. By a single impulse we broke into a run, and shot down the roadway at speed. A few yards short of the Head of Erasmus we came, one by one, Croisette first, to a full stop. A full stop!

The house opposite the bookseller's was sacked; gutted from top to bottom. It was a tall house, immediately fronting the street, and every window in it was broken. The door hung forlornly on one hinge, glaring cracks in its surface showing where the axe had splintered it. Fragments of glass and ware, flung out and shattered in sheer wantonness, strewed the steps; and down one corner of the latter a dark red stream trickled—to curdle by and by in the gutter. Whence came the stream? Alas! there was something more to be seen yet; something our eyes instinctively sought last of all. The body of a man.

It lay on the threshold, the head hanging back, the wide, glazed eyes looking up to the summer sky whence the sweltering heat would soon pour down upon it. We looked shuddering at the face. It was that of a servant, a valet who had been with Louis at Caylus. We recognized him at once, for we had known and liked him. He had carried our guns on the hills a dozen times, and told us stories of the war. The blood crawled slowly from him. He was dead.

Croisette began to shake all over. He clutched one of the pillars which bore up the porch, and pressed his face against its cold surface, hiding his eyes from the sight. The worst had come. In our hearts I think we had always fancied some accident would save our friend, some stranger warn him.

"Oh, poor, poor Kit!" Croisette cried, bursting suddenly into violent sobs. "Oh, Kit! Kit!"

CHAPTER X

HAU, HAU, HUGUENOTS!

His late majesty Henry the IV, I remember, than whom no braver man wore sword, who loved danger indeed for its own sake, and courted it as a mistress, could never sleep on the night before an action. I have heard him say himself that it was so before the fight at Arques. Croisette partook of this nature too, being high-strung and apt to be easily overwrought, but never until the necessity for exertion had passed away; while Marie and I, though not a whit stouter at a pinch, were slower to feel and less easy to move—more Germanic in fact.

I name this here partly lest it should be thought after what I have just told of Croisette that there was anything of the woman about him—save the tenderness; and partly to show that we acted at this crisis each after his manner. While Croisette turned pale and trembled, and hid his eyes, I stood dazed, looking from the desolate house to the face stiffening in the sunshine, and back again; wondering, though I had seen scores of dead faces since daybreak, and a plenitude of suffering in all dreadful shapes, how Providence could let this happen to us. To us! In his instincts man is as selfish as any animal that lives.

I saw nothing indeed of the dead face and dead house after the first convincing glance. I saw, instead, with hot, hot eyes the old castle at home, the green fields about the brook, and the gray hills rising from them;

and the terrace, and Kit coming to meet us, Kit with white face and parted lips and avid eyes that questioned us! And we with no comfort to give her, no lover to bring back to her!

A faint noise behind as of a sign creaking in the wind roused me from this most painful reverie. I turned round, not quickly or in surprise or fear. Rather in the same dull wonder. The upper part of the bookseller's door was ajar. It was that I had heard opened. An old woman was peering out at us.

As our eyes met, she made a slight movement to close the door again. But I did not stir, and seeming to be reassured by a second glance, she nodded to me in a stealthy fashion. I drew a step nearer, listlessly. "Pst! Pst!" she whispered. Her wrinkled old face, which was like a Normandy apple long kept, was soft with pity as she looked at Croisette. "Pst!"

"Well!" I said, mechanically.

"Is he taken?" she muttered.

"Who taken?" I asked, stupidly.

She nodded toward the forsaken house, and answered, "The young lord who lodged there? Ah! sirs," she continued, "he looked gay and handsome, if you'll believe me, as he came from the king's court yester even. As bonny a sight in his satin coat and his ribbons as my eyes ever saw. And to think that they should be hunting him like a rat to-day!"

The woman's words were few and simple; but what a change they made in my world. How my heart awoke from its stupor and leaped up with a new joy and a new-born hope? "Did he get away?" I cried, eagerly. "Did he escape, mother, then?"

"Ay, that he did!" she replied, quickly. "That poor fellow yonder—he lies quiet enough now. God forgive him his heresy, say I—kept the door manfully while the gentleman got on the roof and ran right down the street

on the tops of the houses, with them firing and hooting at him, for all the world as if he had been a squirrel and they a pack of boys with stones!"

"And he escaped?"

"Escaped!" she answered more slowly, shaking her old head in doubt. "I do not know about that. I fear that they have got him by now, gentlemen. I have been shivering and shaking upstairs with my husband—he is in bed, good man, and the safest place for him—the saints have mercy upon us! But I heard them go with their shouting and gunpowder right along to the river, and I doubt they will take him between this and the Châtelet! I doubt they will."

"How long ago was it, dame?" I cried.

"Oh! may be half an hour. Perhaps you are friends of his?" she added, questioningly.

But I did not stay to answer her. I shook Croisette, who had not heard a word of this, by the shoulder. "There is a chance that he has escaped!" I cried in his ear. "Escaped, do you hear?" And I told him hastily what she had said.

It was fine, indeed, and a sight to see the blood rush to his cheeks, and the tears dry in his eyes, and energy and decision spring to life in every nerve and muscle of his face. "Then there is hope?" he cried, grasping my arm. "Hope, Anne! Come! Come! Do not let us lose another instant. If he be alive let us join him!"

The old woman tried to detain us, but in vain. Nay, pitying us, and fearing, I think, that we were rushing on our deaths, she cast aside her caution, and called after us aloud. We took no heed, running after Croisette, who had not waited for our answer, as fast as young limbs could carry us down the street. The exhaustion we had felt a moment before when all seemed lost—be it remembered that we had not been to bed or

tasted food for many hours—fell from us on the instant, and was clean gone and forgotten in the joy of this respite. Louis was living, and for the moment had escaped.

Escaped! But for how long? We soon had our answer. The moment we turned the corner by the riverside, the murmur of a multitude, not loud but continuous, struck our ears, even as the breeze off the waters swept our cheeks. Across the river lay the thousand roofs of the Ile de la Cité, all sparkling in the sunshine. But we swept to the right, thinking little of that sight, and checked our speed on finding ourselves on the skirts of the crowd. Before us was a bridge—the Pont au Change, I think—and at its head on our side of the water stood the Châtelet, with its hoary turrets and battlements. Between us and the latter, and backed only by the river, was a great open space half-filled with people, mostly silent and watchful, come together as to a show, and betraying, at present at least, no desire to take an active part in what was going on.

We hurriedly plunged into the throng, and soon caught the clue to the quietness and the lack of movement which seemed to prevail, and which at first sight had puzzled us. For a moment the absence of the dreadful symptoms we had come to know so well—the flying and pursuing, the random blows, the shrieks and curses, and batterings on doors, the tipsy yells, had reassured us. But the relief was short-lived. The people before us were under control. A tighter grip seemed to close upon our hearts as we discerned this, for we knew that the wild fury of the populace, like the rush of a bull, might have given some chance of escape—in this case as in others. But this cold-blooded ordered search left none.

Every face about us was turned in the same direction, away from the river and toward a block of old

houses which stood opposite to it. The space immediately in front of these was empty, the people being kept back by a score or so of archers of the guard set at intervals, and by as many horsemen, who kept riding up and down, belaboring the bolder spirits with the flat of their swords, and so preserving a line. At each extremity of this—more noticeably on our left where the line curved round the angle of the building—stood a handful of riders, seven in a group perhaps. And alone in the middle of the space so kept clear, walking his horse up and down and gazing at the houses, rode a man of great stature, booted and armed, the feather nodding in his bonnet. I could not see his face, but I had no need to see it. I knew him, and groaned aloud. It was Bezers!

I understood the scene better now. The horsemen, stern, bearded Switzers for the most part, who eyed the rabble about them with grim disdain, and were by no means chary of their blows, were all in his colors and armed to the teeth. The order and discipline were of his making, the revenge of his seeking. A grasp as of steel had settled upon our friend, and I felt that his last chance was gone. Louis de Pavannes might as well be lying on his threshold with his dead servant by his side, as be in hiding within that ring of ordered swords.

It was with despairing eyes we looked at the old wooden houses. They seemed to be bowing themselves toward us, their upper stories projected so far, they were so decrepit. Their roofs were a wilderness of gutters and crooked gables, of tottering chimneys and wooden pinnacles and rotting beams. Among these I judged Kit's lover was hiding. Well, it was a good place for hide and seek—with any other player than Death. In the ground floors of the houses there were no windows and no doors; by reason, I learned afterward, of the frequent flooding of the river. But a long

wooden gallery raised on struts ran along the front, rather more than the height of a man from the ground, and access to this was gained by a wooden staircase at each end. Above this first gallery was a second, and above that a line of windows set between the gables. The block—it may have run for seventy or eighty yards along the shore—contained four houses, each with a door opening on to the lower gallery. I saw indeed that but for the vidame's precautions Louis might well have escaped. Had the mob once poured helter-skelter into that labyrinth of rooms and passages he might with luck have mingled with them, unheeded and unrecognized, and effected his escape when they retreated.

But now there were sentries on each gallery and more on the roof. Whenever one of the latter moved or seemed to be looking inward—where a search party, I understood, were at work—indeed, if he did but turn his head, a thrill ran through the crowd and a murmur arose, which once or twice swelled to a savage roar, such as earlier had made me tremble. When this happened the impulse came, it seemed to me, from the farther end of the line. There the rougher elements were collected, and there I more than once saw Bezers' troopers in conflict with the mob. In that quarter, too, a savage chant was presently struck up, the whole gathering joining in and yelling with an indescribably appalling effect:

"Hau! Hau! Huguenots!
Faites place aux Papegots!"

In derision of the old song said to be popular among the Protestants. But in the Huguenot version the last words were, of course, transposed.

We had worked our way by this time to the front of the line, and, looking into one another's eyes, mutely asked a question; but not even Croisette had an answer ready. There could be no answer but one. What

could we do? Nothing. We were too late. Too late again! And yet how dreadful it was to stand still among the cruel, thoughtless mob and see our friend, the touch of whose hand we knew so well, done to death for their sport! Done to death, as the old woman had said, like any rat, not a soul save ourselves pitying him! Not a soul to turn sick at his cry of agony, or shudder at the glance of his dying eyes. It was dreadful indeed.

"Ah, well," muttered a woman beside me to her companion—there were many women in the crowd—"it is down with the Huguenots, say I. It is Lorraine is the fine man! But after all yon is a bonny fellow and a proper, Margot! I saw him leap from roof to roof over Love Lane, as if the blessed saints had carried him. And him a heretic!"

"It is the black art," the other answered, crossing herself.

"May be it is! But he will need it all to give that big man the slip to-day," replied the first speaker comfortably.

"That devil!" Margot exclaimed, pointing with a stealthy gesture of hate at the vidame. And then in a fierce whisper, with inarticulate threats, she told a story of him, which made me shudder. "He did! And she in religion too!" she concluded. "May our Lady of Loretto reward him."

The tale might be true for aught I knew, horrible as it was. I had heard similar ones attributing things almost as fiendish to him, times and again; from that poor fellow lying dead on Pavannes' doorstep for one, and from others besides. As the vidame in his pacing to and fro turned toward us, I gazed at him, fascinated by his grim visage and that story. His eye rested on the crowd about us, and I trembled, lest even at that distance he should recognize us.

And he did! I had forgotten his keenness of sight. His face flashed suddenly into a grim smile. The tail of his eye resting upon us, and seeming to forbid us to move, he gave some orders. The color fled from my face. To escape indeed was impossible, for we were hemmed in by the press, and could scarcely stir a limb. Yet I did make one effort.

"Croisette!" I muttered—he was the rearmost—"stoop down. He may not have seen you. Stoop down, lad!"

But St. Croix was obstinate and would not stoop. Nay, when one of the mounted men came, and roughly ordered us into the open, it was Croisette who, pushing past us, stepped out first with a lordly air, I, following him, saw that his lips were firmly compressed and that there was an eager light in his eyes. As we emerged, the crowd in our wake broke the line, and tried to pursue us, either hostilely or through eagerness to see what it meant. But a dozen blows of the long pikes drove them back, howling and cursing, to their places.

I expected to be taken to Bezers, and what would follow I could not tell. But he did always, it seemed, what we least expected, for he only scowled at us now, a grim mockery on his lips, and cried, "See that they do not escape again! But do them no harm, sirrah, until I have the batch of them!"

He turned one way and I another, my heart swelling with rage. Would he dare to harm us? Would even the vidame dare to murder a Caylus' nephew openly and in cold blood? I did not think so. And yet—and yet—

Croisette interrupted the train of my thoughts. I found that he was not following me. He had sprung away, and in a dozen strides reached the vidame's stirrup, and was clasping his knee when I turned. I could not hear at the distance at which I stood, what he said.

and the horseman to whom Bezers had committed us spurred between us. But I heard the vidame's answer.

"No! no! no!" he cried, with a ring of restrained fury in his voice. "Let my plans alone! What do you know of them? And if you speak to me again, M. St. Croix—I think that is your name, boy—I will—no, I will not kill you. That might please you; you are stubborn, I can see. But I will have you stripped and lashed like the meanest of my scullions! Now go, and take care!"

Impatience, hate and wild passion flamed in his face for the moment, transfiguring it. Croisette came back to us slowly, white-lipped and quiet. "Never mind," I said, bitterly. "The third time may bring luck."

Not that I felt much indignation at the vidame's insult, or any anger with the lad for incurring it, as I had felt on that other occasion. Life and death seemed to be everything on this morning. Words had ceased to please and annoy, for what are words to the sheep in the shambles? One man's life and one woman's happiness—outside ourselves we thought only of these now. And some day, I reflected, Croisette might remember, even with pleasure, that he had, as a drowning man clutching at straws, stooped to a last prayer for them.

We were placed in the middle of a knot of troopers who closed the line to the right. And presently Marie touched me. He was gazing intently at the sentry on the roof of the third house from us, the farthest but one. The man's back was to the parapet, and he was gesticulating wildly.

"He sees him!" Marie muttered.

I nodded almost in apathy. But this passed away, and I started involuntarily and shuddered, as a savage roar, breaking the silence, rang along the front of the mob like a rolling volley of firearms. What was it? A man posted at a window on the upper gallery had

dropped his pike's point, and was leveling it at some one inside; we could see no more.

But those in front of the window could; they saw too much for the vidame's precautions, as a moment showed. He had not laid his account with the frenzy of a rabble, the passions of a mob which had tasted blood. I saw the line at its farther end waver suddenly and toss to and fro. Then a hundred hands went up, and confused angry cries rose with them. The troopers struck about them, giving back slowly as they did so. But their efforts were in vain. With a scream of triumph a wild torrent of people broke through between them, leaving them stranded, and rushed in a headlong cataract toward the steps. Bezers was close to us at the time. "S'death!" he cried, swearing oaths which even his sovereign could scarce have equaled. "They will snatch him from me yet, the hell-hounds!"

He whirled his horse around and spurred him in a dozen bounds to the stairs at our end of the gallery. There he leaped from him, dropping the bridle recklessly; and bounding up three steps at a time, he ran along the gallery. Half a dozen of the troopers about us stayed only to fling their reins to one of their number, and then followed, their great boots clattering on the planks.

My breath came fast and short, for I felt it was a crisis. It was a race between the two parties, or rather between the vidame and the leaders of the mob. The latter had the shorter way to go; but on the narrow steps they were carried off their feet by the press behind them, and fell over and hampered one another, and lost time. The vidame, free from this drawback, was some way along the gallery before they had set foot on it.

How I prayed—amid a scene of the wildest uproar

and excitement—that the mob might be first! Let there be only a short conflict between Bezers' men and the people, and in the confusion Pavannes might yet escape. Hope awoke in the turmoil. Above the yells of the crowd a score of deep voices about me thundered "A Wolf! A Wolf!" And I, too, lost my head, and drew my sword, and screamed at the top of my voice, "A Caylus! A Caylus!" with the maddest.

Thousands of eyes besides mine were strained on the foremost figures on either side. They met, as it chanced, precisely at the door of the house. The mob leader was a slender man, I saw; a priest apparently, though now he was girt with unpriestly weapons, his skirts were tucked up, and his head was bare. So much my first glance showed me. It was at the second look—it was when I saw the blood forsake his pale, lowering face and leave it whiter than ever, when horror sprang along with recognition to his eyes, when borne along by the crowd behind he saw his position and who was before him—it was only then when his mean figure shrank, and he quailed and would have turned but could not, that I recognized the coadjutor.

I was silent now, my mouth agape. There are seconds which are minutes; ay, and many minutes. A man may die, a man may come into life in such a second. In one of these, it seemed to me, those two men paused, face to face; though in fact a pause was for one of them impossible. He was between—and I think he knew it—the devil and the deep sea. Yet he seemed to pause, while all, even that yelling crowd below, held their breath. The next moment, glaring askance at one another like two dogs unevenly coupled, he and Bezers shot shoulder to shoulder into the doorway, and in another jot of time would have been out of sight. But then, in that instant, I saw something happen. The vidame's hand flashed up above the priest's

head, and the crosshilt of his sheathed sword crashed down with awful force, and still more awful passion, on the other's tonsure. The wretch went down like a log, without a word, without a cry. Amid a roar of rage from a thousand throats, a roar that might have shaken the stoutest heart and blanched the swarthiest cheek, Bezers disappeared within.

It was then I saw the power of discipline and custom. Few as were the troopers who had followed him—a mere handful—they fell without hesitation on the foremost of the crowd, who were already in confusion, stumbling and falling over their leader's body, and hurled them back pell-mell along the gallery. The throng below had no firearms, and could give no aid at the moment; the stage was narrow; in two minutes the vidame's people had swept it clear of the crowd and were in possession of it. A tall fellow took up the priest's body, dead or alive, I do not know which, and flung it as if it had been a sack of corn over the rail. It fell with a heavy thud on the ground. I heard a piercing scream that rose above that babel, one shrill scream, and the mob closed round and hid the thing.

If the rascals had had the wit to make at once for the right-hand stairs, where we stood with two or three of Bezers' men who had kept their saddles, I think they might easily have disposed of us, encumbered as we were by the horses; and then they could have attacked the handful on the gallery on both flanks. But the mob had no leaders, and no plan of operations. They seized indeed two or three of the scattered troopers, and tearing them from their horses, wreaked their passion upon them horribly. But most of the Switzers escaped, thanks to the attention the mob paid to the houses and what was going forward on the galleries; and these, extricating themselves, joined us one by one, so that gradually a little ring of stern faces gathered about the

stair-foot. A moment's hesitation, and seeing no help for it, we ranged ourselves with them; and, unchecked as unbidden, sprang on three of the led horses.

All this passed more quickly than I can relate it; so that before our feet were well in the stirrups a partial silence, then a mightier roar of anger at once proclaimed and hailed the reappearance of the vidame. Bigoted beyond belief were the mob of Paris of that day, cruel, vengeful, and always athirst for blood; and this man had killed not only their leader but a priest. He had committed sacrilege! What would they do? I could just, by stooping forward, command a side view of the gallery, and the scene passing there was such that I forgot in it our own peril.

For surely in all his reckless life Bezers had never been so emphatically the man for the situation—had never shown to such advantage as at this moment when he stood confronting the sea of faces, the sneer on his lips, a smile in his eyes, and looked down unblenching, a figure of scorn, on the men who were literally agape for his life. The calm defiance of his steadfast look fascinated even me. Wonder and admiration for the time took the place of dislike. I could scarcely believe that there was not some atom of good in this man so fearless. And no face but one—no face I think in the world, but one—could have drawn my eyes from him. But that one face was beside him. I clutched Marie's arm, and pointed to the bareheaded figure at Bezers' right hand.

It was Louis himself, our Louis de Pavannes. But he was changed indeed from the gay cavalier I remembered, and whom I had last seen riding down the street at Caylus, smiling back at us, and waving his adieux to his mistress. Beside the vidame he had the air of being slight, even short. The face which I had known so bright, and winning, was now white and set. His

fair, curling hair, scarce darker than Croisette's, hung dank, bedabbled with blood which flowed from a wound in his head. His sword was gone; his dress was torn and disordered and covered with dust. His lips moved. But he held up his head, he bore himself bravely with it all; so bravely that I choked, and my heart seemed bursting as I looked at him standing there forlorn and now unarmed. I knew that Kit seeing him thus would gladly have died with him; and I thanked God she did not see him. Yet there was a quietness in his fortitude which made a great difference between his air and that of Bezers. He lacked, as became one looking unarmed on certain death, the sneer and smile of the giant beside him.

What was the vidame about to do? I shuddered as I asked myself. Not surrender him, not fling him bodily to the people? No, not that. I felt sure he would let no others share his vengeance; that his pride would not suffer that; and even while I wondered the doubt was solved. I saw Bezers raise his hand in a peculiar fashion. Simultaneously a cry rang sharply out above the tumult, and down in headlong charge toward the farther steps came the band of horsemen, who had got clear of the crowd on that side. They were but ten or twelve, but under his eye they charged as if they had been a thousand. The rabble shrank from the collision, and fled aside. Quick as thought the riders swerved, and, changing their course, galloped through the looser part of the throng, and in a trice drew rein side by side with us, a laugh and a jeer on their reckless lips.

It was neatly done, and while it was being done the vidame and his knot of men, with those who had been searching the building, hurried down the gallery toward us, their rear cleared for the moment by the troopers' feint. The dismounted men came bundling down the steps, their eyes aglow with the war-fire, and

got horses as they could. Among them I lost sight of Louis, but perceived him presently, pale and bewildered, mounted behind a trooper. A man sprang up before each of us, too, greeting our appearance merely by a grunt of surprise; for it was no time to ask or answer. The mob was recovering itself, and each moment brought it reinforcements, while its fury was augmented by the trick we had played it and the prospect of our escape.

We were under forty, all told, and some men were riding double. Bezers' eyes glanced hastily over his array, and lit on us three. He turned and gave some order to his lieutenant. The fellow spurred his horse, a splendid gray, as powerful as his master's, alongside of Croisette, threw his arm around the lad, and dragged him dexterously on to his own crupper. I did not understand the action, but I saw Croisette settle himself behind Blaise Buré, for he it was, and supposed no harm was intended. The next moment we had surged forward, and were swaying to and fro in the midst of the crowd.

What ensued I can not tell. The outlook, so far as I was concerned, was limited to wildly plunging horses—we were in the center of the band—and riders swaying in the saddle, with a glimpse here and there of a fringe of white scowling faces and tossing arms. Once, a lane opening, I saw the vidame's charger—he was in the van—stumble and fall among the crowd, and heard a great shout go up But Bezers by a mighty effort lifted it to its legs again. And once too, a minute later, those riding on my right swerved outward, and I saw something I never afterward forgot.

It was the body of the coadjutor, lying face upward, the eyes open and the teeth bared in a last spasm. Prostrate on it lay a woman. a young woman, with hair like red gold falling about her neck, and skin like milk.

I did not know whether she was alive or dead, but I noticed that one arm stuck out stiffly and the crowd flying before the sudden impact of the horses must have passed over her, even if she had escaped the iron hoofs which followed. Still in the fleeting glance I had of her as my horse bounded aside, I saw no wound or disfigurement. Her one arm was cast about the priest's breast, her face was hidden on it. But for all that, I knew her—knew her, shuddering for the woman whose badges I was even now wearing, whose gift I bore at my side, and I remembered the priest's vaunt of a few hours before, made in her presence, "There is no man in Paris shall thwart me to-night."

It had been a vain boast, indeed! No hand in all that host of thousands was more feeble than his now, for good or ill. No brain more dull, no voice less heeded. A righteous retribution, indeed, had overtaken him. He had died by the sword he had drawn—died, a priest by violence! The cross he had renounced had crushed him. And all his schemes and thoughts, and no doubt they had been many, had perished with him. It had come to this, only this, the sum of the whole matter, that there was one wicked man the less in Paris—one lump of breathless clay the more.

For her—the woman on his breast—what man can judge a woman, knowing her? And not knowing her, how much less? For the present I put her out of my mind, feeling for the moment faint and cold.

We were clear of the crowd and clattering unmolested down a paved street before I fully recovered from the shock which this sight had caused me. Wonder whither we were going took its place. To Bezers' house? My heart sank at the prospect if that were so. Before I thought of an alternative a gateway, flanked by huge, round towers, appeared before us, and we pulled up suddenly, a confused jostling mass in the

narrow way; while some words passed between the vidame and the captain of the guard. A pause of several minutes followed; and then the gates rolled slowly open, and two by two we passed under the arch. Those gates might have belonged to a fortress or a prison, a dungeon or a palace, for all I knew.

They led, however, to none of these, but to an open space, dirty and littered with rubbish, marked by a hundred ruts and tracks, and fringed with disorderly cabins and makeshift booths. And beyond this—oh, ye gods! the joy of it—beyond this, which we crossed at a rapid trot, lay the open country!

The transition and relief were so wonderful that I shall never forget them. I gazed on the wide landscape before me, lying quiet and peaceful in the sunlight, and could scarcely believe in my happiness. I drew the fresh air into my lungs. I threw up my sheathed sword and caught it again in a frenzy of delight, while the gloomy men about me smiled at my enthusiasm. I felt the horse beneath me move once more like a thing of life. No enchanter with his wand, not Merlin nor Virgil, could have made a greater change in my world than had the captain of the gate with his simple key! Or so it seemed to me in the first moments of freedom and escape—of removal from those loathsome streets.

I looked back at Paris, at the cloud of smoke which hung over the towers and roofs, and it seemed to me the canopy of hell itself. I fancied that my head still rang with the cries and screams and curses, the sounds of death. In very fact I could hear the dull reports of firearms near the Louvre, and the jangle of the bells. Country-folk were congregated at the cross-roads and in the villages, listening and gazing; asking timid questions of the more good-natured among us, and showing that the rumor of the dreadful work doing in the town

had somehow spread abroad. And this though I learned afterward that the keys of the city had been taken the night before to the king, and that, except a party with the Duke of Guise, who had left at eight in pursuit of Montgomery and some of the Protestants—lodgers, happily for themselves, in the Faubourg St. Germain—no one had left the town before ourselves.

While I am speaking of our departure from Paris, I may say what I have to say of the dreadful excesses of those days, ay, and of the following days; excesses of which France is now ashamed, and for which she blushed even before the accession of his late majesty. I am sometimes asked, as one who witnessed them, what I think, and I answer that it was not our country which was to blame. A something besides Queen Catherine de' Medici had been brought from Italy forty years before, a something invisible but very powerful; a spirit of cruelty and treachery. In Italy it had done small harm. But grafted on French daring and recklessness, and the rougher and more soldierly manners of the north, this spirit of intrigue proved capable of very dreadful things. For a time, until it wore itself out, it was the curse of France. Two Dukes of Guise, Francis and Henry, a cardinal of Guise, the Prince of Condé, Admiral Coligny, King Henry III.—all these the foremost men of their day—died by assassination within little more than a quarter of a century, to say nothing of the Prince of Orange and King Henry the Great.

Then mark—a most curious thing—the extreme youth of those who were in this business. France, subject to the queen-mother, of course, was ruled at the time by boys scarce out of their tutors' hands. They were mere lads, hot-blooded, reckless nobles, ready for any wild brawl, without forethought or prudence. Of the four Frenchmen who it is thought took the leading

parts, one, the king, was twenty-two; monsieur, his brother, was only twenty; the Duke of Guise was twenty-one! Only the Marshal de Tavannes was of mature age. For the other conspirators, for the queen-mother, for her advisers Retz and Nevers and Birague, they were Italians; and Italy may answer for them if Florence, Mantua and Milan care to raise the glove.

To return to our journey. A league from the town we halted at a large inn, and some of us dismounted. Horses were brought out to fill the places of those lost or left behind, and Buré had food served to us. We were famished and exhausted, and ate it ravenously, as if we could never have enough.

The vidame sat his horse apart, served by his page. I stole a glance at him, and it struck me that even on his iron nature the events of the night had made some impression. I read, or thought I read, in his countenance signs of emotions not quite in accordance with what I knew of him—emotions strange and varied. I could almost have sworn that as he looked at us a flicker of kindliness lit up his stern and cruel gloom; I could almost have sworn he smiled with a curious sadness. As for Louis, riding with a squad who stood in a different part of the yard, he did not see us; had not yet seen us at all. His side face, turned toward me, was pale and sad, his manner preoccupied, his mien rather sorrowful than downcast. He was thinking, I judged, as much of the many brave men who had yesterday been his friends—companions at board and play-table—as of his own fate. When we presently, at a signal from Buré, took to the road again, I asked no permission, but thrusting my horse forward, rode to his side as he passed through the gateway.

CHAPTER XI

A NIGHT OF SORROW

"Louis! Louis!"

He turned with a start at the sound of my voice, joy and bewilderment—and no wonder—in his countenance. He had not supposed us to be within a hundred leagues of him. And lo! here we were, knee to knee, hand meeting hand in a long grasp, while his eyes, to which tears sprang unbidden, dwelt on my face as though they could read in it the features of his sweetheart. Someone had furnished him with a hat, and enabled him to put his dress in order, and wash his wound, which was very slight, and these changes had improved his appearance; so that the shadow of grief and despondency passing for a moment from him in the joy of seeing me, he looked once more his former self, as he had looked in the old days of Caylus on his return from hawking, or from some boyish escapade among the hills. Only, alas! he wore no sword.

"And now tell me all," he cried, after his first exclamation of wonder had found vent. "How on earth do you come here? Here, of all places, and by my side? Is all well at Caylus? Surely mademoiselle is not—"

"Mademoiselle is well, perfectly well! And thinking of you, I swear!" I answered passionately. "For us," I went on, eager for a moment to escape that subject —how could I talk of it in the daylight and under strange eyes?—"Marie and Croisette are behind. We left Caylus eight days ago. We reached Paris yester-

day evening. We have not been to bed. We have passed, Louis, such a night as I never—"

He stopped me with a gesture. "Hush!" he said, raising his hand. "Don't speak of it, Anne!" and I saw that the fate of his friends was still too recent, the horror of his awakening to those dreadful sights and sounds was still too vivid for him to bear reference to them. Yet after riding for a time in silence—though his lips moved—he asked me again what had brought us up.

"We came to warn you—of him," I answered, pointing to the solitary, moody figure of the vidame, who was riding ahead of the party. "He—he said that Kit should never marry you, and boasted of what he would do to you, and frightened her. So, learning he was going to Paris, we followed him—to put you on your guard, you know." And I briefly sketched our adventures, and the strange circumstances and mistakes which had delayed us hour after hour, through all that strange night, until the time had gone by when we could do good.

His eyes glistened and his color rose as I told the story. He wrung my hand warmly, and looked back to smile at Marie and Croisette. "It was like you!" he ejaculated, with emotion. "It was like her cousins! Brave, brave lads! The vicomte will live to be proud of you. Some day you will all do great things! I say it!"

"But, oh, Louis!" I exclaimed, sorrowfully, though my heart was bounding with pride at his words, "if we had only been in time! If we had only come to you two hours earlier!"

"You would have spoken to little purpose, then, I fear," he replied, shaking his head. "We were given over as a prey to the enemy. Warnings? We had warnings in plenty. De Rosny warned us, and we

scoffed at him. The king's eye warned us, and we trusted him. But—" and Louis' form dilated and his hand rose as he went on, and I thought of his cousin's prediction—"it will never be so again in France, Anne! Never! No man will after this trust another! There will be no honor, no faith, no quarter, and no peace. And for the Valois who has done this, the sword will never depart from his house. I believe it! I do believe it!"

How truly he spoke we know now. For two-and-twenty years after that 24th of August, 1572, the sword was scarcely laid aside in France for a single month. In the streets of Paris, at Arques, and Coutras, and Ivry, blood flowed like water, that the blood of the St. Bartholomew might be forgotten—that blood which, by the grace of God, Navarre saw fall from the dice-box on the eve of the massacre. The last of the Valois passed to the vaults of St. Denis, and a greater king, the first of all Frenchmen, alive or dead, the bravest, gayest, wisest of the land, succeeded him; yet even he had to fall by the knife, in a moment most unhappy for his country, before France, horror-striken, put away the treachery and evil from her.

Talking with Louis as we rode, it was not unnatural —nay, it was the natural result of the situation—that I should avoid one subject. Yet that subject was the uppermost in my thoughts. What were the vidame's intentions? What was the meaning of this strange journey? What was to be Louis' fate? I shrank with good reason from asking him these questions. There could be so little room for hope, even after that smile which I had seen Bezers smile, that I dared not dwell upon them. I should but torture him and myself.

So it was he who first spoke about it. Not at that time, but after sunset, when the dusk had fallen upon

us, and found us still plodding southward with tired horses; a link outwardly like other links in the long chain of riders, toiling onward. Then he said, suddenly, "Do you know whither we are going, Anne?"

I started, and found myself struggling with a strange confusion before I could reply. "Home," I suggested at random.

"Home? No. And yet nearly home. To Cahors," he answered, with an odd quietude. "Your home, my boy, I shall never see again. Nor Kit! Nor my own Kit!" It was the first time I had heard him call her by the fond name we used ourselves. And the pathos in his tone as of the past, not the present, as of pure memory—I was very thankful that I could not in the dusk see his face—shook my self-control. I wept. "Nay, my lad," he went on, speaking softly and leaning upon his saddle so that he could lay his hand on my shoulder. "We are all men together. We must be brave. Tears can not help us, so we should leave them to the—women."

I cried more passionately at that. Indeed his own voice quavered over the last word. But in a moment he was talking to me coolly and quietly. I had muttered something to the effect that the vidame would not dare—it would be too public.

"There is no question of daring in it," he replied. "And the more public it is, the better he will like it. They have dared to take thousands of lives since yesterday. There is no one to call him to account since the king—our king, forsooth!—has declared every Huguenot an outlaw, to be killed wherever he be met with. No, when Bezers disarmed me, yonder," he pointed as he spoke to his wound, "I looked of course for instant death, Anne. I saw blood in his eyes! But he did not strike."

"Why not?" I asked, in suspense.

"I can only guess," Louis answered with a sigh. "He told me that my life was in his hands, but that he should take it at his own time. Further, that if I would not give my word to go with him without trying to escape, he would throw me to those howling dogs outside. I gave my word. We are on the road together. And oh, Anne! yesterday, only yesterday, at this time I was riding home with Teligny from the Louvre, where we had been playing at paume with the king! And the world—the world was very fair."

"I saw you, or rather Croisette did," I muttered, as his sorrow, not for himself but his friends, forced him to stop. "Yet how, Louis, do you know that we are going to Cahors?"

"He told me, as we passed through the gates, that he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Quercy to carry out the edict against the religion. Do you not see, Anne?" my companion added bitterly. "To kill me at once was too small a revenge for him! He must torture me—or rather he would if he could—by the pains of anticipation. Besides, my execution will so finely open his bed of justice. Bah!" and Pavannes raised his head proudly, "I fear him not! I fear him not a jot!"

For a moment he forgot Kit, the loss of his friends, his own doom. He snapped his fingers in derision of his foe.

But my heart sank miserably. The vidame's rage, I remembered, had been directed rather against my cousin than her lover, and now by the light of his threats I read Bezers' purpose more clearly than Louis could. His aim was to punish the woman who had played with him. To do so he was bringing her lover from Paris that he might execute him, after giving her notice! That was it; after giving her notice, it might

be in her very presence! He would lure her to Cahors, and then—

I shuddered. I well might feel that a precipice was opening at my feet. There was something in the plan so devilish, yet so accordant with those stories I had heard of the Wolf, and I felt no doubt of my insight. I read his evil mind, and saw in a moment why he had troubled himself with us. He hoped to draw mademoiselle to Cahors by our means.

Of course I said nothing of this to Louis. I hid my feelings as well as I could. But I vowed a great vow that at the eleventh hour we would balk the vidame. Surely if all else failed we could kill him, and, though we died ourselves, spare Kit this ordeal. My tears were dried up as by a fire. My heart burned with a great and noble rage; or so it seemed to me.

I do not think that there was ever any journey so strange as this one of ours. We met with the same incidents which had pleased us on the road to Paris. But their novelty was gone. Gone, too, were the cosy chats with old rogues of landlords and good-natured dames. We were traveling now in such force that our coming was rather a terror to the innkeeper than a boon. How much the Lieutenant-Governor of Quercy, going down to his province, requisitioned in the king's name, and for how much he paid, we could only judge from the gloomy looks which followed us as we rode away each morning. Such looks were not solely due, I fear, to the news from Paris, although for some time we were the first bearers of the tidings.

Presently, on the third day of our journey I think, couriers from the court passed us, and henceforth forestalled us. One of these messengers—who I learned from the talk about me was bound for Cahors with letters for the lieutenant-governor and the count-bishop—the vidame interviewed and stopped. How it

was managed I do not know, but I fear the count-bishop never got his letters, which I fancy would have given him some joint authority. Certainly we left the messenger—a prudent fellow with a care for his skin—in comfortable quarters at Limoges, whence I do not doubt he presently returned to Paris at his leisure.

The strangeness of the journey, however, arose from none of these things, but from the relations of our party to one another. After the first day we four rode together, unmolested, so long as we kept near the center of the straggling cavalcade. The vidame always rode alone, and in front, brooding with bent head and somber face over his revenge, as I supposed. He would ride in this fashion, speaking to no one and giving no orders, for a day together. At times I came near to pitying him. He had loved Kit in his masterful way, the way of one not wont to be thwarted, and he had lost her—lost her, whatever might happen. He would get nothing after all by his revenge; nothing but ashes in the mouth. And so I saw in softer moments something inexpressibly melancholy in that solitary giant-figure pacing always alone.

He seldom spoke to us. More rarely to Louis. When he did, the harshness of his voice and his cruel eyes betrayed the gloomy hatred in which he held him. At meals he ate at one end of the table; we four at the other, as three of us had done on that first evening in Paris. And sometimes the covert looks, the grim sneer he shot at his rival—his prisoner—made me shiver even in the sunshine. Sometimes, on the other hand, when I took him unawares, I found an expression on his face I could not read.

I told Croisette, but warily, my suspicions of his purpose. He heard me, less astounded to all appearance than I had expected. Presently I learned the reason. He had his own view. "Do you not think it

possible, Anne," he suggested timidly—we were of course alone at the time—"that he thinks to make Louis resign mademoiselle?"

"Resign her!" I exclaimed obtusely. "How?"

"By giving him a choice—you understand?"

I did understand—I saw it in a moment. I had been dull not to see it before. Bezers might put it in this way: Let M. de Pavannes resign his mistress and live, or die and lose her.

"I see," I answered. "But Louis would not give her up. Not to him!"

"He would lose her either way," Croisette answered in a low tone. "That is not, however, the worst of it. Louis is in his power. Suppose he thinks to make Kit the arbiter, Anne, and puts Louis up to ransom, setting Kit for the price? And gives her the option of accepting himself, and saving Louis' life; or refusing, and leaving Louis to die?"

"St. Croix!" I exclaimed, fiercely, "he would not be so base!" And yet was not even this better than the blind vengeance I had myself attributed to him?

"Perhaps not," Croisette answered, while he gazed onward through the twilight. We were at the time the foremost of the party save the vidame; and there was nothing to interrupt our view of his gigantic figure, as he moved on alone before us with bowed shoulders. "Perhaps not," Croisette repeated thoughtfully. "Sometimes I think we do not understand him; and that after all there may be worse people in the world than Bezers."

I looked hard at the lad, for that was not what I had meant. "Worse?" I said. "I do not think so. Hardly!"

"Yes, worse," he replied, shaking his head. "Do you remember lying under the curtain in the box-bed at Mirepoix's?"

"Of course I do! Do you think I shall ever forget it?"

"And Madame d'O coming in?"

"With the coadjutor?" I said with a shudder. "Yes."

"No, the second time," he answered, "when she came back alone. It was pretty dark, you remember, and Madame de Pavannes was at the window, and her sister did not see her?"

"Well, well, I remember," I said impatiently. I knew from the tone of his voice that he had something to tell me about Madame d'O, and I was not anxious to hear it. I shrank, as a wounded man shrinks from the cautery, from hearing anything about that woman; herself so beautiful, yet moving in an atmosphere of suspicion and horror. Was it shame or fear, or some chivalrous feeling having its origin in that moment when I had fancied myself her knight? I am not sure, for I had not made up my mind, even now, whether I ought to pity or detest her; whether she had made a tool of me, or I had been false to her.

"She came up to the bed, you remember, Anne?" Croisette went on. "You were next to her. She saw you indistinctly, and took you for her sister. And then I sprang from the bed."

"I know you did!" I exclaimed, sharply. All this time I had forgotten that grievance. "You nearly frightened her out of her wits, St. Croix. I can not think what possessed you—why you did it!"

"To save your life, Anne," he answered, solemnly, "and her from a crime; an unutterable, an unnatural crime. She had come back to—I can hardly tell it to you—to murder her sister. You start. You do not believe me. It sounds too horrible. But I could see better than you could. She was exactly between you and the light. I saw the knife raised. I saw her wicked face. If I had not startled her as I did, she would

have stabbed you. She dropped the knife on the floor, and I picked it up and have it. See!"

I looked furtively and turned away again, shivering. "Why," I muttered, "why did she do it?"

"She had failed, you know, to get her sister back to Pavannes' house, where she would have fallen an easy victim. Bezers, who knew Madame d'O, prevented that. Then that fiend slipped back with her knife, thinking that in the common butchery the crime would be overlooked and never investigated, and that Mirepoix would be silent."

I said nothing. I was stunned. Yet I believed the story. When I went over the facts in my mind I found that a dozen things, overlooked at the time and almost forgotten in the hurry of events, sprang up to confirm it. M. de Pavannes'—the other M. de Pavannes'—suspicions had been well founded. Worse than Bezers was she? Ay! worse a hundred times. As much worse as treachery ever is than violence, as the pitiless fraud of the serpent is baser than the rage of the wolf.

"I thought," Croisette added, softly, not looking at me, "when I discovered that you had gone off with her, that I should never see you again, Anne. I gave you up for lost. The happiest moment of my life, I think, was when I saw you come back."

"Croisette," I whispered, piteously, my cheeks burning, "let us never speak of her again."

And we never did—for years. But how strange is life! She and the wicked man with whom her fate seemed bound up had just crossed our lives when their own were at the darkest. They clashed with us, and, strangers and boys as we were, we ruined them. I have often asked myself what would have happened to me had I met her at some earlier and less stormy period—in the brilliance of her beauty? And I find but one answer. I should bitterly have rued the day. Provi-

dence was good to me. Such men and such women, we may believe, have ceased to exist now. They flourished in those miserable days of war and divisions, and passed away with them like the foul night-birds of the battle-field.

To return to our journey. In the morning sunshine one could not but be cheerful, and think good things possible. The worst trial I had came with each sunset. For then—we generally rode late into the evening—Louis sought my side to talk to me of his sweetheart. And how he would talk of her! How many thousand messages he gave me for her! How often he recalled old days among the hills, with each laugh, and jest, and incident, when we five had been as children! until I would wonder passionately, the tears running down my face in the darkness, how he could—how he could talk of her in that quiet voice which betrayed no rebellion against fate, no cursing of Providence! How he could plan for her and think of her when she should be alone!

Now I understand it. He was still laboring under the shock of his friends' murder. He was still partially stunned. Death seemed natural and familiar to him, as to one who had seen his allies and companions perish without warning or preparation. Death had come to be normal to him, life the exception; as I have known it seem to a child brought face to face with a corpse for the first time.

One afternoon a strange thing happened. We could see the Auvergne hills at no great distance on our left —the Puy de Dôme above them—and we four were riding together. We had fallen—an unusual thing—to the rear of the party. Our road at the moment was a mere track running across moorland, sprinkled here and there with gorse and brushwood. The main company had straggled on out of sight. There were but

half a dozen riders to be seen an eighth of a league before us, a couple almost as far behind. I looked every way with a sudden surging of the heart. For the first time the possibility of flight occurred to me. The rough Auvergne hills were within reach. Supposing we could get a lead of a quarter of a league; we could hardly be caught before darkness came and covered us. Why should we not put spurs to our horses and ride off?

"Impossible!" said Pavannes, quietly, when I spoke.

"Why?" I asked with warmth.

"Firstly,' he replied, "because I have given my word to go with the vidame to Cahors."

My face flushed hotly. But I cried, "What of that? You were taken by treachery. Your safe conduct was disregarded. Why should you be scrupulous? Your enemies are not. This is folly."

"I think not, Nay," Louis answered, shaking his head, "you would not do it yourself in my place."

"I think I should," I stammered, awkwardly.

"No, you would not, lad," he said, smiling. "I know you too well. But if I would do it, it is impossible." He turned in the saddle, and shading his eyes with his hand from the level rays of the sun, looked back intently. "It is as I thought," he continued. "One of those men is riding gray Margot, which Buré said yesterday was the fastest mare in the troop. And the man on her is a light weight. The other fellow has that Norman bay horse we were looking at this morning. It is a trap laid by Bezers, Anne. If we turned aside a dozen yards, those two would be after us like the wind."

"Do you mean," I cried, "that Bezers has drawn his men forward on purpose?"

"Precisely," was Louis' answer. "That is the fact. Nothing would please him better than to take my

honor first and my life afterward. But, thank God, only the one is in his power."

And when I came to look at the horsemen, immediately before us, they confirmed Louis' view. They were the best mounted of the party—all men of light weight, too. One or other of them was constantly looking back. As night fell they closed in upon us with their usual care. When Buré joined us there was a gleam of intelligence in his bold eyes, a flash of conscious trickery. He knew that we had found him out, and cared nothing for it.

And the others cared nothing. But the thought that if left to myself I should have fallen into the vidame's cunning trap filled me with new hatred toward him; such hatred and such fear, for there was humiliation mingled with them, as I had scarcely felt before. I brooded over this, barely noticing what passed in our company for hours—nay, not until the next day when, toward evening, the cry arose around me that we were in sight of Cahors. Yes, there it lay below us, in its shallow basin, surrounded by gentle hills. The domes of the cathedral, the towers of the Vallandré Bridge, the bend of the lot, where its stream embraces the town—I knew them all. Our long journey was over.

And I had but one idea. I had some time before communicated to Croisette the desperate design I had formed—to fall upon Bezers and kill him in the midst of his men—in the last resort. Now the time had come if the thing was ever to be done, if we had not left it too long already. And I looked about me. There was some confusion and jostling as we halted on the brow of the hill, while two men were dispatched ahead to announce the governor's arrival, and Buré, with half a dozen spears, rode out as an advance guard.

The road where we stood was narrow, a shallow cutting winding down the declivity of the hills. The

horses were tired. It was a bad time and place for my design, and only the coming night was in my favor. But I was desperate.

Yet before I moved or gave a signal which nothing could recall, I scanned the landscape eagerly, scrutinizing in turn the small, rich plain below us, warmed by the last rays of the sun, the bare hills here glowing, there dark; the scattered wood clumps and spinneys that filled the angles of the river, even the dusky line of holm-oaks that crowned the ridge beyond, Caylusway. So near our own country there might be help! If the messenger whom we had dispatched to the vicomte before leaving home had reached him, our uncle might have returned, and even be in Cahors to meet us.

But no party appeared in sight, and I saw no place where an ambush could be lying. I remembered that no tidings of our present plight or of what had happened could have reached the vicomte. The hope faded out of life as soon as despair had given it birth. We must fend for ourselves and for Kit.

This was my justification. I leaned from my saddle toward Croisette—I was riding by his side—and muttered, as I felt my horse's head and settled myself firmly in the stirrups. "You remember what I said? Are you ready?"

He looked at me in a startled way, with a face showing white in the shadow, and from me to the one solitary figure seated like a pillar a score of paces in front, with no one between us and it. "There need be but two of us," I muttered, loosening my sword. "Shall it be you or Marie? The others must leap their horses out of the road in the confusion, cross the river at the Arembal Ford if they are not overtaken, and make for Caylus."

He hesitated. I do not know whether it had any-

thing to do with his hesitation that at that moment the cathedral bell in the town below us began to ring slowly for vespers. Yes, he hesitated. He—a Caylus. Turning to him again, I repeated my question impatiently. "Which shall it be? A moment, and we shall be moving on, and it will be too late."

He laid his hand hurriedly on my bridle, and began a rambling answer. Rambling as it was I gathered his meaning. It was enough for me. I cut him short with one word of fiery indignation, and turned to Marie and spoke quickly.

"Will you then?" I said.

But Marie shook his head in perplexity, and answering little, said the same.

So it happened a second time.

Strange! Yet strange as it seemed, I was not greatly surprised. Under other circumstances I should have been beside myself with anger at the defection. Now I felt as if I had half expected it, and without further words of reproach I dropped my head and gave it up. I passed again into the stupor of endurance. The vidame was too strong for me. It was useless to fight against him. We were under the spell. When the troop moved forward, I went with them, silent and apathetic.

We passed through the gate of Cahors, and no doubt the scene was worthy of note, but I had only a listless eye for it—much such an eye as a man about to be broken on the wheel must have for that curious instrument, supposing him never to have seen it before. The whole population had come out to line the streets through which we rode, and stood gazing, with scarcely veiled looks of apprehension, at the procession of troopers and the stern face of the new governor.

We dismounted passively in the courtyard of the castle, and were for going in together, when Buré in-

tervened. "M. de Pavannes," he said, pushing rather rudely between us, "will sup alone to-night. For you, gentlemen, this way, if you please."

I went without remonstrance. What was the use? I was conscious that the vidame from the top of the stairs leading to the grand entrance was watching us with a wolfish glare in his eyes. I went quietly. But I heard Croisette urging something with passionate energy.

We were led through a low doorway to a room on the ground floor, a place very like a cell. Here we took our meal in silence. When it was over I flung myself on one of the beds prepared for us, shrinking from my companions rather in misery than in resentment.

No explanation had passed between us. Still I knew that the other two from time to time eyed me doubtfully. I feigned therefore to be asleep, but I heard Buré enter to bid us good night, and see that we had not escaped. And I was conscious, too, of the question Croisette put to him, "Does M. de Pavannes lie alone to-night, Buré?"

"Not entirely," the captain answered, with gloomy meaning. Indeed, he seemed in bad spirits himself, or tired. "The vidame is anxious for his soul's welfare, and sends a priest to him."

They sprang to their feet at that. But the light and its bearer, who so far recovered himself as to chuckle at his master's pious thought, had disappeared. They were left to pace the room, and reproach themselves and curse the vidame in an agony of late repentance. Not even Marie could find a loop-hole of escape from here. The door was double-locked; the windows so barred that a cat could scarcely pass through them; the walls were of solid masonry.

Meanwhile I lay and feigned sleep, and lay feigning

through long, long hours, though my heart, like theirs, throbbed in response to the dull hammering that presently began without, and not far from us, and lasted until daybreak. From our windows, set low and facing a wall, we could see nothing. But we could guess what the noise meant, the dull, earthy thuds when posts were set in the ground; the brisk, wooden clattering when one plank was laid to another. We could not see the progress of the work, or hear the voices of the workmen, or catch the glare of their lights, but we knew what they were doing. They were raising the scaffold.

CHAPTER XII

JOY IN THE MORNING

I was too weary with riding to go entirely without sleep. And, moreover, it is anxiety and the tremor of excitement which make the pillow sleepless, not, heaven be thanked, sorrow. God made man to lie awake and hope, but never to lie awake and grieve. An hour or two before daybreak I fell asleep, utterly worn out. When I awoke the sun was high and shining slantwise on our window. The room was gay with the morning rays, and soft with the morning freshness, and I lay awhile, my cheek on my hand, drinking in the cheerful influence as I had done many and many a day in our room at Caylus. It was the touch of Marie's hand, laid timidly on my arm, which roused me with a shock to consciousness. The truth broke upon me. I remembered where we were, and what was before us. "Will you get up, Anne?" Croisette said. "The vidame has sent for us."

I got to my feet and buckled on my sword. Croisette was leaning against the wall, pale and downcast. Buré filled the open doorway, his feathered cap in his hand, a queer smile on his face. "You are a good sleeper, young gentleman," he said. "You should have a good conscience."

"Better than yours, no doubt!" I retorted, "or your master's."

He shrugged his shoulders, and, bidding us by a sign to follow him, led the way through several gloomy

passages. At the end of these a flight of stone steps, leading upward, seemed to promise something better; and true enough, the door at the top being opened, the murmur of a crowd reached our ears, with a burst of sunlight and warmth. We were in a lofty room, with walls in some places painted and elsewhere hung with tapestry; well lighted by three old pointed windows reaching to the rush-covered floor. The room was large, set here and there with stands of arms, and had a dais with a raised carved chair at one end. The ceiling was of blue, with gold stars set about it. Seeing this, I remembered the place. I had been in it once, years ago, when I had attended the vicomte on a state visit to the governor. Ah! that the vicomte were here now!

I advanced to the middle window, which was open. Then I started back, for outside was the scaffold built level with the floor, and rush-covered like it! Two or three people were lounging on it. My eyes sought Louis among the group, but in vain. He was not there; and while I looked for him, I heard a noise behind me, and he came in, guarded by four soldiers with pikes.

His face was pale and grave, but perfectly composed. There was a wistful look in his eyes indeed, as if he were thinking of something or some one far away—Kit's face on the sunny hills of Quercy where he had ridden with her, perhaps; a look which seemed to say that the doings here were nothing to him, and the parting was yonder where she was. But his bearing was calm and collected, his step firm and fearless. When he saw us, indeed, his face lightened a moment and he greeted us cheerfully, even acknowledging Buré's salutation with dignity and good temper. Croisette sprang toward him impulsively, and cried his name—Croisette ever the first to speak. But before Louis could grasp

his hand, the door at the bottom of the hall was swung open, and the vidame came hurriedly in.

He was alone. He glanced around, his forbidding face, which was somewhat flushed as if by haste, wearing a scowl. Then he saw us, and, nodding haughtily, strode up the floor, his spurs clanking heavily on the boards. He gave us no greeting, but by a short word dismissed Buré and the soldiers to the lower end of the room. And then he stood and looked at us four, but principally at his rival; and looked—and looked with eyes of smouldering hate. And there was a silence, a long silence, while the murmur of the crowd came almost cheerfully through the window, and the sparrows under the eaves chirped and twittered, and the heart that throbbed least painfully was, I do believe, Louis de Pavannes'!

At last Bezers broke the silence.

"M. de Pavannes," he began, speaking hoarsely, yet concealing all passion under a cynical smile and a mock politeness, "M. de Pavannes, I hold the king's commission to put to death all the Huguenots within my province of Quercy. Have you anything to say, I beg, why I should not begin with you? Or do you wish to return to the Church?"

Louis shrugged his shoulders as in contempt, and held his peace. I saw his captor's great hands twitch convulsively at this, but still the vidame mastered himself, and when he spoke again he spoke slowly. "Very well," he continued, taking no heed of us, the silent witnesses of this strange struggle between the two men, but eyeing Louis only. "You have wronged me more than any man alive. Alive or dead! or dead! You have thwarted me, M. de Pavannes, and taken from me the woman I loved. Six days ago I might have killed you. I had it in my power. I had but to leave you to the rabble, remember, and you would

have been rotting at Montfaucon to-day, M. de Pavannes."

"That is true," said Louis, quietly. "Why so many words?"

But the vidame went on as if he had not heard. "I did not leave you to them," he resumed, "and yet I hate you—more than I ever hated any man yet, and I am not apt to forgive. But now the time has come, sir, for my revenge! The oath I swore to your mistress a fortnight ago I will keep to the letter. I—silence, babe!" he thundered, turning suddenly, "or I will keep my word with you, too!"

Croisette had muttered something, and this had drawn on him the glare of Bezers' eyes. But the threat was effectual. Croisette was silent. The two were left henceforth to one another.

Yet the vidame seemed to be put out by the interruption. Muttering a string of oaths, he strode from us to the window and back again. The cool cynicism with which he was wont to veil his anger and impose on other men, while it heightened the effect of his ruthless deeds, in part fell from him. He showed himself as he was—masterful and violent, hating with all the strength of a turbulent nature which had never known a check. I quailed before him myself. I confess it.

"Listen!" he continued harshly, coming back and taking his place in front of us at last, his manner more violent than before the interruption. "I might have left you to die in that hell yonder! And I did not leave you. I had but to hold my hand, and you would have been torn to pieces! The wolf, however, does not hunt with the rats, and a Bezers wants no help in his vengeance from king or canaille! When I hunt my enemy down I will hunt him alone, do you hear? And as there is a heaven above me"—he paused a mo-

ment—"if I ever meet you face to face again, M. de Pavannes, I will kill you where you stand!"

He paused, and the murmur of the crowd without came to my ears, but mingled with and heightened by some confusion in my thoughts. I struggled feebly with this, seeing a rush of color to Croisette's face, a lightening in his eyes as if a veil had been raised from before him. Some confusion, for I thought I grasped the vidame's meaning; yet there he was, still glowering on his victim with the same grim visage, still speaking in the same rough tone. "Listen, M. de Pavannes," he continued, rising to his full height and waving his hand with a certain majesty toward the window—no one had spoken. "The doors are open! Your mistress is at Caylus! The road is clear; go to her. Go to her, and tell her that I have saved your life, and that I give it to you not out of love, but out of hate! If you had flinched I would have killed you, for so you would have suffered most, M. de Pavannes. As it is, take your life—a gift! and suffer as I should if I were saved and spared by my enemy."

Slowly the full sense of his words came home to me. Slowly, not in its full completeness indeed until I heard Louis in broken phrases, phrases half proud and half humble, thanking him for his generosity. Even then I almost lost the true and wondrous meaning of the thing when I heard his answer. For he cut Pavannes short with bitter, caustic gibes, spurned his proffered gratitude with insults, and replied to his acknowledgments with threats.

"Go! go!" he continued to cry violently. "Have I brought you so far safely that you will cheat me of my vengeance at the last, and provoke me to kill you? Away, and take these blind puppies with you! Reckon me as much your enemy now as ever! And if I meet

you, be sure you will meet a foe! Begone, M. de Pavannes, begone!"

"But, M. de Bezers," Louis persisted, "hear me. It takes two to——"

"Begone! begone! before we do one another a mischief!" cried the vidame, furiously. "Every word you say in that strain is an injury to me. It robs me of my vengeance. Go! in God's name!"

And we went; for there was no change, no promise of softening in his malignant aspect as he spoke; nor any as he stood and watched us draw off slowly from him. We went one by one, each lingering after the other, striving, out of a natural desire to thank him, to break through that stern reserve. But grim and unrelenting, a picture of scorn to the last, he saw us go.

My latest memory of that strange man—still fresh after a lapse of two and fifty years—is of a huge form towering in the gloom below the state canopy, the sunlight which poured in through the windows and flooded us, falling short of him; of a pair of fierce, cross eyes, that seemed to glow as they covered us, of a lip that curled as in the enjoyment of some cruel jest. And so I—and I think each of us four—saw the last of Raoul de Mar, Vidame de Bezers, in this life.

He was a man whom we cannot judge by to-day's standard; for he was such an one in his vices and virtues as the present day does not know; one who in his time did immense evil—and, if his friends be believed, little good. But the evil is forgotten, the good lives. And if all that good save one act were buried with him, this one act alone, the act of a French gentleman, would be told of him—ay! and will be told—as long as the kingdom of France and the gracious memory of the late king shall endure.

* * * * * *

I see again by the simple process of shutting my

eyes, the little party of five—for Jean, our servant, had rejoined us—who on that summer day rode over the hills to Caylus—threading the mazes of the holm-oaks, and galloping down the rides, and hallooing the hare from her form, but never pursuing her; arousing the nestling farmhouses from their sleepy stillness by joyous shout and laugh, and sniffing, as we climbed the hillside again, the scent of the ferns that died, crushed under our horses' hoofs—died only that they might add one little pleasure more to the happiness God had given us. Rare and sweet indeed are those few days in life when it seems that all creation lives only that we may have pleasure in it, and thank God for it. It is well that we should make the most of them, as we surely did of that day.

It was nightfall when we reached the edge of the uplands and looked down on Caylus. The last rays of the sun lingered with us, but the valley below was dark; so dark that even the rock about which our homes clustered would have been invisible save for the half-dozen lights that were beginning to twinkle into being on its summit. A silence fell upon us as we slowly wended our way down the well-known path.

All day long we had ridden in great joy; if thoughtless, yet innocent; if selfish, yet thankful; and always blithely, with a great exultation and relief at heart, a great rejoicing for our own sakes and for Kit's.

Now with the nightfall and the darkness, now when we were near our home, and on the eve of giving joy to another, we grew silent. There arose other thoughts—thoughts of all that had happened since we had last ascended that track; and so our minds naturally turned back to him to whom we owed our happiness—to the giant left behind in his pride and power and his loneliness. The others could think of him with full hearts, yet without shame. But I reddened, re-

flecting how it would have been with us if I had had my way; if I had resorted in my short-sightedness to one last violent, cowardly deed, and killed him, as I had twice wished to do.

Pavannes would then have been lost—almost certainly. Only the vidame with his powerful troop—we never knew whether he had gathered them for that purpose or merely with an eye to his government—could have saved him. And few men, however powerful—perhaps Bezers only of all men in Paris—would have dared to snatch him from the mob when once it had sighted him. I dwell on this now that my grandchildren may take warning by it, though never will they see such days as I have seen.

And so we clattered up the steep street of Caylus with a pleasant melancholy upon us, and passed, not without a more serious thought, the gloomy, frowning portals, all barred and shuttered, of the House of the Wolf, and under the very window, somber and vacant, from which Bezers had incited the rabble in their attack on Pavannes' courier. We had gone by day, and we came back by night. But we had gone trembling, and we came back in joy.

We did not need to ring the great bell. Jean's cry, "Ho! Gate there! Open for my lords!" had scarcely passed his lips before we were admitted. And ere we could mount the ramp, one person outran those who came forth to see what the matter was; one outran Madame Claude, outran old Gil, outran the hurrying servants, and the welcome of the house. I saw a slender figure all in white break away from the little crowd and dart toward us, disclosing as it reached me a face that seemed still whiter than its robes, and yet a face that seemed all eyes—eyes that asked the question the lips could not frame.

I stood aside with a low bow, my hat in my hand;

and said, simply—it was the great effect of my life—"Voilà, monsieur!"

And then I saw the sun rise in a woman's face.

* * * * * *

The Vidame de Bezers died as he had lived. He was still Governor of Cahors when Henry the Great attacked it on the night of the 17th of June, 1580. Taken by surprise and wounded in the first confusion of the assault, he still defended himself and his charge with desperate courage, fighting from street to street and house to house for five nights and as many days. While he lived Henry's destiny and the fate of France trembled in the balance. But he fell at length, his brain pierced by the ball of an arquebuse, and died an hour before sunset on the 22d of June. The garrison immediately surrendered.

Marie and I were present in this action, on the side of the King of Navarre, and at the request of that prince hastened to pay such honors to the vidame as were due to his renown and might serve to evince our gratitude. A year later his remains were removed from Cahors and laid where they now rest in his own Abbey Church of Bezers, under a monument which very briefly tells of his stormy life and his valor. No matter. He has small need of a monument whose name lives in the history of his country, and whose epitaph is written in the lives of men.

NOTE.—The character and conduct of the Vidame de Bezers, as they appear in the above memoir, find a parallel in an account given by De Thou of one of the most remarkable incidents in the Massacre of St. Bartholomew: "Amid such examples," he writes, "of the ferocity of the city, a thing happened worthy to be related, and which may perhaps in some degree weigh against these atrocities. There was a deadly hatred,

which up to this time the intervention of their friends and neighbors had failed to appease, between two men —Vezins, the lieutenant of Honoratus of Savoy, Marshall Villars, a man notable among the nobility of the province for his valor, but obnoxious to many owing to his brutal disposition (ferinâ naturâ), and Regnier, a young man of like rank and vigor, but of milder character. When Regnier then, in the middle of that great uproar, death meeting his eye everywhere, was making up his mind to the worst, his door was suddenly burst open, and Vezins, with two other men, stood before him sword in hand. Upon this Regnier, assured of death, knelt down and asked mercy of heaven; but Vezins in a harsh voice bid him rise from his prayers and mount a palfrey already standing ready in the street for him. So he led Regnier—uncertain for the time whither he was being taken—out of the city, and put him on his honor to go with him without trying to escape. And together, without pausing on their journey, the two traveled all the way to Guienne. During this time Vezins honored Regnier with very little conversation—but so far cared for him that food was prepared for him at the inns by his servants, and so they came to Quercy and the castle of Regnier. There Vezins turned to him and said, "You know how I have for a long time back sought to avenge myself on you, and how easily I might now have done it to the full, had I been willing to use this opportunity. But shame would not suffer it; and besides, your courage seemed worthy to be set against mine on even terms. Take therefore the life which you owe to my kindness." With much more which the curious will find in the second (folio) volume of De Thou.

The Sire De Malétroit's Door

THE SIRE DE MALÉTROIT'S DOOR

Robert Louis Stevenson

Denis de Beaulieu was not yet two-and-twenty, but he counted himself a grown man, and a very accomplished cavalier into the bargain. Lads were early formed in that rough, warfaring epoch; and when one has been in a pitched battle and a dozen raids, has killed one's man in an honorable fashion, and knows a thing or two of strategy and mankind, a certain swagger in the gait is surely to be pardoned. He had put up his horse with due care, and supped with due deliberation; and then, in a very agreeable frame of mind, went out to pay a visit in the gray of the evening. It was not a very wise proceeding on the young man's part. He would have done better to remain beside the fire or go decently to bed. For the town was full of the troops of Burgundy and England under a mixed command; and though Denis was there on safe-conduct, his safe-conduct was like to serve him little on a chance encounter.

It was September, 1429; the weather had fallen sharp; a flighty, piping wind, laden with showers, beat about the township; and the dead leaves ran riot along the streets. Here and there a window was already lighted up; and the noise of men-at-arms making merry over supper within, came forth in fits and was swallowed up and carried away by the wind. The night fell swiftly; the flag of England, fluttering on the spire-top, grew ever fainter and fainter against the flying

clouds—a black speck like a swallow in the tumultuous, leaden chaos of the sky. As the night fell the wind rose, and began to hoot under archways and roar amid the treetops in the valley below the town.

Denis de Beaulieu walked fast and was soon knocking at his friend's door; but though he promised himself to stay only a little while and make an early return, his welcome was so pleasant, and he found so much to delay him, that it was already long past midnight before he said good-bye upon the threshold. The wind had fallen again in the meantime; the night was as black as the grave; not a star nor a glimmer of moonshine slipped through the canopy of cloud. Denis was ill-acquainted with the intricate lanes of Chateau Landon; even by daylight he had found some trouble in picking his way; and in this absolute darkness he soon lost it altogether. He was certain of one thing only—to keep mounting the hill; for his friend's house lay at the lower end, or tail, of Chateau Landon, while the inn was up at the head, under the great church spire. With this clue to go upon he stumbled and groped forward, now breathing more freely in open places where there was a good slice of sky overhead, now feeling along the wall in stifling closes. It is an eerie and mysterious position to be thus submerged in opaque blackness in an almost unknown town. The silence is terrifying in its possibilities. The touch of cold window bars to the exploring hand startles the man like the touch of a toad; the inequalities of the pavement shake his heart into his mouth; a piece of denser darkness threatens an ambuscade or a chasm in the pathway; and where the air is brighter, the houses put on strange and bewildering appearances, as if to lead him farther from his way. For Denis, who had to regain his inn without attracting notice, there was real danger as well as mere discomfort in the

walk; and he went warily and boldly at once, and at every corner paused to make an observation.

He had been for some time threading a lane so narrow that he could touch a wall with either hand when it began to open out and go sharply downward. Plainly this lay no longer in the direction of his inn; but the hope of a little more light tempted him forward to reconnoitre. The lane ended in a terrace with a bartizan wall, which gave an outlook between high houses, as out of an embrasure, into the valley lying dark and formless several hundred feet below. Denis looked down, and could discern a few tree-tops waving and a single speck of brightness where the river ran across a weir. The weather was clearing up, and the sky had lightened, so as to show the outline of the heavier clouds and the dark margin of the hills. By the uncertain glimmer, the house on his left hand should be a place of some pretensions; it was surmounted by several pinnacles and turret-tops; the round stern of a chapel, with a fringe of flying buttresses, projected boldly from the main block; and the door was sheltered under a deep porch carved with figures and overhung by two long gargoyles. The windows of the chapel gleamed through their intricate tracery with a light as of many tapers, and threw out the buttresses and the peaked roof in a more intense blackness against the sky. It was plainly the hotel of some great family of the neighborhood; and as it reminded Denis of a town house of his own at Bourges, he stood for some time gazing up at it and mentally gauging the skill of the architects and the consideration of the two families.

There seemed to be no issue to the terrace but the lane by which he had reached it; he could only retrace his steps, but he had gained some notion of his whereabouts, and hoped by this means to hit the main

thoroughfare and speedily regain the inn. He was reckoning without that chapter of accidents which was to make this night memorable above all others in his career; for he had not gone back over a hundred yards before he saw a light coming to meet him, and heard loud voices speaking together in the echoing narrows of the lane. It was a party of men-at-arms going the night round with torches. Denis assured himself that they had all been making free with the wine-bowl, and were in no mood to be particular about safe-conducts or the niceties of chivalrous war. It was as like as not that they would kill him like a dog and leave him where he fell. The situation was inspiriting but nervous. Their own torches would conceal him from sight, he reflected; and he hoped that they would drown the noise of his footsteps with their own empty voices. If he were but fleet and silent, he might evade their notice altogether.

Unfortunately, as he turned to beat a retreat, his foot rolled upon a pebble; he fell against the wall with an ejaculation, and his sword rang loudly on the stones. Two or three voices demanded who went there—some in French, some in English; but Denis made no reply, and ran the faster down the lane. Once upon the terrace he paused to look back. They still kept calling after him, and just then began to double the pace in pursuit, with a considerable clank of armor, and great tossing of the torchlight to and fro in the narrow jaws of the passage.

Denis cast a look around and darted into the porch. There he might escape observation, or—if that were too much to expect—was in a capital posture whether for parley or defence. So thinking, he drew his sword and tried to set his back against the door. To his surprise, it yielded behind his weight; and though he turned in a moment, continued to swing back on oiled

and noiseless hinges, until it stood wide open on a black interior. When things fall out opportunely for the person concerned, he is not apt to be critical about the how or why, his own immediate personal convenience seeming a sufficient reason for the strangest oddities and revolutions in our sublunary things; and so Denis, without a moment's hesitation, stepped within and partly closed the door behind him to conceal his place of refuge. Nothing was further from his thoughts than to close it altogether; but for some inexplicable reason—perhaps by a spring or a weight—the ponderous mass of oak whipped itself out of his fingers and clanked to, with a formidable rumble and a noise like the falling of an automatic bar.

The round, at that very moment, debouched upon the terrace and proceeded to summon him with shouts and curses. He heard them ferreting in the dark corners; the stock of a lance even rattled along the outer surface of the door behind which he stood; but these gentlemen were in too high a humor to be long delayed, and soon made off down a corkscrew pathway which had escaped Denis's observation, and passed out of sight and hearing along the battlements of the town.

Denis breathed again. He gave them a few minutes' grace for fear of accidents, and then groped about for some means of opening the door and slipping forth again. The inner surface was quite smooth, not a handle, not a moulding, not a projection of any sort. He got his finger-nails round the edges and pulled, but the mass was immovable. He shook it, it was as firm as a rock. Denis de Beaulieu frowned and gave vent to a little noiseless whistle. What ailed the door? he wondered. Why was it open? How came it to shut so easily and so effectually after him? There was something obscure and underhand about all this, that

was little to the young man's fancy. It looked like a snare; and yet who could suppose a snare in such a quiet by-street and in a house of so prosperous and even noble an exterior? And yet—snare or no snare, intentionally or unintentionally—here he was, prettily trapped; and for the life of him he could see no way out of it again. The darkness began to weigh upon him. He gave ear; all was silent without, but within and close by he seemed to catch a faint sighing, a faint, sobbing rustle, a little stealthy creak—as though many persons were at his side, holding themselves quite still, and governing even their respiration with the extreme of slyness. The idea went to his vitals with a shock, and he faced about suddenly as if to defend his life. Then, for the first time, he became aware of a light about the level of his eyes and at some distance in the interior of the house—a vertical thread of light, widening towards the bottom, such as might escape between two wings of arras over a doorway. To see anything was a relief to Denis; it was like a piece of solid ground to a man laboring in a morass; his mind seized upon it with avidity; and he stood staring at it and trying to piece together some logical conception of his surroundings. Plainly there was a flight of steps ascending from his own level to that of this illuminated doorway; and indeed he thought he could make out another thread of light, as fine as a needle and as faint as phosphorescence, which might very well be reflected along the polished wood of a handrail. Since he had begun to suspect that he was not alone, his heart had continued to beat with smothering violence, and an intolerable desire for action of any sort had possessed itself of his spirit. He was in deadly peril, he believed. What could be more natural than to mount the staircase, lift the curtain and confront his difficulty at once? At least he would be dealing with something

tangible; at least he would be no longer in the dark. He stepped slowly forward with outstretched hands, until his foot struck the bottom step; then he rapidly scaled the stair, stood for a moment to compose his expression, lifted the arras and went in.

He found himself in a large apartment of polished stone. There were three doors; one on each of three sides; all similarly curtained with tapestry. The fourth side was occupied by two large windows and a great stone chimney-piece, carved with the arms of the Malétroits. Denis recognized the bearings, and was gratified to find himself in such good hands. The room was strongly illuminated; but it contained little furniture except a heavy table and a chair or two, the hearth was innocent of fire, and the pavement was but sparsely strewn with rushes clearly many days old.

On a high chair beside the chimney, and directly facing Denis as he entered, sat a little old gentleman in a fur tippet. He sat with his legs crossed and his hands folded, and a cup of spiced wine stood by his elbow on a bracket on the wall. His countenance had a strongly masculine cast; not properly human, but such as we see in the bull, the goat, or the domestic boar; something equivocal and wheedling, something greedy, brutal and dangerous. The upper lip was inordinately full, as though swollen by a blow or a toothache; and the smile, the peaked eyebrows, and the small, strong eyes were quaintly and almost comically evil in expression. Beautiful white hair hung straight all round his head, like a saint's, and fell in a single curl upon the tippet. His beard and moustache were the pink of venerable sweetness. Age, probably in consequence of inordinate precautions, had left no mark upon his hands; and the Malétroit hand was famous. It would be difficult to imagine anything at once so fleshly and so delicate in design; the taper, sensual

fingers were like those of one of Leonardo's women; the fork of the thumb made a dimpled protuberance when closed; the nails were perfectly shaped, and of a dead, surprising whiteness. It rendered his aspect tenfold more redoubtable, that a man with hands like these should keep them devoutedly folded like a virgin martyr—that a man with so intent and startling an expression of face should sit patiently on his seat and contemplate people with an unwinking stare, like a god, or a god's statue. His quiescence seemed ironical and treacherous, it fitted so poorly with his looks.

Such was Alain, Sire de Malétroit.

Denis and he looked silently at each other for a second or two.

"Pray step in," said the Sire de Malétroit. "I have been expecting you all the evening."

He had not risen but he accompanied his words with a smile and a slight but courteous inclination of the head. Partly from the smile, partly from the strange musical murmur with which the Sire prefaced his observation, Denis felt a strong shudder of disgust go through his marrow. And what with disgust and honest confusion of mind, he could scarcely get words together in reply.

"I fear," he said, "that this is a double accident. I am not the person you suppose me. It seems you were looking for a visit; but for my part, nothing was further from my thoughts—nothing could be more contrary to my wishes—than this intrusion."

"Well, well," replied the old gentleman indulgently, "here you are, which is the main point. Seat yourself, my friend, and put yourself entirely at your ease. We shall arrange our little affairs presently."

Denis perceived that the matter was still complicated with some misconception, and he hastened to continue his explanations.

"Your door . . ." he began.

"About my door?" asked the other, raising his peaked eyebrows. "A little piece of ingenuity." And he shrugged his shoulders. "A hospitable fancy! By your own account, you were not desirous of making my acquaintance. We old people look for such reluctance now and then; when it touches our honor, we cast about until we find some way of overcoming it. You arrive uninvited, but believe me, very welcome."

"You persist in error, sir," said Denis. "There can be no question between you and me. I am a stranger in this countryside. My name is Denis, damoiseau de Beaulieu. If you see me in your house, it is only—"

"My young friend," interrupted the other, "you will permit me to have my own ideas on that subject. They probably differ from yours at the present moment," he added with a leer, "but time will show which of us is in the right."

Denis was convinced he had to do with a lunatic. He seated himself with a shrug, content to wait the upshot; and a pause ensued, during which he thought he could distinguish a hurried gabbling as of prayer from behind the arras immediately opposite him. Sometimes there seemed to be but one person engaged, sometimes two; and the vehemence of the voice, low as it was, seemed to indicate either great haste or an agony of spirit. It occurred to him that this piece of tapestry covered the entrance to the chapel he had noticed from without.

The old gentleman meanwhile surveyed Denis from head to foot with a smile, and from time to time emitted little noises like a bird or a mouse, which seemed to indicate a high degree of satisfaction. This state of matters became rapidly insupportable; and Denis, to put an end to it, remarked politely that the wind had gone down.

The old gentleman fell into a fit of silent laughter, so

prolonged and violent that he became quite red in the face. Denis got upon his feet at once, and put on his hat with a flourish.

"Sir," he said, "if you are in your wits, you have affronted me grossly. If you are out of them I flatter myself I can find better employment for my brains than to talk with lunatics. My conscience is clear; you have made a fool of me from the first moment; you have refused to hear my explanations; and now there is no power under God will make me stay here any longer; and if I cannot make my way out in a more decent fashion, I will hack your door in pieces with my sword."

The Sire de Malétroit raised his right hand and wagged it at Denis with the fore and little fingers extended.

"My dear nephew," he said, "sit down."

"Nephew!" retorted Denis, "you lie in your throat," and he snapped his fingers in his face.

"Sit down, you rogue!" cried the old gentleman, in a sudden harsh voice, like the barking of a dog. "Do you fancy," he went on, "that when I had made my little contrivance for the door I had stopped short with that? If you prefer to be bound hand and foot till your bones ache, rise and try to go away. If you choose to remain a free young buck, agreeably conversing with an old gentleman—why, sit where you are in peace, and God be with you."

"Do you mean I am a prisoner?" demanded Denis.

"I state the facts," replied the other. "I would rather leave the conclusion to yourself."

Denis sat down again. Externally he managed to keep pretty calm, but within he was now boiling with anger, now chilled with apprehension. He no longer felt convinced that he was dealing with a madman. And if the old gentleman was sane, what, in God's

name, had he to look for? What absurd or tragical adventure had befallen him? What countenance was he to assume?

While he was thus unpleasantly reflecting, the arras that overhung the chapel door was raised, and a tall priest in his robes came forth, and, giving a long, keen stare at Denis, said something in an undertone to Sire de Malétroit.

"She is in a better frame of spirit?" asked the latter.

"She is more resigned, messire," replied the priest.

"Now the Lord help her, she is hard to please!" sneered the old gentleman. "A likely stripling—not ill-born—and of her own choosing, too? Why, what more would the jade have?"

"The situation is not usual for a young damsel," said the other, "and somewhat trying to her blushes."

"She should have thought of that before she began the dance? It was none of my choosing, God knows that; but since she is in it, by our lady, she shall carry it to the end." And then addressing Denis, "Monsieur de Beaulieu," he asked, "may I present you to my niece? She has been waiting your arrival, I may say, with even greater impatience than myself."

Denis had resigned himself with a good grace—all he desired to know was the worst of it as speedily as possible; so he rose at once, and bowed in acquiescence. The Sire de Malétroit followed his example and limped, with the assistance of the chaplain's arm, towards the chapel-door. The priest pulled aside the arras, and all three entered. The building had considerable architectural pretensions. A light groining sprang from six stout columns, and hung down in two rich pendants from the center of the vault. The place terminated behind the altar in a round end, embossed and honeycombed with a superfluity of ornament in relief, and pierced by many little windows shaped like stars, tre-

foils or wheels. These windows were imperfectly glazed, so that the night air circulated freely in the chapel. The tapers, of which there must have been half a hundred burning on the altar, were unmercifully blown about; and the light went through many different phases of brilliancy and semi-eclipse. On the steps in front of the altar knelt a young girl richly attired as a bride. A chill settled over Denis as he observed her costume; he fought with desperate energy against the conclusion that was being thrust upon his mind; it could not—should not—be as he feared.

"Blanche," said the Sire, in his most flute-like tones, "I have brought a friend to see you, my little girl; turn round and give him your pretty hand. It is good to be devout; but it is necessary to be polite, my niece."

The girl rose to her feet and turned towards the new comers. She moved all of a piece; and shame and exhaustion were expressed in every line of her fresh, young body; and she held her head down and kept her eyes upon the pavement, as she came slowly forward. In the course of her advance, her eyes fell upon Denis de Beanlieu's feet—feet of which he was justly vain, be it remarked, and wore in the most elegant accoutrement even while traveling. She paused—started, as if his yellow boots had conveyed some shocking meaning—and glanced suddenly up into the wearer's countenance. Their eyes met; shame gave place to horror and terror in her looks; the blood left her lips; with a piercing scream she covered her face with her hands and sank upon the chapel floor.

"That is not the man!" she cried. "My uncle, that is not the man!"

The Sire de Malétroit chirped agreeably. "Of course not," he said, "I expected as much. It was so unfortunate you could not remember his name."

"Indeed," she cried, "indeed, I have never seen this person till this moment—I have never so much as set eyes upon him—I never wish to see him again. Sir," she said, turning to Denis, "if you are a gentleman you will bear me out. Have I ever seen you—have you ever seen me—before this accursed hour?"

"To speak for yourself, I have never had that pleasure," answered the young man. "This is the first time, messire, that I have met with your engaging niece."

The old gentleman shrugged his shoulders.

"I am distressed to hear it," he said. "But it is never too late to begin. I had little more acquaintance with my own late lady ere I married her; which proves," he added, with a grimace, "that these impromptu marriages may often produce an excellent understanding in the long run. As the bridegroom is to have a voice in the matter, I will give him two hours to make up for lost time before we proceed with the ceremony." And he turned toward the door followed by the clergyman.

The girl was on her feet in a moment. "My uncle, you cannot be in earnest," she said. "I declare before God I will stab myself rather than be forced on that young man. The heart rises at it; God forbids such marriages; you dishonor your white hair. Oh, my uncle, pity me! There is not a woman in all the world but would prefer death to such a nuptial. Is it possible," she added, faltering—"is it possible that you do not believe me—that you still think this"—and she pointed at Denis with a tremor of anger and contempt —"that you still think this to be the man?"

"Frankly," said the old gentleman, pausing on the threshold, "I do. But let me explain to you once for all, Blanche de Malétroit, my way of thinking about this affair. When you took it into your head to dishonor my family and the name that I have borne, in peace and war, for more than threescore years, you

forfeited, not only the right to question my designs, but that of looking me in the face. If your father had been alive, he would have spat on you and turned you out of doors. His was the hand of iron. You may bless your God you have only to deal with the hand of velvet, mademoiselle. It was my duty to get you married without delay. Out of pure good will, I have tried to find your own gallant for you. And I believe I have succeeded. But before God and all the holy angels, Blanche de Malétroit, if I have not, I care not one jack-straw. So let me recommend you to be polite to our young friend; for upon my word, your next groom may be less appetizing."

And with that he went out, with the chaplain at his heels; and the arras fell behind the pair.

The girl turned upon Denis with flashing eyes.

"And what, sir," she demanded, "may be the meaning of all this?"

"God knows," returned Denis, gloomily. "I am a prisoner in this house, which seems full of mad people. More I know not, and nothing do I understand."

"And pray how came you here," she asked.

He told her as briefly as he could. "For the rest," he added, "perhaps you will follow my example, and tell me the answer to all these riddles, and what, in God's name, is like to be the end of it."

She stood silent for a little, and he could see her lips tremble and her tearless eyes burn with a feverish lustre. Then she pressed her forehead in both hands.

"Alas, how my head aches!" she said wearily—"to say nothing of my poor heart! But it is due to you to know my story, unmaidenly as it must seem. I am called Blanche de Malétroit; I have been without father or mother for—oh! for as long as I can recollect, and indeed I have been most unhappy all my life. Three months ago a young captain began to stand near

me every day in church. I could see that I pleased him; I am much to blame, but I was so glad that anyone should love me; and when he passed me a letter, I took it home with me and read it with great pleasure. Since that time he has written many. He was so anxious to speak with me, poor fellow! and kept asking me to leave the door open some evening that we might have two words upon the stair. For he knew how much my uncle trusted me." She gave something like a sob at that, and it was a moment before she could go on. "My uncle is a hard man, but he is very shrewd," she said at last. "He has performed many feats in war, and was a great person at court, and much trusted by Queen Isabeau in old days. How he came to suspect me I cannot tell; but it is hard to keep anything from his knowledge; and this morning, as we came from mass, he took my hand into his, forced it open and read my little billet, walking by my side all the while. When he finished, he gave it back to me with great politeness. It contained another request to have the door left open; and this has been the ruin of us all. My uncle kept me strictly in my room until evening, and then ordered me to dress myself as you see me—a hard mockery for a young girl, do you not think so? I suppose when he could not prevail with me to tell him the young captain's name, he must have laid a trap for him; into which, alas! you have fallen in the anger of God. I looked for much confusion; for how could I tell whether he was willing to take me for his wife on these sharp terms? He might have been trifling with me from the first; or I might have made myself too cheap in his eyes. But truly I had not looked for such a shameful punishment as this! I could not think that God would let a girl be so disgraced before a young man. And now I tell you all;

and I can scarcely hope that you will not despise me."

Denis made her a respectful inclination.

"Madam," he said, "you have honored me by your confidence. It remains for me to prove that I am not unworthy of the honor. Is Messire de Malétroit at hand?"

"I believe he is writing in the salle without," she answered.

"May I lead you thither, madam?" asked Denis, offering his hand with his most courtly bearing.

She accepted it; and the pair passed out of the chapel, Blanche in a very drooping and shamefast condition, but Denis strutting and ruffling in the consciousness of a mission, and the boyish certainty of accomplishing it with honor.

The Sire de Malétroit rose to meet them with an ironical obeisance.

"Sir," said Denis, with the grandest possible air, "I believe I am to have some say in the matter of this marriage; and let me tell you at once I will be no party to forcing the inclination of this young lady. Had it been freely offered to me, I should have been proud to accept her hand, for I perceive she is as good as she is beautiful; but as things are, I have now the honor, messire, of refusing."

Blanche looked at him with gratitude in her eyes; but the old gentleman only smiled and smiled, until his smile grew positively sickening to Denis.

"I am afraid," he said, "Monsieur de Beaulieu, that you do not perfectly understand the choice I have offered you. Follow me, I beseech you, to this window." And he led the way to one of the large windows which stood open on the night. "You observe," he went on, "there is an iron ring in the upper masonry, and reeved through that a very efficacious rope. Now, mark my words: if you should find your disinclination

to my niece's person insurmountable, I shall have you hanged out of this window before sunrise. I shall only proceed to such an extremity with the greatest regret, you may believe me. For it is not at all your death that I desire, but my niece's establishment in life. At the same time, it must come to that if you prove obstinate. Your family, Monsieur de Beaulieu, is very well in its way; but if you sprang from Charlemagne, you should not refuse the hand of a Malétroit with impunity—not if she had been as common as the Paris road—not if she were as hideous as the gargoyle over my door. Neither my niece nor you, nor my own private feelings, move me at all in this matter. The honor of my house has been compromised; I believe you to be the guilty person, at least you are now in the secret; and you can hardly wonder if I request you to wipe out the stain. If you will not, your blood be on your own head! It will be no great satisfaction to me to have your interesting relics kicking their heels in the breeze below my windows, but half a loaf is better than no bread, and if I cannot cure the dishonor, I shall at least stop the scandal."

There was a pause.

"I believe there are other ways of settling such imbroglios among gentlemen," said Denis. "You wear a sword, and I hear you have used it with distinction."

The Sire de Malétroit made a signal to the chaplain, who crossed the room with long, silent strides and raised the arras over the third of the three doors. It was only a moment before he let it fall again; but Denis had time to see a dusky passage full of armed men.

"When I was a little younger, I should have been delighted to honor you, Monsieur de Beaulieu," said Sire Alain; "but I am now too old. Faithful retainers are the sinews of age, and I must employ the strength

I have. This is one of the hardest things to swallow as a man grows up in years; but with a little patience, even this becomes habitual. You and the lady seem to prefer the salle for what remains of your two hours; and as I have no desire to cross your preference, I shall resign it to your use with all the pleasure in the world. No haste!" he added, holding up his hand, as he saw a dangerous look come into Denis de Beaulieu's face. "If your mind revolt against hanging, it will be time enough two hours hence to throw yourself out of the window or upon the pikes of my retainers. Two hours of life are always two hours. A great many things may turn up in even as little a while as that. And, besides, if I understand her appearance, my niece has something to say to you. You will not disfigure your last hours by a want of politeness to a lady?"

Denis looked at Blanche, and she made him an imploring gesture.

It is likely that the old gentleman was hugely pleased at this symptom of an understanding; for he smiled on both, and added sweetly: "If you will give me your word of honor, Monsieur de Beaulieu, to await my return at the end of the two hours before attempting anything desperate, I shall withdraw my retainers, and let you speak in greater privacy with mademoiselle."

Denis again glanced at the girl, who seemed to beseech him to agree.

"I give you my word of honor," he said.

Messire de Malétroit bowed, and proceeded to limp about the apartment, clearing his throat the while with that odd musical chirp which had already grown so irritating in the ears of Denis de Beaulieu. He first possessed himself of some papers which lay upon the table; then he went to the mouth of the passage and appeared to give an order to the men behind the

arras; and lastly he hobbled out through the door by which Denis had come in, turning upon the threshold to address a last smiling bow to the young couple, and followed by the chaplain with a hand-lamp.

No sooner were they alone than Blanche advanced towards Denis with her hands extended. Her face was flushed and excited, and her eyes shone with tears.

"You shall not die!" she cried; "you shall marry me after all."

"You seem to think, madam," replied Denis, "that I stand much in fear of death."

"Oh, no, no," she said, "I see you are no poltroon. It is for my own sake—I could not bear to have you slain for such a scruple."

"I am afraid," returned Denis, "that you underrate the difficulty, madam. What you may be too generous to refuse, I may be too proud to accept. In a moment of noble feeling towards me, you forgot what you perhaps owe to others."

He had the decency to keep his eyes on the floor as he said this, and after he had finished, so as not to spy upon her confusion. She stood silent for a moment, then walked suddenly away, and falling on her uncle's chair, fairly burst out sobbing. Denis was in the acme of embarrassment. He looked round, as if to seek for inspiration, and seeing a stool, plumped down upon it for something to do. There he sat playing with the guard of his rapier, and wishing himself dead a thousand times over, and buried in the nastiest kitchen-heap in France. His eyes wandered round the apartment, but found nothing to arrest them. There were such wide spaces between the furniture, the light fell so badly and cheerlessly over all, the dark outside air looked in so coldly through the windows, that he thought he had never seen a church so vast, nor a tomb so melancholy. The regular sobs of Blanche de Malétroit

measured out the time like the ticking of a clock. He read the device upon the shield over and over again, until his eyes became obscured; he stared into shadowy corners until he imagined they were swarming with horrible animals; and every now and again he awoke with a start, to remember that his last two hours were running, and death was on the march.

Oftener and oftener, as the time went on, did his glance settle on the girl herself. Her face was bowed forward and covered with her hands, and she was shaken at intervals by the convulsive hiccup of grief. Even thus she was not an unpleasant object to dwell upon, so plump and yet so fine, with a warm brown skin, and the most beautiful hair, Denis thought, in the whole world of womankind. Her hands were like her uncle's; but they were more in place at the end of her young arms, and looked infinitely soft and caressing. He remembered how her blue eyes had shone upon him, full of anger, pity, and innocence. And the more he dwelt on her perfections, the uglier death looked, and the more deeply was he smitten with penitence at her continued tears. Now he felt that no man could have the courage to leave the world which contained so beautiful a creature; and now he would have given forty minutes of his last hours to have unsaid his cruel speech.

Suddenly a hoarse and ragged peal of cockcrow rose to their ears from the dark valley below the windows. And this shattering noise in the silence of all around was like a light in a dark place, and shook them both out of their reflections.

"Alas, can I do nothing to help you!" she said, looking up.

"Madam," replied Denis, with a fine irrelevancy, "if I have said anything to wound you, believe me, it was for your own sake and not for mine."

She thanked him with a tearful look.

"I feel your position cruelly," he went on. "The world has been bitter hard on you. Your uncle is a disgrace to mankind. Believe me, madam, there is no young gentleman in all France but would be glad of my opportunity, to die in doing you a momentary service."

"I know already that you can be very brave and generous," she answered. "What I want to know is whether I can serve you—now or afterwards," she added, with a quaver.

"Most certainly," he answered with a smile. "Let me sit beside you as if I were a friend, instead of a foolish intruder; try to forget how awkwardly we are placed to one another; make my last moments go pleasantly; and you will do me the chief service possible."

"You are very gallant," she added, with a yet deeper sadness . . . "very gallant . . . and it somehow pains me. But draw nearer, if you please; and if you find anything to say to me, you will at least make certain of a very friendly listener. Ah! Monsieur de Beaulieu," she broke forth—"ah, Monsieur de Beaulieu, how can I look you in the face?" And she fell to weeping again with a renewed effusion.

"Madam," said Denis, taking her hand in both of his, "reflect on the little time I have before me, and the great bitterness into which I am cast by the sight of your distress. Spare me, in my last moments, the spectacle of what I cannot cure even with the sacrifice of my life."

"I am very selfish," answered Blanche. "I will be braver, Monsieur de Beaulieu, for your sake. But think if I can do you no kindness in the future—if you have no friends to whom I could carry your adieux. Charge me as heavily as you can; every burden will lighten,

by so little, the invaluable gratitude I owe you. Put it in my power to do something more for you than weep."

"My mother is married again, and has a young family to care for. My brother Guichard will inherit my fiefs; and, if I am not in error, that will content him amply for my death. Life is a little vapor that passeth away, as we are told by those in holy orders. When a man is in a fair way and sees all life open in front of him, he seems to himself to make a very important figure in the world. His horse whinnies to him; the trumpets blow and the girls look out of window as he rides into town before his company; he receives many assurances of trust and regard—sometimes by express in a letter—sometimes face to face, with persons of great consequence falling on his neck. It is not wonderful if his head is turned for a time. But once he is dead, were he as brave as Hercules or as wise as Solomon, he is soon forgotten. It is not ten years since my father fell, with many other knights around him, in a very fierce encounter, and I do not think that any one of them, nor so much as the name of the fight, is now remembered. No, no, madam, the nearer you come to it, you see that death is a dark and dusty corner, where a man gets into his tomb and has the door shut after him till the judgment day. I have few friends just now, and once I am dead I shall have none."

"Ah, Monsieur de Beaulieu!" she exclaimed, "you forget Blanche de Malétroit."

"You have a sweet nature, madam, and you are pleased to estimate a little service far beyond its worth."

"It is not that," she answered. "You mistake me if you think I am easily touched by my own concerns. I say so, because you are the noblest man I have ever

met; because I recognize in you a spirit that would have made even a common person famous in the land."

"And yet here I die in a mousetrap—with no more noise about it than my own squeaking," answered he.

A look of pain crossed her face, and she was silent for a little while. Then a light came into her eyes, and with a smile she spoke again.

"I cannot have my champion think meanly of himself. Anyone who gives his life for another will be met in Paradise by all the heralds and angels of the Lord God. And you have no such cause to hang your head. For . . . pray, do you think me beautiful?" she asked, with a deep flush.

"Indeed, madam, I do," he said.

"I am glad of that," she answered heartily. "Do you think there are many men in France who have been asked in marriage by a beautiful maiden—with her own lips—and who have refused her to her face! I know you men would half despise such a triumph; but believe me, we women know more of what is precious in love. There is nothing that should set a person higher in his own esteem; and we women would prize nothing more dearly."

"You are very good," he said; "but you cannot make me forget that I was asked in pity and not for love."

"I am not so sure of that," she replied, holding down her head. "Hear me to an end, Monsieur de Beaulieu. I know how you must despise me; I feel you are right to do so; I am too poor a creature to occupy one thought of your mind, although, alas! you must die for me this morning. But when I asked you to marry me, indeed and indeed it was because I respected and admired you and loved you with my whole soul, from the very moment that you took my part against my uncle. If you had seen yourself, and how noble you

looked, you would pity rather than despise me. And now," she went on, hurriedly checking him with her hand, "although I have laid aside all reserve and told you so much, remember that I know your sentiments towards me already. I would not, believe me, being nobly born, weary you with importunities into consent. I, too, have a pride of my own; and I declare before the holy mother of God, if you should now go back from your word already given, I would no more marry you than I would marry my uncle's groom."

Denis smiled a little bitterly.

"It is a small love," he said, "that shies at a little pride."

She made no answer, although she probably had her own thoughts.

"Come hither to the window," he said with a sigh. "Here is the dawn."

And indeed the dawn was already beginning. The hollow of the sky was full of essential daylight, colorless and clean; and the valley underneath was flooded with a gray reflection. A few thin vapors clung in the coves of the forest or lay along the winding course of the river. The scene disengaged a surprising effect of stillness, which was hardly interrupted when the cocks began once more to crow among the steadlings. Perhaps the same fellow who had made so horrid a clangor in the darkness not half an hour before, now sent up the merriest cheer to greet the coming day. A little wind went bustling and eddying among the tree-tops underneath the windows. And still the daylight kept flooding insensibly out of the east, which was soon to grow incandescent and cast up that red-hot cannon ball, the rising sun.

Denis looked out over all this with a bit of a shiver. He had taken her hand and retained it in his almost unconsciously.

"Has the day begun already?" she said; and then, illogically enough; "the night has been so long! Alas! what shall we say to my uncle when he returns?"

"What you will," said Denis, and he pressed her fingers in his.

She was silent.

"Blanche," he said, with a swift, uncertain, passionate utterance, "you have seen whether I fear death. You must know well enough that I would as gladly leap out of that window into the empty air as to lay a finger on you without your free and full consent. But if you care for me at all do not let me lose my life in a misapprehension; for I love you better than the whole world; and though I will die for you blithely, it would be like all the joys of Paradise to live on and spend my life in your service."

As he stopped speaking, a bell began to ring loudly in the interior of the house; and a clatter of armor in the corridor showed that the retainers were returning to their post, and the two hours were at an end.

"After all that you have heard?" she whispered, leaning toward him with her lips and eyes.

"I have heard nothing," he replied.

"The captain's name was Florimond de Champdivers," she said in his ear.

"I did not hear it," he answered, taking her supple body in his arms, and covering her wet face with kisses.

A melodious chirping was audible behind, followed by a beautiful chuckle, and the voice of Messire de Malétroit wished his new nephew a good-morning.

A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT

A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT

Robert Louis Stevenson

It was late in November, 1456. The snow fell over Paris with rigorous, relentless persistence; sometimes the wind made a sally and scattered it in flying cortices, sometimes there was a lull, and flake after flake descended out of the black night air, silent, circuitous, interminable. To poor people, looking up under moist eyebrows, it seemed a wonder where it all came from. Master Francis Villon had propounded an alternative that afternoon, at a tavern window: was it only Pagan Jupiter plucking geese upon Olympus? or were the holy angels moulting? He was only a poor Master of Arts, he went on; and as the question somewhat touched upon divinity, he durst not venture to conclude. A silly old priest from Montargis, who was among the company, treated the young rascal to a bottle of wine in honor of the jest and grimaces with which it was accompanied, and swore on his own white beard that he had been just such another irreverent dog when he was Villon's age.

The air was raw and pointed, but not far below freezing; and the flakes were large, damp and adhesive. The whole city was sheeted up. An army might have marched from end to end and not a footfall given the alarm. If there were any belated birds in heaven, they saw the island like a large white patch, and the bridges like slim white spars, on the black ground of the river. High up overhead the snow settled among the tracery

of the cathedral towers. Many a niche was drifted full; many a statue wore a long white bonnet on its grotesque or sainted head. The gargoyles had been transformed into great false noses, drooping towards the point. The crockets were like upright pillows swollen on one side. In the intervals of the wind, there was a dull sound of dripping about the precincts of the church.

The cemetery of St. John had taken its own share of the snow. All the graves were decently covered; tall white housetops stood around in grave array; worthy burghers were long ago in bed, be-nightcapped like their domiciles; there was no light in all the neighborhood but a little peep from a lamp that hung swinging in the church choir, and tossed the shadows to and fro in time to its oscillations. The clock was hard on ten when the patrol went by with halberds and a lantern, beating their hands; and they saw nothing suspicious about the cemetery of St. John.

Yet there was a small house, backed up against the cemetery wall, which was still awake, and awake to evil purpose, in that snoring district. There was not much to betray it from without; only a stream of warm vapor from the chimney-top, a patch where the snow melted on the roof, and a few half-obliterated footprints at the door. But within, behind the shuttered windows, Master Francis Villon, the poet, and some of the thievish crew with whom he consorted, were keeping the night alive and passing round the bottle.

A great pile of living embers diffused a strong and ruddy glow from the arched chimney. Before this straddled Dom Nicolas, the Picardy monk, with his skirts picked up and his fat legs bared to the comfortable warmth. His dilated shadow cut the room in half and the firelight only escaped on either side of his broad person, and in a little pool between his outspread

feet. His face had the beery, bruised appearance of the continual drinker's; it was covered with a network of congested veins, purple in ordinary circumstances, but now pale violet, for even with his back to the fire the cold pinched him on the other side. His cowl had half fallen back, and made a strange excrescence on either side of his bull neck. So he straddled, grumbling, and cut the room in half with the shadow of his portly frame.

On the right, Villon and Guy Tabary were huddled together over a scrap of parchment; Villon making a ballade which he was to call the "Ballade of Roast Fish," and Tabary spluttering admiration at his shoulder. The poet was a rag of a man, dark, little, and lean, with hollow cheeks and thin black locks. He carried his four-and-twenty years with feverish animation. Greed had made folds about his eyes, evil smiles had puckered his mouth. The wolf and pig struggled together in his face. It was an eloquent, sharp, ugly, earthly countenance. His hands were small and prehensile, with fingers knotted like a cord; and they were continually flickering in front of him in violent and expressive pantomine. As for Tabary, a broad, complacent, admiring imbecility breathed from his squash nose and slobbering lips: he had become a thief, just as he might have become the most decent of burgesses, by the imperious chance that rules the lives of human geese and human donkeys.

At the monk's other hand, Montigny and Thevenin Pensete played a game of chance. About the first there clung some flavor of good birth and training, as about a fallen angel; something long, lithe, and courtly in the person; something aquiline and darkling in the face. Thevenin, poor soul, was in great feather: he had done a good stroke of knavery that afternoon in the Faubourg St. Jacques, and all night he had been gaining

from Montigny. A flat smile illuminated his face; his bald head shone rosily in a garland of red curls; his little protuberant stomach shook with silent chucklings as he swept in his gains.

"Doubles or quits?" said Thevenin.

Montigny nodded grimly.

"Some may prefer to dine in state," wrote Villon, "On bread and cheese on silver plate. Or, or—help me out, Guido!"

Tabary giggled.

"Or parsley on a golden dish," scribbled the poet.

The wind was freshening without; it drove the snow before it, and sometimes raised its voice in a victorious whoop, and made sepulchral grumblings in the chimney. The cold was growing sharper as the night went on. Villon, protruding his lips, imitated the gust with something between a whistle and a groan. It was an eerie, uncomfortable talent of the poet's, much detested by the Picardy monk.

"Can't you hear it rattle in the gibbet?" said Villon. "They are all dancing the devil's jig on nothing, up there. You may dance, my gallants, you'll be none the warmer! Whew! what a gust! Down went somebody just now! A medlar the fewer on the three-legged medlar-tree!—I say, Dom Nicolas, it'll be cold to-night on the St. Denis Road?" he asked.

Dom Nicolas winked both his big eyes, and seemed to choke upon his Adam's apple. Montfaucon, the great grisly Paris gibbet, stood hard by the St. Denis Road, and the pleasantry touched him on the raw. As for Tabary, he laughed immoderately over the medlars; he had never heard anything more light-hearted; and he held his sides and crowed. Villon fetched him a fillip on the nose, which turned his mirth into an attack of coughing.

"Oh, stop that row," said Villon, "and think of rhymes to 'fish.'"

"Doubles or quits," said Montigny doggedly.

"With all my heart," quoth Thevenin.

"Is there any more in that bottle?" asked the monk.

"Open another," said Villon. "How do you ever hope to fill that big hogshead, your body, with little things like bottles? And how do you expect to get to heaven? How many angels, do you fancy, can be spared to carry up a single monk from Picardy? Or do you think yourself another Elias—and they'll send the coach for you?"

"Hominibus impossible," replied the monk as he filled his glass.

Tabary was in ecstasies.

Villon filliped his nose again.

"Laugh at my jokes, if you like," he said.

"It was very good," objected Tabary.

Villon made a face at him. "Think of rhymes to 'fish,'" he said. "What have you to do with Latin? You'll wish you knew none of it at the great assizes, when the devil calls for Guido Tabary, clericus—the devil with the hump-back and red-hot finger-nails. Talking of the devil," he added in a whisper, "look at Montigny!"

All three peered covertly at the gamester. He did not seem to be enjoying his luck. His mouth was a little to a side; one nostril nearly shut, and the other much inflated. The black dog was on his back, as people say, in terrifying nursery metaphor; and he breathed hard under the gruesome burden.

"He looks as if he could knife him," whispered Tabary, with round eyes.

The monk shuddered, and turned his face and spread his open hands to the red embers. It was the cold that

thus affected Dom Nicolas, and not any excess of moral sensibility.

"Come now," said Villon—"About this ballade. How does it run so far?" And beating time with his hands, he read it aloud to Tabary.

They were interrupted at the fourth rhyme by a brief and fatal movement among the gamesters. The round was completed, and Thevenin was just opening his mouth to claim another victory, when Montigny leaped up, swift as an adder, and stabbed him to the heart. The blow took effect before he had time to utter a cry, before he had time to move. A tremor or two convulsed his frame; his hands opened and shut, his heels rattled on the floor; then his head rolled backward over one shoulder with the eyes wide open; and Thevenin Pensete's spirit had returned to Him who made it.

Everyone sprang to his feet; but the business was over in two twos. The four living fellows looked at each other in rather a ghastly fashion; the dead man contemplating a corner of the roof with a singular and ugly leer.

"My God!" said Tabary; and he began to pray in Latin.

Villon broke out into hysterical laughter. He came a step forward and ducked a ridiculous bow at Thevenin, and laughed still louder. Then he sat down suddenly, all of a heap, upon a stool, and continued laughing bitterly as though he would shake himself to pieces.

Montigny recovered his composure first.

"Let's see what he has about him," he remarked, and he picked the dead man's pockets with a practiced hand, and divided the money into four equal portions on the table. "There's for you," he said.

The monk received his share with a deep sigh, and a single stealthy glance at the dead Thevenin, who was

beginning to sink into himself and topple sideways off the chair.

"We're all in for it," cried Villon, swallowing his mirth. "It's a hanging job for every man jack of us that's here—not to speak of those who aren't." He made a shocking gesture in the air with his raised right hand, and put out his tongue and threw his head on one side, so as to counterfeit the appearance of one who has been hanged. Then he pocketed his share of the spoil, and executed a shuffle with his feet as if to restore the circulation.

Tabary was the last to help himself; he made a dash at the money, and retired to the other end of the apartment.

Montigny stuck Thevenin upright in the chair, and drew out the dagger, which was followed by a jet of blood.

"You fellows had better be moving," he said, as he wiped the blade on his victim's doublet.

"I think we had," returned Villon, with a gulp. "Damn his fat head!" he broke out. "It sticks in my throat like phlegm. What right has a man to have red hair when he is dead?" And he fell all of a heap again upon the stool, and covered his face with his hands.

Montigny and Dom Nicolas laughed aloud, even Tabary feebly chiming in.

"Cry baby," said the monk.

"I always said he was a woman," added Montigny, with a sneer. "Sit up, can't you?" he went on, giving another shake to the murdered body. "Tread out that fire, Nick!"

But Nick was better employed; he was quietly taking Villon's purse, as the poet sat, limp and trembling, on the stool where he had been making a ballade not three minutes before. Montigny and Tabary dumbly demanded a share of the booty, which the monk silently

promised as he passed the little bag into the bosom of his gown. In many ways an artistic nature unfits a man for practical existence.

No sooner had the theft been accomplished than Villon shook himself, jumped to his feet, and began helping to scatter and extinguish the embers. Meanwhile Montigny opened the door and cautiously peered into the street. The coast was clear; there was no meddlesome patrol in sight. Still it was judged wiser to slip out severally; and as Villon was himself in a hurry to escape from the neighborhood of the dead Thevenin, and the rest were in a still greater hurry to get rid of him before he should discover the loss of his money, he was the first by general consent to issue forth into the street.

The wind had triumphed and swept all the clouds from heaven. Only a few vapors, as thin as moonlight, fleeted rapidly across the stars. It was bitter cold; and by a common optical effect, things seemed almost more definite than in the broadest daylight. The sleeping city was absolutely still; a company of white hoods, a field full of little alps, below the twinkling stars. Villon cursed his fortune. Would it were still snowing! Now, wherever he went, he left an indelible trail behind him on the glittering streets; wherever he went he was still tethered to the house by the cemetery of St. John; wherever he went he must weave, with his own plodding feet, the rope that bound him to the crime and would bind him to the gallows. The leer of the dead man came back to him with a new significance. He snapped his fingers as if to pluck up his own spirits, and choosing a street at random, stepped boldly forward in the snow.

Two things preoccupied him as he went: the aspect of the gallows at Montfaucon in this bright, windy phase of the night's existence, for one; and for another

the look of the dead man with his bald head and garland of red curls. Both struck cold upon his heart, and he kept quickening his pace as if he could escape from unpleasant thoughts by mere fleetness of foot. Sometimes he looked back over his shoulder with a sudden nervous jerk; but he was the only moving thing in the white streets, except when the wind swooped round a corner and threw up the snow, which was beginning to freeze, in spouts of glittering dust.

Suddenly he saw, a long way before him, a black clump and a couple of lanterns. The clump was in motion, and the lanterns swung as though carried by men walking. It was a patrol. And though it was merely crossing his line of march he judged it wiser to get out of eyeshot as speedily as he could. He was not in the humor to be challenged, and he was conscious of making a very conspicuous mark upon the snow. Just on his left hand there stood a great hotel, with some turrets and a large porch before the door; it was half-ruinous, he remembered, and had long stood empty; and so he made three steps of it, and jumped into the shelter of the porch. It was pretty dark inside, after the glimmer of the snowy streets, and he was groping forward with outspread hands, when he stumbled over some substance which offered an indescribable mixture of resistances, hard and soft, firm and loose. His heart gave a leap, and he sprang two steps back and stared dreadfully at the obstacle. Then he gave a little laugh of relief. It was only a woman, and she dead. He knelt beside her to make sure upon this latter point. She was freezing cold, and rigid like a stick. A little ragged finery fluttered in the wind about her hair, and her cheeks had been heavily rouged that same afternoon. Her pockets were quite empty; but in her stocking, underneath the garter, Villon found two of the small coins that went by the name of whites.

It was little enough; but it was always something; and the poet was moved with a deep sense of pathos that she should have died before she had spent her money. That seemed to him a dark and pitiable mystery; and he looked from the coins in his hand to the dead woman and back again to the coins, shaking his head over the riddle of man's life. Henry V. of England, dying at Vincennes just after he had conquered France, and this poor jade cut off by a cold draught in a great man's doorway, before she had time to spend her couple of whites—it seemed a cruel way to carry on the world. Two whites would have taken such a little while to squander; and yet it would have been one more good taste in the mouth, one more smack of the lips, before the devil got the soul, and the body was left to birds and vermin. He would like to use all his tallow before the light was blown out and the lantern broken.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he was feeling, half mechanically, for his purse. Suddenly his heart stopped beating; a feeling of cold scales passed up the back of his legs, and a cold blow seemed to fall upon his scalp. He stood petrified for a moment; then he felt again with one feverish movement; and then his loss burst upon him, and he was covered at once with perspiration. To spendthrifts money is so living and actual—it is such a thin veil between them and their pleasures! There is only one limit to their fortune—that of time; and a spendthrift with only a few crowns is the Emperor of Rome until they are spent. For such a person to lose his money is to suffer the most shocking reverse, and fall from heaven to hell, from all to nothing, in a breath. And all the more if he has put his head in the halter for it; if he may be hanged to-morrow for that same purse, so dearly earned, so foolishly departed! Villon stood and cursed; he threw the two whites into the street;

he shook his fist at heaven; he stamped, and was not horrified to find himself trampling the poor corpse. Then he began rapidly to retrace his steps towards the house beside the cemetery. He had forgotten all fear of the patrol, which was long gone by at any rate, and had no idea but that of his lost purse. It was in vain that he looked right and left upon the snow: nothing was to be seen. He had not dropped it in the streets. Had it fallen in the house? He would have liked dearly to go in and see; but the idea of the grisly occupant unmanned him. And he saw besides, as he drew near, that their efforts to put out the fire had been unsuccessful; on the contrary, it had broken into a blaze, and a changeful light played in the chinks of door and window, and revived his terror for the authorities and Paris gibbet.

He returned to the hotel with the porch, and groped about upon the snow for the money he had thrown away in his childish passion. But he could only find one white; the other had probably struck sideways and sunk deeply in. With a single white in his pocket, all his projects for a rousing night in some wild tavern vanished utterly away. And it was not only pleasure that fled laughing from his grasp; positive discomfort, positive pain, attacked him as he stood ruefully before the porch. His perspiration had dried upon him; and although the wind had now fallen, a binding frost was setting in stronger with every hour, and he felt benumbed and sick at heart. What was to be done? Late as was the hour, improbable as was success, he would try the house of his adopted father, the chaplain of St. Benoit.

He ran there all the way, and knocked timidly. There was no answer. He knocked again and again, taking heart with every stroke; and at last steps were heard approaching from within. A barred wicket fell

open in the iron-studded door, and emitted a gush of yellow light.

"Hold up your face to the wicket," said the chaplain from within.

"It's only me," whimpered Villon.

"Oh, it's only you, is it?" returned the chaplain; and he cursed him with foul unpriestly oaths for disturbing him at such an hour, and bade him be off to hell, where he came from.

"My hands are blue to the wrist," pleaded Villon; "my feet are dead and full of twinges; my nose aches with the sharp air; the cold lies at my heart. I may be dead before morning. Only this once, father, and before God, I will never ask again!"

"You should have come earlier," said the ecclesiastic coolly. "Young men require a lesson now and then." He shut the wicket and retired deliberately into the interior of the house.

Villon was beside himself; he beat upon the door with his hands and feet, and shouted hoarsely after the chaplain.

"Wormy old fox!" he cried. "If I had my hand under your twist, I would send you flying headlong into the bottomless pit."

A door shut in the interior, faintly audible to the poet down long passages. He passed his hand over his mouth with an oath. And then the humor of the situation struck him, and he laughed and looked lightly up to heaven, where the stars seemed to be winking over his discomfiture.

What was to be done? It looked very like a night in the frosty streets. The idea of the dead woman popped into his imagination, and gave him a hearty fright; what had happened to her in the early night might very well happen to him before morning. And he so young! and with such immense possibilities of disorderly amuse-

ment before him! He felt quite pathetic over the notion of his own fate, as if it had been some one else's, and made a little imaginative vignette of the scene in the morning when they should find his body.

He passed all his chances under review, turning the white between his thumb and forefinger. Unfortunately he was on bad terms with some old friends who would once have taken pity on him in such a plight. He had lampooned them in verses; he had beaten and cheated them; and yet now, when he was in so close a pinch, he thought there was at least one who might perhaps relent. It was a chance. It was worth trying at least, and he would go and see.

On the way, two little accidents happened to him which colored his musings in a very different manner. For, first, he fell in with the track of a patrol, and walked in it for some hundred yards, although it lay out of his direction. And this spirited him up; at least he had confused his trail; for he was still possessed with the idea of people tracking him all about Paris over the snow, and collaring him next morning before he was awake. The other matter affected him quite differently. He passed a street corner, where, not so long before, a woman and her child had been devoured by wolves. This was just the kind of weather, he reflected, when wolves might take it into their heads to enter Paris again; and a lone man in these deserted streets would run the chance of something worse than a mere scare. He stopped and looked upon the place with an unpleasant interest—it was a center where several lanes intersected each other—and held his breath to listen, lest he should detect some galloping black things on the snow or hear the sound of howling between him and the river. He remembered his mother telling him the story and pointing out the spot, while he was yet a child. His mother! If he only knew where she lived, he

might make sure at least of shelter. He determined he would inquire upon the morrow; nay, he would go and see her too, poor old girl! So thinking, he arrived at his destination—his last hope for the night.

The house was quite dark, like its neighbors; and yet after a few taps, he heard a movement overhead, a door opening, and a cautious voice asking who was there. The poet named himself in a loud whisper, and waited, not without some trepidation, the result. Nor had he to wait long. A window was suddenly opened, and a pailful of slops splashed down upon the doorstep. Villon had not been unprepared for something of the sort, and had put himself as much in shelter as the nature of the porch admitted; but for all that, he was deplorably drenched below the waist. His hose began to freeze almost at once. Death from cold and exposure stared him in the face; he remembered he was of phthisical tendency, and began coughing tentatively. But the gravity of the danger steadied his nerves. He stopped a few hundred yards from the door where he had been so rudely used, and reflected with his finger to his nose. He could only see one way of getting a lodging, and that was to take it. He had noticed a house not far away, which looked as if it might be easily broken into, and thither he betook himself promptly, entertaining himself on the way with the idea of a room still hot, with a table still loaded with the remains of supper, where he might pass the rest of the black hours and whence he should issue, on the morrow, with an armful of valuable plate. He even considered on what viands and what wines he should prefer; and as he was calling the roll of his favorite dainties, roast fish presented itself to his mind with an odd mixture of amusement and horror.

"I shall never finish that ballade," he thought to himself; and then, with another shudder at the recol-

lection, "Oh, damn his fat head!" he repeated fervently, and spat upon the snow.

The house in question looked dark at first sight; but as Villon made a preliminary inspection in search of the handiest point of attack, a little twinkle of light caught his eye from behind a curtained window.

"The devil!" he thought. "People awake! Some student or some saint, confound the crew! Can't they get drunk and lie in bed snoring like their neighbors! What's the good of curfew, and poor devils of bell-ringers jumping at a rope's end in bell-towers? What's the use of day if people sit up all night? The gripes to them!" He grinned as he saw where his logic was leading him. "Every man to his business, after all," added he, "and if they're awake, by the Lord, I may come by a supper honestly for once, and cheat the devil."

He went boldly to the door and knocked with an assured hand. On both previous occasions, he had knocked timidly and with some dread of attracting notice; but now when he had just discarded the thought of a burglarious entry, knocking at a door seemed a mighty simple and innocent proceeding. The sound of his blows echoed through the house with thin, phantasmal reverberations, as though it were quite empty; but these had scarcely died away before a measured tread drew near, a couple of bolts were withdrawn, and one wing was opened broadly, as though no guile or fear of guile were known to those within. A tall figure of a man, muscular and spare, but a little bent, confronted Villon. The head was massive in bulk, but finely sculptured; the nose blunt at the bottom, but refining upward to where it joined a pair of strong and honest eyebrows; the mouth and eyes surrounded with delicate markings, and the whole face based upon a thick, white beard, boldly and squarely trimmed. Seen

as it was by the light of a flickering hand-lamp, it looked perhaps nobler than it had a right to do; but it was a fine face, honorable rather than intelligent, strong, simple, and righteous.

"You knock late, sir," said the old man in resonant, courteous tones.

Villon cringed, and brought up many servile words of apology; at a crisis of this sort, the beggar was uppermost in him, and the man of genius hid his head with confusion.

"You are cold," repeated the old man, "and hungry? Well, step in." And he ordered him into the house with a noble enough gesture.

"Some great seigneur," thought Villon, as his host, setting down the lamp on the flagged pavement of the entry, shot the bolts once more into their places.

"You will pardon me if I go in front," he said, when this was done; and he preceded the poet upstairs into a large apartment, warmed with a pan of charcoal and lit by a great lamp hanging from the roof. It was very bare of furniture; only some gold plate on a sideboard, some folios, and a stand of armor between the windows. Some smart tapestry hung upon the walls, representing the crucifixion of our Lord in one piece, and in another a scene of shepherds and shepherdesses by a running stream. Over the chimney was a shield of arms.

"Will you seat yourself," said the old man, "and forgive me if I leave you? I am alone in my house tonight, and if you are to eat I must forage for you myself."

No sooner was his host gone than Villon leaped from the chair on which he had just seated himself, and began examining the room, with the stealth and passion of a cat. He weighed the gold flagons in his hand, opened all the folios, and investigated the arms upon the shield, and the stuff with which the seats were

lined. He raised the window curtains, and saw that the windows were set with rich stained glass in figures, so far as he could see, of martial import. Then he stood in the middle of the room, drew a long breath, and retaining it with puffed cheeks, looked round and round him, turning on his heels, as if to impress every feature of the apartment on his memory.

"Seven pieces of plate," he said. "If there had been ten, I would have risked it. A fine house, and a fine old master, so help me all the saints!"

And just then, hearing the old man's tread returning along the corridor, he stole back to his chair, and began humbly toasting his wet legs before the charcoal pan.

His entertainer had a plate of meat in one hand and a jug of wine in the other. He set down the plate upon the table, motioning Villon to draw in his chair, and going to the sideboard, brought back two goblets which he filled.

"I drink your better fortune," he said, gravely, touching Villon's cup with his own.

"To our better acquaintance," said the poet, growing bold. A mere man of the people would have been awed by the courtesy of the old seigneur, but Villon was hardened in that matter; he had made mirth for great lords before now, and found them as black rascals as himself. And so he devoted himself to the viands with a ravenous gusto, while the old man, leaning backward, watched him with steady, curious eyes.

"You have blood on your shoulder, my man," he said.

Montigny must have laid his wet right hand upon him as he left the house. He cursed Montigny in his heart.

"It was none of my shedding," he stammered.

"I had not supposed so," returned his host, quietly. "A brawl?"

"Well, something of that sort," Villon admitted with a quaver.

"Perhaps a fellow murdered?"

"Oh, no, not murdered," said the poet, more and more confused. "It was all fair play—murdered by accident. I had no hand in it, God strike me dead!" he added fervently.

"One rogue the fewer, I dare say," observed the master of the house.

"You may dare to say that," agreed Villon, infinitely relieved. "As big a rogue as there is between here and Jerusalem. He turned up his toes like a lamb. But it was a nasty thing to look at. I dare say you've seen dead men in your time, my lord?" he added, glancing at the armor.

"Many," said the old man. "I have followed the wars, as you imagine."

Villon laid down his knife and fork, which he had just taken up again.

"Were any of them bald?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, and with hair as white as mine."

"I don't think I should mind the white so much," said Villon. "His was red." And he had a return of his shuddering and tendency to laughter, which he drowned with a great draught of wine. "I'm a little put out when I think of it," he went on. "I knew him —damn him! And then the cold gives a man fancies —or the fancies give a man cold, I don't know which."

"Have you any money?" asked the old man.

"I have one white," returned the poet, laughing. "I got it out of a dead jade's stocking in a porch. She was as dead as Cæsar, poor wench, and as cold as a church, with bits of ribbon sticking in her hair This is a hard world in winter for wolves and wenches and poor rogues like me."

"I," said the old man, "am Enguerrand de la Feuil-

lèe, seigneur de Brisetout, bailly du Patatrac. Who and what may you be?"

Villon rose and made a suitable reverence. "I am called Francis Villon," he said, "a poor Master of Arts of this university. I know some Latin, and a deal of vice. I can make chansons, ballades, lais, virelais and roundels, and I am very fond of wine. I was born in a garret, and I shall not improbably die upon the gallows. I may add, my lord, that from this night forward I am your lordship's very obsequious servant to command."

"No servant of mine," said the knight, "my guest for this evening, and no more."

"A very grateful guest," said Villon politely, and he drank in dumb show to his entertainer.

"You are shrewd," began the old man, tapping his forehead, "very shrewd; you have learning; you are a clerk; and yet you take a small piece of money off a dead woman in the street. Is it not a kind of theft?"

"It is a kind of theft much practised in the wars, my lord."

"The wars are the field of honor," returned the old man proudly. "There a man plays his life upon the cast; he fights in the name of his lord the king, his Lord God, and all their lordships the holy saints and angels."

"Put it," said Villon, "that I were really a thief, should I not play my life also, and against heavier odds?"

"For gain but not for honor."

"Gain?" repeated Villon with a shrug. "Gain! The poor fellow wants supper, and takes it. So does the soldier in a campaign. Why, what are all these requisitions we hear so much about? If they are not gain to those who take them, they are loss enough to the others. The men-at-arms drink by a good fire, while

the burgher bites his nails to buy them wine and wood. I have seen a good many ploughmen swinging on trees about the country; ay, I have seen thirty on one elm, and a very poor figure they made; and when I asked someone how all these came to be hanged, I was told it was because they could not scrape together enough crowns to satisfy the men-at-arms."

"These things are a necessity of war, which the low-born must endure with constancy. It is true that some captains drive overhard; there are spirits in every rank not easily moved by pity; and indeed many follow arms who are no better than brigands."

"You see," said the poet, "you cannot separate the soldier from the brigand; and what is a thief but an isolated brigand with circumspect manners? I steal a couple of mutton chops, without so much as disturbing people's sleep; the farmer grumbles a bit, but sups none the less wholesomely on what remains. You come up blowing on a trumpet, take away the whole sheep, and beat the farmer pitifully into the bargain. I have no trumpet; I am only Tom, Dick, or Harry; I am a rogue and a dog, and hanging's too good for me—with all my heart; but just ask the farmer which of us he prefers, just find out which of us he lies awake to curse on cold nights."

"Look at us two," said his lordship. "I am old, strong, and honored. If I were turned from my house to-morrow, hundreds would be proud to shelter me. Poor people would go out and pass the night in the streets with their children, if I merely hinted that I wished to be alone. And I find you up, wandering homeless, and picking farthings off dead women by the wayside! I fear no man and nothing; I have seen you tremble and lose countenance at a word. I wait God's summons contentedly in my own house, or, if it please the king to call me out again, upon the field of battle.

You look for the gallows; a rough, swift death, without hope or honor. Is there no difference between these two?"

"As far as to the moon," Villon acquiesced. "But if I had been born lord of Brisetout, and you had been the poor scholar Francis, would the difference have been any the less? Should not I have been warming my knees at this charcoal pan, and would not you have been groping for farthings in the snow? Should not I have been the soldier, and you the thief?"

"A thief?" cried the old man. "I a thief! If you understood your words, you would repent them."

Villon turned out his hands with a gesture of inimitable impudence. "If your lordship had done me the honor to follow my argument!" he said.

"I do you too much honor in submitting to your presence," said the knight. "Learn to curb your tongue when you speak with old and honorable men, or some one hastier than I may reprove you in a sharper fashion." And he rose and paced the lower end of the apartment, struggling with anger and antipathy. Villon surreptitiously refilled his cup, and settled himself more comfortably in the chair, crossing his knees and leaning his head upon one hand and the elbow against the back of the chair. He was now replete and warm; and he was in nowise frightened for his host, having gauged him as justly as was possible between two such different characters. The night was far spent, and in a very comfortable fashion after all; and he felt morally certain of a safe departure on the morrow.

"Tell me one thing," said the old man, pausing in his walk. "Are you really a thief?"

"I claim the sacred rights of hospitality," returned the poet. "My lord, I am."

"You are very young," the knight continued.

"I should never have been so old" replied Villon,

showing his fingers, "if I had not helped myself with these ten talents. They have been my nursing mothers and my nursing fathers."

"You may still repent and change."

"I repent daily," said the poet. "There are few people more given to repentance than poor Francis. As for change, let somebody change my circumstances. A man must continue to eat, if it were only that he may continue to repent."

"The change must begin in the heart," returned the old man solemnly.

"My dear lord," answered Villon, "do you really fancy that I steal for pleasure? I hate stealing, like any other piece of work or of danger. My teeth chatter when I see a gallows. But I must eat, I must drink, I must mix in society of some sort. What the devil! Man is not a solitary animal—Cui Deus fæminam tradit. Make me king's pantler—make me abbot of St. Denis; make me bailly of the Patatrac; and then I shall be changed indeed. But as long as you leave me the poor scholar Francis Villon, without a farthing, why, of course, I remain the same."

"The grace of God is all powerful."

"I should be a heretic to question it," said Francis. "It has made you lord of Brisetout and bailly of the Patatrac; it has given me nothing but the quick wits under my hat and these ten toes upon my hands. May I help myself to wine? I thank you respectfully. By God's grace you have a very superior vintage."

The lord of Brisetout walked to and fro with his hands behind his back. Perhaps he was not yet quite settled in his mind about the parallel between thieves and soldiers; perhaps Villon had interested him by some cross-thread of sympathy; perhaps his wits were simply muddled by so much unfamiliar reasoning; but whatever the cause, he somehow yearned to convert

the young man to a better way of thinking, and could not make up his mind to drive him forth again into the street.

"There is something more than I can understand in this," he said at length. "Your mouth is full of subtleties, and the devil has led you very far astray; but the devil is only a very weak spirit before God's truth, and all his subtleties vanish at a word of true honor, like darkness at morning. Listen to me once more. I learned long ago that a gentleman should live chivalrously and lovingly to God, and the king and his lady; and though I have seen many strange things done, I have still striven to command my ways upon that rule. It is not only written in all noble histories, but in every man's heart, if he will take care to read. You speak of food and wine, and I know very well that hunger is a difficult trial to endure; but you do not speak of other wants; you say nothing of honor, of faith to God and other men, of courtesy, or love without reproach. It may be that I am not very wise—and yet I think I am—but you seem to me like one who has lost his way and made a great error in life. You are attending to the little wants, and you have totally forgotten the great and only real ones, like a man who should be doctoring toothache on the Judgment Day. For such things as honor and love and faith are not only nobler than food and drink, but indeed I think we desire them more, and suffer more sharply for their absence. I speak to you as I think you will most easily understand me. Are you not, while careful to fill your belly, disregarding another appetite in your heart, which spoils the pleasure of your life and keeps you continually wretched?"

Villon was sensibly nettled under all this sermonizing. "You think I have no sense of honor!" he cried. "I'm poor enough. God knows! It's hard to see rich

people with their gloves, and you blowing in your hands. An empty belly is a bitter thing, although you speak so lightly of it. If you had had as many as I, perhaps you would change your tune. Any way I'm a thief—make the most of that—but I'm not a devil from hell, God strike me dead. I would have you to know I've an honor of my own, as good as yours, though I don't prate about it all day long, as if it was a God's miracle to have any. It seems quite natural to me; I keep it in its box till it's wanted. Why now, look you here, how long have I been in this room with you? Did you not tell me you were alone in the house? Look at your gold plate! You're strong, if you like, but you're old and unarmed, and I have my knife. What did I want but a jerk of the elbow and here would have been you with the cold steel in your bowels, and there would have been me, linking in the streets, with an armful of golden cups! Did you suppose I hadn't wit enough to see that? And I scorned the action. There are your damned goblets, as safe as in a church; there are you, with your heart ticking as good as new; and here am I, ready to go out again as poor as I came in, with my one white that you threw in my teeth! And you think I have no sense of honor—God strike me dead!"

The old man stretched out his right arm. "I will tell you what you are," he said. "You are a rogue, my man, an impudent and black-hearted rogue and vagabond. I have passed an hour with you. Oh! believe me, I feel myself disgraced! And you have eaten and drunk at my table. But now I am sick at your presence; the day has come, and the night-bird should be off to his roost. Will you go before, or after?"

"Which you please," returned the poet, rising. "I believe you to be strictly honorable." He thoughfully emptied his cup. "I wish I could add you were intelli-

gent," he went on, knocking on his head with his knuckles. "Age! age! the brains stiff and rheumatic."

The old man preceded him from a point of self-respect; Villon followed, whistling, with his thumbs in his girdle.

"God pity you," said the lord of Brisetout at the door.

"Good-bye, papa," returned Villon with a yawn. "Many thanks for the cold mutton."

The door closed behind him. The dawn was breaking over the white roofs. A chill, uncomfortable morning ushered in the day. Villon stood and heartily stretched himself in the middle of the road.

"A very dull old gentleman," he thought. "I wonder what his goblets may be worth."

THE END

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