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## THE STEWARD OF CRÉ

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### IV.—*Continued.*

AND my uncle; what of him? was this his work? If so, then certainly he had become a master of the art. But why should he turn brigand? I asked myself the question several times, and in trying to account for it, found myself in the greatest quandary. The mystery was more than I could solve, and not wishing to trust my imagination to any great extent, I ascribed the present state of affairs to the mental derangement of which I had been led to believe my uncle suffered.

I found a box in a corner of the cell, and sitting down upon it, tried to collect my thoughts. The struggle with my captors had left me out of breath, and being both heated and excited, my thoughts came in a whirl. I was in a rage for Mademoiselle de Catinac, and chagrined over my defeat in the Emperor's mission. Mon Dieu! Perhaps my uncle had turned Royalist, and my capture was due to my adventure into France as His Majesty's agent. As the thought occurred I tore open the lining of my waistcoat, and removed the despatches. They were in cipher, on tissue paper. I could not make them out, but remembering the Emperor's advice to destroy them if I got into trouble, and not knowing what my present predicament might mean, I tore the despatches into bits and swallowed them. Then refreshing my memory with the words

"the first of March, at Cannes," which I had been instructed to deliver, should the despatches have to be destroyed, I resolved that General Moncey should hear them, if I had to crawl through a knot-hole to make my escape.

You may be sure the thought of escape occurred many times, but to no avail. The walls of my cell were of solid masonry, the door was of heavy oak, the window was grated with thick bars of iron, and there were no knot-holes.

Having thus settled the matter with regard to myself, my thoughts reverted to Mademoiselle de Catinac, whom I feared had been badly treated. Her plight among these rascals might be even worse than mine, and the very thought of it was maddening. Could I have gained my freedom and a good sword, I should have attacked this whole motley band of desperadoes single handed, for her sake, nor would I have hesitated to challenge my uncle, good swordsman that he was; and I should have secured mademoiselle's liberty, too, or perhaps been killed in the attempt. I railed at everything in general, and at my uncle in particular. For a man of his wealth and good standing, it was a dastardly business to be in, and I was sorry I had kept aloof from him so many years. Perhaps my influence would have prevented such a disgraceful state of affairs. I certainly should have thwarted such a policy, even though his