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BREBNER***

VAYENNE

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Vayenne

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CHAPTER I

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THE TRAVELLER ARRIVES

A long, straight road, no hedge or ditch separating it from the fields on either side, but at intervals of fifty yards or so trees in pairs; tall, thin trees, but heavy-headed and with foliage spread out fussily near the ground, all bent forward in one direction, and looking for all the world like ancient dames with their petticoats held out of the mud as they struggled wearily homeward against a strong wind. In its season this road could be muddy, as many a traveller knew, the fierce storms which raged across the low country making it almost impassable for days together in winter-time. To-day the ancient diligence which traversed it at an even, jog-trot pace only left a long cloud of dust in its wake; and the driver, an old man who had driven along this road at regular intervals for more years than he could count, who possibly knew the exact number of trees which lined it, sat hunched upon his seat and had nothing to do. Perhaps he slept, for the horses knew the way well enough to have performed the journey without him. Earlier in the day there had been half a dozen passengers, but of these only one remained, and he had found the driver so taciturn, and his patois so difficult to understand when he did speak, that he had given up all attempt at conversation. He was weary of the long journey, and dozed whenever the jolting of the somewhat crazy vehicle would allow him to do so.

For two days he had waited in the little frontier town, for the diligence only performed this journey twice in the week,

and he had been travelling since early morning. At the last moment, indeed, he had hesitated whether he should take the journey at all. It was an absurd fancy that had brought him to this Duchy of Montvilliers, a wonder and speculation which had lain latent in him since childhood. As a boy a few chance words, and an elderly woman's earnest looking into his face, had stirred his imagination. Since then the work of life had come to fire him with other ambitions, some partially realized, perhaps, some found to be unworthy of pursuit; and then, suddenly as it were, almost as though some compelling voice had spoken to his inner consciousness, the old wonder and speculation had sprung again into life, and at last he was nearing the end of a journey which as a lad he had promised himself one day to take.

The sun was fast sinking westward when the jolting of the vehicle again woke the traveller, and he saw that the aspect of the land had changed. The monotonous pairs of trees had gone, and the diligence was ascending a stiff incline between two swelling downs, part of a long line of hills which had risen mistily in the distance before them all day. It was a long climb and the horses stopped at intervals to rest without any suggestion from the driver; on their own initiative they went on again, and finally paused on the summit before beginning the long descent on the other side.

"Vayenne?" asked the traveller, suddenly leaning toward the driver and pointing down into the valley. The man looked at him with sleepy eyes and nodded. It seemed a foolish question to him. What place could it be but Vayenne?

It lay in the gathering twilight like the city of a dream, indefinite, unreal, mystical. The hills overshadowed it, keeping silent watch; and spanned by a stone bridge, a river, dotted with green islands like emeralds upon its bosom, swept around its southern and western sides, holding it in its arms. Over all was the diaphanous haze of evening and silence, save for the thin music of bell and chime from belfry or clock tower, joyous little cadences which rose and fell at short intervals. Indistinctly the eye could trace the direction of some of the wider streets, and toward the northern side, dominating the city from rising ground, five gaunt, weather-beaten towers, with massive walls and battlements between, frowned over all below. There was menace in this castle, power, and perchance cruelty. It spoke of despotic government, of might as right, of stern repression, of feudal laws and the crushing of all liberty; and yet close to it, the crowning glory of a glorious church, a great spire pierced upward through the haze, telling of other things and a time to come.

They were complex thoughts which filled the mind of the traveller as the diligence swung rapidly down toward the town. To him, indeed, Vayenne was a dream city, an unknown city; yet somehow it had always seemed a part of himself. In an indefinite way he had always known that some day he would come to it, would have a part in its life, be of it; and now, as every moment brought him nearer to it, he forgot that he was a casual traveller merely, that only a few hours ago he had hesitated whether he should come at all. He was obliged to come. He was only fulfilling his destiny.

Lights began to blink in the houses as they crossed the old stone bridge and passed under a massive gateway on the city side of it. Lights swung at street corners as the lumbering vehicle passed over the cobblestones with much rattle and noise upward toward the castle. Even the driver roused a little from his lethargy, and cracked his whip. They had proceeded some distance when he suddenly drew to the side of the street, and the horses came to a standstill. They were evidently used to such pauses; for in these narrow thoroughfares traffic was difficult, and the diligence made no pretence of keeping time. There was the sound of horses' hoofs behind, and in a few moments a woman, followed by half a dozen horsemen, rode by. She checked her pace as she passed, and turned to look at the traveller, while the driver slowly raised his whip in salute. The light from a lamp swinging from a bracket on the wall fell upon her, and the traveller saw that she was young, two or three and twenty, her figure slight and supple. Her dark gray habit may have made her look smaller than she really was, and the mare, which she sat like an accomplished horsewoman, was a big and powerful animal, almost too much, it seemed, for those little gloved hands which held the reins to manage. Yet there was strength in those little hands. There was a suggestion of strength about her altogether, strength of will and purpose. It shone out of a pair of dark gray eyes set under gracefully curved brows and veiled with long lashes. The firm little mouth showed it, and there was just enough suspicion of squareness about the chin to emphasize it. She had nut-brown hair, a curl of which fell upon her forehead from underneath a gray astrakhan cap, and the little head

was poised proudly on her shoulders. No ordinary woman this, not one to be easily swayed by love or any other passion, a woman to rule rather than be ruled.

"Who is that?" asked the traveller, leaning toward the driver as the cavalcade passed on.

"A beautiful woman," was the slow answer.

"But her name?"

The driver cracked his whip and the diligence began to rattle over the cobbles again.

"Some day she may be Duchess," he said, as though he was following his own train of thought rather than answering his companion's question.

There was no time to tempt him into being more explicit, for the horses turned a corner sharply, and with a shake of their harness stopped before a long, low building, on which the traveller could just decipher the words, Hôtel de la Croix Verte. It was an old house, redolent of the past, the lights within shining but faintly through the small windows. Its upper story projected over the narrow footway, and its lower walls bulged outward, as though they had grown tired of the load they had had to bear so long. Its age seemed to have infected its inhabitants, too, for some moments elapsed before the door opened, and a man came out leisurely to receive the parcels which the diligence had brought. That it had brought a traveller also did not excite him, nor was he in any hurry to welcome him. Perhaps the traveller was half dreaming, for he almost started when the man turned and spoke to him.

"Yes; it's a long journey," he answered, "and I am ready to do justice to the best you have."

He followed the landlord along a narrow passage and up a twisting staircase.

"The best room," said the landlord as he opened a door and lit a candle. "There's no one else staying in the house. Strangers do not come much to Vayenne."

"No?" said the traveller interrogatively.

"No," returned the landlord. "It's not an easy journey, and, besides, what can strangers want in Vayenne? By your accent you'll be——"

"Well, to what extent does my accent betray me?" asked the traveller, with a smile.

"English or German," was the answer.

"Englishman," said the traveller—"Roger Herrick by name, a casual visitor who may be interested enough to stay in Vayenne some time."

The landlord nodded, as though he were not surprised at anything an Englishman might do, and went out promising an excellent dinner forthwith.

"So I am in Vayenne at last!" Herrick exclaimed as he glanced around the old room, pleased with its panelled walls and low, beamed ceiling. "In Vayenne! I hardly thought when the time came that the fact would impress me so much."

He went to the window, opened it, and looked out. Like shadows in the darkness he could dimly discern the towers of the castle above the roofs opposite, and the slender spire with its top lost in the night. The chimes made little bursts of ecstatic music like the voices and laughter of spirits in the air. Somewhere there was the low rumble of a cart over the cobbles, but the street below him was empty. The diligence

had gone; no pedestrian was on the narrow footway. It almost seemed as though he were deserted, left here for all time; that, however anxious he might be to leave Vayenne, he would not be able to do so. The city of his dreams had him fast, and already the first of her surprises was preparing for him. Could he have looked but for an instant into the near future, he might possibly have gone to dinner with less appetite than he did.

The long, low room had its windows toward the street, and was broken up by partitions. A waiter pointed to one of these separate retreats as Herrick entered, and he saw that his table was laid there. On the other side of the partition four men were sitting, a bottle of wine and glasses on the table between them. Herrick casually noticed that one was in uniform and that another wore the cassock of a priest, but took no further interest in them, and he had come into the room so quietly that they did not look up at his entrance, and were perhaps unconscious that any one was dining on the other side of the partition.

The landlord had been true to his word, and had provided an excellent dinner. It was good wine, too, that was set upon the table, and Herrick began to discover how hungry he really was. For a long time his attention was confined to the business in hand, and then he suddenly became conscious of the conversation on the other side of the partition. It seemed to have taken a more serious turn, the voices were dropped a little, and it was this fact, no doubt, which made Herrick listen unconsciously.

"Such men as he is die hard," said one man. "The old Duke may hold death at arm's length for years yet."

"Not so, my son. I know something of his disease, and naught but a miracle can help him. A few weeks perhaps, and then——"

It was evidently the priest who spoke. His voice was soft and persuasive, and Herrick thought that some suggestive gesture, explaining what must ensue, had probably finished the sentence.

There was silence for a few moments, and then the ring of a glass as it was placed on the table.

"When the reins fall from a strong hand there is always trouble," said another man.

"And opportunity, don't forget that," said the priest. "You have your ambitions; have we not talked of them before this? They are within a few short weeks of realization, if you will be guided by me."

"Ay, or I am within measurable distance of losing my head, if things go awry," was the answer. "There are always two sides to such a scheme as this."

"I hadn't thought to find a coward in Gaspard Lemasle," said the priest.

There was a sudden movement and quick shuffle of feet, then a laugh, the laugh of a strong man, deep-chested and resonant.

"Bah! I forgot. One cannot fight with a cassock. See here, Father Bertrand, granted I have ambitions, where it not better to stand by the stronger side? Count Felix is strong, even as his uncle. The old Duke looks upon him as his successor. Strong hands are ready to catch the reins as they fall. In the face of such a man will Vayenne shout for a pale-faced scholar it has little knowledge of, think you?"

"And what reward is Gaspard Lemasle to win from Count Felix?" asked the priest. "Is Gaspard Lemasle's support necessary to him? Rewards come only to those who struggle for them. For you they lie in the hands of that pale scholar at Passey. There will be many to shout for him, and, with a determined leader to fight for him, I can see enthusiastic crowds in the streets of Vayenne."

"Father Bertrand speaks nothing but the truth," said another man, and it seemed certain that only Lemasle's consent was wanting to complete a scheme which had long occupied the priest's attention.

"Maybe," Lemasle returned, "I care not overmuch which way it goes."

"And you have forgotten Mademoiselle de Liancourt," said the priest.

"A second time your cassock protects you, father," laughed the other. "It were a sin, indeed, to forget her. Pass the bottle, and let us have brimming glasses to drink her health. Christine de Liancourt, the most beautiful woman in Montvilliers."

"In the world," corrected the priest quietly. "She is heart and soul for this pale scholar, and she has mentioned Gaspard Lemasle to me."

"By the faith, you shall tell me what she said," the other cried, striking the table until the glasses rattled.

"Nay, nay, it was for no ears but mine; yet, mark you, she knows a brave man when she sees him, and——"

The priest stopped suddenly. The silent street had suddenly awoke. There were hurrying feet and men shouting to each other as they ran, then the sound of a gun which

boomed in deep vibration and died slowly away in the distance.

With inarticulate and fragmentary exclamations the four men sprang up and hurried to the door. Herrick followed them more leisurely.

"The Duke is dead!" a man cried to them as they stood in the doorway, and as he ran he shouted the news to others who had been brought from their houses by the sound of the gun. "The Duke is dead!"

"Dead!" said the priest slowly, crossing himself, more by habit than intention it seemed, for other thoughts than of death were reflected in his face. He looked at his companions one after the other, deep meaning in his look, and last of all his eyes rested on Roger Herrick, standing a little in the rear, his face lit up by the light of a lamp hanging in the passage. For a moment the priest did not appear to realize that Herrick was a stranger, and then his eyes opened wider and remained fixed upon him.

"A sudden death," said Herrick. "I heard you say just now that he might live for weeks."

Father Bertrand glanced back into the room they had left, to the place where he and his companions had been sitting.

"Very sudden," he answered, and then after a pause he added, "Very strange."

CHAPTER II

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THE CROIX VERTE LOSES ITS GUEST

"Does the death of a man prevent the living from finishing the bottle? It's a sin to waste good wine," said Lemasle, striding back into the room.

He spoke rather as a man who was perplexed than as one who was callous. Whatever scheme Father Bertrand was persuading him to, had been in the future a few moments ago; there was plenty of time to weigh it and digest it, to play with it and calculate the chances; that cannon booming out into the night had made a quick decision imperative, and Gaspard Lemasle was troubled.

"Leave him to me," said the priest to the other two men, and then as Herrick turned and went down the passage toward the stairs, Father Bertrand drew his companions closer to him, and talked eagerly to them for a few moments.

When Herrick descended the stairs a few minutes later the passage was empty, and only a waiter was in the long room. The conversation he had chanced to overhear had made little impression upon him. Was there ever a state yet in which every citizen was contented with his rulers? Here in Montvilliers there were contentions, and the coming demise of the Duke prompted men to talk. How dangerous such talk might be, Herrick had no means of judging. He had heard a few names which had little meaning for him—a count, a beautiful woman, and a scholar. Evidently they were of import in the Duchy, but of what interest could they be to

him? Nor had he particularly noticed the priest's close scrutiny of his face. Father Bertrand had been astonished to see a stranger there, one who had certainly overheard something of what had been said, and, being a politician as well as a churchman, more loyal as the latter possibly than as the former, he had naturally sought to understand what manner of man this stranger might be. That was all.

So Herrick sought to dismiss the occurrence from his mind as he passed out of the inn, and, after standing on the narrow footway for a moment looking up and down the street, turned in the direction of the castle, bent on a short walk before bed.

There is ever a sense of mystery in an unknown city when it is traversed for the first time after nightfall. Seen over the intervening roofs, some tower or battlemented edifice, rising gray and ghost-like in the dim light of the moon as it did to-night, seems full of mystery; there is a secret in every street turning to right and left, leading we know not whither; in every narrow alley, looking dangerous betwixt frowning walls; in every dark window, from whence evil might peep out unseen. In Vayenne this sense of mystery was intensified since for long centuries history had been busy with it. Its interest lay in the folded mantle of the past rather than in the open lap of the present. Its foundations were in the days of Charlemagne, and in war and peace it had played a foremost part since then. Hate and ambition had fought out their deadly feuds around it and in its streets. Thrice it had closed its gates against the invader and stood a siege. Chivalry had held sway in it, and in cruel ages deeds unspeakable had been perpetrated

within its walls. It had had its periods of great glory and of even greater neglect, of victory and defeat, yet it stood to-day as it ever had stood, the capital of the Duchy of Montvilliers, the centre of an independent state, the dukes of which could still link themselves with those Frankish pirates who had conquered and made their home here.

But to-day Vayenne had fallen behind in the march of modern civilization. For the most part its streets were old and ill-lighted. Men still inhabited houses which had stood for centuries, the castle still frowned over the city as it had done in the Middle Ages, and the ruling hand had still an iron grip in it. Perhaps nowhere in Europe had the ways of the foreigner made less progress. Travellers had not yet marked Vayenne as a place to visit. It was not easy of access, and no one had written eulogies concerning it. That it had fallen behind the times in this manner may have been a potent factor in keeping it inviolate and independent. What wonder then if its rulers, and its people, too, were satisfied with things as they were?

Well might a traveller feel strangely alone and out of the world in this city, whose monuments of chiselled stone and sturdy oak had defied the ravages of the conqueror and of time. Yet no such strangeness took possession of Roger Herrick. Vayenne had been to him a dream city. He had known of it from earliest childhood, why and how he hardly understood; as a boy he had vowed one day to see and know it in reality; and to-night the sudden rushes of bell and chime music, the very cadences of the carillon, which came from the belfry of the great church whose spire rose high toward heaven, seemed familiar. They were not new, he had

only forgotten them for a while. He seemed to have known these dark streets with their overhanging houses in some other life, and in this present existence the death of the Duke to-night seemed to hold some meaning for him.

This sense of familiarity with his surroundings was particularly strong as he stopped at a corner with the intention of turning and retracing his steps to the inn. Some distance down, the street was spanned by a deep archway, in the upper part of which was a great clock. By the light of a lamp swinging at the corner, Herrick saw that it was called the Rue de la Grosse Horloge. Its upper end, at least, was better lighted than most of the streets he had passed through, and he walked toward the archway, which was old and weather-worn, and must have been a familiar object in Vayenne long before any clock was placed there. There were small shops, part of the structure on either side of the road, and in the deep arch itself, above and on the sides, were bold reliefs, some past history of the city carved into permanence in stone. Herrick paused to look up at them, his action marking him for a foreigner, for who amongst those who passed daily through that familiar archway would give them a thought? Two men walking a dozen yards behind him stopped to watch him, and when he went on, they went on, too, quickening their pace a little and drawing closer to him. The street beyond the arch was darker, most of the shops there being closed for the night, and the fact reminded Herrick that it was time to return to the Croix Verte. He turned so suddenly that he almost collided with the two men who followed him, and had walked so lightly that he was quite unconscious of their presence. One stepped aside and

passed on, the other stepped back and began a voluble apology.

"Pardon, monsieur, I did not see. I was walking with my eyes on the ground. It is a bad habit."

Raising his hat and bowing even as the other did, Herrick was explaining that if there were any fault it was his, and that no apology was necessary, when an arm was thrown suddenly across his throat from behind, and he was dragged violently backward. Immediately the man in front closed with him, endeavoring to prevent his using his hands; and the attack was so unexpected that for some moments it was all Herrick could do to keep his feet. He was, however, a strong man, a wrestler and a fighter of no mean skill. With the hand that he had succeeded in keeping free he gripped the arm about his throat, and with one great heave of his body threw the man over his head on to the roadway, where he lay motionless, as though all life were beaten out of him. In another moment it would have gone hard with his other assailant had the man not slipped to the ground, keeping his arms tightly clasped round Herrick's legs, however.

"A spy! Help! A spy!" he shouted. The effect of that cry was wonderful. Before Herrick could kick himself free, a score of men were upon him. He attempted to shout an explanation, but to no purpose. This way and that was he thrown, his arms were seized and twisted behind him, and then a noose was slipped over his wrists, rendering him helpless.

Hatless and with torn clothes he was hustled down the street, the crowd about him becoming larger every moment,

those on the outer fringe of it loudly questioning who he was and what he had done.

"A spy!" some one shouted.

"A quick death to all spies," came the ready answer.

Herrick had been severely handled, and for a few moments was hardly conscious of what was happening about him. The reiterated cry of "Spy" served to rouse him. For these people the word appeared to have a special interpretation. They expected and feared spies, and were inclined to be merciless. Revenge was in their minds rather than justice. That the two men who had attacked him took him for a spy, Herrick did not believe; the man clasp ing his legs had only raised the cry to save himself, knowing full well how promptly assistance would come to such a shout. A quick death seemed likely to follow capture, and, one man as he was against a multitude, Herrick nerved himself for a last struggle. The cord that bound his wrists was not fastened in too workman-like a fashion, he could work his hands free, and it should go hard with some before they succeeded in stringing him to some lamp at a corner, which he imagined was their intention.

The cry, however, had gone farther than the street of the great clock. There was a spirit of excitement abroad in Vayenne to-night consequent on the death of the Duke, and the closing of the shops had only sent more men into the taverns and streets to talk and perchance to plot. The cry of "Spy" had leaped from lip to lip far beyond the man who had been the cause of it, and now as the excited crowd poured out of the street into a wide, open square, and Herrick was about to make a last struggle for his life, there came a sharp

word of command, a ring of steel drawn from the scabbard, and the crowd halted in confusion before a body of soldiers.

"What have we here?" said a voice which sounded familiar to Herrick.

"A spy, captain," shouted a dozen voices.

"You may easily call a man that, but the proof?"

There was silence, each man expecting his neighbor to speak.

"You may well ask for the proof, since there is none," said Herrick. "Some scoundrels——"

"Ay, and the accusation is as easily denied," interrupted the soldier, turning toward Herrick. "There was never a spy yet but had plenty of lies ready to his tongue."

"I am a stranger in Vayenne—shall I seek justice in it in vain, Captain Lamasle?" For Herrick recognized him as the soldier who had been with the priest at the Croix Verte that evening.

An expression of astonishment crossed the captain's face at being known by this stranger. It was evident that he did not recognize Herrick, but perhaps he remembered what company he had been in not long since and what had been said over the wine.

"Being so ready with my name is not much in your favor," he said; "you'll get justice, I warrant." And then in obedience to a quick command, Herrick found himself a prisoner amongst soldiers instead of in the midst of a crowd. It would be useless now to attempt to escape, and at the word of command he marched forward.

Until this moment Herrick had taken little note of his surroundings. Now a sudden rush of music in the air above

made him look around him. The square was of great size, misty and ghost-like in the pale, uncertain moonlight, but, in front of him there loomed a great gateway flanked by towers, and behind and on higher ground, there were other towers and frowning walls. It was the castle, and near it rose the stately pile of a great church, its spire piercing far into the night.

As they approached the castle the great gates were flung open, and Herrick saw that the court-yard within was full of men hurrying to and fro. Horses' hoofs impatiently beat the stones, which were rough and uneven. There was much jingling of harness and ring of spur and steel. Lights shone in narrow doorways, and there was the flame of a torch here and there. All was hurry and excitement; and in some silent chamber near, the Duke lay dead. Herrick remembered this, found himself speculating upon it, yet even as he passed through the gate he hardly felt strange in playing a part in this drama.

The word "Spy" seemed to have run before him even here. That grim gateway had not kept it out. Men paused a moment to look at him: some were silent, some uttered a sound of hatred and contempt, but all seemed convinced that the accusation was a just one.

The soldiers halted by the wall some twenty feet in height. Herrick concluded that there was a terrace or garden above, because several persons, women and pages among them, were leaning over the wall looking into the court-yard below. A flight of stone steps, placed sideways to the wall, led down from this terrace, and at the foot of these steps was a woman mounted upon a beautiful bay mare, which

pawed the ground, impatient to be gone. At a little distance a group of horsemen waited for her signal, which she was in the act of giving when the soldiers, with their prisoner in their midst, came to a halt not a dozen yards from her. The light from two or three torches held by servants who stood on the lower steps lit up her face, and Herrick saw again the woman who had ridden past the diligence a few hours ago, the woman who was destined to play so great a part in his life.

Captain Lemasle stepped to her side and saluted.

"Are you not to ride with us?" she asked. "We are waiting."

"Pardon, mademoiselle. I have just been rescuing a spy. The crowd had caught him, and it would have gone hard with him had we not taken him."

"If he is a spy, would that have mattered?" she said, loud enough for Herrick to hear.

"There is justice in proving a man guilty before he is hanged," Lemasle answered.

"Since when have you been so fastidious? I have heard other things of Gaspard Lemasle. Let me look at this spy."

"I seem better known than I imagined," the soldier muttered as he stood aside.

She rode toward Herrick, the men about him falling back, until she was close upon him.

"Look up," she commanded, "and let me see the face of a spy."

"Not of a spy, mademoiselle, but of an honest man," he answered, looking her straight in the eyes.

"Spy, spy," she contradicted sharply, "or what do you in Vayenne at such a time as this?"

"I am a traveller."

"So are they all," she cried. "There is a guest-room within these walls for you. Vayenne knows how to welcome such travellers. Ah! I could honor an enemy, but a spy——" And there was such utter contempt in her face that Herrick could find no words to answer her.

As she tightened her reins, her riding whip slipped from her fingers and fell at his feet, and before any one could prevent him he had shaken the loosened cord from his wrists, and had stooped and picked it up. In an instant half a dozen soldiers sprang forward to prevent his attacking her. She did not flinch, but waving them back, held out her hand for the whip.

"Thank you, mademoiselle," said Herrick. "At least you have generosity enough to know that I am incapable of such a thing as that."

She looked at him for an instant as she took the whip, a new interest in her eyes, and a slight lowering of her proud head thanked him. Then she turned the mare round sharply.

"Captain Lemasle, I am ready," she said, and as the soldiers closed round Herrick again, she rode out through the grim gateway, followed by the troop of horsemen.

CHAPTER III

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THE DWARF OF ST. ETIENNE

Along dark stone passages, through many a doorway, and across two or three rough court-yards, half a dozen soldiers conducted Herrick to his "guest-room." The woman's pleasantries had caught their fancy, and they laughed boisterously as they went, hoping, perhaps, to put fear into the heart of their prisoner.

They halted before a low door, which one man unlocked with a great key. The immense thickness of the wall formed a narrow passage, at the end of which some steps descended into a semicircular cell of no great size, but of considerable height.

"There's straw for a bed," said the jailer, pointing to a corner, "though how it came here I don't understand, and you've got heaven's light itself for a candle." And he nodded toward a patch of moonlight. "There are honest soldiers who are worse lodged, I warrant."

"It ill becomes a guest to complain of his treatment," Herrick answered.

"Ay; that idea of a guest-room was smartly thought of," the man returned, "but maybe you hardly see the full humor of it. This is the South Tower, and it's usually the last lodging a man needs this side the grave."

"Is that so?" And Herrick's attitude had interest in it, but little personal concern.

"Yes; and it's a short walk from here to the last yard we crossed. It usually happens there." And the jailer made a

suggestive downward sweep with his arm.

"Axe or sword?" asked Herrick.

"Sword. Unless they decide to make an especial example in your case, then they're likely to hang you over the great gateway."

"Am I sufficiently important for that, think you?"

"I've known a dead sparrow on a string scare away much finer birds," the jailer answered; "but at any rate you're no white-livered man, and I shouldn't grieve to see you cheat both sword and rope."

"Thanks for your good will," said Herrick. "Who knows, I may live to speak a comforting word to you. I will be honest with you, I had not appreciated the full extent of the lady's humor."

With something like a salute, deference to the prisoner's courage, the jailer departed, and the key grated harshly in the lock as the bolts shot home.

High up near the roof there was a deep-set window through which the moonlight came. The tower could not be shut in by high walls, therefore, and probably was one of the outer towers of the castle. From that window possibly a prisoner might look into a free world, reach it, perhaps, if age had worn the bars loose in their stone sockets. A moment later Herrick felt certain that only this single wall held him from freedom, for the music of the carillon burst upon his ears. His fancy made the moonbeams the path along which the music travelled. But the window was unattainable. The rounded walls were almost as smooth as if the surface had been polished, and the cell was bare of everything but the heap of straw in the corner.

"My first night in Vayenne," he muttered, and some of the bravery with which he had addressed the jailer was wanting. The moonlight was upon his face as he spoke, a serious face just now, although neither hopelessness nor despair was in it. It could hardly be called a handsome face, yet it was one to remember. They were good, steady eyes, and if the nose and mouth were not an artist's ideals of beauty, in the whole face the artist would have found attraction. It was strong, forceful, fashioned in an uncommon mould; it was a face apart rather than one of a type, a strong family possession which to strangers had often marked him for a Herrick.

"My first night in Vayenne," he repeated as he began to pace his narrow cell slowly. How long ago it seemed since he had first seen the city from the brow of the hills. How much had happened in the few short hours since then, and yet one incident stood out more clearly than all the rest, the woman leaning from her horse to look into the face of a spy. Even now her contempt hurt him. It was hateful to appear mean in her eyes. All else that had happened to him seemed of little account beside this. The moment his eyes had rested upon her there had sprung a desire in his soul to serve her. In that service he felt himself capable of much, yet she despised him. A little touch of sympathy had shown in her face for a moment when he handed her the whip, but it had no power to obliterate the contempt. That was her true feeling toward him, the other was but the passing pity which a woman may have even for a coward.

The carillon had sounded several times, and the direction of the moon ray had changed, leaving the floor of the cell in

darkness; but buried in thought Herrick took no notice of the little rushes of music, nor was he conscious of the deepening gloom around him until a sudden shadow seemed to flit through the chamber, and a new stealthy sound startled him. Instinctively he drew back to the wall, that whatever enemy might be near should have to face him and not be able to take him unawares. Once to-night already he had been seized from behind.

Standing on the outside ledge of the window, holding on to the bars and peering into the cell, was a figure that might well startle the bravest. The opening could not be more than four feet in height, yet it was sufficient to allow this figure to stand upright. Head, feet, and hands were at least normal in size, those of a full-grown and powerful man, the body was that of a child, though its curiously twisted form might have abnormal strength in it. His hair was long, and a thick, stubbly beard and whiskers completely surrounded his face. He was ugly in the extreme, and even Herrick was pleased to think that solid bars were between them.

For full five minutes the dwarf stood there, uttering no sound, but moving his head from side to side, trying to pierce the darkness, and once or twice he leant backward at arm's length to look down on the outside below him. Then he took hold of one bar with both hands, and, lifting it out of its socket, laid it carefully along the window-ledge. From the breast of the loose smock-like garment he wore he took a length of rope, knotted one end round one of the bars, and let the other end fall into the cell. For a moment he waited and listened; then, with the agility of a gorilla, he swung himself down, and stood on the floor of the cell, the rope

still in his hand, as though he were prepared to spring upward to safety again at the first sign of danger.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" said Herrick suddenly.

The dwarf turned quickly toward him.

"Hush! It's only friend Jean."

"I have no such friend."

"You do not know it, but yes, from this moment you have. See here, my knife; watch, I fling it across the floor! Take it, it is for your protection—to show my good faith. I have no other weapon. Now, let's come close and look at each other."

The knife, a formidable blade, came skimming across the stone flags to Herrick's feet. He picked it up, and walked into the centre of the cell to meet his strange visitor.

"You must bend down to let me be sure that you are the man," said the dwarf.

"You have seen me before, then?"

"To-night when she rode across the court-yard to look at you. Ah, yes, you are the man. You were so quiet I thought they had put you elsewhere. Did I frighten you?"

"Well, you startled me, friend Jean."

The dwarf laughed a little, low chuckle, and, silently clapping his hands, stood on one foot and scratched the calf of his leg with the other.

"Ah! So I startled you, friend Spy."

"Stop! Not that word."

"I must needs call you by some name. Give me another."

"Roger Herrick."

"Friend Roger, good. It comes to my tongue easily. Let's sit, and I'll tell you who I am." And doubling his legs under him he sank cross-legged onto the floor.

"I will lean by the wall, Jean, I find it easier," said Herrick.

"Ah, there are compensations, after all, for a man like me. To know Vayenne is to know me; you can't help it. They call me an innocent; you know what that means?"

"Yes."

"But not all it means, I warrant," chuckled the dwarf. "I get pity; I am not supposed to do things like other men. Who cares where I go? In the castle, in the church, in a house where there's feasting—anywhere—I don't count. Who cares if I listen? It's only Jean; in at one ear, out at the other. No one looks to me for work, they'd sooner pay me for playing the fool, and I let 'em, I let 'em." And somewhere in his strange, loose garments he made the coins jingle. "So I go in and out as I will. If I curled up to sleep on the rug at the Duke's door they'd hardly trouble to disturb me, I count for such a little. Generally I sleep in the church."

"In the church?"

"Ay; in the porch. They call me the dwarf of St. Etienne. Listen! there's its music." And he remained silent with uplifted finger until the ripple of the carillon had died away into the night. "I'm a little fellow to have so large a church to myself, as I often do at nights; and, friend Roger, I see things in St. Etienne when the moonlight sends faint, colored beams through the painted windows. There are legends and superstitions about St. Etienne, and people are superstitious about me, too. They believe I know things, and so I do, but not of the sort they fancy."