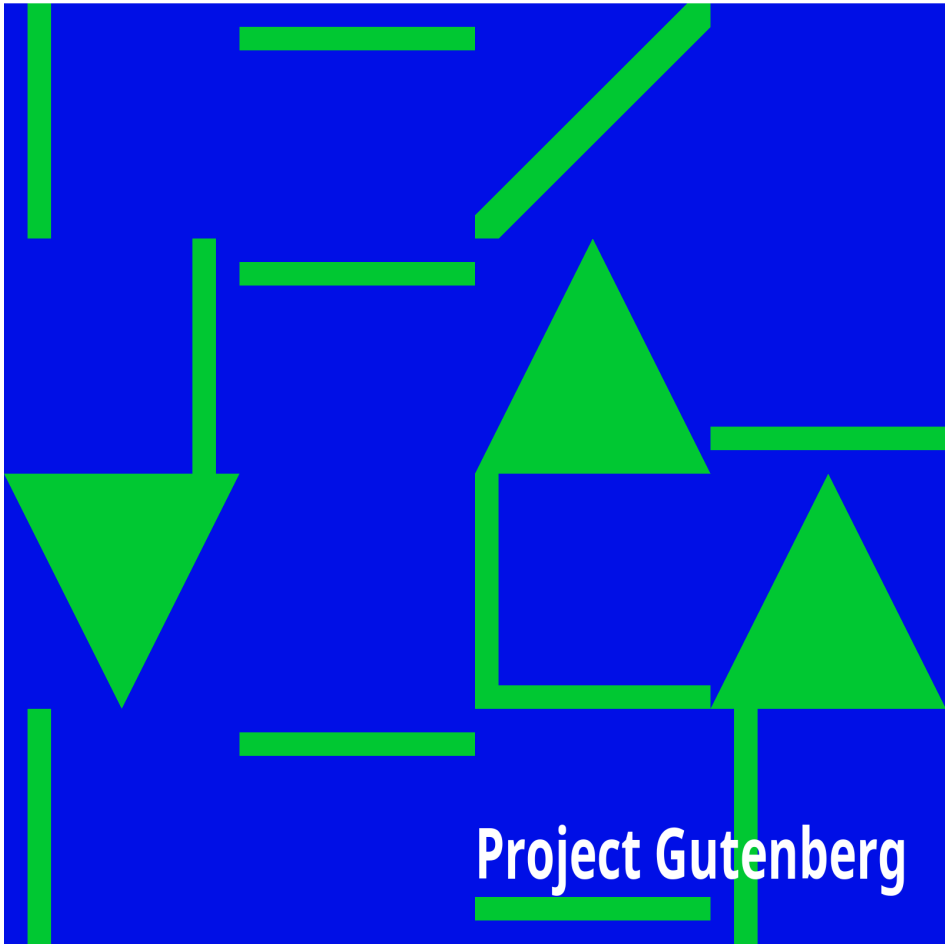
Ten Years Later

Alexandre Dumas



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Title: Ten Years Later

Author: Alexandre Dumas

Release date: June 1, 2001 [eBook #2681]
Most recently updated: April 24, 2025

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2681

Credits: John Bursey and David Widger

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Ten Years Later

(1660–1661, Chapters 76–140 of the Third Volume of the D'Artagnan series)

by Alexandre Dumas

THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EDITOR'S NOTE TO THE PG D'ARTAGNAN SERIES

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Transcriber’s Notes:

As you may be aware, Project Gutenberg has been involved with the writings of both the Alexandre Dumases for some time now, and since we get a few questions about the order in which the books should be read, and in which they were published, these following comments should hopefully help most of our readers.

The Vicomte de Bragelonne is the final volume of D’Artagnan Romances: it is usually split into three or four parts, and the final portion is entitled The Man in the Iron Mask. The Man in the Iron Mask we’re familiar with today is the last volume of the four-volume edition. [Not all the editions split them in the same manner, hence some of the confusion...but wait...there’s yet more reason for confusion.]

We intend to do ALL of The Vicomte de Bragelonne, split into four etexts entitled The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Ten Years Later, Louise de la Vallière, and The Man in the Iron Mask; you WILL be getting The Man in the Iron Mask.

One thing that may be causing confusion is that the etext we have now, entitled Ten Years Later, says it’s the sequel to The Three Musketeers. While this is technically true, there’s another book, Twenty Years After, that comes between. The confusion is generated by the two facts that we published Ten Years Later BEFORE we published Twenty Years After, and that many people see those titles as meaning Ten and Twenty Years “After” the original story...however, this is why the different words “After” and

“Later”...the Ten Years “After” is ten years after the Twenty Years later...as per history. Also, the third book of the D’Artagnan Romances, while entitled The Vicomte de Bragelonne, has the subtitle Ten Years Later. These two titles are also given to different volumes: The Vicomte de Bragelonne can refer to the whole book, or the first volume of the three or four-volume editions. Ten Years Later can, similarly, refer to the whole book, or the second volume of the four-volume edition. To add to the confusion, in the case of our etexts, it refers to the first 104 chapters of the whole book, covering material in the first and second etexts in the new series. Here is a guide to the series which may prove helpful:

The Three Musketeers: Etext 1257—First book of the D’Artagnan Romances. Covers the years 1625-1628.

Twenty Years After: Etext 1259—Second book of the D’Artagnan Romances. Covers the years 1648-1649. [Third in the order that we published, but second in time sequence!!!]

Ten Years Later: Etext 1258—First 104 chapters of the third book of the D’Artagnan Romances. Covers the years 1660-1661.

The Vicomte de Bragelonne: Etext 2609 (first in the new series)—First 75 chapters of the third book of the D’Artagnan Romances. Covers the year 1660.

Ten Years Later: Etext 2681 (our new etext)—Chapters 76-140 of that third book of the D’Artagnan Romances. Covers the years 1660-1661. [In this particular editing of it]

Louise de la Vallière: forthcoming (our next etext)—Chapters 141-208 of the third book of the D’Artagnan Romances. Covers the year 1661.

The Man in the Iron Mask: forthcoming (following)—Chapters 209-269 of the third book of the D’Artagnan Romances. Covers the years 1661-1673.

If we've calculated correctly, that fourth text SHOULD correspond to the modern editions of The Man in the Iron Mask, which is still widely circulated, and comprises about the last 1/4 of The Vicomte de Bragelonne.

Many thanks to Dr. David Coward, whose editions of the D'Artagnan Romances have proved an invaluable source of information.

Introduction:

In the months of March-July in 1844, in the magazine Le Siecle, the first portion of a story appeared, penned by the celebrated playwright Alexandre Dumas. It was based, he claimed, on some manuscripts he had found a year earlier in the Bibliotheque Nationale while researching a history he planned to write on Louis XIV. They chronicled the adventures of a young man named D'Artagnan who, upon entering Paris, became almost immediately embroiled in court intrigues, international politics, and ill-fated affairs between royal lovers. Over the next six years, readers would enjoy the adventures of this youth and his three famous friends, Porthos, Athos, and Aramis, as their exploits unraveled behind the scenes of some of the most momentous events in French and even English history.

Eventually these serialized adventures were published in novel form, and became the three D'Artagnan Romances known today. Here is a brief summary of the first two novels:

The Three Musketeers (serialized March-July, 1844): The year is 1625. The young D'Artagnan arrives in Paris at the tender age of 18, and almost immediately offends three musketeers, Porthos, Aramis, and Athos. Instead of dueling, the four are attacked by five of the Cardinal's guards, and the courage of the youth is made apparent during the battle. The four become fast friends, and, when asked by D'Artagnan's landlord to find his missing wife, embark upon an adventure that takes them across both France and England in order to thwart the plans of the Cardinal Richelieu. Along the way, they encounter a

beautiful young spy, named simply Milady, who will stop at nothing to disgrace Queen Anne of Austria before her husband, Louis XIII, and take her revenge upon the four friends.

Twenty Years After (serialized January-August, 1845): The year is now 1648, twenty years since the close of the last story. Louis XIII has died, as has Cardinal Richelieu, and while the crown of France may sit upon the head of Anne of Austria as Regent for the young Louis XIV, the real power resides with the Cardinal Mazarin, her secret husband. D'Artagnan is now a lieutenant of musketeers, and his three friends have retired to private life. Athos turned out to be a nobleman, the Comte de la Fere, and has retired to his home with his son, Raoul de Bragelonne. Aramis, whose real name is D'Herblay, has followed his intention of shedding the musketeer's cassock for the priest's robes, and Porthos has married a wealthy woman, who left him her fortune upon her death. But trouble is stirring in both France and England. Cromwell menaces the institution of royalty itself while marching against Charles I, and at home the Fronde is threatening to tear France apart. D'Artagnan brings his friends out of retirement to save the threatened English monarch, but Mordaunt, the son of Milady, who seeks to avenge his mother's death at the musketeers' hands, thwarts their valiant efforts. Undaunted, our heroes return to France just in time to help save the young Louis XIV, quiet the Fronde, and tweak the nose of Cardinal Mazarin.

The third novel, The Vicomte de Bragelonne (serialized October, 1847 —January, 1850), has enjoyed a strange history in its English translation. It has been split into three, four, or five volumes at various points in its history. The five-volume edition generally does not give titles to the smaller portions, but the others do. In the three-volume edition, the novels are entitled The Vicomte de

Bragelonne, Louise de la Vallière, and The Man in the Iron Mask. For the purposes of this etext, I have chosen to split the novel as the four-volume edition does, with these titles: The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Ten Years Later, Louise de la Vallière, and The Man in the Iron Mask. In the last etext:

The Vicomte de Bragelonne (Etext 2609): It is the year 1660, and D'Artagnan, after thirty-five years of loyal service, has become disgusted with serving King Louis XIV while the real power resides with the Cardinal Mazarin, and has tendered his resignation. He embarks on his own project, that of restoring Charles II to the throne of England, and, with the help of Athos, succeeds, earning himself quite a fortune in the process. D'Artagnan returns to Paris to live the life of a rich citizen, and Athos, after negotiating the marriage of Philip, the king's brother, to Princess Henrietta of England, likewise retires to his own estate, La Fere. Meanwhile, Mazarin has finally died, and left Louis to assume the reigns of power, with the assistance of M. Colbert, formerly Mazarin's trusted clerk. Colbert has an intense hatred for M. Fouquet, the king's superintendent of finances, and has resolved to use any means necessary to bring about his fall. With the new rank of intendant bestowed on him by Louis, Colbert succeeds in having two of Fouquet's loyal friends tried and executed. He then brings to the king's attention that Fouquet is fortifying the island of Belle-Ile-en-Mer, and could possibly be planning to use it as a base for some military operation against the king. Louis calls D'Artagnan out of retirement and sends him to investigate the island, promising him a tremendous salary and his long-promised promotion to captain of the musketeers upon his return. At Belle-Isle, D'Artagnan discovers that the engineer of the fortifications is, in fact, Porthos, now the Baron du Vallon, and that's not all. The blueprints for the island, although in Porthos's handwriting, show evidence of another script that has

been erased, that of Aramis. D'Artagnan later discovers that Aramis has become the bishop of Vannes, which is, coincidentally, a parish belonging to M. Fouquet. Suspecting that D'Artagnan has arrived on the king's behalf to investigate, Aramis tricks D'Artagnan into wandering around Vannes in search of Porthos, and sends Porthos on an heroic ride back to Paris to warn Fouquet of the danger. Fouquet rushes to the king, and gives him Belle-Isle as a present, thus allaying any suspicion, and at the same time humiliating Colbert, just minutes before the usher announces someone else seeking an audience with the king.

And now, the second etext of The Vicomte de Bragelonne. Enjoy!

John Bursey Mordaunt

There is one French custom that may cause confusion. The Duc d'Orleans is traditionally called "Monsieur" and his wife "Madame." Gaston, the king's uncle, currently holds that title. Upon the event of his death, it will be conferred upon the king's brother, Philip, who is currently the Duc d'Anjou. The customary title of "Monsieur" will go to him as well, and upon his future wife, Henrietta of England, that of "Madame." Gaston's widow will be referred to as the "Dowager Madame."—JB

Chapter I. In which D'Artagnan finishes by at Length placing his Hand upon his Captain's Commission.

The reader guesses beforehand whom the usher preceded in announcing the courier from Bretagne. This messenger was easily recognized. It was D'Artagnan, his clothes dusty, his face inflamed, his hair dripping with sweat, his legs stiff; he lifted his feet painfully at every step, on which resounded the clink of his blood-stained spurs. He perceived in the doorway he was passing through, the superintendent coming out. Fouquet bowed with a smile to him who, an hour before, was bringing him ruin and death. D'Artagnan found in his goodness of heart, and in his inexhaustible vigor of body, enough presence of mind to remember the kind reception of this man; he bowed then, also, much more from benevolence and compassion, than from respect. He felt upon his lips the word which had so many times been repeated to the Duc de Guise: "Fly." But to pronounce that word would have been to betray his cause; to speak that word in the cabinet of the king, and before an usher, would have been to ruin himself gratuitously, and could save nobody. D'Artagnan then, contented himself with bowing to Fouquet and entered. At this moment the king floated between the joy the last words of Fouquet had given him, and his pleasure at the return of D'Artagnan. Without being a courtier, D'Artagnan had a glance as sure and as rapid as if he had been one. He read, on his entrance, devouring humiliation on the countenance of Colbert. He even heard the king say these words to him:—

"Ah! Monsieur Colbert; you have then nine hundred thousand livres at the intendance?" Colbert, suffocated, bowed but made no reply. All this scene entered into the mind of D'Artagnan, by the eyes and ears, at once.

The first word of Louis to his musketeer, as if he wished it to contrast with what he was saying at the moment, was a kind "good day." His second was to send away Colbert. The latter left the king's cabinet, pallid and tottering, whilst D'Artagnan twisted up the ends of his mustache.

"I love to see one of my servants in this disorder," said the king, admiring the martial stains upon the clothes of his envoy.

"I thought, sire, my presence at the Louvre was sufficiently urgent to excuse my presenting myself thus before you."

"You bring me great news, then, monsieur?"

"Sire, the thing is this, in two words: Belle-Isle is fortified, admirably fortified; Belle-Isle has a double *enceinte*, a citadel, two detached forts; its ports contain three corsairs; and the side batteries only await their cannon."

"I know all that, monsieur," replied the king.

"What! your majesty knows all that?" replied the musketeer, stupefied.

"I have the plan of the fortifications of Belle-Isle," said the king.

"Your majesty has the plan?"

"Here it is."

"It is really correct, sire: I saw a similar one on the spot."

D'Artagnan's brow became clouded.

"Ah! I understand all. Your majesty did not trust to me alone, but sent some other person," said he in a reproachful tone.

"Of what importance is the manner, monsieur, in which I have learnt what I know, so that I know it?"

"Sire, sire," said the musketeer, without seeking even to conceal his dissatisfaction; "but I must be permitted to say to your majesty, that it is not worth while to make me use such speed, to risk twenty times the breaking of my neck, to salute me on my arrival with such intelligence. Sire, when people are not trusted, or are deemed insufficient, they should scarcely be employed." And D'Artagnan, with a movement

perfectly military, stamped with his foot, and left upon the floor dust stained with blood. The king looked at him, inwardly enjoying his first triumph.

"Monsieur," said he, at the expiration of a minute, "not only is Belle-Isle known to me, but, still further, Belle-Isle is mine."

"That is well! that is well, sire, I ask but one thing more," replied D'Artagnan.—"My discharge."

"What! your discharge?"

"Without doubt I am too proud to eat the bread of the king without earning it, or rather by gaining it badly.—My discharge, sire!"

"Oh, oh!"

"I ask for my discharge, or I will take it."

"You are angry, monsieur?"

"I have reason, *mordioux!* Thirty-two hours in the saddle, I ride day and night, I perform prodigies of speed, I arrive stiff as the corpse of a man who has been hung—and another arrives before me! Come, sire, I am a fool!—My discharge, sire!"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Louis, leaning his white hand upon the dusty arm of the musketeer, "what I tell you will not at all affect that which I promised you. A king's word given must be kept." And the king going straight to his table, opened a drawer, and took out a folded paper. "Here is your commission of captain of musketeers; you have won it, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan opened the paper eagerly, and scanned it twice. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"And this commission is given you," continued the king, "not only on account of your journey to Belle-Isle but, moreover, for your brave intervention at the Place de Greve. There, likewise, you served me valiantly."

"Ah, ah!" said D'Artagnan, without his self-command being able to prevent a blush from mounting to his eyes—"you know that also, sire?"

"Yes, I know it."

The king possessed a piercing glance and an infallible judgment when it was his object to read men's minds. "You have something to say," said he to the musketeer, "something to say which you do not say. Come, speak freely, monsieur; you know that I told you, once and for all, that you are to be always quite frank with me."

"Well, sire! what I have to say is this, that I would prefer being made captain of the musketeers for having charged a battery at the head of my company, or taken a city, than for causing two wretches to be hung."

"Is this quite true you tell me?"

"And why should your majesty suspect me of dissimulation, I ask?"

"Because I have known you well, monsieur; you cannot repent of having drawn your sword for me."

"Well, in that your majesty is deceived, and greatly; yes, I do repent of having drawn my sword on account of the results that action produced; the poor men who were hung, sire, were neither your enemies nor mine; and they could not defend themselves."

The king preserved silence for a moment. "And your companion, M. d'Artagnan, does he partake of your repentance?"

"My companion?"

"Yes, you were not alone, I have been told."

"Alone, where?"

"At the Place de Greve."

"No, sire, no," said D'Artagnan, blushing at the idea that the king might have a suspicion that he, D'Artagnan, had wished to engross to himself all the glory that belonged to Raoul; "no, *mordioux!* and as your majesty says, I had a companion, and a good companion, too."

"A young man?"

"Yes, sire; a young man. Oh! your majesty must accept my compliments, you are as well informed of things out of doors as things within. It is M. Colbert who makes all these fine reports to the king."

“M. Colbert has said nothing but good of you, M. d’Artagnan, and he would have met with a bad reception if he had come to tell me anything else.”

“That is fortunate!”

“But he also said much good of that young man.”

“And with justice,” said the musketeer.

“In short, it appears that this young man is a fire-eater,” said Louis, in order to sharpen the sentiment which he mistook for envy.

“A fire-eater! Yes, sire,” repeated D’Artagnan, delighted on his part to direct the king’s attention to Raoul.

“Do you not know his name?”

“Well, I think—”

“You know him then?”

“I have known him nearly five-and-twenty years, sire.”

“Why, he is scarcely twenty-five years old!” cried the king.

“Well, sire! I have known him ever since he was born, that is all.”

“Do you affirm that?”

“Sire,” said D’Artagnan, “your majesty questions me with a mistrust in which I recognize another character than your own. M. Colbert, who has so well informed you, has he not forgotten to tell you that this young man is the son of my most intimate friend?”

“The Vicomte de Bragelonne?”

“Certainly, sire. The father of the Vicomte de Bragelonne is M. le Comte de la Fere, who so powerfully assisted in the restoration of King Charles II. Bragelonne comes of a valiant race, sire.”

“Then he is the son of that nobleman who came to me, or rather to M. Mazarin, on the part of King Charles II., to offer me his alliance?”

“Exactly, sire.”

“And the Comte de la Fere is a great soldier, say you?”

“Sire, he is a man who has drawn his sword more times for the king, your father, than there are, at present, months in the happy life of your majesty.”

It was Louis XIV. who now bit his lip.

“That is well, M. d’Artagnan, very well! And M. le Comte de la Fere is your friend, say you?”

“For about forty years; yes, sire. Your majesty may see that I do not speak to you of yesterday.”

“Should you be glad to see this young man, M. d’Artagnan?”

“Delighted, sire.”

The king touched his bell, and an usher appeared. “Call M. de Bragelonne,” said the king.

“Ah! ah! he is here?” said D’Artagnan.

“He is on guard to-day, at the Louvre, with the company of the gentlemen of monsieur le prince.”

The king had scarcely ceased speaking, when Raoul presented himself, and, on seeing D’Artagnan, smiled on him with that charming smile which is only found upon the lips of youth.

“Come, come,” said D’Artagnan, familiarly, to Raoul, “the king will allow you to embrace me; only tell his majesty you thank him.”

Raoul bowed so gracefully, that Louis, to whom all superior qualities were pleasing when they did not overshadow his own, admired his beauty, strength, and modesty.

“Monsieur,” said the king, addressing Raoul, “I have asked monsieur le prince to be kind enough to give you up to me; I have received his reply, and you belong to me from this morning. Monsieur le prince was a good master, but I hope you will not lose by the exchange.”

“Yes, yes, Raoul, be satisfied; the king has some good in him,” said D’Artagnan, who had fathomed the character of Louis, and who played with his self-love, within certain limits; always observing, be it understood, the proprieties and flattering, even when he appeared to be bantering.

“Sire,” said Bragelonne, with voice soft and musical, and with the natural and easy elocution he inherited from his father; “Sire, it is not from to-day that I belong to your majesty.”

“Oh! no, I know,” said the king, “you mean your enterprise of the Greve. That day, you were truly mine, monsieur.”

“Sire, it is not of that day I would speak; it would not become me to refer to so paltry a service in the presence of such a man as M. d’Artagnan. I would speak of a circumstance which created an epoch in my life, and which consecrated me, from the age of sixteen, to the devoted service of your majesty.”

“Ah! ah!” said the king, “what was that circumstance? Tell me, monsieur.”

“This is it, sire.—When I was setting out on my first campaign, that is to say, to join the army of monsieur le prince, M. le Comte de la Fere came to conduct me as far as Saint-Denis, where the remains of King Louis XIII. wait, upon the lowest steps of the funeral *basilique*, a successor, whom God will not send him, I hope, for many years. Then he made me swear upon the ashes of our masters, to serve royalty, represented by you—incarnate in you, sire—to serve it in word, in thought, and in action. I swore, and God and the dead were witnesses to my oath. During ten years, sire, I have not so often as I desired had occasion to keep it. I am a soldier of your majesty, and nothing else; and, on calling me nearer to you, I do not change my master, I only change my garrison.”

Raoul was silent and bowed. Louis still listened after he had done speaking.

“*Mordioux!*” cried D’Artagnan, “that was well spoken! was it not, your majesty? A good race! a noble race!”

“Yes,” murmured the king, without, however daring to manifest his emotion, for it had no other cause than contact with a nature intrinsically noble. “Yes, monsieur, you say truly:—wherever you were, you were the king’s. But in changing your garrison, believe me you will find an advancement of which you are worthy.”

Raoul saw that this ended what the king had to say to him. And with the perfect tact which characterized his refined nature, he bowed and retired.

“Is there anything else, monsieur, of which you have to inform me?” said the king, when he found himself again alone with D’Artagnan.

“Yes, sire, and I kept that news for the last, for it is sad, and will clothe European royalty in mourning.”

“What do you tell me?”

“Sire, in passing through Blois, a word, a sad word, echoed from the palace, struck my ear.”

“In truth, you terrify me, M. d’Artagnan.”

“Sire, this word was pronounced to me by a *piqueur*, who wore crape on his arm.”

“My uncle, Gaston of Orleans, perhaps.”

“Sire, he has rendered his last sigh.”

“And I was not warned of it!” cried the king, whose royal susceptibility saw an insult in the absence of this intelligence.

“Oh! do not be angry, sire,” said D’Artagnan; “neither the couriers of Paris, nor the couriers of the whole world, can travel with your servant; the courier from Blois will not be here these two hours, and he rides well, I assure you, seeing that I only passed him on the thither side of Orleans.”

“My uncle Gaston,” murmured Louis, pressing his hand to his brow, and comprising in those three words all that his memory recalled of that symbol of opposing sentiments.

“Eh! yes, sire, it is thus,” said D’Artagnan, philosophically replying to the royal thought, “it is thus the past flies away.”

“That is true, monsieur, that is true; but there remains for us, thank God! the future; and we will try to make it not too dark.”

“I feel confidence in your majesty on that head,” said D’Artagnan, bowing, “and now—”

“You are right, monsieur; I had forgotten the hundred leagues you have just ridden. Go, monsieur, take care of one of the best of soldiers, and when you have reposed a little, come and place yourself at my disposal.”

“Sire, absent or present, I am always yours.”

D’Artagnan bowed and retired. Then, as if he had only come from Fontainebleau, he quickly traversed the Louvre to rejoin Bragelonne.

Chapter II. A Lover and His Mistress.

Whilst the wax-lights were burning in the castle of Blois, around the inanimate body of Gaston of Orleans, that last representative of the past; whilst the *bourgeois* of the city were thinking out his epitaph, which was far from being a panegyric; whilst madame the dowager, no longer remembering that in her young days she had loved that senseless corpse to such a degree as to fly the paternal palace for his sake, was making, within twenty paces of the funeral apartment, her little calculations of interest and her little sacrifices of pride; other interests and other prides were in agitation in all the parts of the castle into which a living soul could penetrate. Neither the lugubrious sounds of the bells, nor the voices of the chanters, nor the splendor of the wax-lights through the windows, nor the preparations for the funeral, had power to divert the attention of two persons, placed at a window of the interior court—a window that we are acquainted with, and which lighted a chamber forming part of what were called the little apartments. For the rest, a joyous beam of the sun, for the sun appeared to care little for the loss France had just suffered; a sunbeam, we say, descended upon them, drawing perfumes from the neighboring flowers, and animating the walls themselves. These two persons, so occupied, not by the death of the duke, but by the conversation which was the consequence of that death, were a young woman and a young man. The latter personage, a man of from twenty-five to twenty-six years of age, with a mien sometimes lively and sometimes dull, making good use of two large eyes, shaded with long eye-lashes, was short of stature and swart of skin; he smiled with an enormous, but well-furnished mouth, and his pointed chin, which appeared to enjoy a mobility nature does not ordinarily grant to that portion of the countenance, leant from time to time very

lovingly towards his interlocutrix, who, we must say, did not always draw back so rapidly as strict propriety had a right to require. The young girl—we know her, for we have already seen her, at that very same window, by the light of that same sun—the young girl presented a singular mixture of shyness and reflection; she was charming when she laughed, beautiful when she became serious; but, let us hasten to say, she was more frequently charming than beautiful. These two appeared to have attained the culminating point of a discussion—half-bantering, half-serious.

"Now, Monsieur Malicorne," said the young girl, "does it, at length, please you that we should talk reasonably?"

"You believe that that is very easy, Mademoiselle Aure," replied the young man. "To do what we like, when we can only do what we are able —"

"Good! there he is bewildered in his phrases."

"Who, I?"

"Yes, you; quit that lawyer's logic, my dear."

"Another impossibility. Clerk I am, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Demoiselle I am, Monsieur Malicorne."

"Alas, I know it well, and you overwhelm me by your rank; so I will say no more to you."

"Well, no, I don't overwhelm you; say what you have to tell me—say it, I insist upon it."

"Well, I obey you."

"That is truly fortunate."

"Monsieur is dead."

"Ah, *peste!* that's news! And where do you come from, to be able to tell us that?"

"I come from Orleans, mademoiselle."

"And is that all the news you bring?"

“Ah, no; I am come to tell you that Madame Henrietta of England is coming to marry the king’s brother.”

“Indeed, Malicorne, you are insupportable with your news of the last century. Now, mind, if you persist in this bad habit of laughing at people, I will have you turned out.”

“Oh!”

“Yes, for really you exasperate me.”

“There, there. Patience, mademoiselle.”

“You want to make yourself of consequence; I know well enough why. Go!”

“Tell me, and I will answer you frankly, yes, if the thing be true.”

“You know that I am anxious to have that commission of lady of honor, which I have been foolish enough to ask of you, and you do not use your credit.”

“Who, I?” Malicorne cast down his eyes, joined his hands, and assumed his sullen air. “And what credit can the poor clerk of a procurer have, pray?”

“Your father has not twenty thousand livres a year for nothing, M. Malicorne.”

“A provincial fortune, Mademoiselle de Montalais.”

“Your father is not in the secrets of monsieur le prince for nothing.”

“An advantage which is confined to lending monseigneur money.”

“In a word, you are not the most cunning young fellow in the province for nothing.”

“You flatter me!”

“Who, I?”

“Yes, you.”

“How so?”

“Since I maintain that I have no credit, and you maintain I have.”

“Well, then,—my commission?”

“Well,—your commission?”

“Shall I have it, or shall I not?”

“You shall have it.”

“Ay, but when?”

“When you like.”

“Where is it, then?”

“In my pocket.”

“How—in your pocket?”

“Yes.”

And, with a smile, Malicorne drew from his pocket a letter, upon which mademoiselle seized as a prey, and which she read eagerly. As she read, her face brightened.

“Malicorne,” cried she after having read it, “In truth, you are a good lad.”

“What for, mademoiselle?”

“Because you might have been paid for this commission, and you have not.” And she burst into a loud laugh, thinking to put the clerk out of countenance; but Malicorne sustained the attack bravely.

“I do not understand you,” said he. It was now Montalais who was disconcerted in her turn. “I have declared my sentiments to you,” continued Malicorne. “You have told me three times, laughing all the while, that you did not love me; you have embraced me once without laughing, and that is all I want.”

“All?” said the proud and coquettish Montalais, in a tone through which the wounded pride was visible.

“Absolutely all, mademoiselle,” replied Malicorne.

“Ah!”—And this monosyllable indicated as much anger as the young man might have expected gratitude. He shook his head quietly.

“Listen, Montalais,” said he, without heeding whether that familiarity pleased his mistress or not; “let us not dispute about it.”

“And why not?”

“Because during the year which I have known you, you might have had me turned out of doors twenty times if I did not please you.”

“Indeed; and on what account should I have had you turned out?”

“Because I have been sufficiently impertinent for that.”

“Oh, that,—yes, that’s true.”

“You see plainly that you are forced to avow it,” said Malicorne.

“Monsieur Malicorne!”

“Don’t let us be angry; if you have retained me, then it has not been without cause.”

“It is not, at least, because I love you,” cried Montalais.

“Granted. I will even say, at this moment, I am certain that you hate me.”

“Oh, you have never spoken so truly.”

“Well, on my part, I detest you.”

“Ah! I take the act.”

“Take it. You find me brutal and foolish; on my part I find you have a harsh voice, and your face is too often distorted with anger. At this moment you would allow yourself to be thrown out of that window rather than allow me to kiss the tip of your finger; I would precipitate myself from the top of the balcony rather than touch the hem of your robe. But, in five minutes, you will love me, and I shall adore you. Oh, it is just so.”

“I doubt it.”

“And I swear it.”

“Coxcomb!”

“And then, that is not the true reason. You stand in need of me, Aure, and I of you. When it pleases you to be gay, I make you laugh; when it suits me to be loving, I look at you. I have given you a commission of lady of honor which you wished for; you will give me, presently, something I wish for.”

“I will?”

“Yes, you will; but, at this moment, my dear Aure, I declare to you that I wish for absolutely nothing, so be at ease.”

“You are a frightful man, Malicorne; I was going to rejoice at getting this commission, and thus you quench my joy.”

“Good; there is no time lost,—you will rejoice when I am gone.”

“Go, then; and after—”

“So be it; but in the first place, a piece of advice.”

“What is it?”

“Resume your good-humor,—you are ugly when you pout.”

“Coarse!”

“Come, let us tell the truth to each other, while we are about it.”

“Oh, Malicorne! Bad-hearted man!”

“Oh, Montalais! Ungrateful girl!”

The young man leant with his elbow upon the window-frame; Montalais took a book and opened it. Malicorne stood up, brushed his hat with his sleeve, smoothed down his black doublet;—Montalais, though pretending to read, looked at him out of the corner of her eye.

“Good!” cried she, furious; “he has assumed his respectful air—and he will pout for a week.”

“A fortnight, mademoiselle,” said Malicorne, bowing.

Montalais lifted up her little doubled fist. “Monster!” said she; “oh! that I were a man!”

“What would you do to me?”

“I would strangle you.”

“Ah! very well, then,” said Malicorne; “I believe I begin to desire something.”

“And what do you desire, Monsieur Demon? That I should lose my soul from anger?”

Malicorne was rolling his hat respectfully between his fingers; but, all at once, he let fall his hat, seized the young girl by the shoulders, pulled her towards him, and sealed her mouth with two lips that were very

warm, for a man pretending to so much indifference. Aure would have cried out, but the cry was stifled in his kiss. Nervous and, apparently, angry, the young girl pushed Malicorne against the wall.

"Good!" said Malicorne, philosophically, "that's enough for six weeks. Adieu, mademoiselle, accept my very humble salutation." And he made three steps towards the door.

"Well! no,—you shall not go!" cried Montalais, stamping with her little foot. "Stay where you are! I order you!"

"You order me?"

"Yes; am I not mistress?"

"Of my heart and soul, without doubt."

"A pretty property! *ma foi!* The soul is silly and the heart dry."

"Beware, Montalais, I know you," said Malicorne; "you are going to fall in love with your humble servant."

"Well, yes!" said she, hanging round his neck with childish indolence, rather than with loving abandonment. "Well, yes! for I must thank you at least."

"And for what?"

"For the commission; is it not my whole future?"

"And mine."

Montalais looked at him.

"It is frightful," said she, "that one can never guess whether you are speaking seriously or not."

"I cannot speak more seriously. I was going to Paris,—you are going there,—we are going there."

"And so it was for that motive only you have served me; selfish fellow!"

"What would you have me say, Aure? I cannot live without you."

"Well! in truth, it is just so with me; you are, nevertheless, it must be confessed, a very bad-hearted young man."

“Aure, my dear Aure, take care! if you take to calling me names again, you know the effect they produce upon me, and I shall adore you.” And so saying, Malicorne drew the young girl a second time towards him. But at that instant a step resounded on the staircase. The young people were so close, that they would have been surprised in the arms of each other, if Montalais had not violently pushed Malicorne, with his back against the door, just then opening. A loud cry, followed by angry reproaches, immediately resounded. It was Madame de Saint-Remy who uttered the cry and the angry words. The unlucky Malicorne almost crushed her between the wall and the door she was coming in at.

“It is again that good-for-nothing!” cried the old lady. “Always here!”

“Ah, madame!” replied Malicorne, in a respectful tone; “it is eight long days since I was here.”

Chapter III. In Which We at Length See the True Heroine of this History

Appear.

Behind Madame de Saint-Remy stood Mademoiselle de la Vallière. She heard the explosion of maternal anger, and as she divined the cause of it, she entered the chamber trembling, and perceived the unlucky Malicorne, whose woeful countenance might have softened or set laughing whoever observed it coolly. He had promptly intrenched himself behind a large chair, as if to avoid the first attacks of Madame de Saint-Remy; he had no hopes of prevailing with words, for she spoke louder than he, and without stopping; but he reckoned upon the eloquence of his gestures. The old lady would neither listen to nor see anything; Malicorne had long been one of her antipathies. But her anger was too great not to overflow from Malicorne on his accomplice. Montalais had her turn.

“And you, mademoiselle; you may be certain I shall inform madame of what is going on in the apartment of one of her ladies of honor?”

“Oh, dear mother!” cried Mademoiselle de la Vallière, “for mercy’s sake, spare—”

“Hold your tongue, mademoiselle, and do not uselessly trouble yourself to intercede for unworthy people; that a young maid of honor like you should be subjected to a bad example is, certes, a misfortune great enough; but that you should sanction it by your indulgence is what I will not allow.”

“But in truth,” said Montalais, rebelling again, “I do not know under what pretense you treat me thus. I am doing no harm, I suppose?”

“And that great good-for-nothing, mademoiselle,” resumed Madame de Saint-Remy, pointing to Malicorne, “is he here to do any good, I ask you?”

“He is neither here for good nor harm, madame; he comes to see me, that is all.”

“It is all very well! all very well!” said the old lady. “Her royal highness shall be informed of it, and she will judge.”

“At all events, I do not see why,” replied Montalais, “it should be forbidden M. Malicorne to have intentions towards me, if his intentions are honorable.”

“Honorable intentions with such a face!” cried Madame de Saint-Remy.

“I thank you in the name of my face, madame,” said Malicorne.

“Come, my daughter, come,” continued Madame de Saint-Remy; “we will go and inform madame that at the very moment she is weeping for her husband, at the moment when we are all weeping for a master in this old castle of Blois, the abode of grief, there are people who amuse themselves with flirtations!”

“Oh!” cried both the accused, with one voice.

“A maid of honor! a maid of honor!” cried the old lady, lifting her hands towards heaven.

“Well! it is there you are mistaken, madame,” said Montalais, highly exasperated; “I am no longer a maid of honor, of madame’s at least.”

“Have you given in your resignation, mademoiselle? That is well! I cannot but applaud such a determination, and I do applaud it.”

“I do not give in my resignation, madame; I take another service,—that is all.”

“In the *bourgeoisie* or in the *robe?*” asked Madame de Saint-Remy, disdainfully.

“Please to learn, madame, that I am not a girl to serve either *bourgeoises* or *robines*; and that instead of the miserable court at which you vegetate, I am going to reside in a court almost royal.”

“Ha, ha! a royal court,” said Madame de Saint-Remy, forcing a laugh; “a royal court! What do you think of that, my daughter?”

And she turned towards Mademoiselle de la Vallière, whom she would by main force have dragged away from Montalais, and who instead of obeying the impulse of Madame de Saint-Remy, looked first at her mother and then at Montalais with her beautiful conciliatory eyes.

“I did not say a royal court, madame,” replied Montalais; “because Madame Henrietta of England, who is about to become the wife of S. A. R. Monsieur, is not a queen. I said almost royal, and I spoke correctly, since she will be sister-in-law to the king.”

A thunderbolt falling upon the castle of Blois would not have astonished Madame de Saint-Remy more than the last sentence of Montalais.

“What do you say? of Son Altesse Royale Madame Henrietta?” stammered out the old lady.

“I say I am going to belong to her household, as maid of honor; that is what I say.”

“As maid of honor!” cried, at the same time, Madame de Saint-Remy with despair, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière with delight.

“Yes, madame, as maid of honor.”

The old lady’s head sank down as if the blow had been too severe for her. But, almost immediately recovering herself, she launched a last projectile at her adversary.

“Oh! oh!” said she; “I have heard of many of these sorts of promises beforehand, which often lead people to flatter themselves with wild hopes, and at the last moment, when the time comes to keep the promises, and have the hopes realized, they are surprised to see the great credit upon which they reckoned vanish like smoke.”

“Oh! madame, the credit of my protector is incontestable and his promises are as good as deeds.”

“And would it be indiscreet to ask you the name of this powerful protector?”

“Oh! *mon Dieu!* no! it is that gentleman there,” said Montalais, pointing to Malicorne, who, during this scene, had preserved the most imperturbable coolness, and the most comic dignity.

“Monsieur!” cried Madame de Saint-Remy, with an explosion of hilarity, “monsieur is your protector! Is the man whose credit is so powerful, and whose promises are as good as deeds, Monsieur Malicorne!”

Malicorne bowed.

As to Montalais, as her sole reply, she drew the brevet from her pocket, and showed it to the old lady.

“Here is the *brevet*,” said she.

At once all was over. As soon as she had cast a rapid glance over this fortunate *brevet*, the good lady clasped her hands, an unspeakable expression of envy and despair contracted her countenance, and she was obliged to sit down to avoid fainting. Montalais was not malicious enough to rejoice extravagantly at her victory, or to overwhelm the conquered enemy, particularly when that enemy was the mother of her friend; she used then, but did not abuse her triumph. Malicorne was less generous; he assumed noble *poses* in his *fauteuil* and stretched himself out with a familiarity which, two hours earlier, would have drawn upon him threats of a caning.

“Maid of honor to the young madame!” repeated Madame de Saint-Remy, still but half convinced.

“Yes, madame, and through the protection of M. Malicorne, moreover.”

“It is incredible!” repeated the old lady: “is it not incredible, Louise?” But Louise did not reply; she was sitting, thoughtfully, almost sad; passing one had over her beautiful brow, she sighed heavily.

“Well, but, monsieur,” said Madame de Saint-Remy, all at once, “how did you manage to obtain this post?”

“I asked for it, madame.”

“Of whom?”

“One of my friends.”

“And you have friends sufficiently powerful at court to give you such proofs of their credit?”

“It appears so.”

“And may one ask the name of these friends?”

“I did not say I had many friends, madame, I said I had one friend.”

“And that friend is called?”

“*Peste!* madame, you go too far! When one has a friend as powerful as mine, we do not publish his name in that fashion, in open day, in order that he may be stolen from us.”

“You are right, monsieur, to be silent as to that name; for I think it would be pretty difficult for you to tell it.”

“At all events,” said Montalais, “if the friend does not exist, the *brevet* does, and that cuts short the question.”

“Then, I conceive,” said Madame de Saint-Remy, with the gracious smile of the cat who is going to scratch, “when I found monsieur here just now—”

“Well?”

“He brought you the *brevet*.”

“Exactly, madame; you have guessed rightly.”

“Well, then, nothing can be more moral or proper.”

“I think so, madame.”

“And I have been wrong, as it appears, in reproaching you, mademoiselle.”

“Very wrong, madame; but I am so accustomed to your reproaches, that I pardon you these.”

“In that case, let us begone, Louise; we have nothing to do but retire. Well!”

“Madame!” said La Vallière starting, “did you speak?”

“You do not appear to be listening, my child.”

“No, madame, I was thinking.”

“About what?”

“A thousand things.”

“You bear me no ill-will, at least, Louise?” cried Montalais, pressing her hand.

“And why should I, my dear Aure?” replied the girl in a voice soft as a flute.

“*Dame!*” resumed Madame de Saint-Remy; “if she did bear you a little ill-will, poor girl, she could not be much blamed.”

“And why should she bear me ill-will, good gracious?”

“It appears to me that she is of as good a family, and as pretty as you.”

“Mother! mother!” cried Louise.

“Prettier a hundred times, madame—not of a better family; but that does not tell me why Louise should bear me ill-will.”

“Do you think it will be very amusing for her to be buried alive at Blois, when you are going to shine at Paris?”

“But, madame, it is not I who prevent Louise following me thither; on the contrary, I should certainly be most happy if she came there.”

“But it appears that M. Malicorne, who is all-powerful at court—”

“Ah! so much the worse, madame,” said Malicorne, “every one for himself in this poor world.”

“Malicorne! Malicorne!” said Montalais. Then stooping towards the young man:—

“Occupy Madame de Saint-Remy, either in disputing with her, or making it up with her; I must speak to Louise.” And, at the same time, a soft pressure of the hand recompensed Malicorne for his future obedience. Malicorne went grumbling towards Madame de Saint-Remy, whilst Montalais said to her friend, throwing one arm around her neck:—

“What is the matter? Tell *me*. Is it true that you would not love me if I were to shine, as your mother says?”

“Oh, no!” said the young girl, with difficulty restraining her tears; “on the contrary, I rejoice at your good fortune.”

“Rejoice! why, one would say you are ready to cry!”

“Do people never weep except from envy?”

“Oh! yes, I understand; I am going to Paris and that word Paris recalls to your mind a certain cavalier—”

“Aure!”

“A certain cavalier who formerly lived near Blois, and who now resides at Paris.”

“In truth, I know not what ails me, but I feel stifled.”

“Weep, then, weep, as you cannot give me a smile!”

Louise raised her sweet face, which the tears, rolling down one after the other, illumined like diamonds.

“Come, confess,” said Montalais.

“What shall I confess?”

“What makes you weep; people don’t weep without cause. I am your friend; whatever you would wish me to do, I will do. Malicorne is more powerful than you would think. Do you wish to go to Paris?”

“Alas!” sighed Louise.

“Do you wish to come to Paris?”

“To remain here alone, in this old castle, I who have enjoyed the delightful habit of listening to your songs, of pressing your hand, of running about the park with you. Oh! how I shall be *ennuyee!* how quickly I shall die!”

“Do you wish to come to Paris?”

Louise breathed another sigh.

“You do not answer me.”

“What would you that I should reply?”

“Yes or no; that is not very difficult, I think.”

“Oh! you are very fortunate, Montalais!”

“That is to say you would like to be in my place.”

Louise was silent.

“Little obstinate thing!” said Montalais; “did ever any one keep her secrets from her friend thus? But, confess that you would like to come to Paris; confess that you are dying with the wish to see Raoul again.”

“I cannot confess that.”

“Then you are wrong.”

“In what way?”

“Because—do you not see this *brevet?*”

“To be sure I do.”

“Well, I would have got you a similar one.”

“By whose means?”

“Malicorne’s.”

“Aure, are you telling the truth? Is that possible?”

“Malicorne is there; and what he has done for me, he surely can do for you.”

Malicorne had heard his name pronounced twice; he was delighted at having an opportunity of coming to a conclusion with Madame de Saint-Remy, and he turned round:—

“What is the question, mademoiselle?”

“Come hither, Malicorne,” said Montalais, with an imperious gesture. Malicorne obeyed.

“A *brevet* like this,” said Montalais.

“How so?”

“A *brevet* like this; that is plain enough.”

“But—”

“I want one—I must have one!”

“Oh! oh! you must have one!”

“Yes.”

“It is impossible, is it not, M. Malicorne?” said Louise, with her sweet, soft voice.

“If it is for *you*, mademoiselle—”

“For me. Yes, Monsieur Malicorne, it *would* be for me.”

“And if Mademoiselle de Montalais asks it at the same time—”

“Mademoiselle de Montalais does not ask it, she requires it.”

“Well! we will endeavor to obey you, mademoiselle.”

“And you will have her named?”

“We will try.”

“No evasive answers, Louise de la Vallière shall be maid of honor to Madame Henrietta within a week.”

“How you talk!”

“Within a week, or else—”

“Well! or else?”

“You may take back your *brevet*, Monsieur Malicorne; I will not leave my friend.”

“Dear Montalais!”

“That is right. Keep your *brevet*; Mademoiselle de la Vallière shall be a maid of honor.”

“Is that true?”

“Quite true.”

“I may then hope to go to Paris?”

“Depend on it.”

“Oh! Monsieur Malicorne, what joy!” cried Louise, clapping her hands, and bounding with pleasure.

“Little dissembler!” said Montalais, “try again to make me believe you are not in love with Raoul.”

Louise blushed like a rose in June, but instead of replying, she ran and embraced her mother. “Madame,” said she, “do you know that M. Malicorne is going to have me appointed maid of honor?”

“M. Malicorne is a prince in disguise,” replied the old lady, “he is all-powerful, seemingly.”

“Should you also like to be a maid of honor?” asked Malicorne of Madame de Saint-Remy. “Whilst I am about it, I might as well get everybody appointed.”

And upon that he went away, leaving the poor lady quite disconcerted.

“Humph!” murmured Malicorne as he descended the stairs, —“Humph! there goes another note of a thousand livres! but I must get through as well as I can; my friend Manicamp does nothing for nothing.”

Chapter IV. Malicorne and Manicamp.

The introduction of these two new personages into this history and that mysterious affinity of names and sentiments, merit some attention on the part of both historian and reader. We will then enter into some details concerning Messieurs Malicorne and Manicamp. Malicorne, we know, had made the journey to Orleans in search of the *brevet* destined for Mademoiselle de Montalais, the arrival of which had produced such a strong feeling at the castle of Blois. At that moment, M. de Manicamp was at Orleans. A singular person was this M. de Manicamp; a very intelligent young fellow, always poor, always needy, although he dipped his hand freely into the purse of M. le Comte de Guiche, one of the best furnished purses of the period. M. le Comte de Guiche had had, as the companion of his boyhood, this De Manicamp, a poor gentleman, vassal-born, of the house of Gramont. M. de Manicamp, with his tact and talent had created himself a revenue in the opulent family of the celebrated marechal. From his infancy he had, with calculation beyond his age, lent his mane and complaisance to the follies of the Comte de Guiche. If his noble companion had stolen some fruit destined for Madame la Marechale, if he had broken a mirror, or put out a dog's eye, Manicamp declared himself guilty of the crime committed, and received the punishment, which was not made the milder for falling on the innocent. But this was the way this system of abnegation was paid for: instead of wearing such mean habiliments as his paternal fortunes entitled him to, he was able to appear brilliant, superb, like a young noble of fifty thousand livres a year. It was not that he was mean in character or humble in spirit; no, he was a philosopher, or rather he had the indifference, the apathy, the obstinacy which banish from man every sentiment of the supernatural. His sole ambition was to spend money.

But, in this respect, the worthy M. de Manicamp was a gulf. Three or four times every year he drained the Comte de Guiche, and when the Comte de Guiche was thoroughly drained, when he had turned out his pockets and his purse before him, when he declared that it would be at least a fortnight before paternal munificence would refill those pockets and that purse, Manicamp lost all his energy, he went to bed, remained there, ate nothing and sold his handsome clothes, under the pretense that, remaining in bed, he did not want them. During this prostration of mind and strength, the purse of the Comte de Guiche was getting full again, and when once filled, overflowed into that of De Manicamp, who bought new clothes, dressed himself again, and recommenced the same life he had followed before. The mania of selling his new clothes for a quarter of what they were worth, had rendered our hero sufficiently celebrated in Orleans, a city where, in general, we should be puzzled to say why he came to pass his days of penitence. Provincial *debauches, petits-maitres* of six hundred livres a year, shared the fragments of his opulence.

Among the admirers of these splendid toilettes, our friend Malicorne was conspicuous; he was the son of a syndic of the city, of whom M. de Conde, always needy as a De Conde, often borrowed money at enormous interest. M. Malicorne kept the paternal money-chest; that is to say, that in those times of easy morals, he had made for himself, by following the example of his father, and lending at high interest for short terms, a revenue of eighteen hundred livres, without reckoning six hundred livres furnished by the generosity of the syndic; so that Malicorne was the king of the gay youth of Orleans, having two thousand four hundred livres to scatter, squander, and waste on follies of every kind. But, quite contrary to Manicamp, Malicorne was terribly ambitious. He loved from ambition; he spent money out of ambition; and he would have ruined himself for ambition. Malicorne had determined to rise, at whatever price it might cost, and for this, whatever price it did cost, he had given himself a mistress and a friend. The mistress, Mademoiselle de Montalais, was cruel, as regarded love; but she was of a noble family, and that was sufficient for Malicorne. The friend had little or no

friendship, but he was the favorite of the Comte de Guiche, himself the friend of Monsieur, the king's brother; and that was sufficient for Malicorne. Only, in the chapter of charges, Mademoiselle de Montalais cost *per annum*:—ribbons, gloves, and sweets, a thousand livres. De Manicamp cost—money lent, never returned—from twelve to fifteen hundred livres *per annum*. So that there was nothing left for Malicorne. Ah! yes, we are mistaken; there was left the paternal strong box. He employed a mode of proceeding, upon which he preserved the most profound secrecy, and which consisted in advancing to himself, from the coffers of the syndic, half a dozen year's profits, that is to say, fifteen thousand livres, swearing to himself—observe, quite to himself—to repay this deficiency as soon as an opportunity should present itself. The opportunity was expected to be the concession of a good post in the household of Monsieur, when that household would be established at the period of his marriage. This juncture had arrived, and the household was about to be established. A good post in the family of a prince of the blood, when it is given by the credit, and on the recommendation of a friend, like the Comte de Guiche, is worth at least twelve thousand livres *per annum*; and by the means which M. Malicorne had taken to make his revenues fructify, twelve thousand livres might rise to twenty thousand. Then, when once an incumbent of this post, he would marry Mademoiselle de Montalais. Mademoiselle de Montalais, of a half noble family, not only would be dowered, but would ennoble Malicorne. But, in order that Mademoiselle de Montalais, who had not a large patrimonial fortune, although an only daughter, should be suitably dowered, it was necessary that she should belong to some great princess, as prodigal as the dowager Madame was covetous. And in order that the wife should not be of one party whilst the husband belonged to the other, a situation which presents serious inconveniences, particularly with characters like those of the future consorts—Malicorne had imagined the idea of making the central point of union the household of Monsieur, the king's brother. Mademoiselle de Montalais would be maid of honor to Madame. M. Malicorne would be officer to Monsieur.

It is plain the plan was formed by a clear head; it is plain, also, that it had been bravely executed. Malicorne had asked Manicamp to ask a *brevet* of maid of honor of the Comte de Guiche; and the Comte de Guiche had asked this *brevet* of Monsieur, who had signed it without hesitation. The constructive plan of Malicorne—for we may well suppose that the combinations of a mind as active as his were not confined to the present, but extended to the future—the constructive plan of Malicorne, we say, was this:—To obtain entrance into the household of Madame Henrietta for a woman devoted to himself, who was intelligent, young, handsome, and intriguing; to learn, by means of this woman, all the feminine secrets of the young household; whilst he, Malicorne, and his friend Manicamp, should, between them, know all the male secrets of the young community. It was by these means that a rapid and splendid fortune might be acquired at one and the same time. Malicorne was a vile name; he who bore it had too much wit to conceal this truth from himself; but an estate might be purchased; and Malicorne of some place, or even De Malicorne itself, for short, would ring more nobly on the ear.

It was not improbable that a most aristocratic origin might be hunted up by the heralds for this name of Malicorne; might it not come from some estate where a bull with mortal horns had caused some great misfortune, and baptized the soil with the blood it had spilt? Certes, this plan presented itself bristling with difficulties: but the greatest of all was Mademoiselle de Montalais herself. Capricious, variable, close, giddy, free, prudish, a virgin armed with claws, Erigone stained with grapes, she sometimes overturned, with a single dash of her white fingers, or with a single puff from her laughing lips, the edifice which had exhausted Malicorne's patience for a month.

Love apart, Malicorne was happy; but this love, which he could not help feeling, he had the strength to conceal with care; persuaded that at the least relaxing of the ties by which he had bound his Protean female, the demon would overthrow and laugh at him. He humbled his mistress by disdaining her. Burning with desire, when she advanced to tempt him, he had the art to appear ice, persuaded that if he opened his arms,

she would run away laughing at him. On her side, Montalais believed she did not love Malicorne; whilst, on the contrary, in reality she did. Malicorne repeated to her so often his protestation of indifference, that she finished, sometimes, by believing him; and then she believed she detested Malicorne. If she tried to bring him back by coquetry, Malicorne played the coquette better than she could. But what made Montalais hold to Malicorne in an indissoluble fashion, was that Malicorne always came cram full of fresh news from the court and the city; Malicorne always brought to Blois a fashion, a secret, or a perfume; that Malicorne never asked for a meeting, but, on the contrary, required to be supplicated to receive the favors he burned to obtain. On her side, Montalais was no miser with stories. By her means, Malicorne learnt all that passed at Blois, in the family of the dowager Madame; and he related to Manicamp tales that made him ready to die with laughing, which the latter, out of idleness, took ready-made to M. de Guiche, who carried them to Monsieur.

Such, in two words, was the woof of petty interests and petty conspiracies which united Blois with Orleans, and Orleans with Pairs; and which was about to bring into the last named city where she was to produce so great a revolution, the poor little La Vallière, who was far from suspecting, as she returned joyfully, leaning on the arm of her mother, for what a strange future she was reserved. As to the good man, Malicorne—we speak of the syndic of Orleans—he did not see more clearly into the present than others did into the future; and had no suspicion as he walked, every day, between three and five o'clock, after his dinner, upon the Place Sainte-Catherine, in his gray coat, cut after the fashion of Louis XIII. and his cloth shoes with great knots of ribbon, that it was he who was paying for all those bursts of laughter, all those stolen kisses, all those whisperings, all those little keepsakes, and all those bubble projects which formed a chain of forty-five leagues in length, from the palais of Blois to the Palais Royal.

Chapter V: Manicamp and Malicorne.

Malicorne, then, left Blois, as we have said, and went to find his friend, Manicamp, then in temporary retreat in the city of Orleans. It was just at the moment when that young nobleman was employed in selling the last decent clothing he had left. He had, a fortnight before, extorted from the Comte de Guiche a hundred pistoles, all he had, to assist in equipping him properly to go and meet Madame, on her arrival at Le Havre. He had drawn from Malicorne, three days before, fifty pistoles, the price of the *brevet* obtained for Montalais. He had then no expectation of anything else, having exhausted all his resources, with the exception of selling a handsome suit of cloth and satin, embroidered and laced with gold, which had been the admiration of the court. But to be able to sell this suit, the last he had left,—as we have been forced to confess to the reader—Manicamp had been obliged to take to his bed. No more fire, no more pocket-money, no more walking-money, nothing but sleep to take the place of repasts, companies and balls. It has been said—"He who sleeps, dines;" but it has never been affirmed—He who sleeps, plays—or, He who sleeps, dances. Manicamp, reduced to this extremity of neither playing nor dancing, for a week at least, was, consequently, very sad; he was expecting a usurer, and saw Malicorne enter. A cry of distress escaped him.

"Eh! what!" said he, in a tone which nothing can describe, "is that you again, dear friend?"

"Humph! you are very polite!" said Malicorne.

"Ay, but look you, I was expecting money, and, instead of money, I see *you*."

"And suppose I brought you some money?"

“Oh! that would be quite another thing. You are very welcome, my dear friend!”

And he held out his hand, not for the hand of Malicorne, but for the purse. Malicorne pretended to be mistaken, and gave him his hand.

“And the money?” said Manicamp.

“My dear friend, if you wish to have it, earn it.”

“What must be done for it?”

“Earn it, *parbleu!*”

“And after what fashion?”

“Oh! that is rather trying, I warn you.”

“The devil!”

“You must get out of bed, and go immediately to M. le Comte de Guiche.”

“I get up!” said Manicamp, stretching himself in his bed, complacently, “oh, no, thank you!”

“You have sold all your clothes?”

“No, I have one suit left, the handsomest even, but I expect a purchaser.”

“And the *chausses?*”

“Well, if you look, you will see them on that chair.”

“Very well! since you have some *chausses* and a *pourpoint* left, put your legs into the first and your back into the other; have a horse saddled, and set off.”

“Not I.”

“And why not?”

“*Morbleu!* don’t you know, then, that M. de Guiche is at Etampes?”

“No, I thought he was at Paris. You will then only have fifteen leagues to go, instead of thirty.”

“You are a wonderfully clever fellow! If I were to ride fifteen leagues in these clothes, they would never be fit to put on again; and, instead of selling them for thirty pistoles, I should be obliged to take fifteen.”

“Sell them for whatever you like, but I must have a second commission of maid of honor.”

“Good! for whom? Is Montalais doubled, then?”

“Vile fellow!—It is you who are doubled. You swallow up two fortunes —mine, and that of M. le Comte de Guiche.”

“You should say, that of M. le Comte de Guiche and yours.”

“That is true; honor where it is due; but I return to my *brevet*.”

“And you are wrong.”

“Prove me that.”

“My friend, there will only be twelve maids of honor for madame; I have already obtained for you what twelve hundred women are trying for, and for that I was forced to employ all my diplomacy.”

“Oh! yes, I know you have been quite heroic, my dear friend.”

“We know what we are about,” said Manicamp.

“To whom do you tell that? When I am king, I promise you one thing.”

“What? To call yourself Malicorne the First?”

“No; to make you superintendent of my finances; but that is not the question now.”

“Unfortunately.”

“The present affair is to procure for me a second place of maid of honor.”

“My friend, if you were to promise me the price of heaven, I would decline to disturb myself at this moment.”

Malicorne chinked the money in his pocket.

“There are twenty pistoles here,” said Malicorne.

“And what would you do with twenty pistoles, *mon Dieu!*”

“Well!” said Malicorne, a little angry, “suppose I were to add them to the five hundred you already owe me?”

“You are right,” replied Manicamp, stretching out his hand again, “and from that point of view I can accept them. Give them to me.”

“An instant, what the devil! it is not only holding out your hand that will do; if I give you the twenty pistoles, shall I have my *brevet?*”

“To be sure you shall.”

“Soon?”

“To-day.”

“Oh! take care! Monsieur de Manicamp; you undertake much, and I do not ask that. Thirty leagues in a day is too much, you would kill yourself.”

“I think nothing impossible when obliging a friend.”

“You are quite heroic.”

“Where are the twenty pistoles?”

“Here they are,” said Malicorne, showing them.

“That’s well.”

“Yes, but my dear M. Manicamp, you would consume them in post-horses alone!”

“No, no, make yourself easy on that score.”

“Pardon me. Why, it is fifteen leagues from this place to Etampes?”

“Fourteen.”

“Well! fourteen be it; fourteen leagues makes seven posts; at twenty *sous* the post, seven *livres*; seven *livres* the courier, fourteen; as many for coming back, twenty-eight! as much for bed and supper, that makes sixty *livres* this complaisance would cost.”

Manicamp stretched himself like a serpent in his bed, and fixing his two great eyes upon Malicorne, “You are right,” said he; “I could not return before to-morrow;” and he took the twenty pistoles.

“Now, then, be off!”

“Well, as I cannot be back before to-morrow, we have time.”

“Time for what?”

“Time to play.”

“What do you wish to play with?”

“Your twenty pistoles, *pardieu!*”

“No; you always win.”

“I will wager them, then.”

“Against what?”

“Against twenty others.”

“And what shall be the object of the wager?”

“This. We have said it was fourteen leagues to Etampes.”

“Yes.”

“And fourteen leagues back?”

“Doubtless.”

“Well; for these twenty-eight leagues you cannot allow less than fourteen hours?”

“That is agreed.”

“One hour to find the Comte de Guiche.”

“Go on.”

“And an hour to persuade him to write a letter to Monsieur.”

“Just so.”

“Sixteen hours in all?”

“You reckon as well as M. Colbert.”

“It is now twelve o’clock.”

“Half-past.”

“*Hein!*—you have a handsome watch!”

“What were you saying?” said Malicorne, putting his watch quickly back into his fob.

“Ah! true; I was offering to lay you twenty pistoles against these you have lent me, that you will have the Comte de Guiche’s letter in—”

“How soon?”

“In eight hours.”

“Have you a winged horse, then?”

“That is no matter. Will you bet?”

“I shall have the comte’s letter in eight hours?”

“Yes.”

“In hand?”

“In hand.”

“Well, be it so; I lay,” said Malicorne, curious enough to know how this seller of clothes would get through.

“Is it agreed?”

“It is.”

“Pass me the pen, ink, and paper.”

“Here they are.”

“Thank you.”

Manicamp raised himself with a sigh, and leaning on his left elbow, in his best hand, traced the following lines:—

“Good for an order for a place of maid of honor to Madame, which M. le Comte de Guiche will take upon him to obtain at sight. DE MANICAMP.”

This painful task accomplished, he laid himself down in bed again.

“Well!” asked Malicorne, “what does this mean?”

“That means that if you are in a hurry to have the letter from the Comte de Guiche for Monsieur, I have won my wager.”

“How the devil is that?”

“That is transparent enough, I think; you take that paper.”

“Well?”

“And you set out instead of me.”

“Ah!”

“You put your horses to their best speed.”

“Good!”

“In six hours you will be at Etampes; in seven hours you have the letter from the comte, and I shall have won my wager without stirring from my bed, which suits me and you too, at the same time, I am very sure.”

“Decidedly, Manicamp, you are a great man.”

“*Hein!* I know that.”

“I am to start then for Etampes?”

“Directly.”

“I am to go to the Comte de Guiche with this order?”

“He will give you a similar one for Monsieur.”

“Monsieur will approve?”

“Instantly.”

“And I shall have my *brevet?*”

“You will.”

“Ah!”

“Well, I hope I behave genteely?”

“Adorably.”

“Thank you.”

“You do as you please, then, with the Comte de Guiche, Manicamp?”

“Except making money of him—everything?”

“*Diable!* the exception is annoying; but then, if instead of asking him for money, you were to ask—”

“What?”

“Something important.”

“What do you call important?”

“Well! suppose one of your friends asked you to render him a service?”

“I would not render it to him.”

“Selfish fellow!”

“Or at least I would ask him what service he would render me in exchange.”

“Ah! that, perhaps, is fair. Well, that friend speaks to you.”

“What, you, Malicorne?”

“Yes; I.”

“Ah! ah! you are rich, then?”

“I have still fifty pistoles left.”

“Exactly the sum I want. Where are those fifty pistoles?”

“Here,” said Malicorne, slapping his pocket.

“Then speak, my friend; what do you want?”

Malicorne took up the pen, ink, and paper again, and presented them all to Manicamp. “Write!” said he.

“Dictate!”

“An order for a place in the household of Monsieur.”

“Oh!” said Manicamp, laying down the pen, “a place in the household of Monsieur for fifty pistoles?”

“You mistook me, my friend; you did not hear plainly.”

“What did you say, then?”

“I said five hundred.”

“And the five hundred?”

“Here they are.”

Manicamp devoured the rouleau with his eyes; but this time Malicorne held it at a distance.

“Eh! what do you say to that? Five hundred pistoles.”

“I say it is for nothing, my friend,” said Manicamp, taking up the pen again, “and you exhaust my credit. Dictate.”

Malicorne continued:

“Which my friend the Comte de Guiche will obtain for my friend Malicorne.”

“That’s it,” said Manicamp.

“Pardon me, you have forgotten to sign.”

“Ah! that is true. The five hundred pistoles?”

“Here are two hundred and fifty of them.”

“And the other two hundred and fifty?”

“When I am in possession of my place.”

Manicamp made a face.

“In that case give me the recommendation back again.”

“What to do?”

“To add two words to it.”

“Two words?”

“Yes; two words only.”

“What are they?”

“In haste.”

Malicorne returned the recommendation; Manicamp added the words.

“Good,” said Malicorne, taking back the paper.

Manicamp began to count out the pistoles.

“There want twenty,” said he.

“How so?”

“The twenty I have won.”

“In what way?”

“By laying that you would have the letter from the Comte de Guiche in eight hours.”

“Ah! that’s fair,” and he gave him the twenty pistoles.

Manicamp began to scoop up his gold by handfuls, and pour it in cascades upon his bed.

“This second place,” murmured Malicorne, whilst drying his paper, “which, at first glance appears to cost me more than the first, but—” He stopped, took up the pen in his turn, and wrote to Montalais:—

“MADEMOISELLE,—Announce to your friend that her commission will not be long before it arrives; I am setting out to get it signed: that will be twenty-eight leagues I shall have gone for the love of you.”

Then with his sardonic smile, taking up the interrupted sentence: —“This place,” said he, “at first glance, appears to have cost more than the first; but—the benefit will be, I hope, in proportion with the expense, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière will bring me back more than Mademoiselle de Montalais, or else,—or else my name is not Malicorne. Farewell, Manicamp,” and he left the room.

Chapter VI. The Courtyard of the Hotel Grammont.

On Malicorne's arrival at Orleans, he was informed that the Comte de Guiche had just set out for Paris. Malicorne rested himself for a couple of hours, and then prepared to continue his journey. He reached Paris during the night, and alighted at a small hotel, where, in his previous journeys to the capital, he had been accustomed to put up, and at eight o'clock the next morning presented himself at the Hotel Grammont. Malicorne arrived just in time, for the Comte de Guiche was on the point of taking leave of Monsieur before setting out for Le Havre, where the principal members of the French nobility had gone to await Madame's arrival from England. Malicorne pronounced the name of Manicamp, and was immediately admitted. He found the Comte de Guiche in the courtyard of the Hotel Grammont, inspecting his horses, which his trainers and equerries were passing in review before him. The count, in the presence of his tradespeople and of his servants, was engaged in praising or blaming, as the case seemed to deserve, the appointments, horses, and harness that were being submitted to him; when, in the midst of this important occupation, the name of Manicamp was announced.

"Manicamp!" he exclaimed; "let him enter by all means." And he advanced a few steps toward the door.

Malicorne slipped through the half-open door, and looking at the Comte de Guiche, who was surprised to see a face he did not recognize, instead of the one he expected, said: "Forgive me, monsieur le comte, but I believe a mistake has been made. M. Manicamp himself was announced to you, instead of which it is only an envoy from him."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Guiche, coldly; "and what do you bring me?"

“A letter, monsieur le comte.” Malicorne handed him the first document, and narrowly watched the count’s face, who, as he read it, began to laugh.

“What!” he exclaimed, “another maid of honor? Are all the maids of honor in France, then, under his protection?”

Malicorne bowed.

“Why does he not come himself?” he inquired.

“He is confined to his bed.”

“The deuce! he has no money then, I suppose,” said De Guiche, shrugging his shoulders. “What does he do with his money?”

Malicorne made a movement, to indicate that upon this subject he was as ignorant as the count himself. “Why does he not make use of his credit, then?” continued De Guiche.

“With regard to that, I think—”

“What?”

“That Manicamp has credit with no one but yourself, monsieur le comte!”

“He will not be at Le Havre, then?” Whereupon Malicorne made another movement.

“But every one will be there.”

“I trust, monsieur le comte, that he will not neglect so excellent an opportunity.”

“He should be at Paris by this time.”

“He will take the direct road perhaps to make up for lost time.”

“Where is he now?”

“At Orleans.”

“Monsieur,” said De Guiche, “you seem to me a man of very good taste.”

Malicorne was wearing some of Manicamp’s old-new clothes. He bowed in return, saying, “You do me a very great honor, monsieur le comte.”

“Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?”

“My name is Malicorne, monsieur.”

“M. de Malicorne, what do you think of these pistol-holsters?”

Malicorne was a man of great readiness and immediately understood the position of affairs. Besides, the “de” which had been prefixed to his name, raised him to the rank of the person with whom he was conversing. He looked at the holsters with the air of a connoisseur and said, without hesitation: “Somewhat heavy, monsieur.”

“You see,” said De Guiche to the saddler, “this gentleman, who understands these matters well, thinks the holsters heavy, a complaint I had already made.” The saddler was full of excuses.

“What do you think,” asked De Guiche, “of this horse, which I have just purchased?”

“To look at it, it seems perfect, monsieur le comte; but I must mount it before I give you my opinion.”

“Do so, M. de Malicorne, and ride him round the court two or three times.”

The courtyard of the hotel was so arranged, that whenever there was any occasion for it, it could be used as a riding-school. Malicorne, with perfect ease, arranged the bridle and snaffle-reins, placed his left hand on the horse’s mane, and, with his foot in the stirrup, raised himself and seated himself in the saddle. At first, he made the horse walk the whole circuit of the court-yard at a foot-pace; next at a trot; lastly at a gallop. He then drew up close to the count, dismounted, and threw the bridle to a groom standing by. “Well,” said the count, “what do you think of it, M. de Malicorne?”

“This horse, monsieur le comte, is of the Mecklenburg breed. In looking whether the bit suited his mouth, I saw that he was rising seven, the very age when the training of a horse intended for a charger should commence. The forehand is light. A horse which holds its head high, it is said, never tires his rider’s hand. The withers are rather low. The drooping of the hind-quarters would almost make me doubt the purity of

its German breed, and I think there is English blood in him. He stands well on his legs, but he trots high, and may cut himself, which requires attention to be paid to his shoeing. He is tractable; and as I made him turn round and change his feet, I found him quick and ready in doing so."

"Well said, M. de Malicorne," exclaimed the comte; "you are a judge of horses, I perceive;" then, turning towards him again, he continued, "you are most becomingly dressed, M. de Malicorne. That is not a provincial cut, I presume. Such a style of dress is not to be met with at Tours or Orleans."

"No, monsieur le comte; my clothes were made at Paris."

"There is no doubt about that. But let us resume our own affair. Manicamp wishes for the appointment of a second maid of honor."

"You perceive what he has written, monsieur le comte."

"For whom was the first appointment?"

Malicorne felt the color rise in his face as he answered hurriedly.

"A charming maid of honor, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Ah, ah! you are acquainted with her?"

"We are affianced, or nearly so."

"That is quite another thing, then; a thousand compliments," exclaimed De Guiche, upon whose lips a courtier's jest was already fitting, but to whom the word "affianced," addressed by Malicorne with respect to Mademoiselle de Montalais, recalled the respect due to women.

"And for whom is the second appointment destined?" asked De Guiche; "is it for anyone to whom Manicamp may happen to be affianced? In that case I pity her, poor girl! for she will have a sad fellow for a husband."

"No, monsieur le comte; the second appointment is for Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière."

"Unknown," said De Guiche.

“Unknown? yes, monsieur,” said Malicorne, smiling in his turn.

“Very good. I will speak to Monsieur about it. By the by, she is of gentle birth?”

“She belongs to a very good family and is maid of honor to Madame.”

“That’s well. Will you accompany me to Monsieur?”

“Most certainly, if I may be permitted the honor.”

“Have you your carriage?”

“No; I came here on horseback.”

“Dressed as you are?”

“No, monsieur; I posted from Orleans, and I changed my traveling suit for the one I have on, in order to present myself to you.”

“True, you already told me you had come from Orleans;” saying which he crumpled Manicamp’s letter in his hand, and thrust it in his pocket.

“I beg your pardon,” said Malicorne, timidly; “but I do not think you have read all.”

“Not read all, do you say?”

“No; there were two letters in the same envelope.”

“Oh! are you sure?”

“Quite sure.”

“Let us look, then,” said the count, as he opened the letter again.

“Ah! you are right,” he said opening the paper which he had not yet read.

“I suspected it,” he continued—“another application for an appointment under Monsieur. This Manicamp is a regular vampire:—he is carrying on a trade in it.”

“No, monsieur le comte, he wishes to make a present of it.”

“To whom?”

“To myself, monsieur.”

“Why did you not say so at once, my dear M. Mauvaisecorne?”

“Malicorne, monsieur le comte.”

“Forgive me; it is that Latin that bothers me—that terrible mine of etymologies. Why the deuce are young men of family taught Latin? *Mala* and *mauvaise*—you understand it is the same thing. You will forgive me, I trust, M. de Malicorne.”

“Your kindness affects me much, monsieur: but it is a reason why I should make you acquainted with one circumstance without any delay.”

“What is it?”

“That I was not born a gentleman. I am not without courage, and not altogether deficient in ability; but my name is Malicorne simply.”

“You appear to me, monsieur!” exclaimed the count, looking at the astute face of his companion, “to be a most agreeable man. Your face pleases me, M. Malicorne, and you must possess some indisputably excellent qualities to have pleased that egotistical Manicamp. Be candid and tell me whether you are not some saint descended upon the earth.”

“Why so?”

“For the simple reason that he makes you a present of anything. Did you not say that he intended to make you a present of some appointment in the king’s household?”

“I beg your pardon, count; but, if I succeed in obtaining the appointment, you, and not he, will have bestowed it on me.”

“Besides he will not have given it to you for nothing, I suppose. Stay, I have it;—there is a Malicorne at Orleans who lends money to the prince.”

“I think that must be my father, monsieur.”

“Ah! the prince has the father, and that terrible dragon of a Manicamp has the son. Take care, monsieur, I know him. He will fleece you completely.”

“The only difference is, that I lend without interest,” said Malicorne, smiling.

“I was correct in saying you were either a saint or very much resembled one. M. Malicorne, you shall have the post you want, or I will forfeit my name.”

“Ah! monsieur le comte, what a debt of gratitude shall I not owe you?” said Malicorne, transported.

“Let us go to the prince, my dear M. Malicorne.” And De Guiche proceeded toward the door, desiring Malicorne to follow him. At the very moment they were about to cross the threshold, a young man appeared on the other side. He was from twenty-four to twenty-five years of age, of pale complexion, bright eyes and brown hair and eyebrows. “Good-day,” said he, suddenly, almost pushing De Guiche back into the courtyard again.

“Is that you, De Wardes?—What! and booted, spurred and whip in hand, too?”

“The most befitting costume for a man about to set off for Le Havre. There will be no one left in Paris to-morrow.” And hereupon he saluted Malicorne with great ceremony, whose handsome dress gave him the appearance of a prince.

“M. Malicorne,” said De Guiche to his friend. De Wardes bowed.

“M. de Wardes,” said Guiche to Malicorne, who bowed in return. “By the by, De Wardes,” continued De Guiche, “you who are so well acquainted with these matters, can you tell us, probably, what appointments are still vacant at the court; or rather in the prince’s household?”

“In the prince’s household,” said De Wardes looking up with an air of consideration, “let me see—the appointment of the master of the horse is vacant, I believe.”

“Oh,” said Malicorne, “there is no question of such a post as that, monsieur; my ambition is not nearly so exalted.”

De Wardes had a more penetrating observation than De Guiche, and fathomed Malicorne immediately. “The fact is,” he said, looking at him from head to foot, “a man must be either a duke or a peer to fill that post.”

“All I solicit,” said Malicorne, “is a very humble appointment; I am of little importance, and I do not rank myself above my position.”

“M. Malicorne, whom you see here,” said De Guiche to De Wardes, “is a very excellent fellow, whose only misfortune is that of not being of gentle birth. As far as I am concerned, you know, I attach little value to those who have but gentle birth to boast of.”

“Assuredly,” said De Wardes; “but will you allow me to remark, my dear count, that, without rank of some sort, one can hardly hope to belong to his royal highness’s household?”

“You are right,” said the count, “court etiquette is absolute. The devil! —we never so much as gave it a thought.”

“Alas! a sad misfortune for me, monsieur le comte,” said Malicorne, changing color.

“Yet not without remedy, I hope,” returned De Guiche.

“The remedy is found easily enough,” exclaimed De Wardes; “you can be created a gentleman. His Eminence, the Cardinal Mazarin, did nothing else from morning till night.”

“Hush, hush, De Wardes,” said the count; “no jests of that kind; it ill becomes us to turn such matters into ridicule. Letters of nobility, it is true, are purchasable; but that is a sufficient misfortune without the nobles themselves laughing at it.”

“Upon my word, De Guiche, you’re quite a Puritan, as the English say.”

At this moment the Vicomte de Bragelonne was announced by one of the servants in the courtyard, in precisely the same manner as he would have done in a room.

“Come here, my dear Raoul. What! you, too, booted and spurred? You are setting off, then?”

Bragelonne approached the group of young men, and saluted them with that quiet and serious manner peculiar to him. His salutation was principally addressed to De Wardes, with whom he was unacquainted, and whose features, on his perceiving Raoul, had assumed a strange sternness of expression. “I have come, De Guiche,” he said, “to ask your companionship. We set off for Le Havre, I presume.”

“This is admirable—delightful. We shall have a most enjoyable journey. M. Malicorne, M. Bragelonne—ah! M. de Wardes, let me present you.” The young men saluted each other in a restrained manner. Their very natures seemed, from the beginning, disposed to take exception to each other. De Wardes was pliant, subtle, full of dissimulation; Raoul was calm, grave, and upright. “Decide between us—between De Wardes and myself, Raoul.”

“Upon what subject?”

“Upon the subject of noble birth.”

“Who can be better informed on that subject than a De Gramont?”

“No compliments; it is your opinion I ask.”

“At least, inform me of the subject under discussion.”

“De Wardes asserts that the distribution of titles is abused; I, on the contrary, maintain that a title is useless to the man on whom it is bestowed.”

“And you are correct,” said Bragelonne, quietly.

“But, monsieur le vicomte,” interrupted De Wardes, with a kind of obstinacy, “I affirm that it is I who am correct.”

“What was your opinion, monsieur?”

“I was saying that everything is done in France at the present moment, to humiliate men of family.”

“And by whom?”

“By the king himself. He surrounds himself with people who cannot show four quarterings.”

“Nonsense,” said De Guiche, “where could you possibly have seen that, De Wardes?”

“One example will suffice,” he returned, directing his look fully upon Raoul.

“State it then.”

“Do you know who has just been nominated captain-general of the musketeers?—an appointment more valuable than a peerage; for it gives precedence over all the marechals of France.”

Raoul’s color mounted in his face; for he saw the object De Wardes had in view. “No; who has been appointed? In any case it must have been very recently, for the appointment was vacant eight days ago; a proof of which is, that the king refused Monsieur, who solicited the post for one of his *proteges*.”

“Well, the king refused it to Monsieur’s *protege*, in order to bestow it upon the Chevalier d’Artagnan, a younger brother of some Gascon family, who has been trailing his sword in the ante-chambers during the last thirty years.”

“Forgive me if I interrupt you,” said Raoul, darting a glance full of severity at De Wardes; “but you give me the impression of being unacquainted with the gentleman of whom you are speaking.”

“I not acquainted with M. d’Artagnan? Can you tell me, monsieur, who does *not* know him?”

“Those who *do* know him, monsieur,” replied Raoul, with still greater calmness and sternness of manner, “are in the habit of saying, that if he is not as good a gentleman as the king—which is not his fault—he is the equal of all the kings of the earth in courage and loyalty. Such is my opinion, monsieur; and I thank heaven I have known M. d’Artagnan from my birth.”

De Wardes was about to reply, when De Guiche interrupted him.

Chapter VII. The Portrait of Madame.

The discussion was becoming full of bitterness. De Guiche perfectly understood the whole matter, for there was in Bragelonne's face a look instinctively hostile, while in that of De Wardes there was something like a determination to offend. Without inquiring into the different feelings which actuated his two friends, De Guiche resolved to ward off the blow which he felt was on the point of being dealt by one of them, and perhaps by both. "Gentlemen," he said, "we must take our leave of each other, I must pay a visit to Monsieur. You, De Wardes, will accompany me to the Louvre, and you, Raoul, will remain here master of the house; and as all that is done here is under your advice, you will bestow the last glance upon my preparations for departure."

Raoul, with the air of one who neither seeks nor fears a quarrel, bowed his head in token of assent, and seated himself upon a bench in the sun. "That is well," said De Guiche, "remain where you are, Raoul, and tell them to show you the two horses I have just purchased; you will give me your opinion, for I only bought them on condition that you ratified the purchase. By the by, I have to beg your pardon for having omitted to inquire after the Comte de la Fere." While pronouncing these latter words, he closely observed De Wardes, in order to perceive what effect the name of Raoul's father would produce upon him. "I thank you," answered the young man, "the count is very well." A gleam of deep hatred passed into De Wardes's eyes. De Guiche, who appeared not to notice the foreboding expression, went up to Raoul, and grasping him by the hand, said,—"It is agreed, then, Bragelonne, is it not, that you will rejoin us in the courtyard of the Palais Royal?" He then signed to De Wardes to follow him, who had been engaged in balancing himself first on one foot, then on the other. "We are going," said he, "come, M.

Malicorne." This name made Raoul start; for it seemed that he had already heard it pronounced before, but he could not remember on what occasion. While trying to recall it half-dreamily, yet half-irritated at his conversation with De Wardes, the three young men set out on their way towards the Palais Royal, where Monsieur was residing. Malicorne learned two things; the first, that the young men had something to say to each other; and the second, that he ought not to walk in the same line with them; and therefore he walked behind. "Are you mad?" said De Guiche to his companion, as soon as they had left the Hotel de Grammont; "you attack M. d'Artagnan, and that, too, before Raoul."

"Well," said De Wardes, "what then?"

"What do you mean by 'what then?'"

"Certainly, is there any prohibition against attacking M. d'Artagnan?"

"But you know very well that M. d'Artagnan was one of those celebrated and terrible four men who were called the musketeers."

"That they may be; but I do not perceive why, on that account, I should be forbidden to hate M. d'Artagnan."

"What cause has he given you?"

"Me! personally, none."

"Why hate him, therefore?"

"Ask my dead father that question."

"Really, my dear De Wardes, you surprise me. M. d'Artagnan is not one to leave unsettled any *enmity* he may have to arrange, without completely clearing his account. Your father, I have heard, carried matters with a high hand. Moreover, there are no enmities so bitter that they cannot be washed away by blood, by a good sword-thrust loyally given."

"Listen to me, my dear De Guiche, this inveterate dislike existed between my father and M. d'Artagnan, and when I was quite a child, he acquainted me with the reason for it, and, as forming part of my inheritance, I regard it as a particular legacy bestowed upon me."

"And does this hatred concern M. d'Artagnan alone?"

"As for that, M. d'Artagnan was so intimately associated with his three friends, that some portion of the full measure of my hatred falls to their lot, and that hatred is of such a nature, whenever the opportunity occurs, they shall have no occasion to complain of their allowance."

De Guiche had kept his eyes fixed on De Wardes, and shuddered at the bitter manner in which the young man smiled. Something like a presentiment flashed across his mind; he knew that the time had passed away for *grands coups entre gentilshommes*; but that the feeling of hatred treasured up in the mind, instead of being diffused abroad, was still hatred all the same; that a smile was sometimes as full of meaning as a threat; and, in a word, that to the fathers who had hated with their hearts and fought with their arms, would now succeed the sons, who would indeed hate with their hearts, but would no longer combat their enemies save by means of intrigue or treachery. As, therefore, it certainly was not Raoul whom he could suspect either of intrigue or treachery, it was on Raoul's account that De Guiche trembled. However, while these gloomy forebodings cast a shade of anxiety over De Guiche's countenance, De Wardes had resumed the entire mastery over himself.

"At all events," he observed, "I have no personal ill-will towards M. de Bragelonne; I do not know him even."

"In any case," said De Guiche, with a certain amount of severity in his tone of voice, "do not forget one circumstance, that Raoul is my most intimate friend;" a remark at which De Wardes bowed.

The conversation terminated there, although De Guiche tried his utmost to draw out his secret from him; but, doubtless, De Wardes had determined to say nothing further, and he remained impenetrable. De Guiche therefore promised himself a more satisfactory result with Raoul. In the meantime they had reached the Palais Royal, which was surrounded by a crowd of lookers-on. The household belonging to Monsieur awaited his command to mount their horses, in order to form part of the escort of the ambassadors, to whom had been intrusted the care of bringing the young princess to Paris. The brilliant display of horses, arms, and rich liveries, afforded some compensation in those

times, thanks to the kindly feelings of the people, and to the traditions of deep devotion to their sovereigns, for the enormous expenses charged upon the taxes. Mazarin had said: “Let them sing, provided they pay;” while Louis XIV.‘s remark was, “Let them look.” Sight had replaced the voice; the people could still look but they were no longer allowed to sing. De Guiche left De Wardes and Malicorne at the bottom of the grand staircase, while he himself, who shared the favor and good graces of Monsieur with the Chevalier de Lorraine, who always smiled at him most affectionately, though he could not endure him, went straight to the prince’s apartments, whom he found engaged in admiring himself in the glass, and rouging his face. In a corner of the cabinet, the Chevalier de Lorraine was extended full length upon some cushions, having just had his long hair curled, with which he was playing in the same manner a woman would have done. The prince turned round as the count entered, and perceiving who it was, said: “Ah! is that you, De Guiche; come here and tell me the truth.”

“You know, my lord, it is one of my defects to speak the truth.”

“You will hardly believe, De Guiche, how that wicked chevalier has annoyed me.”

The chevalier shrugged his shoulders.

“Why, he pretends,” continued the prince, “that Mademoiselle Henrietta is better looking as a woman than I am as a man.”

“Do not forget, my lord,” said De Guiche, frowning slightly, “you require me to speak the truth.”

“Certainly,” said the prince, tremblingly.

“Well, and I shall tell it you.”

“Do not be in a hurry, Guiche,” exclaimed the prince, “you have plenty of time; look at me attentively, and try to recollect Madame. Besides, her portrait is here. Look at it.” And he held out to him a miniature of the finest possible execution. De Guiche took it, and looked at it for a long time attentively.

“Upon my honor, my lord, this is indeed a most lovely face.”

“But look at me, count, look at me,” said the prince, endeavoring to direct upon himself the attention of the count, who was completely absorbed in contemplation of the portrait.

“It is wonderful,” murmured Guiche.

“Really one would imagine you had never seen the young lady before.”

“It is true, my lord, I have seen her but it was five years ago; there is a great difference between a child twelve years old, and a girl of seventeen.”

“Well, what is your opinion?”

“My opinion is that the portrait must be flattering, my lord.”

“Of that,” said the prince triumphantly, “there can be no doubt; but let us suppose that it is not, what would your opinion be?”

“My lord, that your highness is exceedingly happy to have so charming a bride.”

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing. The prince understood how severe towards himself this opinion of the Comte de Guiche was, and he looked somewhat displeased, saying, “My friends are not over indulgent.” De Guiche looked at the portrait again, and, after lengthened contemplation, returned it with apparent unwillingness, saying, “Most decidedly, my lord, I should rather prefer to look ten times at your highness, than to look at Madame once again.” It seemed as if the chevalier had detected some mystery in these words, which were incomprehensible to the prince, for he exclaimed: “Very well, get married yourself.” Monsieur continued painting himself, and when he had finished, looked at the portrait again once more, turned to admire himself in the glass, and smiled, and no doubt was satisfied with the comparison. “You are very kind to have come,” he said to Guiche, “I feared you would leave without bidding me adieu.”

“Your highness knows me too well to believe me capable of so great a disrespect.”

“Besides, I suppose you have something to ask from me before leaving Paris?”

“Your highness has indeed guessed correctly, for I have a request to make.”

“Very good, what is it?”

The Chevalier de Lorraine immediately displayed the greatest attention, for he regarded every favor conferred upon another as a robbery committed against himself. And, as Guiche hesitated, the prince said: “If it be money, nothing could be more fortunate, for I am in funds; the superintendent of the finances has sent me 500,000 pistoles.”

“I thank your highness; but is not an affair of money.”

“What is it, then? Tell me.”

“The appointment of a maid of honor.”

“Oh! oh! Guiche, what a protector you have become of young ladies,” said the prince, “you never speak of any one else now.”

The Chevalier de Lorraine smiled, for he knew very well that nothing displeased the prince more than to show any interest in ladies. “My lord,” said the comte, “it is not I who am directly interested in the lady of whom I have just spoken; I am acting on behalf of one of my friends.”

“Ah! that is different; what is the name of the young lady in whom your friend is so interested?”

“Mlle. de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière; she is already maid of honor to the dowager princess.”

“Why, she is lame,” said the Chevalier de Lorraine, stretching himself on his cushions.

“Lame,” repeated the prince, “and Madame to have her constantly before her eyes? Most certainly not; it may be dangerous for her when in an interesting condition.”

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing.

“Chevalier,” said Guiche, “your conduct is ungenerous; while I am soliciting a favor, you do me all the mischief you can.”

“Forgive me, comte,” said the Chevalier de Lorraine, somewhat uneasy at the tone in which Guiche had made his remark, “but I had no intention of doing so, and I begin to believe that I have mistaken one young lady for another.”

“There is no doubt of it, monsieur; and I do not hesitate to declare that such is the case.”

“Do you attach much importance to it, Guiche?” inquired the prince.

“I do, my lord.”

“Well, you shall have it; but ask me for no more appointments, for there are none to give away.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the chevalier, “midday already, that is the hour fixed for the departure.”

“You dismiss me, monsieur?” inquired Guiche.

“Really, count, you treat me very ill to-day,” replied the chevalier.

“For heaven’s sake, count, for heaven’s sake, chevalier,” said Monsieur, “do you not see how you are distressing me?”

“Your highness’s signature?” said Guiche.

“Take a blank appointment from that drawer, and give it to me.” Guiche handed the prince the document indicated, and at the same time presented him with a pen already dipped in ink; whereupon the prince signed. “Here,” he said, returning him the appointment, “but I give it on one condition.”

“Name it.”

“That you make friends with the chevalier.”

“Willingly,” said Guiche. And he held out his hand to the chevalier with an indifference amounting to contempt.

“Adieu, count,” said the chevalier, without seeming in any way to have noticed the count’s slight; “adieu, and bring us back a princess who will not talk with her own portrait too much.”

“Yes, set off and lose no time. By the by, who will accompany you?”

“Bragelonne and De Wardes.”

“Both excellent and fearless companions.”

“Too fearless,” said the chevalier; “endeavor to bring them both back, count.”

“A bad heart, bad!” murmured De Guiche; “he scents mischief everywhere, and sooner than anything else.” And taking leave of the prince, he quitted the apartment. As soon as he reached the vestibule, he waved in the air the paper which the prince had signed. Malicorne hurried forward, and received it, trembling with delight. When, however, he held in his hand, Guiche observed that he still awaited something further.

“Patience, monsieur,” he said; “the Chevalier de Lorraine was there, and I feared an utter failure if I asked too much at once. Wait until I return. Adieu.”

“Adieu, monsieur le comte; a thousand thanks,” said Malicorne.

“Send Manicamp to me. By the way, monsieur, is it true that Mlle. de la Vallière is lame?” As he said this, he noticed that Bragelonne, who had just at that moment entered the courtyard, turned suddenly pale. The poor lover had heard the remark, which, however, was not the case with Malicorne, for he was already beyond the reach of the count’s voice.

“Why is Louise’s name spoken of here,” said Raoul to himself; “oh! let not De Wardes, who stands smiling yonder, even say a word about her in my presence.”

“Now, gentlemen,” exclaimed the Comte de Guiche, “prepare to start.”

At this moment the prince, who had complete his toilette, appeared at the window, and was immediately saluted by the acclamations of all who composed the escort, and ten minutes afterwards, banners, scarfs, and feathers were fluttering and waving in the air, as the cavalcade galloped away.

Chapter VIII. Le Havre.

This brilliant and animated company, the members of which were inspired by various feelings, arrived at Le Havre four days after their departure from Paris. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and no intelligence had yet been received of Madame. They were soon engaged in quest of apartments; but the greatest confusion immediately ensued among the masters, and violent quarrels among their attendants. In the midst of this disorder, the Comte de Guiche fancied he recognized Manicamp. It was, indeed, Manicamp himself; but as Malicorne had taken possession of his very best costume, he had not been able to get any other than a suit of violet velvet, trimmed with silver. Guiche recognized him as much by his dress as by his features, for he had very frequently seen Manicamp in his violet suit, which was his last resource. Manicamp presented himself to the count under an arch of torches, which set in a blaze, rather than illuminated, the gate by which Le Havre is entered, and which is situated close to the tower of Francis I. The count, remarking the woe-begone expression of Manicamp's face, could not resist laughing. "Well, my poor Manicamp," he exclaimed, "how violet you look; are you in mourning?"

"Yes," replied Manicamp; "I am in mourning."

"For whom, or for what?"

"For my blue-and-gold suit, which has disappeared, and in the place of which I could find nothing but this; and I was even obliged to economize from compulsion, in order to get possession of it."

"Indeed?"

"It is singular you should be astonished at that, since you leave me without any money."

“At all events, here you are, and that is the principal thing.”

“By the most horrible roads.”

“Where are you lodging?”

“Lodging?”

“Yes!”

“I am not lodging anywhere.”

De Guiche began to laugh. “Well,” said he, “where do you intend to lodge?”

“In the same place you do.”

“But I don’t know, myself.”

“What do you mean by saying you don’t know?”

“Certainly, how is it likely I should know where I should stay?”

“Have you not retained an hotel?”

“I?”

“Yes, you or the prince.”

“Neither of us has thought of it. Le Havre is of considerable size, I suppose; and provided I can get a stable for a dozen horses, and a suitable house in a good quarter—”

“Certainly, there are some very excellent houses.”

“Well then—”

“But not for us.”

“What do you mean by saying not for us?—for whom, then?”

“For the English, of course.”

“For the English?”

“Yes; the houses are all taken.”

“By whom?”

“By the Duke of Buckingham.”

“I beg your pardon?” said Guiche, whose attention this name had awakened.

“Yes, by the Duke of Buckingham. His Grace was preceded by a courier, who arrived here three days ago, and immediately retained all the houses fit for habitation the town possesses.”

“Come, come, Manicamp, let us understand each other.”

“Well, what I have told you is clear enough, it seems to me.”

“But surely Buckingham does not occupy the whole of Le Havre?”

“He certainly does not occupy it, since he has not yet arrived; but, once disembarked, he will occupy it.”

“Oh! oh!”

“It is quite clear you are not acquainted with the English; they have a perfect rage for monopolizing everything.”

“That may be; but a man who has the whole of one house, is satisfied with it, and does not require two.”

“Yes, but two men?”

“Be it so; for two men, two houses, or four or six, or ten, if you like; but there are a hundred houses at Le Havre.”

“Yes, and all the hundred are let.”

“Impossible!”

“What an obstinate fellow you are. I tell you Buckingham has hired all the houses surrounding the one which the queen dowager of England and the princess her daughter will inhabit.”

“He is singular enough, indeed,” said De Wardes, caressing his horse’s neck.

“Such is the case, however, monsieur.”

“You are quite sure of it, Monsieur de Manicamp?” and as he put this question, he looked slyly at De Guiche, as though to interrogate him upon the degree of confidence to be placed in his friend’s state of mind. During this discussion the night had closed in, and the torches, pages, attendants, squires, horses, and carriages, blocked up the gate and the open place; the torches were reflected in the channel, which the rising tide was gradually filling, while on the other side of the jetty might be

noticed groups of curious lookers-on, consisting of sailors and townspeople, who seemed anxious to miss nothing of the spectacle. Amidst all this hesitation of purpose, Bragelonne, as though a perfect stranger to the scene, remained on his horse somewhat in the rear of Guiche, and watched the rays of light reflected on the water, inhaling with rapture the sea breezes, and listening to the waves which noisily broke upon the shore and on the beach, tossing the spray into the air with a noise that echoed in the distance. “But,” exclaimed De Guiche, “what is Buckingham’s motive for providing such a supply of lodgings?”

“Yes, yes,” said De Wardes; “what reason has he?”

“A very excellent one,” replied Manicamp.

“You know what it is, then?”

“I fancy I do.”

“Tell us, then.”

“Bend your head down towards me.”

“What! may it not be spoken except in private?”

“You shall judge of that yourself.”

“Very well.” De Guiche bent down.

“Love,” said Manicamp.

“I do not understand you at all.”

“Say rather, you cannot understand me yet.”

“Explain yourself.”

“Very well; it is quite certain, count, that his royal highness will be the most unfortunate of husbands.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Duke of Buckingham—”

“It is a name of ill omen to the princes of the house of France.”

“And so the duke is madly in love with Madame, so the rumor runs, and will have no one approach her but himself.”

De Guiche colored. “Thank you, thank you,” said he to Manicamp, grasping his hand. Then, recovering himself, added, “Whatever you do, Manicamp, be careful that this project of Buckingham’s is not made known to any Frenchman here; for, if so, many a sword would be unsheathed in this country that does not fear English steel.”

“But after all,” said Manicamp, “I have had no satisfactory proof given me of the love in question, and it may be no more than an idle tale.”

“No, no,” said De Guiche, “it must be the truth;” and despite his command over himself, he clenched his teeth.

“Well,” said Manicamp, “after all, what does it matter to you? What does it matter to me whether the prince is to be what the late king was? Buckingham the father for the queen, Buckingham the son for the princess.”

“Manicamp! Manicamp!”

“It is a fact, or at least, everybody says so.”

“Silence!” cried the count.

“But why, silence?” said De Wardes; “it is a highly creditable circumstance for the French nation. Are not you of my opinion, Monsieur de Bragelonne?”

“To what circumstance do you allude?” inquired De Bragelonne with an abstracted air.

“That the English should render homage to the beauty of our queens and our princesses.”

“Forgive me, but I have not been paying attention to what has passed; will you oblige me by explaining.”

“There is no doubt it was necessary that Buckingham the father should come to Paris in order that his majesty, King Louis XIII., should perceive that his wife was one of the most beautiful women of the French court; and it seems necessary, at the present time, that Buckingham the son should consecrate, by the devotion of his worship, the beauty of a

princess who has French blood in her veins. The fact of having inspired a passion on the other side of the Channel will henceforth confer a title to beauty on this."

"Sir," replied De Bragelonne, "I do not like to hear such matters treated so lightly. Gentlemen like ourselves should be careful guardians of the honor of our queens and our princesses. If we jest at them, what will our servants do?"

"How am I to understand that?" said De Wardes, whose ears tingled at the remark.

"In any way you chose, monsieur," replied De Bragelonne, coldly.

"Bragelonne, Bragelonne," murmured De Guiche.

"M. de Wardes," exclaimed Manicamp, noticing that the young man had spurred his horse close to the side of Raoul.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said De Guiche, "do not set such an example in public, in the street too. De Wardes, you are wrong."

"Wrong; in what way, may I ask you?"

"You are wrong, monsieur, because you are always speaking ill of someone or something," replied Raoul, with undisturbed composure.

"Be indulgent, Raoul," said De Guiche, in an undertone.

"Pray do not think of fighting, gentlemen!" said Manicamp, "before you have rested yourselves; for in that case you will not be able to do much."

"Come," said De Guiche, "forward, gentlemen!" and breaking through the horses and attendants, he cleared the way for himself towards the center of the square, through the crowd, followed by the whole cavalcade. A large gateway looking out upon a courtyard was open; Guiche entered the courtyard, and Bragelonne, De Wardes, Manicamp, and three or four other gentlemen, followed him. A sort of council of war was held, and the means to be employed for saving the dignity of the embassy were deliberated upon. Bragelonne was of the opinion that the right of priority should be respected, while De Wardes suggested that the town should be sacked. This latter proposition appearing to Manicamp

rather premature, he proposed instead that they should first rest themselves. This was the wisest thing to do, but, unhappily, to follow his advice, two things were wanting; namely, a house and beds. De Guiche reflected for awhile, and then said aloud, “Let him who loves me, follow me!”

“The attendants also?” inquired a page who had approached the group.

“Every one,” exclaimed the impetuous young man. “Manicamp, show us the way to the house destined for her royal highness’s residence.”

Without in any way divining the count’s project, his friends followed him, accompanied by a crowd of people, whose acclamations and delight seemed a happy omen for the success of that project with which they were yet unacquainted. The wind was blowing strongly from the harbor, and moaning in fitful gusts.

Chapter IX. At Sea.

The following day was somewhat calmer, although the gale still continued. The sun had, however, risen through a bank of orange clouds, tingeing with its cheerful rays the crests of the black waves. Watch was impatiently kept from the different look-outs. Towards eleven o'clock in the morning a ship, with sails full set, was signalled as in view; two others followed at the distance of about half a knot. They approached like arrows shot from the bow of a skillful archer; and yet the sea ran so high that their speed was as nothing compared to the rolling of the billows in which the vessels were plunging first in one direction and then in another. The English fleet was soon recognized by the line of the ships, and by the color of their pennants; the one which had the princess on board and carried the admiral's flag preceded the others.

The rumor now spread that the princess was arriving. The whole French court ran to the harbor, while the quays and jetties were soon covered by crowds of people. Two hours afterwards, the other vessels had overtaken the flagship, and the three, not venturing perhaps to enter the narrow entrance of the harbor, cast anchor between Le Havre and La Heve. When the maneuver had been completed, the vessel which bore the admiral saluted France by twelve discharges of cannon, which were returned, discharge for discharge, from Fort Francis I. Immediately afterwards a hundred boats were launched; they were covered with the richest stuffs, and destined for the conveyance of the different members of the French nobility towards the vessels at anchor. But when it was observed that even inside the harbor the boats were tossed to and fro, and that beyond the jetty the waves rose mountains high, dashing upon the shore with a terrible uproar, it was readily believed that not one of those frail boats would be able with safety to reach a fourth part of the

distance between the shore and the vessels at anchor. A pilot-boat, however, notwithstanding the wind and the sea, was getting ready to leave the harbor, for the purpose of placing itself at the admiral's disposal.

De Guiche, who had been looking among the different boats for one stronger than the others, which might offer a chance of reaching the English vessels, perceiving the pilot-boat getting ready to start, said to Raoul: "Do you not think, Raoul, that intelligent and vigorous men, as we are, ought to be ashamed to retreat before the brute strength of wind and waves?"

"That is precisely the very reflection I was silently making to myself," replied Bragelonne.

"Shall we get into that boat, then, and push off? Will you come, De Wardes?"

"Take care, or you will get drowned," said Manicamp.

"And for no purpose," said De Wardes, "for with the wind in your teeth, as it will be, you will never reach the vessels."

"You refuse, then?"

"Assuredly I do; I would willingly risk and lose my life in an encounter against men," he said, glancing at Bragelonne, "but as to fighting with oars against waves, I have no taste for that."

"And for myself," said Manicamp, "even were I to succeed in reaching the ships, I should not be indifferent to the loss of the only good dress which I have left,—salt water would spoil it."

"You, then, refuse also?" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Decidedly I do; I beg you to understand that most distinctly."

"But," exclaimed De Guiche, "look, De Wardes—look, Manicamp—look yonder, the princesses are looking at us from the poop of the admiral's vessel."

"An additional reason, my dear fellow, why we should not make ourselves ridiculous by being drowned while they are looking on."

"Is that your last word, Manicamp?"

“Yes.”

“And then yours, De Wardes?”

“Yes.”

“Then I go alone.”

“Not so,” said Raoul, “for I shall accompany you; I thought it was understood I should do so.”

The fact is, that Raoul, uninfluenced by devotion, measuring the risk they run, saw how imminent the danger was, but he willingly allowed himself to accept a peril which De Wardes had declined.

The boat was about to set off when De Guiche called to the pilot. “Stay,” said he: “we want two places in your boat;” and wrapping five or six pistoles in paper, he threw them from the quay into the boat.

“It seems you are not afraid of salt water, young gentlemen.”

“We are afraid of nothing,” replied De Guiche.

“Come along, then.”

The pilot approached the side of the boat, and the two young men, one after the other, with equal vivacity, jumped into the boat. “Courage, my men,” said De Guiche; “I have twenty pistoles left in this purse, and as soon as we reach the admiral’s vessel they shall be yours.” The sailors bent themselves to their oars, and the boat bounded over the crest of the waves. The interest taken in this hazardous expedition was universal; the whole population of Le Havre hurried towards the jetties and every look was directed towards the little bark; at one moment it flew suspended on the crest of the foaming waves, then suddenly glided downwards towards the bottom of a raging abyss, where it seemed utterly lost. At the expiration of an hour’s struggling with the waves, it reached the spot where the admiral’s vessel was anchored, and from the side of which two boats had already been dispatched towards their aid. Upon the quarter-deck of the flagship, sheltered by a canopy of velvet and ermine, which was suspended by stout supports, Henriette, the queen dowager, and the young princess—with the admiral, the Duke of Norfolk, standing beside them—watched with alarm this slender bark, at one moment tossed to

the heavens, and the next buried beneath the waves, and against whose dark sail the noble figures of the two French gentlemen stood forth in relief like two luminous apparitions. The crew, leaning against the bulwarks and clinging to the shrouds, cheered the courage of the two daring young men, the skill of the pilot, and the strength of the sailors. They were received at the side of the vessel by a shout of triumph. The Duke of Norfolk, a handsome young man, from twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age, advanced to meet them. De Guiche and Bragelonne lightly mounted the ladder on the starboard side, and, conducted by the Duke of Norfolk, who resumed his place near them, they approached to offer their homage to the princess. Respect, and yet more, a certain apprehension, for which he could not account, had hitherto restrained the Comte de Guiche from looking at Madame attentively, who, however, had observed him immediately, and had asked her mother, “Is not that Monsieur in the boat yonder?” Madame Henriette, who knew Monsieur better than her daughter did, smiled at the mistake her vanity had led her into, and had answered, “No; it is only M. de Guiche, his favorite.” The princess, at this reply, was constrained to check an instinctive tenderness of feeling which the courage displayed by the count had awakened. At the very moment the princess had put this question to her mother, De Guiche had, at last, summoned courage to raise his eyes towards her and could compare the original with the portrait he had so lately seen. No sooner had he remarked her pale face, her eyes so full of animation, her beautiful nut-brown hair, her expressive lips, and her every gesture, which, while betokening royal descent, seemed to thank and to encourage him at one and the same time, than he was, for a moment, so overcome, that, had it not been for Raoul, on whose arm he leant, he would have fallen. His friend’s amazed look, and the encouraging gesture of the queen, restored Guiche to his self-possession. In a few words he explained his mission, explained in what way he had become envoy of his royal highness; and saluted, according to their rank and the reception they gave him, the admiral and several of the English noblemen who were grouped around the princess.

Raoul was then presented, and was most graciously received; the share that the Comte de la Fere had had in the restoration of Charles II. was known to all; and, more than that, it was the comte who had been charged with the negotiation of the marriage, by means of which the granddaughter of Henry IV. was now returning to France. Raoul spoke English perfectly, and constituted himself his friend's interpreter with the young English noblemen, who were indifferently acquainted with the French language. At this moment, a young man came forward, of extremely handsome features, and whose dress and arms were remarkable for their extravagance of material. He approached the princesses, who were engaged in conversation with the Duke of Norfolk, and, in a voice which ill concealed his impatience, said, "It is now time to disembark, your royal highness." The younger of the princesses rose from her seat at this remark, and was about to take the hand which the young nobleman extended to her, with an eagerness which arose from a variety of motives, when the admiral intervened between them, observing: "A moment, if you please, my lord; it is not possible for ladies to disembark just now, the sea is too rough; it is probable the wind may abate before sunset, and the landing will not be effected, therefore, until this evening."

"Allow me to observe, my lord," said Buckingham, with an irritation of manner which he did not seek to disguise, "you detain these ladies, and you have no right to do so. One of them, unhappily, now belongs to France, and you perceive that France claims them by the voice of her ambassadors;" and at the same moment he indicated Raoul and Guiche, whom he saluted.

"I cannot suppose that these gentlemen intend to expose the lives of their royal highnesses," replied the admiral.

"These gentlemen," retorted Buckingham, "arrived here safely, notwithstanding the wind; allow me to believe that the danger will not be greater for their royal highnesses when the wind will be in their favor."

“These envoys have shown how great their courage is,” said the admiral. “You may have observed that there was a great number of persons on shore who did *not* venture to accompany them. Moreover, the desire which they had to show their respect with the least possible delay to Madame and her illustrious mother, induced them to brave the sea, which is very tempestuous to-day, even for sailors. These gentlemen, however, whom I recommend as an example for my officers to follow, can hardly be so for these ladies.”

Madame glanced at the Comte de Guiche, and perceived that his face was burning with confusion. This look had escaped Buckingham, who had eyes for nothing but Norfolk, of whom he was evidently very jealous; he seemed anxious to remove the princesses from the deck of a vessel where the admiral reigned supreme. “In that case,” returned Buckingham, “I appeal to Madame herself.”

“And I, my lord,” retorted the admiral, “I appeal to my own conscience, and to my own sense of responsibility. I have undertaken to convey Madame safe and sound to France, and I shall keep my promise.”

“But, sir—” continued Buckingham.

“My lord, permit me to remind you that I command here.”

“Are you aware what you are saying, my lord?” replied Buckingham, haughtily.

“Perfectly so; I therefore repeat it: I alone command here, all yield obedience to me; the sea and the winds, the ships and men too.” This remark was made in a dignified and authoritative manner. Raoul observed its effect upon Buckingham, who trembled with anger from head to foot, and leaned against one of the poles of the tent to prevent himself falling; his eyes became suffused with blood, and the hand which he did not need for his support wandered towards the hilt of his sword.

“My lord,” said the queen, “permit me to observe that I agree in every particular with the Duke of Norfolk; if the heavens, instead of being clouded as they are at the present moment, were perfectly serene and

propitious, we can still afford to bestow a few hours upon the officer who has conducted us so successfully, and with such extreme attention, to the French coast, where he is to take leave of us."

Buckingham, instead of replying, seemed to seek counsel from the expression of Madame's face. She, however, half-concealed beneath the thick curtains of the velvet and gold which sheltered her, had not listened to the discussion, having been occupied in watching the Comte de Guiche, who was conversing with Raoul. This was a fresh misfortune for Buckingham, who fancied he perceived in Madame Henrietta's look a deeper feeling than that of curiosity. He withdrew, almost tottering in his gait, and nearly stumbled against the mainmast of the ship.

"The duke has not acquired a steady footing yet," said the queen-mother, in French, "and that may possibly be his reason for wishing to find himself on firm land again."

The young man overheard this remark, turned suddenly pale, and, letting his hands fall in great discouragement by his side, drew aside, mingling in one sigh his old affection and his new hatreds. The admiral, however, without taking any further notice of the duke's ill-humor, led the princesses into the quarter-deck cabin, where dinner had been served with a magnificence worthy in every respect of his guests. The admiral seated himself at the right hand of the princess, and placed the Comte de Guiche on her left. This was the place Buckingham usually occupied; and when he entered the cabin, how profound was his unhappiness to see himself banished by etiquette from the presence of his sovereign, to a position inferior to that which, by rank, he was entitled to. De Guiche, on the other hand, paler still perhaps from happiness, than his rival was from anger, seated himself tremblingly next to the princess, whose silken robe, as it lightly touched him, caused a tremor of mingled regret and happiness to pass through his whole frame. The repast finished, Buckingham darted forward to hand Madame Henrietta from the table; but this time it was De Guiche's turn to give the duke a lesson. "Have the goodness, my lord, from this moment," said he, "not to interpose between her royal highness and

myself. From this moment, indeed, her royal highness belongs to France, and when she deigns to honor me by touching my hand it is the hand of Monsieur, the brother of the king of France, she touches."

And saying this, he presented his hand to Madame Henrietta with such marked deference, and at the same time with a nobleness of mien so intrepid, that a murmur of admiration rose from the English, whilst a groan of despair escaped from Buckingham's lips. Raoul, who loved, comprehended it all. He fixed upon his friend one of those profound looks which a bosom friend or mother can alone extend, either as protector or guardian, over the one who is about to stray from the right path. Towards two o'clock in the afternoon the sun shone forth anew, the wind subsided, the sea became smooth as a crystal mirror, and the fog, which had shrouded the coast, disappeared like a veil withdrawn before it. The smiling hills of France appeared in full view, with their numerous white houses rendered more conspicuous by the bright green of the trees or the clear blue sky.

Chapter X. The Tents.

The admiral, as we have seen, was determined to pay no further attention to Buckingham's threatening glances and fits of passion. In fact, from the moment they quitted England, he had gradually accustomed himself to his behavior. De Guiche had not yet in any way remarked the animosity which appeared to influence that young nobleman against him, but he felt, instinctively, that there could be no sympathy between himself and the favorite of Charles II. The queen-mother, with greater experience and calmer judgment, perceived the exact position of affairs, and, as she discerned its danger, was prepared to meet it, whenever the proper moment should arrive. Quiet had been everywhere restored, except in Buckingham's heart; he, in his impatience, addressed himself to the princess, in a low tone of voice: "For Heaven's sake, madame, I implore you to hasten your disembarkation. Do you not perceive how that insolent Duke of Norfolk is killing me with his attentions and devotions to you?"

Henrietta heard this remark; she smiled, and without turning her head towards him, but giving only to the tone of her voice that inflection of gentle reproach, and languid impertinence, which women and princesses so well know how to assume, she murmured, "I have already hinted, my lord, that you must have taken leave of your senses."

Not a single detail escaped Raoul's attention; he heard both Buckingham's entreaty and the princess's reply; he remarked Buckingham retire, heard his deep sigh, and saw him pass a hand over his face. He understood everything, and trembled as he reflected on the position of affairs, and the state of the minds of those about him. At last the admiral, with studied delay, gave the last orders for the departure of the boats. Buckingham heard the directions given with such an

exhibition of delight that a stranger would really imagine the young man's reason was affected. As the Duke of Norfolk gave his commands, a large boat or barge, decked with flags, and capable of holding about twenty rowers and fifteen passengers, was slowly lowered from the side of the admiral's vessel. The barge was carpeted with velvet and decorated with coverings embroidered with the arms of England, and with garlands of flowers; for, at that time, ornamentation was by no means forgotten in these political pageants. No sooner was this really royal boat afloat, and the rowers with oars uplifted, awaiting, like soldiers presenting arms, the embarkation of the princess, than Buckingham ran forward to the ladder in order to take his place. His progress was, however, arrested by the queen. "My lord," she said, "it is hardly becoming that you should allow my daughter and myself to land without having previously ascertained that our apartments are properly prepared. I beg your lordship to be good enough to precede us ashore, and to give directions that everything be in proper order on our arrival."

This was a fresh disappointment for the duke, and, still more so, since it was so unexpected. He hesitated, colored violently, but could not reply. He had thought he might be able to keep near Madame during the passage to the shore, and, by this means, to enjoy to the very last moment the brief period fortune still reserved for him. The order, however, was explicit; and the admiral, who heard it given, immediately called out, "Launch the ship's gig." His directions were executed with that celerity which distinguishes every maneuver on board a man-of-war.

Buckingham, in utter hopelessness, cast a look of despair at the princess, of supplication towards the queen, and directed a glance full of anger towards the admiral. The princess pretended not to notice him, while the queen turned aside her head, and the admiral laughed outright, at the sound of which Buckingham seemed ready to spring upon him. The queen-mother rose, and with a tone of authority said, "Pray set off, sir."

The young duke hesitated, looked around him, and with a last effort, half-choked by contending emotions, said, “And you, gentlemen, M. de Guiche and M. de Bragelonne, do not you accompany me?”

De Guiche bowed and said, “Both M. de Bragelonne and myself await her majesty’s orders; whatever the commands she imposes on us, we shall obey them.” Saying this, he looked towards the princess, who cast down her eyes.

“Your grace will remember,” said the queen, “that M. de Guiche is here to represent Monsieur; it is he who will do the honors of France, as you have done those of England; his presence cannot be dispensed with; besides, we owe him this slight favor for the courage he displayed in venturing to seek us in such a terrible stress of weather.”

Buckingham opened his lips, as if he were about to speak, but, whether thoughts or expressions failed him, not a syllable escaped them, and turning away, as though out of his mind, he leapt from the vessel into the boat. The sailors were just in time to catch hold of him to steady themselves; for his weight and the rebound had almost upset the boat.

“His grace cannot be in his senses,” said the admiral aloud to Raoul.

“I am uneasy on the Duke’s account,” replied Bragelonne.

While the boat was advancing towards the shore, the duke kept his eyes immovably fixed on the admiral’s ship, like a miser torn away from his coffers, or a mother separated from her child, about to be lead away to death. No one, however, acknowledged his signals, his frowns, or his pitiful gestures. In very anguish of mind, he sank down in the boat, burying his hands in his hair, whilst the boat, impelled by the exertions of the merry sailors, flew over the waves. On his arrival he was in such a state of apathy, that, had he not been received at the harbor by the messenger whom he had directed to precede him, he would hardly have had strength to ask his way. Having once, however, reached the house which had been set apart for him, he shut himself up, like Achilles in his tent. The barge bearing the princess quitted the admiral’s vessel at the very moment Buckingham landed. It was followed by another boat filled with officers, courtiers, and zealous friends. Great numbers of the

inhabitants of Le Havre, having embarked in fishing-cobles and boats of every description, set off to meet the royal barge. The cannon from the forts fired salutes, which were returned by the flagship and the two other vessels, and the flashes from the open mouths of the cannon floated in white fumes over the waves, and disappeared in the clear blue sky.

The princess landed at the decorated quay. Bands of gay music greeted her arrival, and accompanied her every step she took. During the time she was passing through the center of town, and treading beneath her delicate feet the richest carpets and the gayest flowers, which had been strewn upon the ground, De Guiche and Raoul, escaping from their English friends, hurried through the town and hastened rapidly towards the place intended for the residence of Madame.

"Let us hurry forward," said Raoul to De Guiche, "for if I read Buckingham's character aright, he will create some disturbance, when he learns the result of our deliberations of yesterday."

"Never fear," said De Guiche, "De Wardes is there, who is determination itself, while Manicamp is the very personification of the artless gentleness."

De Guiche was not, however, the less diligent on that account, and five minutes afterwards they were within sight of the Hotel de Ville. The first thing which struck them was the number of people assembled in the square. "Excellent," said De Guiche; "our apartments, I see, are prepared."

In fact, in front of the Hotel de Ville, upon the wide open space before it, eight tents had been raised, surmounted by the flags of France and England united. The hotel was surrounded by tents, as by a girdle of variegated colors; ten pages and a dozen mounted troopers, for an escort, mounted guard before the tents. It had a singularly curious effect, almost fairy-like in its appearance. These tents had been constructed during the night-time. Fitted up, within and without, with the richest materials that De Guiche had been able to procure in Le Havre, they completely encircled the Hotel de Ville. The only passage which led to the steps of the hotel, and which was not inclosed by the silken

barricade, was guarded by two tents, resembling two pavilions, the doorways of both of which opened towards the entrance. These two tents were destined for De Guiche and Raoul; in whose absence they were intended to be occupied, that of De Guiche by De Wardes, and that of Raoul by Manicamp. Surrounding these two tents, and the six others, a hundred officers, gentlemen, and pages, dazzling in their display of silk and gold, thronged like bees buzzing about a hive. Every one of them, their swords by their sides, was ready to obey the slightest sign either of De Guiche or Bragelonne, the leaders of the embassy.

At the very moment the two young men appeared at the end of one of the streets leading to the square, they perceived, crossing the square at full gallop, a young man on horseback, whose costume was of surprising richness. He pushed hastily thorough the crowd of curious lookers-on, and, at the sight of these unexpected erections, uttered a cry of anger and dismay. It was Buckingham, who had awakened from his stupor, in order to adorn himself with a costume perfectly dazzling from its beauty, and to await the arrival of the princess and the queen-mother at the Hotel de Ville. At the entrance to the tents, the soldiers barred his passage, and his further progress was arrested. Buckingham, hopelessly infuriated, raised his whip; but his arm was seized by a couple of officers. Of the two guardians of the tent, only one was there. De Wardes was in the interior of the Hotel de Ville, engaging in attending to the execution of some orders by De Guiche. At the noise made by Buckingham, Manicamp, who was indolently reclining upon the cushions at the doorway of one of the tents, rose with his usual indifference, and, perceiving that the disturbance continued, made his appearance from underneath the curtains. “What is the matter?” he said, in a gentle tone of voice, “and who is making this disturbance?”

It so happened, that, at the moment he began to speak, silence had just been restored, and, although his voice was very soft and gentle in its touch, every one heard his question. Buckingham turned round, and looked at the tall thin figure, and the listless expression of countenance

of his questioner. Probably the personal appearance of Manicamp, who was dressed very plainly, did not inspire him with much respect, for he replied disdainfully, “Who may you be, monsieur?”

Manicamp, leaning on the arm of a gigantic trooper, as firm as the pillar of a cathedral, replied in his usual tranquil tone of voice,—“And *you*, monsieur?”

“I, monsieur, am the Duke of Buckingham; I have hired all the houses which surround the Hotel de Ville, where I have business to transact; and as these houses are let, they belong to me, and, as I hired them in order to preserve the right of free access to the Hotel de Ville, you are not justified in preventing me passing to it.”

“But who prevents you passing, monsieur?” inquired Manicamp.

“Your sentinels.”

“Because you wish to pass on horseback, and orders have been given to let only persons on foot pass.”

“No one has any right to give orders here, except myself,” said Buckingham.

“On what grounds?” inquired Manicamp, with his soft tone. “Will you do me the favor to explain this enigma to me?”

“Because, as I have already told you, I have hired all the houses looking on the square.”

“We are very well aware of that, since nothing but the square itself has been left for us.”

“You are mistaken, monsieur; the square belongs to me, as well as the houses in it.”

“Forgive me, monsieur, but you are mistaken there. In *our* country, we say, the highway belongs to the king, therefore this square is his majesty’s; and, consequently, as we are the king’s ambassadors, the square belongs to us.”

“I have already asked you who you are, monsieur,” exclaimed Buckingham, exasperated at the coolness of his interlocutor.

“My name is Manicamp,” replied the young man, in a voice whose tones were as harmonious and sweet as the notes of an Aeolian harp.

Buckingham shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and said, “When I hired these houses which surround the Hotel de Ville, the square was unoccupied; these barracks obstruct my sight; I hereby order them to be removed.”

A hoarse and angry murmur ran through the crowd of listeners at these words. De Guiche arrived at this moment; he pushed through the crowd which separated him from Buckingham, and, followed by Raoul, arrived on the scene of action from one side, just as De Wardes came up from the other. “Pardon me, my lord; but if you have any complaint to make, have the goodness to address it to me, inasmuch as it was I who supplied the plans for the construction of these tents.”

“Moreover, I would beg you to observe, monsieur, that the term ‘barrack’ is a highly objectionable one!” added Manicamp, graciously.

“You were saying, monsieur—” continued De Guiche.

“I was saying, monsieur le comte,” resumed Buckingham, in a tone of anger more marked than ever, although in some measure moderated by the presence of an equal, “I was saying that it is impossible these tents can remain where they are.”

“*Impossible!*” exclaimed De Guiche, “and why?”

“Because I object to them.”

A movement of impatience escaped De Guiche, but a warning glance from Raoul restrained him.

“You should the less object to them, monsieur, on account of the abuse of priority you have permitted yourself to exercise.”

“*Abuse!*”

“Most assuredly. You commission a messenger, who hires in your name the whole of the town of Le Havre, without considering the members of the French court, who would be sure to arrive here to meet Madame. Your Grace will admit that this is hardly friendly conduct in the representative of a friendly nation.”

“The right of possession belongs to him who is first on the ground.”

“Not in France, monsieur.”

“Why not in France?”

“Because France is a country where politeness is observed.”

“Which means?” exclaimed Buckingham, in so violent a manner that those who were present drew back, expecting an immediate collision.

“Which means, monsieur,” replied De Guiche, now rather pale, “that I caused these tents to be raised as habitations for myself and my friends, as a shelter for the ambassadors of France, as the only place of refuge which your exactions have left us in the town; and that I and those who are with me, shall remain in them, at least, until an authority more powerful, and more supreme, than your own shall dismiss me from them.”

“In other words, until we are ejected, as the lawyers say,” observed Manicamp, blandly.

“I know an authority, monsieur, which I trust is such as you will respect,” said Buckingham, placing his hand on his sword.

At this moment, and as the goddess of Discord, inflaming all minds, was about to direct their swords against each other, Raoul gently placed his hand on Buckingham’s shoulder. “One word, my lord,” he said.

“My right, my right, first of all,” exclaimed the fiery young man.

“It is precisely upon that point I wish to have the honor of addressing a word to you.”

“Very well, monsieur, but let your remarks be brief.”

“One question is all I ask; you can hardly expect me to be briefer.”

“Speak, monsieur, I am listening.”

“Are you, or is the Duke of Orleans, going to marry the granddaughter of Henry IV.?”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Buckingham, retreating a few steps, bewildered.

“Have the goodness to answer me,” persisted Raoul tranquilly.

“Do you mean to ridicule me, monsieur?” inquired Buckingham.

“Your question is a sufficient answer for me. You admit, then, that it is not you who are going to marry the princess?”

“You know it perfectly well, monsieur, I should imagine.”

“I beg your pardon, but your conduct has been such as to leave it not altogether certain.”

“Proceed, monsieur, what do you mean to convey?”

Raoul approached the duke. “Are you aware, my lord,” he said, lowering his voice, “that your extravagances very much resemble the excesses of jealousy? These jealous fits, with respect to any woman, are not becoming in one who is neither her lover nor her husband; and I am sure you will admit that my remark applies with still greater force, when the lady in question is a princess of the blood royal!”

“Monsieur,” exclaimed Buckingham, “do you mean to insult Madame Henrietta?”

“Be careful, my lord,” replied Bragelonne, coldly, “for it is you who insult her. A little while since, when on board the admiral’s ship, you wearied the queen, and exhausted the admiral’s patience. I was observing, my lord; and, at first, I concluded you were not in possession of your senses, but I have since surmised the real significance of your madness.”

“Monsieur!” exclaimed Buckingham.

“One moment more, for I have yet another word to add. I trust I am the only one of my companions who has guessed it.”

“Are you aware, monsieur,” said Buckingham, trembling with mingled feelings of anger and uneasiness, “are you aware that you are holding language towards me which requires to be checked?”

“Weigh your words well, my lord,” said Raoul, haughtily; “my nature is not such that its vivacities need checking; whilst you, on the contrary, are descended from a race whose passions are suspected by all true Frenchmen; I repeat, therefore, for the second time, be careful!”

“Careful of what, may I ask? Do you presume to threaten me?”

“I am the son of the Comte de la Fere, my lord, and I never threaten, because I strike first. Therefore, understand me well, the threat that I hold out to you is this—”

Buckingham clenched his hands, but Raoul continued, as though he had not observed the gesture. “At the very first word, beyond the respect and deference due to her royal highness, which you permit yourself to use towards her,—be patient my lord, for I am perfectly so.”

“You?”

“Undoubtedly. So long as Madame remained on English territory, I held my peace; but from the very moment she stepped on French ground, and now that we have received her in the name of the prince, I warn you, that at the first mark of disrespect which you, in your insane attachment, exhibit towards the royal house of France, I shall have one of two courses to follow;—either I declare, in the presence of every one, the madness with which you are now affected, and I get you ignominiously ordered back to England; or if you prefer it, I will run my dagger through your throat in the presence of all here. This second alternative seems to me the least disagreeable, and I think I shall hold to it.”

Buckingham had become paler than the lace collar around his neck. “M. de Bragelonne,” he said, “is it, indeed, a gentleman who is speaking to me?”

“Yes; only the gentleman is speaking to a madman. Get cured, my lord, and he will hold quite another language to you.”

“But, M. de Bragelonne,” murmured the duke, in a voice, half-choked, and putting his hand to his neck,—“Do you not see I am choking?”

“If your death were to take place at this moment, my lord,” replied Raoul, with unruffled composure, “I should, indeed, regard it as a great happiness, for this circumstance would prevent all kinds of evil remarks; not alone about yourself, but also about those illustrious persons whom your devotion is compromising in so absurd a manner.”

“You are right, you are right,” said the young man, almost beside himself. “Yes, yes; better to die, than to suffer as I do at this moment.” And he grasped a beautiful dagger, the handle of which was inlaid with precious stones; and which he half drew from his breast.

Raoul thrust his hand aside. “Be careful what you do,” he said; “if you do not kill yourself, you commit a ridiculous action; and if you were to kill yourself, you sprinkle blood upon the nuptial robe of the princess of England.”

Buckingham remained a minute gasping for breath; during this interval, his lips quivered, his fingers worked convulsively, and his eyes wandered, as though in delirium. Then suddenly, he said, “M. de Bragelonne, I know nowhere a nobler mind than yours; you are, indeed, a worthy son of the most perfect gentleman that ever lived. Keep your tents.” And he threw his arms round Raoul’s neck. All who were present, astounded at this conduct, which was the very reverse of what was expected, considering the violence of the one adversary and the determination of the other, began immediately to clap their hands, and a thousand cheers and joyful shouts arose from all sides. De Guiche, in his turn, embraced Buckingham somewhat against his inclination; but, at all events, he did embrace him. This was the signal for French and English to do the same; and they who, until that moment, had looked at each other with restless uncertainty, fraternized on the spot. In the meantime, the procession of the princess arrived, and had it not been for Bragelonne, two armies would have been engaged together in conflict, and blood would have been shed upon the flowers with which the ground was covered. At the appearance, however, of the banners borne at the head of the procession, complete order was restored.

Chapter XI. Night.

Concord returned to its place amidst the tents. English and French rivaled each other in their devotion and courteous attention to the illustrious travelers. The English forwarded to the French baskets of flowers, of which they had made a plentiful provision to greet the arrival of the young princess; the French in return invited the English to a supper, which was to be given the next day. Congratulations were poured in upon the princess everywhere during her journey. From the respect paid her on all sides, she seemed like a queen; and from the adoration with which she was treated by two or three; she appeared an object of worship. The queen-mother gave the French the most affectionate reception. France was her native country, and she had suffered too much unhappiness in England for England to have made her forget France. She taught her daughter, then, by her own affection for it, that love for a country where they had both been hospitably received, and where a brilliant future opened before them. After the public entry was over, and the spectators in the streets had partially dispersed, and the sound of the music and cheering of the crowd could be heard only in the distance; when the night had closed in, wrapping with its star-covered mantle the sea, the harbor, the town, and surrounding country, De Guiche, still excited by the great events of the day, returned to his tent, and seated himself upon one of the stools with so profound an expression of distress that Bragelonne kept his eyes fixed upon him, until he heard him sigh, and then he approached him. The count had thrown himself back on his seat, leaning his shoulders against the partition of the tent, and remained thus, his face buried in his hands, with heaving chest and restless limbs.

“You are suffering?” asked Raoul.

“Cruelly.”

“Bodily, I suppose?”

“Yes; bodily.”

“This has indeed been a harassing day,” continued the young man, his eyes fixed upon his friend.

“Yes; a night’s rest will probably restore me.”

“Shall I leave you?”

“No; I wish to talk to you.”

“You shall not speak to me, Guiche, until you have first answered my questions.”

“Proceed then.”

“You will be frank with me?”

“I always am.”

“Can you imagine why Buckingham has been so violent?”

“I suspect.”

“Because he is in love with Madame, is it not?”

“One could almost swear to it, to observe him.”

“You are mistaken; there is nothing of the kind.”

“It is you who are mistaken, Raoul; I have read his distress in his eyes, in his every gesture and action the whole day.”

“You are a poet, my dear count, and find subjects for your muse everywhere.”

“I can perceive love clearly enough.”

“Where it does not exist?”

“Nay, where it does exist.”

“Do you not think you are deceiving yourself, Guiche?”

“I am convinced of what I say,” said the count.

“Now, inform me, count,” said Raoul, fixing a penetrating look upon him, “what happened to render you so clear-sighted.”

Guiche hesitated for a moment, and then answered, “Self-love, I suppose.”

“Self-love is a pedantic word, Guiche.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that, generally, you are less out of spirits than seems to be the case this evening.”

“I am fatigued.”

“Listen to me, Guiche; we have been campaigners together; we have been on horseback for eighteen hours at a time, and our horses dying from exhaustion, or hunger, have fallen beneath us, and yet we have laughed at our mishaps. Believe me, it is not fatigue that saddens you to-night.”

“It is annoyance, then.”

“What annoyance?”

“That of this evening.”

“The mad conduct of the Duke of Buckingham, do you mean?”

“Of course; is it not vexations for us, the representatives of our sovereign master, to witness the devotion of an Englishman to our future mistress, the second lady in point of rank in the kingdom?”

“Yes, you are right; but I do not think any danger is to be apprehended from Buckingham.”

“No; still he is intrusive. Did he not, on his arrival here, almost succeed in creating a disturbance between the English and ourselves; and, had it not been for you, for your admirable presence, for your singular decision of character, swords would have been drawn in the very streets of the town.”

“You observe, however, that he has changed his tactics.”

“Yes, certainly; but this is the very thing that amazes me so much. You spoke to him in a low tone of voice, what did you say to him? You think he loves her; you admit that such a passion does not give way readily. He does not love her, then!” De Guiche pronounced the latter with so

marked an expression that Raoul raised his head. The noble character of the young man's countenance expressed a displeasure which could easily be read.

"What I said to him, count," replied Raoul, "I will repeat to you. Listen to me. I said, 'You are regarding with wistful feelings, and most injurious desire, the sister of your prince,—her to whom you are not affianced, who is not, who can never be anything to you; you are outraging those who, like ourselves, have come to seek a young lady to escort her to her husband.'"

"You spoke to him in that manner?" asked Guiche, coloring.

"In those very terms; I even added more. 'How would you regard us,' I said, 'if you were to perceive among us a man mad enough, disloyal enough, to entertain other than sentiments of the most perfect respect for a princess who is the destined wife of our master?'"

These words were so applicable to De Guiche that he turned pale, and, overcome by a sudden agitation, was barely able to stretch out one hand mechanically towards Raoul, as he covered his eyes and face with the other.

"But," continued Raoul, not interrupted by this movement of his friend, "Heaven be praised, the French, who are pronounced to be thoughtless and indiscreet, reckless, even, are capable of bringing a calm and sound judgment to bear on matters of such high importance. I added even more, for I said, 'Learn, my lord, that we gentlemen of France devote ourselves to our sovereigns by sacrificing them our affections, as well as our fortunes and our lives; and whenever it may chance to happen that the tempter suggests one of those vile thoughts that set the heart on fire, we extinguish the flame, even if it has to be done by shedding our blood for the purpose. Thus it is that the honor of three is saved: our country's, our master's, and our own. It is thus that we act, your Grace; it is thus that every man of honor ought to act.' In this manner, my dear Guiche," continued Bragelonne, "I addressed the Duke of Buckingham; and he admitted I was right, and resigned himself unresistingly to my arguments."

De Guiche, who had hitherto sat leaning forward while Raoul was speaking, drew himself up, his eyes glancing proudly; he seized Raoul's hand, his face, which had been as cold as ice, seemed on fire. "And you spoke magnificently," he said, in a half-choked voice; "you are indeed a friend, Raoul. But now, I entreat you, leave me to myself."

"Do you wish it?"

"Yes; I need repose. Many things have agitated me to-day, both in mind and body; when you return to-morrow I shall no longer be the same man."

"I leave you, then," said Raoul, as he withdrew. The count advanced a step towards his friend, and pressed him warmly in his arms. But in this friendly pressure Raoul could detect the nervous agitation of a great internal conflict.

The night was clear, starlit, and splendid; the tempest had passed away, and the sweet influences of the evening had restored life, peace and security everywhere. A few fleecy clouds were floating in the heavens, and indicated from their appearance a continuance of beautiful weather, tempered by a gentle breeze from the east. Upon the large square in front of the hotel, the shadows of the tents, intersected by the golden moonbeams, formed as it were a huge mosaic of jet and yellow flagstones. Soon, however, the entire town was wrapped in slumber; a feeble light still glimmered in Madame's apartment, which looked out upon the square, and the soft rays from the expiring lamp seemed to be the image of the calm sleep of a young girl, hardly yet sensible of life's anxieties, and in whom the flame of existence sinks placidly as sleep steals over the body.

Bragelonne quitted the tent with the slow and measured step of a man curious to observe, but anxious not to be seen. Sheltered behind the thick curtains of his own tent, embracing with a glance the whole square, he noticed that, after a few moments' pause, the curtains of De Guiche's tent were agitated, and then drawn partially aside. Behind them he could perceive the shadow of De Guiche, his eyes, glittering in the obscurity, fastened ardently upon the princess's sitting apartment, which was

partially lighted by the lamp in the inner room. The soft light which illumined the windows was the count's star. The fervent aspirations of his nature could be read in his eyes. Raoul, concealed in the shadow, divined the many passionate thoughts that established, between the tent of the young ambassador and the balcony of the princess, a mysterious and magical bond of sympathy—a bond created by thoughts imprinted with so much strength and persistence of will, that they must have caused happy and loving dreams to alight upon the perfumed couch, which the count, with the eyes of his soul, devoured so eagerly.

But De Guiche and Raoul were not the only watchers. The window of one of the houses looking on the square was opened too, the casement of the house where Buckingham resided. By the aid of the rays of light which issued from this latter, the profile of the duke could be distinctly seen, as he indolently reclined upon the carved balcony with its velvet hangings; he also was breathing in the direction of the princess's apartment his prayers and the wild visions of his love.

Raoul could not resist smiling, as thinking of Madame, he said to himself, "Hers is, indeed, a heart well besieged;" and then added, compassionately, as he thought of Monsieur, "and he is a husband well threatened too; it is a good thing for him that he is a prince of such high rank, that he has an army to safeguard for him that which is his own." Bragelonne watched for some time the conduct of the two lovers, listened to the loud and uncivil slumbers of Manicamp, who snored as imperiously as though he was wearing his blue and gold, instead of his violet suit.

Then he turned towards the night breeze which bore towards him, he seemed to think, the distant song of the nightingale; and, after having laid in a due provision of melancholy, another nocturnal malady, he retired to rest thinking, with regard to his own love affair, that perhaps four or even a larger number of eyes, quite as ardent as those of De Guiche and Buckingham, were coveting his own idol in the chateau at Blois. "And Mademoiselle de Montalais is by no means a very conscientious garrison," said he to himself, sighing aloud.

Chapter XII. From Le Havre to Paris.

The next day the *fetes* took place, accompanied by all the pomp and animation that the resources of the town and the cheerful disposition of men's minds could supply. During the last few hours spent in Le Havre, every preparation for the departure had been made. After Madame had taken leave of the English fleet, and, once again, had saluted the country in saluting its flags, she entered her carriage, surrounded by a brilliant escort. De Guiche had hoped that the Duke of Buckingham would accompany the admiral to England; but Buckingham succeeded in demonstrating to the queen that there would be great impropriety in allowing Madame to proceed to Paris, almost unprotected. As soon as it had been settled that Buckingham was to accompany Madame, the young duke selected a corps of gentlemen and officers to form part of his own suite, so that it was almost an army that now set out towards Paris, scattering gold, and exciting the liveliest demonstrations as they passed through the different towns and villages on the route. The weather was very fine. France is a beautiful country, especially along the route by which the procession passed. Spring cast its flowers and its perfumed foliage on their path. Normandy, with its vast variety of vegetation, its blue skies and silver rivers, displayed itself in all the loveliness of a paradise to the new sister of the king. *Fetes* and brilliant displays received them everywhere along the line of march. De Guiche and Buckingham forgot everything; De Guiche in his anxiety to prevent any fresh attempts on the part of the duke, and Buckingham, in his desire to awaken in the heart of the princess a softer remembrance of the country to which the recollection of many happy days belonged. But, alas! the poor duke could perceive that the image of that country so cherished by himself became, from day to day, more and more effaced in Madame's

mind, in exact proportion as her affection for France became more deeply engraved on her heart. In fact, it was not difficult to perceive that his most devoted attention awakened no acknowledgement, and that the grace with which he rode one of his most fiery horses was thrown away, for it was only casually and by the merest accident that the princess's eyes were turned towards him. In vain did he try, in order to fix upon himself one of those looks, which were thrown carelessly around, or bestowed elsewhere, to produce in the animal he rode its greatest display of strength, speed, temper and address; in vain did he, by exciting his horse almost to madness, spur him, at the risk of dashing himself in pieces against the trees, or of rolling in the ditches, over the gates and barriers which they passed, or down the steep declivities of the hills. Madame, whose attention had been aroused by the noise, turned her head for a moment to observe the cause of it, and then, slightly smiling, again entered into conversation with her faithful guardians, Raoul and De Guiche, who were quietly riding at her carriage doors. Buckingham felt himself a prey to all the tortures of jealousy; an unknown, unheard of anguish glided through his veins, and laid siege to his heart; and then, as if to show that he knew the folly of his conduct, and that he wished to correct, by the humblest submission, his flights of absurdity, he mastered his horse, and compelled him, reeking with sweat and flecked with foam, to champ his bit close beside the carriage, amidst the crowd of courtiers. Occasionally he obtained a word from Madame as a recompense, and yet her speech seemed almost a reproach.

"That is well, my lord," she said, "now you are reasonable."

Or from Raoul, "Your Grace is killing your horse."

Buckingham listened patiently to Raoul's remarks, for he instinctively felt, without having had any proof that such was the case, that Raoul checked the display of De Guiche's feelings, and that, had it not been for Raoul, some mad act or proceeding, either of the count, or of Buckingham himself, would have brought about an open rupture, or a disturbance—perhaps even exile itself. From the moment of that excited conversation the two young men had held in front of the tents at Le

Havre, when Raoul made the duke perceive the impropriety of his conduct, Buckingham felt himself attracted towards Raoul almost in spite of himself. He often entered into conversation with him, and it was nearly always to talk to him either of his father or of D'Artagnan, their mutual friend, in whose praise Buckingham was nearly as enthusiastic as Raoul. Raoul endeavored, as much as possible, to make the conversation turn upon this subject in De Wardes's presence, who had, during the whole journey, been exceedingly annoyed at the superior position taken by Bragelonne, and especially by his influence over De Guiche. De Wardes had that keen and merciless penetration most evil natures possess; he had immediately remarked De Guiche's melancholy, and divined the nature of his regard for the princess. Instead, however, of treating the subject with the same reserve which Raoul practiced; instead of regarding with that respect, which was their due, the obligations and duties of society, De Wardes resolutely attacked in the count the ever-sounding chord of juvenile audacity and pride. It happened one evening, during a halt at Mantes, that while De Guiche and De Wardes were leaning against a barrier, engaged in conversation, Buckingham and Raoul were also talking together as they walked up and down. Manicamp was engaged in devoted attendance on the princess, who already treated him without reserve, on account of his versatile fancy, his frank courtesy of manner, and conciliatory disposition.

"Confess," said De Wardes, "that you are really ill, and that your pedagogue of a friend has not succeeded in curing you."

"I do not understand you," said the count.

"And yet it is easy enough; you are dying of love."

"You are mad, De Wardes."

"Madness it would be, I admit, if Madame were really indifferent to your martyrdom; but she takes so much notice of it, observes it to such an extent, that she compromises herself, and I tremble lest, on our arrival at Paris, M. de Bragelonne may not denounce both of you."

"For shame, De Wardes, again attacking De Bragelonne."

“Come, come, a truce to child’s play,” replied the count’s evil genius, in an undertone; “you know as well as I do what I mean. Besides, you must have observed how the princess’s glance softens as she looks at you;—you can tell, by the very inflection of her voice, what pleasure she takes in listening to you, and can feel how thoroughly she appreciates the verses you recite to her. You cannot deny, too, that every morning she tells you how indifferently she slept the previous night.”

“True, De Wardes, quite true; but what good is there in your telling me all that?”

“Is it not important to know the exact position of affairs?”

“No, no; not when I am a witness of things that are enough to drive one mad.”

“Stay, stay,” said De Wardes; “look, she calls you,—do you understand? Profit by the occasion, while your pedagogue is absent.”

De Guiche could not resist; an invincible attraction drew him towards the princess. De Wardes smiled as he saw him withdraw.

“You are mistaken, monsieur,” said Raoul, suddenly stepping across the barrier against which the previous moment the two friends had been leaning. “The pedagogue is here, and has overheard you.”

De Wardes, at the sound of Raoul’s voice, which he recognized without having occasion to look at him, half drew his sword.

“Put up your sword,” said Raoul; “you know perfectly well that, until our journey is at an end, every demonstration of that nature is useless. Why do you distill into the heart of the man you term your friend all the bitterness that infects your own? As regards myself, you wish to arouse a feeling of deep dislike against a man of honor—my father’s friend and my own; and as for the count you wish him to love one who is destined for your master. Really, monsieur, I should regard you as a coward, and a traitor too, if I did not, with greater justice, regard you as a madman.”

“Monsieur,” exclaimed De Wardes, exasperated, “I was deceived, I find, in terming you a pedagogue. The tone you assume, and the style which is peculiarly your own, is that of a Jesuit, and not of a gentleman.

Discontinue, I beg, whenever I am present, this style I complain of, and the tone also. I hate M. d'Artagnan, because he was guilty of a cowardly act towards my father."

"You lie, monsieur," said Raoul, coolly.

"You give me the lie, monsieur?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"Why not, if what you assert is untrue?"

"You give me the lie, and will not draw your sword?"

"I have resolved, monsieur, not to kill you until Madame shall have been delivered safely into her husband's hands."

"Kill me! Believe me, monsieur, your schoolmaster's rod does not kill so easily."

"No," replied Raoul, sternly, "but M. d'Artagnan's sword kills; and, not only do I possess his sword, but he has himself taught me how to use it; and with that sword, when a befitting time arrives, I will avenge his name—a name you have dishonored."

"Take care, monsieur," exclaimed De Wardes; "if you do not immediately give me satisfaction, I will avail myself of every means to revenge myself."

"Indeed, monsieur," said Buckingham, suddenly, appearing upon the scene of action, "that is a threat which savors of assassination, and therefore, ill becomes a gentleman."

"What did you say, my lord?" said De Wardes, turning round towards him.

"I said, monsieur, that the words you have just spoken are displeasing to my English ears."

"Very well, monsieur, if what you say is true," exclaimed De Wardes, thoroughly incensed, "I at least find in you one who will not escape me. Understand my words as you like."

"I take them in the manner they cannot but be understood," replied Buckingham, with that haughty tone which characterized him, and which, even in ordinary conversation, gave a tone of defiance to

everything he said; “M. de Bragelonne is my friend, you insult M. de Bragelonne, and you shall give me satisfaction for that insult.”

De Wardes cast a look upon De Bragelonne, who, faithful to the character he had assumed, remained calm and unmoved, even after the duke’s defiance.

“It would seem that I did not insult M. de Bragelonne, since M. de Bragelonne, who carries a sword by his side, does not consider himself insulted.”

“At all events you insult someone.”

“Yes, I insulted M. d’Artagnan,” resumed De Wardes, who had observed that this was the only means of stinging Raoul, so as to awaken his anger.

“That, then,” said Buckingham, “is another matter.”

“Precisely so,” said De Wardes; “it is the province of M. d’Artagnan’s friends to defend him.”

“I am entirely of your opinion,” replied the duke, who had regained all his indifference of manner; “if M. de Bragelonne were offended, I could not reasonably be expected to espouse his quarrel, since he is himself here; but when you say that it is a quarrel of M. d’Artagnan—”

“You will of course leave me to deal with the matter,” said De Wardes.

“Nay, on the contrary, for I draw my sword,” said Buckingham, unsheathing it as he spoke; “for if M. d’Artagnan injured your father, he rendered, or at least did all that he could to render, a great service to mine.”

De Wardes was thunderstruck.

“M. d’Artagnan,” continued Buckingham, “is the bravest gentleman I know. I shall be delighted, as I owe him many personal obligations, to settle them with you, by crossing my sword with yours.” At the same moment Buckingham drew his sword from its scabbard, saluted Raoul, and put himself on guard.

De Wardes advanced a step to meet him.

“Stay, gentlemen,” said Raoul, advancing towards them, and placing his own drawn sword between the combatants, “the affair is hardly worth the trouble of blood being shed almost in the presence of the princess. M. de Wardes speaks ill of M. d’Artagnan, with whom he is not even acquainted.”

“What, monsieur,” said De Wardes, setting his teeth hard together, and resting the point of his sword on the toe of his boot, “do you assert that I do not know M. d’Artagnan?”

“Certainly not; you do not know him,” replied Raoul, coldly, “and you are even not aware where he is to be found.”

“Not know where he is?”

“Such must be the case, since you fix your quarrel with him upon strangers, instead of seeking M. d’Artagnan where he is to be found.” De Wardes turned pale. “Well, monsieur,” continued Raoul, “I will tell you where M. d’Artagnan is: he is now in Paris; when on duty he is to be met with at the Louvre,—when not on duty, in the Rue des Lombards. M. d’Artagnan can easily be discovered at either of those two places. Having, therefore, as you assert, so many causes of complaint against him, show your courage in seeking him out, and afford him an opportunity of giving you that satisfaction you seem to ask of every one but of himself.” De Wardes passed his hand across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. “For shame, M. de Wardes! so quarrelsome a disposition is hardly becoming after the publication of the edicts against duels. Pray think of that; the king will be incensed at our disobedience, particularly at such a time,—and his majesty will be in the right.”

“Excuses,” murmured De Wardes; “mere pretexts.”

“Really, M. De Wardes,” resumed Raoul, “such remarks are the idlest bluster. You know very well that the Duke of Buckingham is a man of undoubted courage, who has already fought ten duels, and will probably fight eleven. His name alone is significant enough. As far as I am concerned, you are well aware that I can fight also. I fought at Lens, at Bleneau, at the Dunes in front of the artillery, a hundred paces in front

of the line, while you—I say this parenthetically—were a hundred paces behind it. True it is, that on that occasion there was far too great a concourse of persons present for your courage to be observed, and on that account perhaps you did not reveal it; while here, it would be a display, and would excite remark—you wish that others should talk about you, in what manner you do not care. Do not depend upon me, M. de Wardes to assist you in your designs, for I shall certainly not afford you that pleasure."

"Sensibly observed," said Buckingham, putting up his sword, "and I ask your forgiveness, M. de Bragelonne, for having allowed myself to yield to a first impulse."

De Wardes, however, on the contrary, perfectly furious, bounded forward and raised his sword, threateningly, against Raoul, who had scarcely enough time to put himself in a posture of defense.

"Take care, monsieur," said Bragelonne, tranquilly, "or you will put out one of my eyes."

"You will not fight, then?" said De Wardes.

"Not at this moment; but this I promise to do; immediately on our arrival at Paris I will conduct you to M. d'Artagnan, to whom you shall detail all the causes of complaint you have against him. M d'Artagnan will solicit the king's permission to measure swords with you. The king will yield his consent, and when you shall have received the sword-thrust in due course, you will consider, in a calmer frame of mind, the precepts of the Gospel, which enjoin forgetfulness of injuries."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Wardes, furious at this imperturbable coolness, "one can clearly see you are half a bastard, M. de Bragelonne."

Raoul became as pale as death; his eyes flashed lightning, causing De Wardes involuntarily to fall back. Buckingham, also, who had perceived their expression, threw himself between the two adversaries, whom he had expected to see precipitate themselves on each other. De Wardes had reserved this injury for the last; he clasped his sword firmly in his hand, and awaited the encounter. "You are right, monsieur," said Raoul, mastering his emotion, "I am only acquainted with my father's name;

but I know too well that the Comte de la Fere is too upright and honorable a man to allow me to fear for a single moment that there is, as you insinuate, any stain upon my birth. My ignorance, therefore, of my mother's name is a misfortune for me, and not a reproach. You are deficient in loyalty of conduct; you are wanting in courtesy, in reproaching me with misfortune. It matters little, however, the insult has been given, and I consider myself insulted accordingly. It is quite understood, then, that after you shall have received satisfaction from M. d'Artagnan, you will settle your quarrel with me."

"I admire your prudence, monsieur," replied De Wardes with a bitter smile; "a little while ago you promised me a sword-thrust from M. d'Artagnan, and now, after I shall have received his, you offer me one from yourself."

"Do not disturb yourself," replied Raoul, with concentrated anger; "in all affairs of that nature, M. d'Artagnan is exceedingly skillful, and I will beg him as a favor to treat you as he did your father; in other words, to spare your life at least, so as to leave me the pleasure, after your recovery, of killing you outright; for you have the heart of a viper, M. de Wardes, and in very truth, too many precautions cannot be taken against you."

"I shall take my precautions against you," said De Wardes, "be assured of it."

"Allow me, monsieur," said Buckingham, "to translate your remark by a piece of advice I am about to give M. de Bragelonne; M. de Bragelonne, wear a cuirass."

De Wardes clenched his hands. "Ah!" said he, "you two gentlemen intend to wait until you have taken that precaution before you measure your swords against mine."

"Very well, monsieur," said Raoul, "since you positively will have it so, let us settle the affair now." And, drawing his sword, he advanced towards De Wardes.

"What are you going to do?" said Buckingham.

“Be easy,” said Raoul, “it will not be very long.”

De Wardes placed himself on his guard; their swords crossed. De Wardes flew upon Raoul with such impetuosity, that at the first clashing of the steel blades Buckingham clearly saw that Raoul was only trifling with his adversary. Buckingham stepped aside, and watched the combat. Raoul was as calm as if he were handling a foil instead of a sword; having retreated a step, he parried three or four fierce thrusts which De Wardes made at him, caught the sword of the latter with within his own, and sent it flying twenty paces the other side of the barrier. Then as De Wardes stood disarmed and astounded at his defeat, Raoul sheathed his sword, seized him by the collar and the waist band, and hurled his adversary to the other end of the barrier, trembling, and mad with rage.

“We shall meet again,” murmured De Wardes, rising from the ground and picking up his sword.

“I have done nothing for the last hour,” said Raoul, rising from the ground, “but say the same thing.” Then, turning towards the duke, he said, “I entreat you to be silent about this affair; I am ashamed to have gone so far, but my anger carried me away, and I ask your forgiveness for it;—forget it, too.”

“Dear viscount,” said the duke, pressing with his own the vigorous and valiant hand of his companion, “allow me, on the contrary, to remember it, and to look after your safety; that man is dangerous,—he will kill you.”

“My father,” replied Raoul, “lived for twenty years under the menace of a much more formidable enemy, and he still lives.”

“Your father had good friends, viscount.”

“Yes,” sighed Raoul, “such friends, indeed, that none are now left like them.”

“Do not say that, I beg, at the very moment I offer you my friendship;” and Buckingham opened his arms to embrace Raoul, who delightedly received the proffered alliance. “In my family,” added Buckingham, “you are aware, M. de Bragelonne, we die to save our friends.”

“I know it well, duke,” replied Raoul.

Chapter XIII. An Account of what the Chevalier de Lorraine Thought of Madame.

Nothing further interrupted the journey. Under a pretext that was little remarked, M. de Wardes went forward in advance of the others. He took Manicamp with him, for his equable and dreamy disposition acted as a counterpoise to his own. It is a subject of remark, that quarrelsome and restless characters invariably seek the companionship of gentle, timorous dispositions, as if the former sought, in the contrast, a repose for their own ill-humor, and the latter a protection for their weakness. Buckingham and Bragelonne, admitting De Guiche into their friendship, in concert with him, sang the praises of the princess during the whole of the journey. Bragelonne, had, however, insisted that their three voices should be in concert, instead of singing in solo parts, as De Guiche and his rival seemed to have acquired a dangerous habit of doing. This style of harmony pleased the queen-mother exceedingly, but it was not perhaps so agreeable to the young princess, who was an incarnation of coquetry, and who, without any fear as far as her own voice was concerned, sought opportunities of so perilously distinguishing herself. She possessed one of those fearless and incautious dispositions that find gratification in an excess of sensitiveness of feeling, and for whom, also, danger has a certain fascination. And so her glances, her smiles, her toilette, an inexhaustible armory of weapons of offense, were showered on the three young men with overwhelming force; and, from her well-stored arsenal issued glances, kindly recognitions, and a thousand other little charming attentions which were intended to strike at long range the gentlemen who formed the escort, the townspeople, the officers of the different cities she passed through, pages, populace, and servants; it was wholesale slaughter, a general devastation. By the time Madame

arrived at Paris, she had reduced to slavery about a hundred thousand lovers: and brought in her train to Paris half a dozen men who were almost mad about her, and two who were, indeed, literally out of their minds. Raoul was the only person who divined the power of this woman's attraction, and as his heart was already engaged, he arrived in the capital full of indifference and distrust. Occasionally during the journey he conversed with the queen of England respecting the power of fascination which Madame possessed, and the mother, whom so many misfortunes and deceptions had taught experience, replied: "Henrietta was sure to be illustrious in one way or another, whether born in a palace or born in obscurity; for she is a woman of great imagination, capricious and self-willed." De Wardes and Manicamp, in their self-assumed character of courtiers, had announced the princess's arrival. The procession was met at Nanterre by a brilliant escort of cavaliers and carriages. It was Monsieur himself, followed by the Chevalier de Lorraine and by his favorites, the latter being themselves followed by a portion of the king's military household, who had arrived to meet his affianced bride. At St. Germain, the princess and her mother had changed their heavy traveling carriage, somewhat impaired by the journey, for a light, richly decorated chariot drawn by six horses with white and gold harness. Seated in this open carriage, as though upon a throne, and beneath a parasol of embroidered silk, fringed with feathers, sat the young and lovely princess, on whose beaming face were reflected the softened rose-tints which suited her delicate skin to perfection. Monsieur, on reaching the carriage, was struck by her beauty; he showed his admiration in so marked a manner that the Chevalier de Lorraine shrugged his shoulders as he listened to his compliments, while Buckingham and De Guiche were almost heart-broken. After the usual courtesies had been rendered, and the ceremony completed, the procession slowly resumed the road to Paris. The presentations had been carelessly made, and Buckingham, with the rest of the English gentlemen, had been introduced to Monsieur, from whom they had received but very indifferent attention. But, during their progress, as he

observed that the duke devoted himself with his accustomed eagerness to the carriage-door, he asked the Chevalier de Lorraine, his inseparable companion, “Who is that cavalier?”

“He was presented to your highness a short while ago; it is the handsome Duke of Buckingham.”

“Ah, yes, I remember.”

“Madame’s knight,” added the favorite, with an inflection of the voice which envious minds can alone give to the simplest phrases.

“What do you say?” replied the prince.

“I said ‘Madame’s knight’.”

“Has she a recognized knight, then?”

“One would think you can judge of that for yourself; look, only, how they are laughing and flirting. All three of them.”

“What do you mean by *all three?*”

“Do you not see that De Guiche is one of the party?”

“Yes, I see. But what does that prove?”

“That Madame has two admirers instead of one.”

“You poison the simplest thing!”

“I poison nothing. Ah! your royal highness’s mind is perverted. The honors of the kingdom of France are being paid to your wife and you are not satisfied.”

The Duke of Orleans dreaded the satirical humor of the Chevalier de Lorraine whenever it reached a certain degree of bitterness, and he changed the conversation abruptly. “The princess is pretty,” said he, very negligently, as if he were speaking of a stranger.

“Yes,” replied the chevalier, in the same tone.

“You say ‘yes’ like a ‘no’. She has very beautiful black eyes.”

“Yes, but small.”

“That is so, but they are brilliant. She is tall, and of a good figure.”

“I fancy she stoops a little, my lord.”

“I do not deny it. She has a noble appearance.”

“Yes, but her face is thin.”

“I thought her teeth beautiful.”

“They can easily be seen, for her mouth is large enough. Decidedly, I was wrong, my lord; you are certainly handsomer than your wife.”

“But do you think me as handsome as Buckingham?”

“Certainly, and he thinks so, too; for look, my lord, he is redoubling his attentions to Madame to prevent your effacing the impression he has made.”

Monsieur made a movement of impatience, but as he noticed a smile of triumph pass across the chevalier’s lips, he drew up his horse to a foot-pace. “Why,” said he, “should I occupy myself any longer about my cousin? Do I not already know her? Were we not brought up together? Did I not see her at the Louvre when she was quite a child?”

“A great change has taken place in her since then, prince. At the period you allude to, she was somewhat less brilliant, and scarcely so proud, either. One evening, particularly, you may remember, my lord, the king refused to dance with her, because he thought her plain and badly dressed!”

These words made the Duke of Orleans frown. It was by no means flattering for him to marry a princess of whom, when young, the king had not thought much. He would probably have retorted, but at this moment De Guiche quitted the carriage to join the prince. He had remarked the prince and the chevalier together, and full of anxious attention he seemed to try and guess the nature of the remarks which they had just exchanged. The chevalier, whether he had some treacherous object in view, or from imprudence, did not take the trouble to dissimulate. “Count,” he said, “you’re a man of excellent taste.”

“Thank you for the compliment,” replied De Guiche; “but why do you say that?”

“Well I appeal to his highness.”

“No doubt of it,” said Monsieur; “and Guiche knows perfectly well that I regard him as a most finished cavalier.”

“Well, since that is decided, I resume. You have been in the princess’s society, count, for the last eight days, have you not?”

“Yes,” replied De Guiche, coloring in spite of himself.

“Well then, tell us frankly, what do you think of her personal appearance?”

“Of her personal appearance?” returned De Guiche, stupefied.

“Yes; of her appearance, of her mind, of herself, in fact.”

Astounded by this question, De Guiche hesitated answering.

“Come, come, De Guiche,” resumed the chevalier, laughingly, “tell us your opinion frankly; the prince commands it.”

“Yes, yes,” said the prince, “be frank.”

De Guiche stammered out a few unintelligible words.

“I am perfectly well aware,” returned Monsieur, “that the subject is a delicate one, but you know you can tell me everything. What do you think of her?”

In order to avoid betraying his real thoughts, De Guiche had recourse to the only defense which a man taken by surprise really has, and accordingly told an untruth. “I do not find Madame,” he said, “either good or bad looking, yet rather good than bad looking.”

“What! count,” exclaimed the chevalier, “you who went into such ecstasies and uttered so many exclamations at the sight of her portrait.”

De Guiche colored violently. Very fortunately, his horse, which was slightly restive, enabled him by a sudden plunge to conceal his agitation. “What portrait?” he murmured, joining them again. The chevalier had not taken his eyes off him.

“Yes, the portrait. Was not the miniature a good likeness?”

“I do not remember. I had forgotten the portrait; it quite escaped my recollection.”

“And yet it made a very marked impression upon you,” said the chevalier.

“That is not unlikely.”

“Is she witty, at all events?” inquired the duke.

“I believe so, my lord.”

“Is M. de Buckingham witty, too?” said the chevalier.

“I do not know.”

“My own opinion is that he must be,” replied the chevalier, “for he makes Madame laugh, and she seems to take no little pleasure in his society, which never happens to a clever woman when in the company of a simpleton.”

“Of course, then, he must be clever,” said De Guiche, simply.

At this moment Raoul opportunely arrived, seeing how De Guiche was pressed by his dangerous questioner, to whom he addressed a remark, and in that way changed the conversation. The *entree* was brilliant and joyous.

The king, in honor of his brother, had directed that the festivities should be on a scale of the greatest possible magnificence. Madame and her mother alighted at the Louvre, where, during their exile they had so gloomily submitted to obscurity, misery, and privations of every description. That palace, which had been so inhospitable a residence for the unhappy daughter of Henry IV., the naked walls, the uneven floorings, the ceilings matted with cobwebs, the vast dilapidated chimney-places, the cold hearths on which the charity extended to them by parliament hardly permitted a fire to glow, was completely altered in appearance. The richest hangings and the thickest carpets, glistening flagstones, and pictures, with their richly gilded frames; in every direction could be seen candelabra, mirrors, and furniture and fittings of the most sumptuous character; in every direction, also, were guards of the proudest military bearing, with floating plumes, crowds of attendants and courtiers in the ante-chambers and upon the staircases. In the courtyards, where the grass had formerly been allowed to

luxuriate, as if the ungrateful Mazarin had thought it a good idea to let the Parisians perceive the solitude and disorder were, with misery and despair, the fit accompaniments of fallen monarchy; the immense courtyards, formerly silent and desolate, were now thronged with courtiers whose horses were pacing and prancing to and fro. The carriages were filled with young and beautiful women, who awaited the opportunity of saluting, as she passed, the daughter of that daughter of France who, during her widowhood and exile, had sometimes gone without wood for her fire, and bread for her table, whom the meanest attendant at the chateau had treated with indifference and contempt. And so, the Madame Henriette once more returned to the Louvre, with her heart more swollen with bitter recollections than her daughter's, whose disposition was fickle and forgetful, with triumph and delight. She knew but too well this brilliant reception was paid to the happy mother of a king restored to his throne, a throne second to none in Europe, while the worse than indifferent reception she had before met with was paid to her, the daughter of Henry IV., as a punishment for having been unfortunate. After the princess had been installed in their apartments and had rested, the gentlemen who had formed their escort, having, in like manner, recovered from their fatigue, they resumed their accustomed habits and occupations. Raoul began by setting off to see his father, who had left for Blois. He then tried to see M. d'Artagnan, who, however, being engaged in the organization of a military household for the king, could not be found anywhere. Bragelonne next sought out De Guiche, but the count was occupied in a long conference with his tailors and with Manicamp, which consumed his whole time. With the Duke of Buckingham he fared still worse, for the duke was purchasing horses after horses, diamonds upon diamonds. He monopolized every embroiderer, jeweler, and tailor that Paris could boast of. Between De Guiche and himself a vigorous contest ensued, invariably a courteous one, in which, in order to insure success, the duke was ready to spend a million; while the Marechal de Gramont had only allowed his son sixty

thousand francs. So Buckingham laughed and spent his money. Guiche groaned in despair, and would have shown it more violently, had it not been for the advice De Bragelonne gave him.

“A million!” repeated De Guiche daily; “I must submit. Why will not the marechal advance me a portion of my patrimony?”

“Because you would throw it away,” said Raoul.

“What can that matter to him? If I am to die of it, I shall die of it, and then I shall need nothing further.”

“But what need is there to die?” said Raoul.

“I do not wish to be conquered in elegance by an Englishman.”

“My dear count,” said Manicamp, “elegance is not a costly commodity, it is only a very difficult accomplishment.”

“Yes, but difficult things cost a good deal of money, and I have only got sixty thousand francs.”

“A very embarrassing state of things, truly,” said De Wardes; “even if you spent as much as Buckingham, there is only nine hundred and forty thousand francs difference.”

“Where am I to find them?”

“Get into debt.”

“I am in debt already.”

“A greater reason for getting further.”

Advice like this resulted in De Guiche becoming excited to such an extent that he committed extravagances where Buckingham only incurred expenses. The rumor of this extravagant profuseness delighted the hearts of all the shopkeepers in Paris; from the hotel of the Duke of Buckingham to that of the Comte de Gramont nothing but miracles was attempted. While all this was going on, Madame was resting herself, and Bragelonne was engaged in writing to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. He had already dispatched four letters, and not an answer to any one of them had been received, when, on the very morning fixed for the marriage ceremony, which was to take place in the chapel at the Palais

Royal, Raoul, who was dressing, heard his valet announce M. de Malicorne. “What can this Malicorne want with me?” thought Raoul; and then said to his valet, “Let him wait.”

“It is a gentleman from Blois,” said the valet.

“Admit him at once,” said Raoul, eagerly.

Malicorne entered as brilliant as a star, and wearing a superb sword at his side. After having saluted Raoul most gracefully, he said: “M. de Bragelonne, I am the bearer of a thousand compliments from a lady to you.”

Raoul colored. “From a lady,” said he, “from a lady of Blois?”

“Yes, monsieur; from Mademoiselle de Montalais.”

“Thank you, monsieur; I recollect you now,” said Raoul. “And what does Mademoiselle de Montalais require of me.”

Malicorne drew four letters from his pocket, which he offered to Raoul.

“My own letters, is it possible?” he said, turning pale; “my letters, and the seals unbroken?”

“Monsieur, your letters did not find at Blois the person to whom they were addressed, and so they are now returned to you.”

“Mademoiselle de la Vallière has left Blois, then?” exclaimed Raoul.

“Eight days ago.”

“Where is she, then?”

“In Paris.”

“How is it known that these letters were from me?”

“Mademoiselle de Montalais recognized your handwriting and your seal,” said Malicorne.

Raoul colored and smiled. “Mademoiselle de Montalais is exceedingly amiable,” he said; “she is always kind and charming.”

“Always, monsieur.”

“Surely she could have given me some precise information about Mademoiselle de la Vallière. I never could find her in this immense city.”

Malicorne drew another packet from his pocket. “You may possibly find in this letter what you are anxious to learn.”

Raoul hurriedly broke the seal. The writing was that of Mademoiselle Aure, and inclosed were these words:—“Paris, Palais Royal. The day of the nuptial blessing.”

“What does this mean?” inquired Raoul of Malicorne; “you probably know?”

“I do, monsieur.”

“For pity’s sake, tell me, then.”

“Impossible, monsieur.”

“Why so?”

“Because Mademoiselle Aure has forbidden me to do so.”

Raoul looked at his strange visitor, and remained silent;—“At least, tell me whether it is fortunate or unfortunate.”

“That you will see.”

“You are very severe in your reservations.”

“Will you grant me one favor, monsieur?” said Malicorne.

“In exchange for that you refuse me?”

“Precisely.”

“What is it?”

“I have the greatest desire to see the ceremony, and I have no ticket to admit me, in spite of all the steps I have taken to secure one. Could you get me admitted?”

“Certainly.”

“Do me this kindness, then, I entreat.”

“Most willingly, monsieur; come with me.”

“I am exceedingly indebted to you, monsieur,” said Malicorne.

“I thought you were a friend of M. de Manicamp.”

“I am, monsieur; but this morning I was with him as he was dressing, and I let a bottle of blacking fall over his new dress, and he flew at me sword in hand, so that I was obliged to make my escape. That is the reason I could not ask him for a ticket. He wanted to kill me.”

“I can well believe it,” laughed Raoul. “I know Manicamp is capable of killing a man who has been unfortunate enough to commit the crime you have to reproach yourself with, but I will repair the mischief as far as you are concerned. I will but fasten my cloak, and shall then be ready to serve you, not only as a guide, but as your introducer, too.”

Chapter XIV. A Surprise for Raoul.

Madame's marriage was celebrated in the chapel of the Palais Royal, in the presence of a crowd of courtiers, who had been most scrupulously selected. However, notwithstanding the marked favor which an invitation indicated, Raoul, faithful to his promise to Malicorne, who was so anxious to witness the ceremony, obtained admission for him. After he had fulfilled this engagement, Raoul approached De Guiche, who, as if in contrast with his magnificent costume, exhibited a countenance so utterly dejected, that the Duke of Buckingham was the only one present who could contend with him as far as pallor and discomfiture were concerned.

"Take care, count," said Raoul, approaching his friend, and preparing to support him at the moment the archbishop blessed the married couple. In fact, the Prince of Conde was attentively scrutinizing these two images of desolation, standing like caryatides on either side of the nave of the church. The count, after that, kept a more careful watch over himself.

At the termination of the ceremony, the king and queen passed onward towards the grand reception-room, where Madame and her suite were to be presented to them. It was remarked that the king, who had seemed more than surprised at his sister-in-law's appearance, was most flattering in his compliments to her. Again, it was remarked that the queen-mother, fixing a long and thoughtful gaze upon Buckingham, leaned towards Madame de Motteville as though to ask her, "Do you not see how much he resembles his father?" and finally it was remarked that Monsieur watched everybody, and seemed quite discontented. After the

reception of the princess and ambassadors, Monsieur solicited the king's permission to present to him as well as to Madame the persons belonging to their new household.

"Are you aware, vicomte," inquired the Prince de Conde of Raoul, "whether the household has been selected by a person of taste, and whether there are any faces worth looking at?"

"I have not the slightest idea, monseigneur," replied Raoul.

"You affect ignorance, surely."

"In what way, monseigneur?"

"You are a friend of De Guiche, who is one of the friends of the prince."

"That may be so, monseigneur; but the matter having no interest whatever for me, I have never questioned De Guiche on the subject; and De Guiche, on his part, never having been questioned, did not communicate any particulars to me."

"But Manicamp?"

"It is true I saw Manicamp at Le Havre, and during the journey here, but I was no more inquisitive with him than I had been towards De Guiche. Besides, is it likely that Manicamp should know anything of such matters? for he is a person of only secondary importance."

"My dear vicomte, do you not know better than that?" said the prince; "why, it is these persons of secondary importance, who, on such occasions, have all the influence; and the truth is, that nearly everything has been done through Manicamp's presentations to De Guiche, and through De Guiche to Monsieur."

"I assure you, monseigneur, I was ignorant of that," said Raoul, "and what your highness does me the honor to impart is perfectly new to me."

"I will most readily believe you, although it seems incredible; besides we shall not have long to wait. See, the flying squadron is advancing, as good Queen Catherine used to say. Ah! ah! what pretty faces!"

A bevy of young girls at this moment entered the *salon*, conducted by Madame de Navailles, and to Manicamp's credit be it said, if indeed he had taken that part in their selection which the Prince de Conde assigned him, it was a display calculated to dazzle those who, like the prince, could appreciate every character and style of beauty. A young, fair-complexioned girl, from twenty to one-and-twenty years of age, and whose large blue eyes flashed, as she opened them, in the most dazzling manner, walked at the head of the band and was the first presented.

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente," said Madame de Navailles to Monsieur, who, as he saluted his wife, repeated "Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Ah! ah!" said the Prince de Conde to Raoul, "she is presentable enough."

"Yes," said Raoul, "but has she not a somewhat haughty style?"

"Bah! we know these airs very well, vicomte; three months hence she will be tame enough. But look, there, indeed, is a pretty face."

"Yes," said Raoul, "and one I am acquainted with."

"Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais," said Madame de Navailles. The name and Christian name were carefully repeated by Monsieur.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Raoul, fixing his bewildered gaze upon the entrance doorway.

"What's the matter?" inquired the prince; "was it Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais who made you utter such a 'Great heavens'?"

"No, monseigneur, no," replied Raoul, pale and trembling.

"Well, then, if it be not Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, it is that pretty *blonde* who follows her. What beautiful eyes! She is rather thin, but has fascinations without number."

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière!" said Madame de Navailles; and, as this name resounded through his whole being, a cloud seemed to rise from his breast to his eyes, so that he neither saw nor heard anything more; and the prince, finding him nothing more than a

mere echo which remained silent under his railleries, moved forward to inspect somewhat closer the beautiful girls whom his first glance had already particularized.

"Louise here! Louise a maid of honor to Madame!" murmured Raoul, and his eyes, which did not suffice to satisfy his reason, wandered from Louise to Montalais. The latter had already emancipated herself from her assumed timidity, which she only needed for the presentation and for her reverences.

Mademoiselle de Montalais, from the corner of the room to which she had retired, was looking with no slight confidence at the different persons present; and, having discovered Raoul, she amused herself with the profound astonishment which her own and her friend's presence there caused the unhappy lover. Her waggish and malicious look, which Raoul tried to avoid meeting, and which yet he sought inquiringly from time to time, placed him on the rack. As for Louise, whether from natural timidity, or some other reason for which Raoul could not account, she kept her eyes constantly cast down; intimidated, dazzled, and with impeded respiration, she withdrew herself as much as possible aside, unaffected even by the nudges Montalais gave her with her elbow. The whole scene was a perfect enigma for Raoul, the key to which he would have given anything to obtain. But no one was there who could assist him, not even Malicorne; who, a little uneasy at finding himself in the presence of so many persons of good birth, and not a little discouraged by Montalais's bantering glances, had described a circle, and by degrees succeeded in getting a few paces from the prince, behind the group of maids of honor, and nearly within reach of Mademoiselle Aure's voice, she being the planet around which he, as her attendant satellite, seemed constrained to gravitate. As he recovered his self-possession, Raoul fancied he recognized voices on his right hand side that were familiar to him, and he perceived De Wardes, De Guiche, and the Chevalier de Lorraine conversing together. It is true they were talking in tones so low, that the sound of their words could hardly be heard in the vast apartment. To speak in that manner from any

particular place without bending down, or turning round, or looking at the person with whom one may be engaged in conversation, is a talent that cannot be immediately acquired by newcomers. Long study is needed for such conversations, which, without a look, gesture, or movement of the head, seem like the conversation of a group of statues. In fact, the king's and queen's grand assemblies, while their majesties were speaking, and while every one present seemed to be listening in the midst of the most profound silence, some of these noiseless conversations took place, in which adulation was not the prevailing feature. But Raoul was one among others exceedingly clever in this art, so much a matter of etiquette, that from the movement of the lips, he was often able to guess the sense of the words.

"Who is that Montalais?" inquired De Wardes, "and that La Vallière? What country-town have we had sent here?"

"Montalais?" said the chevalier,—"oh, I know her; she is a good sort of girl, whom we shall find amusing enough. La Vallière is a charming girl, slightly lame."

"Ah! bah!" said De Wardes.

"Do not be absurd, De Wardes, there are some very characteristic and ingenious Latin axioms about lame ladies."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said De Guiche, looking at Raoul with uneasiness, "be a little careful, I entreat you."

But the uneasiness of the count, in appearance at least, was not needed. Raoul had preserved the firmest and most indifferent countenance, although he had not lost a word that passed. He seemed to keep an account of the insolence and license of the two speakers in order to settle matters with them at the earliest opportunity.

De Wardes seemed to guess what was passing in his mind, and continued:

"Who are these young ladies' lovers?"

"Montalais's lover?" said the chevalier.

"Yes, Montalais first."

"You, I, or De Guiche,—whoever likes, in fact."

"And the other?"

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yes."

"Take care, gentlemen," exclaimed De Guiche, anxious to put a stop to the chevalier's reply; "take care, Madame is listening to us."

Raoul had thrust his hand up to the wrist into his *justaucorps* in great agitation. But the very malignity which he saw was excited against these poor girls made him take a serious resolution. "Poor Louise," he thought, "has come here only with an honorable object in view, and under honorable protection; and I must learn what that object is which she has in view, and who it is that protects her." And following Malicorne's maneuver, he made his way toward the group of the maids of honor. The presentations were soon over. The king, who had done nothing but look at and admire Madame, shortly afterwards left the reception-room, accompanied by the two queens. The Chevalier de Lorraine resumed his place beside Monsieur, and, as he accompanied him, insinuated a few drops of the venom he had collected during the last hour, while looking at some of the faces in the court, and suspecting that some of their hearts might be happy. A few of the persons present followed the king as he quitted the apartment; but such of the courtiers as assumed an independence of character, and professed a gallantry of disposition, began to approach the ladies of the court. The prince paid his compliments to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, Buckingham devoted himself to Madame Chalais and Mademoiselle de Lafayette, whom Madame already distinguished by her notice, and whom she held in high regard. As for the Comte de Guiche, who had abandoned Monsieur as soon as he could approach Madame alone, he conversed, with great animation, with Madame de Valentinois, and with Mademoiselle de Crequy and de Chatillon.

Amid these varied political, and amorous interests, Malicorne was anxious to gain Montalais's attention; but the latter preferred talking with Raoul, even if it were only to amuse herself with his innumerable

questions and his astonishment. Raoul had gone directly to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and had saluted her with the profoundest respect, at which Louise blushed, and could not say a word. Montalais, however, hurried to her assistance.

"Well, monsieur le vicomte, here we are, you see."

"I do, indeed, see you," said Raoul smiling, "and it is exactly because you are here that I wish to ask for some explanation."

Malicorne approached the group with his most fascinating smile.

"Go away, Malicorne; really you are exceedingly indiscreet." At this remark Malicorne bit his lips and retired a few steps, without making any reply. His smile, however, changed its expression, and from its former frankness, became mocking in its expression.

"You wished for an explanation, M. Raoul?" inquired Montalais.

"It is surely worth one, I think; Mademoiselle de la Vallière is a maid of honor to Madame!"

"Why should she not be a maid of honor, as well as myself?" inquired Montalais.

"Pray accept my compliments, young ladies," said Raoul, who fancied he perceived they were not disposed to answer him in a direct manner.

"Your remark was not made in a very complimentary manner, vicomte."

"Mine?"

"Certainly; I appeal to Louise."

"M. de Bragelonne probably thinks the position is above my condition," said Louise, hesitatingly.

"Assuredly not," replied Raoul, eagerly, "you know very well that such is not my feeling; were you called upon to occupy a queen's throne, I should not be surprised; how much greater reason, then, such a position as this? The only circumstance that amazes me is, that I should have learned it only to-day, and that by the merest accident."

“That is true,” replied Montalais, with her usual giddiness; “you know nothing about it, and there is no reason you should. M. de Bragelonne had written several letters to you, but your mother was the only person who remained behind at Blois, and it was necessary to prevent these letters from falling into her hands; I intercepted them, and returned them to M. Raoul, so that he believed you were still at Blois while you were here in Paris, and had no idea whatever, indeed, how high you had risen in rank.”

“Did you not inform M. Raoul, as I begged you to do?”

“Why should I? to give him opportunity of making some of his severe remarks and moral reflections, and to undo what we have had so much trouble in effecting? Certainly not.”

“Am I so very severe, then?” said Raoul, inquiringly.

“Besides,” said Montalais, “it is sufficient to say that it suited me. I was about setting off for Paris—you were away; Louise was weeping her eyes out; interpret that as you please; I begged a friend, a protector of mine, who had obtained the appointment for me, to solicit one for Louise; the appointment arrived. Louise left in order to get her costume prepared; as I had my own ready, I remained behind; I received your letters, and returned them to you, adding a few words, promising you a surprise. Your surprise is before you, monsieur, and seems to be a fair one enough; you have nothing more to ask. Come, M. Malicorne, it is now time to leave these young people together: they have many things to talk about; give me your hand; I trust that you appreciate the honor conferred upon you, M. Malicorne.”

“Forgive me,” said Raoul, arresting the giddy girl, and giving to his voice an intonation, the gravity of which contrasted with that of Montalais; “forgive me, but may I inquire the name of the protector you speak of; for if protection be extended towards you, Mademoiselle de Montalais,—for which, indeed, so many reasons exist,” added Raoul, bowing, “I do not see that the same reasons exist why Mademoiselle de la Vallière should be similarly cared for.”

“But, M. Raoul,” said Louise, innocently, “there is no difference in the matter, and I do not see why I should not tell it you myself; it was M. Malicorne who obtained it for me.”

Raoul remained for a moment almost stupefied, asking himself if they were trifling with him; he then turned round to interrogate Malicorne, but he had been hurried away by Montalais, and was already at some distance from them. Mademoiselle de la Vallière attempted to follow her friend, but Raoul, with gentle authority, detained her.

“Louise, one word, I beg.”

“But, M. Raoul,” said Louise, blushing, “we are alone. Every one has left. They will become anxious, and will be looking for us.”

“Fear nothing,” said the young man, smiling, “we are neither of us of sufficient importance for our absence to be remarked.”

“But I have my duty to perform, M. Raoul.”

“Do not be alarmed, I am acquainted with these usages of the court; you will not be on duty until to-morrow; a few minutes are at your disposal, which will enable you to give me the information I am about to have the honor to ask you for.”

“How serious you are, M. Raoul!” said Louise.

“Because the circumstances are serious. Are you listening?”

“I am listening; I would only repeat, monsieur, that we are quite alone.”

“You are right,” said Raoul, and, offering her his hand, he led the young girl into the gallery adjoining the reception-room, the windows of which looked out upon the courtyard. Every one hurried towards the middle window, which had a balcony outside, from which all the details of the slow and formal preparations for departure could be seen. Raoul opened one of the side windows, and then, being alone with Louise, said to her: “You know, Louise, that from my childhood I have regarded you as my sister, as one who has been the confidante of all my troubles, to whom I have entrusted all my hopes.”

“Yes, M. Raoul,” she answered softly; “yes, M. Raoul, I know that.”

“You used, on your side, to show the same friendship towards me, and had the same confidence in me; why have you not, on this occasion, been my friend,—why have you shown suspicion of me?”

Mademoiselle de la Vallière did not answer. “I fondly thought you loved me,” said Raoul, whose voice became more and more agitated; “I fondly thought you consented to all the plans we had, together, laid down for our own happiness, at the time when we wandered up and down the walks of Cour-Cheverny, under the avenue of poplar trees leading to Blois. You do not answer me, Louise. Is it possible,” he inquired, breathing with difficulty, “that you no longer love me?”

“I did not say so,” replied Louise, softly.

“Oh! tell me the truth, I implore you. All my hopes in life are centered in you. I chose you for your gentle and simple tastes. Do not suffer yourself to be dazzled, Louise, now that you are in the midst of a court where all that is pure too soon becomes corrupt—where all that is young too soon grows old. Louise, close your ears, so as not to hear what may be said; shut your eyes, so as not to see the examples before you; shut your lips, that you may not inhale the corrupting influences about you. Without falsehood or subterfuge, Louise, am I to believe what Mademoiselle de Montalais stated? Louise, did you come to Paris because I was no longer at Blois?”

La Vallière blushed and concealed her face in her hands.

“Yes, it was so, then!” exclaimed Raoul, delightedly; “that was, then, your reason for coming here. I love you as I never yet loved you. Thanks, Louise, for this devotion; but measures must be taken to place you beyond all insult, to shield you from every lure. Louise, a maid of honor, in the court of a young princess in these days of free manners and inconstant affections—a maid of honor is placed as an object of attack without having any means of defence afforded her; this state of things cannot continue; you must be married in order to be respected.”

“Married?”

“Yes, here is my hand, Louise; will you place yours within it?”

“But your father?”

“My father leaves me perfectly free.”

“Yet—”

“I understand your scruples, Louise; I will consult my father.”

“Reflect, M. Raoul; wait.”

“Wait! it is impossible. Reflect, Louise, when *you* are concerned! it would be insulting,—give me your hand, dear Louise; I am my own master. My father will consent, I know; give me your hand, do not keep me waiting thus. One word in answer, one word only; if not, I shall begin to think that, in order to change you forever, nothing more was needed than a single step in the palace, a single breath of favor, a smile from the queen, a look from the king.”

Raoul had no sooner pronounced this latter word, than La Vallière became as pale as death, no doubt from fear at seeing the young man excite himself. With a movement as rapid as thought, she placed both her hands in those of Raoul, and then fled, without adding a syllable; disappearing without casting a look behind her. Raoul felt his whole frame tremble at the contact of her hand; he received the compact as a solemn bargain wrung by affection from her child-like timidity.

Chapter XV. The Consent of Athos.

Raoul quitted the Palais Royal full of ideas that admitted no delay in execution. He mounted his horse in the courtyard, and followed the road to Blois, while the marriage festivities of Monsieur and the princess of England were being celebrated with exceeding animation by the courtiers, but to the despair of De Guiche and Buckingham. Raoul lost no time on the road, and in sixteen hours he arrived at Blois. As he traveled along, he marshaled his arguments in the most becoming manner. Fever is an argument that cannot be answered, and Raoul had an attack. Athos was in his study, making additions to his memoirs, when Raoul entered, accompanied by Grimaud. Keen-sighted and penetrating, a mere glance at his son told him that something extraordinary had befallen him.

"You seem to come on a matter of importance," said he to Raoul, after he had embraced him, pointing to a seat.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the young man; "and I entreat you to give me the same kind attention that has never yet failed me."

"Speak, Raoul."

"I present the case to you, monsieur, free from all preface, for that would be unworthy of you. Mademoiselle de la Vallière is in Paris as one of Madame's maids of honor. I have pondered deeply on the matter; I love Mademoiselle de la Vallière above everything; and it is not proper to leave her in a position where her reputation, her virtue even, may be assailed. It is my wish, therefore, to marry her, monsieur, and I have come to solicit your consent to my marriage."

While this communication was being made to him, Athos maintained the profoundest silence and reserve. Raoul, who had begun his address with an assumption of self-possession, finished it by allowing a manifest

emotion to escape him at every word. Athos fixed upon Bragelonne a searching look, overshadowed indeed by a slight sadness.

"You have reflected well upon it?" he inquired.

"Yes, monsieur."

"I believe you are already acquainted with my views respecting this alliance?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Raoul, in a low tone of voice; "but you added, that if I persisted—"

"You do persist, then?"

Raoul stammered out an almost unintelligible assent.

"Your passion," continued Athos, tranquilly, "must indeed be very great, since, notwithstanding my dislike to this union, you persist in wanting it."

Raoul passed his hand trembling across his forehead to remove the perspiration that collected there. Athos looked at him, and his heart was touched by pity. He rose and said,—

"It is no matter. My own personal feelings are not to be taken into consideration since yours are concerned; I am ready to give it. Tell me what you want."

"Your kind indulgence, first of all, monsieur," said Raoul, taking hold of his hand.

"You have mistaken my feelings, Raoul, I have more than mere indulgence for you in my heart."

Raoul kissed as devotedly as a lover could have done the hand he held in his own.

"Come, come," said Athos, "I am quite ready; what do you wish me to sign?"

"Nothing whatever, monsieur, only it would be very kind if you would take the trouble to write to the king, to whom I belong, and solicit his majesty's permission for me to marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

“Well thought, Raoul! After, or rather before myself, you have a master to consult, that master being the king; it is loyal in you to submit yourself voluntarily to this double proof; I will grant your request without delay, Raoul.”

The count approached the window, and leaning out, called to Grimaud, who showed his head from an arbor covered with jasmine, which he was occupied in trimming.

“My horses, Grimaud,” continued the count.

“Why this order, monsieur?” inquired Raoul.

“We shall set off in a few hours.”

“Whither?”

“For Paris.”

“Paris, monsieur?”

“Is not the king at Paris?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, ought we not to go there?”

“Yes, monsieur,” said Raoul, almost alarmed by this kind condescension. “I do not ask you to put yourself to such inconvenience, and a letter merely—”

“You mistake my position, Raoul; it is not respectful that a simple gentleman, such as I am, should write to his sovereign. I wish to speak, I ought to speak, to the king, and I will do so. We will go together, Raoul.”

“You overpower me with your kindness, monsieur.”

“How do you think his majesty is affected?”

“Towards me, monsieur?”

“Yes.”

“Excellently well disposed.”

“You *know* that to be so?” continued the count.

“The king has himself told me so.”

“On what occasion?”

“Upon the recommendation of M. d’Artagnan, I believe, and on account of an affair in the Place de Greve, when I had the honor to draw my sword in the king’s service. I have reason to believe that, vanity apart, I stand well with his majesty.”

“So much the better.”

“But I entreat you, monsieur,” pursued Raoul, “not to maintain towards me your present grave and serious manner. Do not make me bitterly regret having listened to a feeling stronger than anything else.”

“That is the second time you have said so, Raoul; it was quite unnecessary; you require my formal consent, and you have it. We need talk no more on the subject, therefore. Come and see my new plantations, Raoul.”

The young man knew very well, that, after the expression of his father’s wish, no opportunity of discussion was left him. He bowed his head, and followed his father into the garden. Athos slowly pointed out to him the grafts, the cuttings, and the avenues he was planting. This perfect repose of manner disconcerted Raoul extremely; the affection with which his own heart was filled seemed so great that the whole world could hardly contain it. How, then, could his father’s heart remain void, and closed to its influence? Bragelonne, therefore, collecting all his courage, suddenly exclaimed,—

“It is impossible, monsieur, you can have any reason to reject Mademoiselle de la Vallière! In Heaven’s name, she is so good, so gentle and pure, that your mind, so perfect in its penetration, ought to appreciate her accordingly. Does any secret repugnance, or any hereditary dislike, exist between you and her family?”

“Look, Raoul, at that beautiful lily of the valley,” said Athos; “observe how the shade and the damp situation suit it, particularly the shadow which that sycamore-tree casts over it, so that the warmth, and not the blazing heat of the sun, filters through its leaves.”

Raoul stopped, bit his lips, and then, with the blood mantling in his face, he said, courageously,—“One word of explanation, I beg, monsieur. You cannot forget that your son is a man.”

“In that case,” replied Athos, drawing himself up with sternness, “prove to me that you are a man, for you do not show yourself a son. I begged you to wait the opportunity of forming an illustrious alliance. I would have obtained a wife for you from the first ranks of the rich nobility. I wish you to be distinguished by the splendor which glory and fortune confer, for nobility of descent you have already.”

“Monsieur,” exclaimed Raoul, carried away by a first impulse. “I was reproached the other day for not knowing who my mother was.”

Athos turned pale; then, knitting his brows like the greatest of all the heathen deities:—“I am waiting to learn the reply you made,” he demanded, in an imperious manner.

“Forgive me! oh, forgive me,” murmured the young man, sinking at once from the lofty tone he had assumed.

“What was your reply, monsieur?” inquired the count, stamping his feet upon the ground.

“Monsieur, my sword was in my hand immediately, my adversary placed himself on guard, I struck his sword over the palisade, and threw him after it.”

“Why did you suffer him to live?”

“The king has prohibited duelling, and, at the moment, I was an ambassador of the king.”

“Very well,” said Athos, “but all the greater reason I should see his majesty.”

“What do you intend to ask him?”

“Authority to draw my sword against the man who has inflicted this injury upon me.”

“If I did not act as I ought to have done, I beg you to forgive me.”

“Did I reproach you, Raoul?”

“Still, the permission you are going to ask from the king?”

“I will implore his majesty to sign your marriage-contract, but on one condition.”

“Are conditions necessary with me, monsieur? Command, and you shall be obeyed.”

“On the condition, I repeat,” continued Athos; “that you tell me the name of the man who spoke of your mother in that way.”

“What need is there that you should know his name; the offense was directed against myself, and the permission once obtained from his majesty, to revenge it is my affair.”

“Tell me his name, monsieur.”

“I will not allow you to expose yourself.”

“Do you take me for a Don Diego? His name, I say.”

“You insist upon it?”

“I demand it.”

“The Vicomte de Wardes.”

“Very well,” said Athos, tranquilly, “I know him. But our horses are ready, I see; and, instead of delaying our departure for a couple of hours, we will set off at once. Come, monsieur.”

Chapter XVI. Monsieur Becomes Jealous of the Duke of Buckingham.

While the Comte de la Fere was proceeding on his way to Pairs, accompanied by Raoul, the Palais Royal was the theatre wherein a scene of what Moliere would have called excellent comedy, was being performed. Four days had elapsed since his marriage, and Monsieur, having breakfasted very hurriedly, passed into his ante-chamber, frowning and out of temper. The repast had not been over-agreeable. Madame had had breakfast served in her own apartment, and Monsieur had breakfasted almost alone; the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp were the only persons present at the meal, which lasted three-quarters of an hour without a single syllable having been uttered. Manicamp, who was less intimate with his royal highness than the Chevalier de Lorraine, vainly endeavored to detect, from the expression of the prince's face, what had made him so ill-humored. The Chevalier de Lorraine, who had no occasion to speculate about anything, inasmuch as he knew all, ate his breakfast with that extraordinary appetite which the troubles of one's friends but stimulates, and enjoyed at the same time both Monsieur's ill-humor and the vexation of Manicamp. He seemed delighted, while he went on eating, to detain a prince, who was very impatient to move, still at table. Monsieur at times repented the ascendency which he had permitted the Chevalier de Lorraine to acquire over him, and which exempted the latter from any observance of etiquette towards him. Monsieur was now in one of those moods, but he dreaded as much as he liked the chevalier, and contented himself with nursing his anger without betraying it. Every now and then Monsieur raised his eyes to the ceiling, then lowered them towards the slices of *pate* which the chevalier was attacking, and finally, not caring to betray the resentment, he

gesticulated in a manner which Harlequin might have envied. At last, however, Monsieur could control himself no longer, and at the dessert, rising from the table in excessive wrath, as we have related, he left the Chevalier de Lorraine to finish his breakfast as he pleased. Seeing Monsieur rise from the table, Manicamp, napkin in hand, rose also. Monsieur ran rather than walked, towards the ante-chamber, where, noticing an usher in attendance, he gave him some directions in a low tone of voice. Then, turning back again, but avoiding passing through the breakfast apartment, he crossed several rooms, with the intention of seeking the queen-mother in her oratory, where she usually remained.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning. Anne of Austria was engaged in writing as Monsieur entered. The queen-mother was extremely attached to her son, for he was handsome in person and amiable in disposition. He was, in fact, more affectionate, and it might be, more effeminate than the king. He pleased his mother by those trifling sympathizing attentions all women are glad to receive. Anne of Austria, who would have been rejoiced to have had a daughter, almost found in this, her favorite son, the attentions, solicitude, and playful manners of a child of twelve years of age. All the time he passed with his mother he employed in admiring her arms, in giving his opinion upon her cosmetics, and recipes for compounding essences, in which she was very particular; and then, too, he kissed her hands and cheeks in the most childlike and endearing manner, and had always some sweetmeats to offer her, or some new style of dress to recommend. Anne of Austria loved the king, or rather the regal power in her eldest son; Louis XIV. represented legitimacy by right divine. With the king, her character was that of the queen-mother, with Philip she was simply the mother. The latter knew that, of all places, a mother's heart is the most compassionate and surest. When quite a child he always fled there for refuge when he and his brother quarreled, often, after having struck him, which constituted the crime of high treason on his part, after certain engagements with hands and nails, in which the king and his rebellious subject indulged in their night-dresses respecting the right to a disputed bed, having their servant Laporte as umpire,—Philip,

conqueror, but terrified at victory, used to flee to his mother to obtain reinforcements from her, or at least the assurance of forgiveness, which Louis XIV. granted with difficulty, and after an interval. Anne, from this habit of peaceable intervention, succeeded in arranging the disputes of her sons, and in sharing, at the same time, all their secrets. The king, somewhat jealous of that maternal solicitude which was bestowed particularly on his brother, felt disposed to show towards Anne of Austria more submission and attachment than his character really dictated. Anne of Austria had adopted this line of conduct especially towards the young queen. In this manner she ruled with almost despotic sway over the royal household, and she was already preparing her batteries to govern with the same absolute authority the household of her second son. Anne experienced almost a feeling of pride whenever she saw any one enter her apartment with woe-begone looks, pale cheeks, or red eyes, gathering from appearances that assistance was required either by the weakest or the most rebellious. She was writing, we have said, when Monsieur entered her oratory, not with red eyes or pale cheeks, but restless, out of temper, and annoyed. With an absent air he kissed his mother's hands, and sat himself down before receiving her permission to do so. Considering the strict rules of etiquette established at the court of Anne of Austria, this forgetfulness of customary civilities was a sign of preoccupation, especially on Philip's part, who, of his own accord, observed a respect towards her of a somewhat exaggerated character. If, therefore, he so notoriously failed in this regard, there must be a serious cause for it.

"What is the matter, Philip?" inquired Anne of Austria, turning towards her son.

"A good many things," murmured the prince, in a doleful tone of voice.

"You look like a man who has a great deal to do," said the queen, laying down her pen. Philip frowned, but did not reply. "Among the various subjects which occupy your mind," said Anne of Austria, "there must surely be one that absorbs it more than others."

"One has indeed occupied me more than any other."

“Well, what is it? I am listening.”

Philip opened his mouth as if to express all the troubles his mind was filled with, and which he seemed to be waiting only for an opportunity of declaring. But he suddenly became silent, and a sigh alone expressed all that his heart was overflowing with.

“Come, Philip, show a little firmness,” said the queen-mother. “When one has to complain of anything, it is generally an individual who is the cause of it. Am I not right?”

“I do not say no, madame.”

“Whom do you wish to speak about? Come, take courage.”

“In fact, madame, what I might possibly have to say must be kept a profound secret; for when a lady is in the case—”

“Ah! you are speaking of Madame, then?” inquired the queen-mother, with a feeling of the liveliest curiosity.

“Yes.”

“Well, then, if you wish to speak of Madame, do not hesitate to do so. I am your mother, and she is no more than a stranger to me. Yet, as she is my daughter-in-law, rest assured I shall be interested, even were it for your own sake alone, in hearing all you may have to say about her.”

“Pray tell me, madame, in your turn, whether you have not remarked something?”

“‘Something’! Philip? Your words almost frighten me, from their want of meaning. What do you mean by ‘something?’”

“Madame is pretty, certainly.”

“No doubt of it.”

“Yet not altogether beautiful.”

“No, but as she grows older, she will probably become strikingly beautiful. You must have remarked the change which a few years have already made in her. Her beauty will improve more and more; she is now only sixteen years of age. At fifteen I was, myself, very thin; but even as she is at present, Madame is very pretty.”

“And consequently others have remarked it.”

“Undoubtedly, for a woman of ordinary rank is noticed—and with still greater reason a princess.”

“She has been well brought up, I suppose?”

“Madame Henriette, her mother, is a woman somewhat cold in manner, slightly pretentious, but full of noble thoughts. The princess’s education may have been neglected, but her principles, I believe, are good. Such at least was the opinion I formed of her when she resided in France; but she afterwards returned to England, and I am ignorant what may have occurred there.”

“What do you mean?”

“Simply that there are some heads naturally giddy, which are easily turned by prosperity.”

“That is the very word, madame. I think the princess rather giddy.”

“We must not exaggerate, Philip; she is clever and witty, and has a certain amount of coquetry very natural in a young woman; but this defect in persons of high rank and position, is a great advantage at a court. A princess who is tinged with coquetry usually forms a brilliant court; her smile stimulates luxury, arouses wit, and even courage; the nobles, too, fight better for a prince whose wife is beautiful.”

“Thank you extremely, madame,” said Philip, with some temper; “you really have drawn some very alarming pictures for me.”

“In what respect?” asked the queen, with pretended simplicity.

“You know, madame,” said Philip, dolefully, “whether I had or had not a very great dislike to getting married.”

“Now, indeed, you alarm me. You have some serious cause of complaint against Madame.”

“I do not precisely say it is serious.”

“In that case, then, throw aside your doleful looks. If you show yourself to others in your present state, people will take you for a very unhappy husband.”

“The fact is,” replied Philip, “I am not altogether satisfied as a husband, and I shall not be sorry if others know it.”

“For shame, Philip.”

“Well, then, madame, I will tell you frankly that I do not understand the life I am required to lead.”

“Explain yourself.”

“My wife does not seem to belong to me; she is always leaving me for some reason or another. In the mornings there are visits, correspondences, and toilettes; in the evenings, balls and concerts.”

“You are jealous, Philip.”

“I! Heaven forbid. Let others act the part of a jealous husband, not I. But I *am* annoyed.”

“All these things you reproach your wife with are perfectly innocent, and, so long as you have nothing of greater importance—”

“Yet, listen; without being very blamable, a woman can excite a good deal of uneasiness. Certain visitors may be received, certain preferences shown, which expose young women to remark, and which are enough to drive out of their senses even those husbands who are least disposed to be jealous.”

“Ah! now we are coming to the real point at last, and not without some difficulty. You speak of frequent visits, and certain preferences—very good; for the last hour we have been beating about the bush, and at last you have broached the true question.”

“Well then, yes—”

“This is more serious than I thought. It is possible, then, that Madame can have given you grounds for these complaints against her?”

“Precisely so.”

“What, your wife, married only four days ago, prefers some other person to yourself? Take care, Philip, you exaggerate your grievances; in wishing to prove everything, you prove nothing.”

The prince, bewildered by his mother's serious manner, wished to reply, but he could only stammer out some unintelligible words.

"You draw back, then?" said Anne of Austria. "I prefer that, as it is an acknowledgement of your mistake."

"No!" exclaimed Philip, "I do not draw back, and I will prove all I asserted. I spoke of preference and of visits, did I not? Well, listen."

Anne of Austria prepared herself to listen, with that love of gossip which the best woman living and the best mother, were she a queen even, always finds in being mixed up with the petty squabbles of a household.

"Well," said Philip, "tell me one thing."

"What is that?"

"Why does my wife retain an English court about her?" said Philip, as he crossed his arms and looked his mother steadily in the face, as if he were convinced that she could not answer the question.

"For a very simple reason," returned Anne of Austria; "because the English are her countrymen, because they have expended large sums in order to accompany her to France, and because it would hardly be polite —not politic, certainly—to dismiss abruptly those members of the English nobility who have not shrunk from any devotion or sacrifice."

"A wonderful sacrifice indeed," returned Philip, "to desert a wretched country to come to a beautiful one, where a greater effect can be produced for a guinea that can be procured elsewhere for four! Extraordinary devotion, really, to travel a hundred leagues in company with a woman one is in love with!"

"In love, Philip! think what you are saying. Who is in love with Madame?"

"The Duke of Buckingham. Perhaps you will defend him, too?"

Anne of Austria blushed and smiled at the same time. The name of the Duke of Buckingham recalled certain recollections of a very tender and melancholy nature. "The Duke of Buckingham?" she murmured.

"Yes; one of those arm-chair soldiers—"

“The Buckinghams are loyal and brave,” said Anne of Austria, courageously.

“This is too bad; my own mother takes the part of my wife’s lover against me,” exclaimed Philip, incensed to such an extent that his weak organization was affected almost to tears.

“Philip, my son,” exclaimed Anne of Austria, “such an expression is unworthy of you. Your wife has no lover; and, had she one, it would not be the Duke of Buckingham. The members of that family, I repeat, are loyal and discreet, and the rights of hospitality are sure to be respected by them.”

“The Duke of Buckingham is an Englishman, madame,” said Philip, “and may I ask if the English so very religiously respect what belongs to princes of France?”

Anne blushed a second time, and turned aside under the pretext of taking her pen from her desk again, but in reality to conceal her confusion from her son. “Really, Philip,” she said, “you seem to discover expressions for the purpose of embarrassing me, and your anger blinds you while it alarms me; reflect a little.”

“There is no need for reflection, madame. I can see with my own eyes.”

“Well, and what do you see?”

“That Buckingham never quits my wife. He presumes to make presents to her, and she ventures to accept them. Yesterday she was talking about *sauchets a la violette*; well, our French perfumers, you know very well, madame, for you have over and over again asked for it without success—our French perfumers, I say, have never been able to procure this scent. The duke, however, wore about him a *sachet a la violette*, and I am sure that the one my wife has came from him.”

“Indeed, monsieur,” said Anne of Austria, “you build your pyramids on needle points; be careful. What harm, I ask you, can there be in a man giving to his countrywoman a recipe for a new essence? These strange ideas, I protest, painfully recall your father to me; he who so frequently and so unjustly made me suffer.”

“The Duke of Buckingham’s father was probably more reserved and more respectful than his son,” said Philip, thoughtlessly, not perceiving how deeply he had wounded his mother’s feelings. The queen turned pale, and pressed her clenched hands upon her bosom; but, recovering herself immediately, she said, “You came here with some intention or another, I suppose?”

“Certainly.”

“What was it?”

“I came, madame, intending to complain energetically, and to inform you that I will not submit to such behavior from the Duke of Buckingham.”

“What do you intend to do, then?”

“I shall complain to the king.”

“And what do you expect the king to reply?”

“Very well, then,” said Monsieur, with an expression of stern determination on his countenance, which offered a singular contrast to its usual gentleness. “Very well. I will right myself!”

“What do you call righting yourself?” inquired Anne of Austria, in alarm.

“I will have the Duke of Buckingham quit the princess, I will have him quit France, and I will see that my wishes are intimated to him.”

“You will intimate nothing of the kind, Philip,” said the queen, “for if you act in that manner, and violate hospitality to that extent, I will invoke the severity of the king against you.”

“Do you threaten me, madame?” exclaimed Philip, almost in tears; “do you threaten me in the midst of my complaints?”

“I do not threaten you; I do but place an obstacle in the path of your hasty anger. I maintain, that, to adopt towards the Duke of Buckingham, or any other Englishman, any rigorous measure—to take even a discourteous step towards him, would be to plunge France and England into the most disastrous disagreement. Can it be possible that a prince of the blood, the brother of the king of France, does not know how to hide

an injury, even did it exist in reality, where political necessity requires it?" Philip made a movement. "Besides," continued the queen, "the injury is neither true nor possible, and it is merely a matter of silly jealousy."

"Madame, I know what I know."

"Whatever you may know, I can only advise you to be patient."

"I am not patient by disposition, madame."

The queen rose, full of severity, and with an icy ceremonious manner. "Explain what you really require, monsieur," she said.

"I do not require anything, madame; I simply express what I desire. If the Duke of Buckingham does not, of his own accord, discontinue his visits to my apartments I shall forbid him entrance."

"That is a point you will refer to the king," said Anne of Austria, her heart swelling as she spoke, and her voice trembling with emotion.

"But, madame," exclaimed Philip, striking his hands together, "act as my mother and not as the queen, since I speak to you as a son; it is simply a matter of a few minutes' conversation between the duke and myself."

"It is that very conversation I forbid," said the queen, resuming her authority, "because it is unworthy of you."

"Be it so; I will not appear in the matter, but I shall intimate my will to Madame."

"Oh!" said the queen-mother, with a melancholy arising from reflection, "never tyrannize over a wife—never behave too haughtily or imperiously towards your own. A woman unwillingly convinced, is unconvinced."

"What is to be done, then?—I will consult my friends about it."

"Yes, your double-dealing advisers, your Chevalier de Lorraine—your De Wardes. Intrust the conduct of this affair to me. You wish the Duke of Buckingham to leave, do you not?"

"As soon as possible, madame."

“Send the duke to me, then; smile upon your wife, behave to her, to the king, to every one, as usual. But follow no advice but mine. Alas! I too well know what any household comes to, that is troubled by advisers.”

“You shall be obeyed, madame.”

“And you will be satisfied at the result. Send the duke to me.”

“That will not be difficult.”

“Where do you suppose him to be?”

“At my wife’s door, whose *levee* he is probably awaiting.”

“Very well,” said Anne of Austria, calmly. “Be good enough to tell the duke that I shall be charmed if he will pay me a visit.”

Philip kissed his mother’s hand, and started off to find the Duke of Buckingham.

Chapter XVII. Forever!

The Duke of Buckingham, obedient to the queen-mother's invitation, presented himself in her apartments half an hour after the departure of the Duc d'Orleans. When his name was announced by the gentleman-usher in attendance, the queen, who was sitting with her elbow resting on a table, and her head buried in her hands, rose, and smilingly received the graceful and respectful salutation which the duke addressed to her. Anne of Austria was still beautiful. It is well known that at her then somewhat advanced age, her long auburn hair, perfectly formed hands, and bright ruby lips, were still the admiration of all who saw her. On the present occasion, abandoned entirely to a remembrance which evoked all the past in her heart, she looked almost as beautiful as in the days of her youth, when her palace was open to the visits of the Duke of Buckingham's father, then a young and impassioned man, as well as an unfortunate prince, who lived for her alone, and died with her name upon his lips. Anne of Austria fixed upon Buckingham a look so tender in its expression, that it denoted, not alone the indulgence of maternal affection, but a gentleness of expression like the coquetry of a woman who loves.

"Your majesty," said Buckingham, respectfully, "desired to speak to me."

"Yes, duke," said the queen, in English; "will you be good enough to sit down?"

The favor which Anne of Austria thus extended to the young man, and the welcome sound of the language of a country from which the duke had been estranged since his stay in France, deeply affected him. He immediately conjectured that the queen had a request to make of him. After having abandoned the first few moments to the irrepressible

emotions she experienced, the queen resumed the smiling air with which she had received him. “What do you think of France?” she said, in French.

“It is a lovely country, madame,” replied the duke.

“Had you ever seen it before?”

“Once only, madame.”

“But, like all true Englishmen, you prefer England?”

“I prefer my own native land to France,” replied the duke; “but if your majesty were to ask me which of the two cities, London or Pairs, I should prefer as a residence, I should be forced to answer Paris.”

Anne of Austria observed the ardent manner with which these words had been pronounced. “I am told, my lord, you have rich possessions in your own country, and that you live in a splendid and time-honored place.”

“It was my father’s residence,” replied Buckingham, casting down his eyes.

“Those are indeed great advantages and *souvenirs*,” replied the queen, alluding, in spite of herself, to recollections from which it is impossible voluntarily to detach one’s self.

“In fact,” said the duke, yielding to the melancholy influence of this opening conversation, “sensitive persons live as much in the past or the future, as in the present.”

“That is very true,” said the queen, in a low tone of voice. “It follows, then, my lord,” she added, “that you, who are a man of feeling, will soon quit France in order to shut yourself up with your wealth and your relics of the past.”

Buckingham raised his head and said, “I think not, madame.”

“What do you mean?”

“On the contrary, I think of leaving England in order to take up my residence in France.”

It was now Anne of Austria's turn to exhibit surprise. "Why?" she said. "Are you not in favor with the new king?"

"Perfectly so, madame, for his majesty's kindness to me is unbounded."

"It cannot," said the queen, "be because your fortune has diminished, for it is said to be enormous."

"My income, madame, has never been so large."

"There is some secret cause, then?"

"No, madame," said Buckingham, eagerly, "there is nothing secret in my reason for this determination. I prefer residence in France; I like a court so distinguished by its refinement and courtesy; I like the amusements, somewhat serious in their nature, which are not the amusements of my own country, and which are met with in France."

Anne of Austria smiled shrewdly. "Amusements of a serious nature?" she said. "Has your Grace well reflected on their seriousness?" The duke hesitated. "There is no amusement so serious," continued the queen, "as to prevent a man of your rank—"

"Your majesty seems to insist greatly on that point," interrupted the duke.

"Do you think so, my lord?"

"If you will forgive me for saying so, it is the second time you have vaunted the attractions of England at the expense of the delight which all experience who live in France."

Anne of Austria approached the young man, and placing her beautiful hand upon his shoulder, which trembled at the touch, said, "Believe me, monsieur, nothing can equal a residence in one's own native country. I have very frequently had occasion to regret Spain. I have lived long, my lord, very long for a woman, and I confess to you, that not a year has passed I have not regretted Spain."

"Not one year, madame?" said the young duke coldly. "Not one of those years when you reigned Queen of Beauty—as you still are, indeed?"

“A truce to flattery, duke, for I am old enough to be your mother.” She emphasized these latter words in a manner, and with a gentleness, which penetrated Buckingham’s heart. “Yes,” she said, “I am old enough to be your mother; and for this reason, I will give you a word of advice.”

“That advice being that I should return to London?” he exclaimed.

“Yes, my lord.”

The duke clasped his hands with a terrified gesture, which could not fail of its effect upon the queen, already disposed to softer feelings by the tenderness of her own recollections. “It must be so,” added the queen.

“What!” he again exclaimed, “am I seriously told that I must leave,—that I must exile myself,—that I am to flee at once?”

“Exile yourself, did you say? One would fancy France was your native country.”

“Madame, the country of those who love is the country of those whom they love.”

“Not another word, my lord; you forget whom you are addressing.”

Buckingham threw himself on his knees. “Madame, you are the source of intelligence, of goodness, and of compassion; you are the first person in this kingdom, not only by your rank, but the first person in the world on account of your angelic attributes. I have said nothing, madame. Have I, indeed, said anything you should answer with such a cruel remark? What have I betrayed?”

“You have betrayed yourself,” said the queen, in a low tone of voice.

“I have said nothing,—I know nothing.”

“You forget you have spoken and thought in the presence of a woman; and besides—”

“Besides,” said the duke, “no one knows you are listening to me.”

“On the contrary, it is known; you have all the defects and all the qualities of youth.”

“I have been betrayed or denounced, then?”

“By whom?”

“By those who, at Le Havre, had, with infernal perspicacity, read my heart like an open book.”

“I do not know whom you mean.”

“M. de Bragelonne, for instance.”

“I know the name without being acquainted with the person to whom it belongs. M. de Bragelonne has said nothing.”

“Who can it be, then? If any one, madame, had had the boldness to notice in me that which I do not myself wish to behold—”

“What would you do, duke?”

“There are secrets which kill those who discover them.”

“He, then, who has discovered your secret, madman that you are, still lives; and, what is more, you will not slay him, for he is armed on all sides,—he is a husband, a jealous man,—he is the second gentleman in France,—he is my son, the Duc du Orleans.”

The duke turned pale as death. “You are very cruel, madame,” he said.

“You see, Buckingham,” said Anne of Austria, sadly, “how you pass from one extreme to another, and fight with shadows, when it would seem so easy to remain at peace with yourself.”

“If we fight, madame, we die on the field of battle,” replied the young man, gently, abandoning himself to the most gloomy depression.

Anne ran towards him and took him by the hand. “Villiers,” she said, in English, with a vehemence of tone which nothing could resist, “what is it you ask? Do you ask a mother to sacrifice her son,—a queen to consent to the dishonor of her house? Child that you are, do not dream of it. What! in order to spare your tears am I to commit these crimes? Villiers! you speak of the dead; the dead, at least, were full of respect and submission; they resigned themselves to an order of exile; they carried their despair away with them in their hearts, like a priceless possession, because the despair was caused by the woman they loved, and because death, thus deceptive, was like a gift of a favor conferred upon them.”

Buckingham rose, his features distorted, and his hands pressed against his heart. “You are right, madame,” he said, “but those of whom you speak had received their order of exile from the lips of the one whom they loved; they were not driven away; they were entreated to leave, and were not laughed at.”

“No,” murmured Anne of Austria, “they were not forgotten. But who says you are driven away, or that you are exiled? Who says that your devotion will not be remembered? I do not speak on any one’s behalf but my own, when I tell you to leave. Do me this kindness,—grant me this favor; let me, for this also, be indebted to one of your name.”

“It is for your sake, then, madame?”

“For mine alone.”

“No one whom I shall leave behind me will venture to mock,—no prince even who shall say, ‘I required it.’”

“Listen to me, duke,” and hereupon the dignified features of the queen assumed a solemn expression. “I swear to you that no one commands in this matter but myself. I swear to you that, not only shall no one either laugh or boast in any way, but no one even shall fail in the respect due to your rank. Rely upon me, duke, as I rely upon you.”

“You do not explain yourself, madame; my heart is full of bitterness, and I am in utter despair; no consolation, however gentle and affectionate, can afford me relief.”

“Do you remember your mother, duke?” replied the queen, with a winning smile.

“Very slightly, madame; yet I remember how she used to cover me with her caresses and her tears whenever I wept.”

“Villiers,” murmured the queen, passing her arm round the young man’s neck, “look upon me as your mother, and believe that no one shall ever make my son weep.”

“I thank you, madame,” said the young man affected and almost suffocated by his emotion; “I feel there is still room in my heart for a gentler and nobler sentiment than love.”

The queen-mother looked at him and pressed his hand. “Go,” she said.

“When must I leave? Command me.”

“At any time that may suit you, my lord,” resumed the queen; “you will choose your own day of departure. Instead, however, of setting off to-day, as you would doubtless wish to do, or to-morrow, as others may have expected, leave the day after to-morrow, in the evening; but announce to-day that it is your wish to leave.”

“My wish?” murmured the young duke.

“Yes, duke.”

“And shall I never return to France?”

Anne of Austria reflected for a moment, seemingly absorbed in sad and serious thought. “It would be a consolation for me,” she said, “if you were to return on the day when I shall be carried to my final resting-place at Saint-Dennis beside the king, my husband.”

“Madame, you are goodness itself; the tide of prosperity is setting in on you; your cup brims over with happiness, and many long years are yet before you.”

“In that case you will not come for some time, then,” said the queen, endeavoring to smile.

“I shall not return,” said Buckingham, “young as I am. Death does not reckon by years; it is impartial; some die young, some reach old age.”

“I will not harbor any sorrowful ideas, duke. Let me comfort you; return in two years. I perceive from your face that the very idea which saddens you so much now, will have disappeared before six months have passed, and will be not only dead but forgotten in the period of absence I have assigned you.”

“I think you judged me better a little while ago, madame,” replied the young man, “when you said that time is powerless against members of the family of Buckingham.”

“Silence,” said the queen, kissing the duke upon the forehead with an affection she could not restrain. “Go, go; spare me and forget yourself no longer. I am the queen; you are the subject of the king of England; King

Charles awaits your return. Adieu, Villiers,—farewell."

"Forever!" replied the young man, and he fled, endeavoring to master his emotions.

Anne leaned her head upon her hands, and then looking at herself in the glass, murmured, "It has been truly said, that a woman who has truly loved is always young, and that the bloom of the girl of twenty years ever lies concealed in some secret cloister of the heart." [1]

Chapter XVIII. King Louis XIV. does not think Mademoiselle de la Vallière either rich enough or pretty enough for a Gentleman of the Rank of the Vicomte de Bragelonne.

Raoul and the Comte de la Fere reached Paris the evening of the same day on which Buckingham had held the conversation with the queen-mother. The count had scarcely arrived, when, through Raoul, he solicited an audience of the king. His majesty had passed a portion of the morning in looking over, with madame and the ladies of the court, various goods of Lyons manufacture, of which he had made his sister-in-law a present. A court dinner had succeeded, then cards, and afterwards, according to his usual custom, the king, leaving the card-tables at eight o'clock, passed into his cabinet in order to work with M. Colbert and M. Fouquet. Raoul entered the ante-chamber at the very moment the two ministers quitted it, and the king, perceiving him through the half-closed door, said, "What do you want, M. de Bragelonne?"

The young man approached: "An audience, sire," he replied, "for the Comte de la Fere, who has just arrived from Blois, and is most anxious to have an interview with your majesty."

"I have an hour to spare between cards and supper," said the king. "Is the Comte de la Fere at hand?"

"He is below, and awaits your majesty's permission."

"Let him come up at once," said the king, and five minutes afterwards Athos entered the presence of Louis XIV. He was received by the king with that gracious kindness of manner which Louis, with a tact beyond

his years, reserved for the purpose of gaining those who were not to be conquered by ordinary favors. “Let me hope, comte,” said the king, “that you have come to ask me for something.”

“I will not conceal from your majesty,” replied the comte, “that I am indeed come for that purpose.”

“That is well,” said the king, joyously.

“It is not for myself, sire.”

“So much the worse; but, at least, I will do for your *protege* what you refuse to permit me to do for you.”

“Your majesty encourages me. I have come to speak on behalf of the Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“It is the same as if you spoke on your own behalf, comte.”

“Not altogether so, sire. I am desirous of obtaining from your majesty that which I cannot ask for myself. The vicomte thinks of marrying.”

“He is still very young; but that does not matter. He is an eminently distinguished man; I will choose a wife for him.”

“He has already chosen one, sire, and only awaits your consent.”

“It is only a question, then, of signing the marriage-contract?” Athos bowed. “Has he chose a wife whose fortune and position accord with your own anticipation?”

Athos hesitated for a moment. “His affirmed wife is of good birth, but has no fortune.”

“That is a misfortune we can remedy.”

“You overwhelm me with gratitude, sire; but your majesty will permit me to offer a remark?”

“Do so, comte.”

“Your majesty seems to intimate an intention of giving a marriage-portion to this young lady.”

“Certainly.”

“I should regret, sire, if the step I have taken towards your majesty should be attended by this result.”

“No false delicacy, comte; what is the bride’s name?”

“Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière,” said Athos, coldly.

“I seem to know that name,” said the king, as if reflecting; “there was a Marquis de la Vallière.”

“Yes, sire, it is his daughter.”

“But he died, and his widow married again M. de Saint-Remy, I think, steward of the dowager Madame’s household.”

“Your majesty is correctly informed.”

“More than that, the young lady has lately become one of the princess’s maids of honor.”

“Your majesty is better acquainted with her history than am I.”

The king again reflected, and glancing at the comte’s anxious countenance, said: “The young lady does not seem to me to be very pretty, comte.”

“I am not quite sure,” replied Athos.

“I have seen her, but she hardly struck me as being so.”

“She seems to be a good and modest girl, but has little beauty, sire.”

“Beautiful fair hair, however.”

“I think so.”

“And her blue eyes are tolerably good.”

“Yes, sire.”

“With regard to her beauty, then, the match is but an ordinary one. Now for the money side of the question.”

“Fifteen to twenty thousand francs dowry at the very outset, sire; the lovers are disinterested enough; for myself, I care little for money.”

“For superfluity, you mean; but a needful amount is of importance. With fifteen thousand francs, without landed property, a woman cannot live at court. We will make up the deficiency; I will do it for De Bragelonne.” The king again remarked the coldness with which Athos received the remark.

“Let us pass from the question of money to that of rank,” said Louis XIV.; “the daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, that is well enough; but there is that excellent Saint-Remy, who somewhat damages the credit of the family; and you, comte, are rather particular, I believe, about your own family.”

“Sire, I no longer hold to anything but my devotion to your majesty.”

The king again paused. “A moment, comte. You have surprised me in no little degree from the beginning of your conversation. You came to ask me to authorize a marriage, and you seem greatly disturbed in having to make the request. Nay, pardon me, comte, but I am rarely deceived, young as I am; for while with some persons I place my friendship at the disposal of my understanding, with others I call my distrust to my aid, by which my discernment is increased. I repeat, that you do not prefer your request as though you wished it success.”

“Well, sire, that is true.”

“I do not understand you, then; refuse.”

“Nay, sire; I love De Bragelonne with my whole heart; he is smitten with Mademoiselle de la Vallière, he weaves dreams of bliss for the future; I am not one who is willing to destroy the illusions of youth. This marriage is objectionable to me, but I implore your majesty to consent to it forthwith, and thus make Raoul happy.”

“Tell me, comte, is she in love with him?”

“If your majesty requires me to speak candidly, I do not believe in Mademoiselle de la Vallière’s affection; the delight at being at court, the honor of being in the service of Madame, counteract in her head whatever affection she may happen to have in her heart; it is a marriage similar to many others which already exist at court; but De Bragelonne wishes it, and so let it be.”

“And yet you do not resemble those easy-tempered fathers who volunteer as stepping-stones for their children,” said the king.

“I am determined enough against the viciously disposed, but not so against men of upright character. Raoul is suffering; he is in great distress of mind; his disposition, naturally light and cheerful, has become gloomy and melancholy. I do not wish to deprive your majesty of the services he may be able to render.”

“I understand you,” said the king; “and what is more, I understand your heart, too, comte.”

“There is no occasion, therefore,” replied the comte, “to tell your majesty that my object is to make these children, or rather Raoul, happy.”

“And I, too, as much as yourself, comte, wish to secure M. de Bragelonne’s happiness.”

“I only await your majesty’s signature. Raoul will have the honor of presenting himself before your majesty to receive your consent.”

“You are mistaken, comte,” said the king, firmly; “I have just said that I desire to secure M. de Bragelonne’s happiness, and from the present moment, therefore, I oppose his marriage.”

“But, sire,” exclaimed Athos, “your majesty has promised!”

“Not so, comte, I did not promise you, for it is opposed to my own views.”

“I appreciate your majesty’s considerate and generous intentions on my behalf; but I take the liberty of recalling to you that I undertook to approach you as an ambassador.”

“An ambassador, comte, frequently asks, but does not always obtain what he asks.”

“But, sire, it will be such a blow for De Bragelonne.”

“My hand shall deal the blow; I will speak to the vicomte.”

“Love, sire, is overwhelming in its might.”

“Love can be resisted, comte. I myself can assure you of that.”

“When one has the soul of a king,—your own, for instance, sire.”

“Do not make yourself uneasy on the subject. I have certain views for De Bragelonne. I do not say that he shall not marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière, but I do not wish him to marry so young; I do not wish him to marry her until she has acquired a fortune; and he, on his side, no less deserves favor, such as I wish to confer upon him. In a word, comte, I wish them to wait.”

“Yet once more, sire.”

“Comte, you told me you came here to request a favor.”

“Assuredly, sire.”

“Grant me one, then, instead; let us speak no longer upon this matter. It is probable that, before long, war may be declared. I require men about me who are unfettered. I should hesitate to send under fire a married man, or a father of a family. I should hesitate also, on De Bragelonne’s account, to endow with a fortune, without some sound reason for it, a young girl, a perfect stranger; such an act would sow jealousy amongst my nobility.” Athos bowed, and remained silent.

“Is that all you wished to ask me?” added Louis XIV.

“Absolutely all, sire; and I take my leave of your majesty. Is it, however, necessary that I should inform Raoul?”

“Spare yourself the trouble and annoyance. Tell the vicomte that at my *levee* to-morrow morning I will speak to him. I shall expect you this evening, comte, to join my card-table.”

“I am in traveling-costume, sire.”

“A day will come, I hope, when you will leave me no more. Before long, comte, the monarchy will be established in such a manner as to enable me to offer a worthy hospitality to men of your merit.”

“Provided, sire, a monarch reigns grandly in the hearts of his subjects, the palace he inhabits matters little, since he is worshipped in a temple.” With these words Athos left the cabinet, and found De Bragelonne, who was awaiting him anxiously.

“Well, monsieur?” said the young man.

“The king, Raoul, is well intentioned towards us both; not, perhaps, in the sense you suppose, but he is kind, and generously disposed to our house.”

“You have bad news to communicate to me, monsieur,” said the young man, turning very pale.

“The king himself will inform you to-morrow morning that it is not bad news.”

“The king has not signed, however?”

“The king wishes himself to settle the terms of the contract, and he desires to make it so grand that he requires time for consideration. Throw the blame rather on your own impatience, than on the king’s good feelings towards you.”

Raoul, in utter consternation, on account of his knowledge of the count’s frankness as well as his diplomacy, remained plunged in dull and gloomy stupor.

“Will you not go with me to my lodgings?” said Athos.

“I beg your pardon, monsieur; I will follow you,” he stammered out, following Athos down the staircase.

“Since I am here,” said Athos, suddenly, “cannot I see M. d’Artagnan?”

“Shall I show you his apartments?” said De Bragelonne.

“Do so.”

“They are on the opposite staircase.”

They altered their course, but on reaching the landing of the grand staircase, Raoul perceived a servant in the Comte de Guiche’s livery, who ran towards him as soon as he heard his voice.

“What is it?” said Raoul.

“This note, monsieur. My master heard of your return and wrote to you without delay; I have been looking for you for the last half-hour.”

Raoul approached Athos as he unsealed the letter, saying, “With your permission, monsieur.”

“Certainly.”

“Dear Raoul,” wrote the Comte de Guiche, “I have an affair in hand which requires immediate attention; I know you have returned; come to me as soon as possible.”

Hardly had he finished reading it, when a servant in the livery of the Duke of Buckingham, turning out of the gallery, recognized Raoul, and approached him respectfully, saying, “From his Grace, monsieur.”

“Well, Raoul, as I see you are already as busy as a general of an army, I shall leave you, and will find M. d’Artagnan myself.”

“You will excuse me, I trust,” said Raoul.

“Yes, yes, I excuse you; adieu, Raoul; you will find me at my apartments until to-morrow; during the day I may set out for Blois, unless I have orders to the contrary.”

“I shall present my respects to you to-morrow, monsieur.”

As soon as Athos had left, Raoul opened Buckingham’s letter.

“Monsieur de Bragelonne,” it ran, “You are, of all the Frenchmen I have known, the one with whom I am most pleased; I am about to put your friendship to the proof. I have received a certain message, written in very good French. As I am an Englishman, I am afraid of not comprehending it very clearly. The letter has a good name attached to it, and that is all I can tell you. Will you be good enough to come and see me? for I am told you have arrived from Blois.

“Your devoted

“VILLIERS, Duke of Buckingham.”

“I am going now to see your master,” said Raoul to De Guiche’s servant, as he dismissed him; “and I shall be with the Duke of Buckingham in an hour,” he added, dismissing with these words the duke’s messenger.

Chapter XIX. Sword-Thrusts in the Water.

Raoul, on betaking himself to De Guiche, found him conversing with De Wardes and Manicamp. De Wardes, since the affair of the barricade, had treated Raoul as a stranger; they behaved as if they were not acquainted. As Raoul entered, De Guiche walked up to him; and Raoul, as he grasped his friend's hand, glanced rapidly at his two companions, hoping to be able to read on their faces what was passing in their minds. De Wardes was cold and impenetrable; Manicamp seemed absorbed in the contemplation of some trimming to his dress. De Guiche led Raoul to an adjoining cabinet, and made him sit down, saying, "How well you look!"

"That is singular," replied Raoul, "for I am far from being in good spirits."

"It is your case, then, Raoul, as it is my own,—our love affairs do not progress."

"So much the better, count, as far as *you* are concerned; the worst news would be good news."

"In that case do not distress yourself, for, not only am I very unhappy, but, what is more, I see others about me who are happy."

"Really, I do not understand you," replied Raoul; "explain yourself."

"You will soon learn. I have tried, but in vain, to overcome the feeling you saw dawn in me, increase, and take entire possession of me. I have summoned all your advice and my own strength to my aid. I have well weighed the unfortunate affair in which I have embarked; I have sounded its depths; that it is an abyss, I am aware, but it matters little for *I* shall pursue my own course."

“This is madness, De Guiche! you cannot advance another step without risking your own ruin to-day, perhaps your life to-morrow.”

“Whatever may happen, I have done with reflections; listen.”

“And you hope to succeed; you believe that Madame will love you?”

“Raoul, I believe nothing; I hope, because hope exists in man, and never abandons him until death.”

“But, admitting that you obtain the happiness you covet, even then, you are more certainly lost than if you had failed in obtaining it.”

“I beseech you, Raoul, not to interrupt me any more; you could never convince me, for I tell you beforehand, I do not wish to be convinced; I have gone so far I cannot recede; I have suffered so much, death itself would be a boon. I no longer love to madness, Raoul, I am being engulfed by a whirlpool of jealousy.”

Raoul struck his hands together with an expression resembling anger. “Well?” said he.

“Well or ill matters little. This is what I claim from you, my friend, my almost brother. During the last three days Madame has been living in a perfect intoxication of gayety. On the first day, I dared not look at her; I hated her for not being as unhappy as myself. The next day I could not bear her out of my sight; and she, Raoul—at least I thought I remarked it—she looked at me, if not with pity, at least with gentleness. But between her looks and mine, a shadow intervened; another’s smile invited hers. Beside her horse another’s always gallops, which is not mine; in her ear another’s caressing voice, not mine, unceasingly vibrates. Raoul, for three days past my brain has been on fire; flame, not blood, courses through my veins. That shadow must be driven away, that smile must be quenched; that voice must be silenced.”

“You wish Monsieur’s death,” exclaimed Raoul.

“No, no, I am not jealous of the husband; I am jealous of the lover.”

“Of the lover?” said Raoul.

“Have you not observed it, you who were formerly so keen-sighted?”

“Are you jealous of the Duke of Buckingham?”

“To the very death.”

“Again jealous?”

“This time the affair will be easy to arrange between us; I have taken the initiative, and have sent him a letter.”

“It was you, then, who wrote to him?”

“How do you know that?”

“I know it, because he told me so. Look at this;” and he handed De Guiche the letter he had received nearly at the same moment as his own. De Guiche read it eagerly, and said, “He is a brave man, and more than that, a gallant man.”

“Most certainly the duke is a gallant man; I need not ask if you wrote to him in a similar style.”

“He will show you my letter when you call on him on my behalf.”

“But that is almost out of the question.”

“What is?”

“That I shall call on him for that purpose.”

“Why so?”

“The duke consults me as you do.”

“I suppose you will give *me* the preference! Listen to me, Raoul, I wish you to tell his Grace—it is a very simple matter—that to-day, to-morrow, the following day, or any other day he may choose, I will meet him at Vincennes.”

“Reflect, De Guiche.”

“I thought I told you I have reflected.”

“The duke is a stranger here; he is on a mission which renders his person inviolable.... Vincennes is close to the Bastile.”

“The consequences concern *me*.”

“But the motive for this meeting? What motive do you wish me to assign?”

“Be perfectly easy on that score, he will not ask any. The duke must be as sick of me as I am of him. I implore you, therefore, seek the duke, and if it is necessary to entreat him, to accept my offer, I will do so.”

“That is useless. The duke has already informed me that he wishes to speak to me. The duke is now playing cards with the king. Let us both go there. I will draw him aside in the gallery; you will remain aloof. Two words will be sufficient.”

“That is well arranged. I will take De Wardes to keep me in countenance.”

“Why not Manicamp? De Wardes can join us at any time; we can leave him here.”

“Yes, that is true.”

“He knows nothing?”

“Positively nothing. You continue still on an unfriendly footing, then?”

“Has he not told you anything?”

“Nothing.”

“I do not like the man, and, as I *never* liked him, the result is, that I am on no worse terms with him to-day than I was yesterday.”

“Let us go, then.”

The four descended the stairs. De Guiche’s carriage was waiting at the door, and took them to the Palais Royal. As they were going along, Raoul was engaged in devising his scheme of action. The sole depositary of two secrets, he did not despair of concluding some arrangement between the two parties. He knew the influence he exercised over Buckingham, and the ascendency he had acquired over De Guiche, and affairs did not look utterly hopeless. On their arrival in the gallery, dazzling with the blaze of light, where the most beautiful and illustrious women of the court moved to and fro, like stars in their own atmosphere, Raoul could not prevent himself for a moment forgetting De Guiche in order to seek out Louise, who, amidst her companions, like a dove completely fascinated, gazed long and fixedly upon the royal circle, which glittered with jewels and gold. All its members were standing, the king alone being seated. Raoul

perceived Buckingham, who was standing a few paces from Monsieur, in a group of French and English, who were admiring his aristocratic carriage and the incomparable magnificence of his costume. Some of the older courtiers remembered having seen his father, but their recollections were not prejudicial to the son.

Buckingham was conversing with Fouquet, who was talking with him aloud about Belle-Isle. “I cannot speak to him at present,” said Raoul.

“Wait, then, and choose your opportunity, but finish everything speedily. I am on thorns.”

“See, our deliverer approaches,” said Raoul, perceiving D’Artagnan, who, magnificently dressed in his new uniform of captain of the musketeers, had just made his entry in the gallery; and he advanced towards D’Artagnan.

“The Comte de la Fere has been looking for you, chevalier,” said Raoul.

“Yes,” replied D’Artagnan, “I have just left him.”

“I thought you would have passed a portion of the evening together.”

“We have arranged to meet again.”

As he answered Raoul, his absent looks were directed on all sides, as if seeking some one in the crowd or looking for something in the room. Suddenly his gaze became fixed, like that of an eagle on its prey. Raoul followed the direction of his glance, and noticed that De Guiche and D’Artagnan saluted each other, but he could not distinguish at whom the captain’s lingering and haughty glance was aimed.

“Chevalier,” said Raoul, “there is no one here but yourself who can render me a service.”

“What is it, my dear vicomte?”

“It is simply to go and interrupt the Duke of Buckingham, to whom I wish to say two words, and, as the duke is conversing with M. Fouquet, you understand that it would not do for *me* to throw myself into the middle of the conversation.”

“Ah, ah, is M. Fouquet there?” inquired D’Artagnan.

“Do you not see him?”

“Yes, now I do. But do you think I have a greater right than you have?”

“You are a more important personage.”

“Yes, you’re right; I am captain of the musketeers; I have had the post promised me so long, and have enjoyed it for so brief a period, that I am always forgetting my dignity.”

“You will do me this service, will you not?”

“M. Fouquet—the deuce!”

“Are you not on good terms with him?”

“It is rather he who may not be on good terms with me; however, since it must be done some day or another—”

“Stay; I think he is looking at you; or is it likely that it might be—”

“No, no; don’t deceive yourself, it is indeed me for whom this honor is intended.”

“The opportunity is a good one, then?”

“Do you think so?”

“Pray go.”

“Well, I will.”

De Guiche had not removed his eyes from Raoul, who made a sign to him that all was arranged. D’Artagnan walked straight up to the group, and civilly saluted M. Fouquet as well as the others.

“Good evening, M. d’Artagnan; we were speaking of Belle-Isle,” said Fouquet, with that usage of society, and that perfect knowledge of the language of looks, which require half a lifetime thoroughly to acquire, and which some persons, notwithstanding all their study, never attain.

“Of Belle-Ile-en-Mer! Ah!” said D’Artagnan. “It belongs to you, I believe, M. Fouquet?”

“M. Fouquet has just told us that he had presented it to the king,” said Buckingham.

“Do you know Belle-Isle, chevalier?” inquired Fouquet.

“I have only been there once,” replied D’Artagnan, with readiness and good-humor.

“Did you remain there long?”

“Scarcely a day.”

“Did you see much of it while you were there?”

“All that could be seen in a day.”

“A great deal can be seen with observation as keen as yours,” said Fouquet; at which D’Artagnan bowed.

During this Raoul made a sign to Buckingham. “M. Fouquet,” said Buckingham, “I leave the captain with you, he is more learned than I am in bastions, scarps, and counter-scarps, and I will join one of my friends, who has just beckoned me.” Saying this, Buckingham disengaged himself from the group, and advanced towards Raoul, stopping for a moment at the table where the queen-mother, the young queen, and the king were playing together.

“Now, Raoul,” said De Guiche, “there he is; be firm and quick.”

Buckingham, having made some complimentary remark to Madame, continued his way towards Raoul, who advanced to meet him, while De Guiche remained in his place, though he followed him with his eyes. The maneuver was so arranged that the young men met in an open space which was left vacant, between the groups of players and the gallery, where they walked, stopping now and then for the purpose of saying a few words to some of the graver courtiers who were walking there. At the moment when the two lines were about to unite, they were broken by a third. It was Monsieur who advanced towards the Duke of Buckingham. Monsieur had his most engaging smile on his red and perfumed lips.

“My dear duke,” said he, with the most affectionate politeness; “is it really true what I have just been told?”

Buckingham turned round; he had not noticed Monsieur approach; but had merely heard his voice. He started in spite of his command over himself, and a slight pallor overspread his face. “Monseigneur,” he asked, “what has been told you that surprises you so much?”

“That which throws me into despair, and will, in truth, be a real cause of mourning for the whole court.”

“Your highness is very kind, for I perceive that you allude to my departure.”

“Precisely.”

Guiche had overheard the conversation from where he was standing, and started in his turn. “His departure,” he murmured. “What does he say?”

Philip continued with the same gracious air, “I can easily conceive, monsieur, why the king of Great Britain recalls you; we all know that King Charles II., who appreciates true gentlemen, cannot dispense with you. But it cannot be supposed we can let you go without great regret; and I beg you to receive the expression of my own.”

“Believe me, monseigneur,” said the duke, “that if I quit the court of France—”

“Because you are recalled; but, if you suppose the expression of my own wish on the subject might possibly have any influence with the king, I will gladly volunteer to entreat his majesty Charles II. to leave you with us a little while longer.”

“I am overwhelmed, monseigneur, by so much kindness,” replied Buckingham; “but I have received positive commands. My residence in France was limited; I have prolonged it at the risk of displeasing my gracious sovereign. It is only this very day that I recollected I ought to have set off four days ago.”

“Indeed,” said Monsieur.

“Yes; but,” added Buckingham, raising his voice in such a manner that the princess could hear him,—“but I resemble that dweller in the East, who turned mad, and remained so for several days, owing to a delightful dream that he had had, but who one day awoke, if not completely cured, in some respects rational at least. The court of France has its

intoxicating properties, which are not unlike this dream, my lord; but at last I wake and leave it. I shall be unable, therefore, to prolong my residence, as your highness has so kindly invited me to do."

"When do you leave?" inquired Philip, with an expression full of interest.

"To-morrow, monseigneur. My carriages have been ready for three days."

The Duc d'Orleans made a movement of the head, which seemed to signify, "Since you are determined, duke, there is nothing to be said." Buckingham returned the gesture, concealing under a smile a contraction of his heart; and then Monsieur moved away in the same direction by which he had approached. At the same moment, however, De Guiche advanced from the opposite direction. Raoul feared that the impatient young man might possibly make the proposition himself, and hurried forth before him.

"No, no, Raoul, all is useless now," said Guiche, holding both his hands towards the duke, and leading him behind a column. "Forgive me, duke, for what I wrote to you, I was mad; give me back my letter."

"It is true," said the duke, "you cannot owe me a grudge any longer now."

"Forgive me, duke; my friendship, my lasting friendship is yours."

"There is certainly no reason why you should bear me any ill-will from the moment I leave her never to see her again."

Raoul heard these words, and comprehending that his presence was now useless between the young men, who had now only friendly words to exchange, withdrew a few paces; a movement which brought him closer to De Wardes, who was conversing with the Chevalier de Lorraine respecting the departure of Buckingham. "A strategic retreat," said De Wardes.

"Why so?"

"Because the dear duke saves a sword-thrust by it." At which reply both laughed.

Raoul, indignant, turned round frowningly, flushed with anger and his lip curling with disdain. The Chevalier de Lorraine turned on his heel, but De Wardes remained and waited.

"You will not break yourself of the habit," said Raoul to De Wardes, "of insulting the absent; yesterday it was M. d'Artagnan, to-day it is the Duke of Buckingham."

"You know very well, monsieur," returned De Wardes, "that I sometimes insult those who are present."

De Wardes was close to Raoul, their shoulders met, their faces approached, as if to mutually inflame each other by the fire of their looks and of their anger. It could be seen that the one was at the height of fury, the other at the end of his patience. Suddenly a voice was heard behind them full of grace and courtesy, saying, "I believe I heard my name pronounced."

They turned round and saw D'Artagnan, who, with a smiling eye and a cheerful face, had just placed his hand on De Wardes's shoulder. Raoul stepped back to make room for the musketeer. De Wardes trembled from head to foot, turned pale, but did not move. D'Artagnan, still with the same smile, took the place which Raoul had abandoned to him.

"Thank you, my dear Raoul," he said. "M. de Wardes, I wish to talk with you. Do not leave us, Raoul; every one can hear what I have to say to M. de Wardes." His smile immediately faded away, and his glace became cold and sharp as a sword.

"I am at your orders, monsieur," said De Wardes.

"For a very long time," resumed D'Artagnan, "I have sought an opportunity of conversing with you; to-day is the first time I have found it. The place is badly chosen, I admit, but you will perhaps have the goodness to accompany me to my apartments, which are on the staircase at the end of this gallery."

"I follow you, monsieur," said De Wardes.

"Are you alone here?" said D'Artagnan.

"No; I have M. Manicamp and M. de Guiche, two of my friends."

“That’s well,” said D’Artagnan; “but two persons are not sufficient; you will be able to find a few others, I trust.”

“Certainly,” said the young man, who did not know what object D’Artagnan had in view. “As many as you please.”

“Are they friends?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Real friends?”

“No doubt of it.”

“Very well, get a good supply, then. Do you come, too, Raoul; bring M. de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham.”

“What a disturbance,” replied De Wardes, attempting to smile. The captain slightly signed to him with his hand, as though to recommend him to be patient, and then led the way to his apartments. 2

Chapter XX. Sword-Thrusts in the Water (concluded).

D'Artagnan's apartment was not unoccupied; for the Comte de la Fere, seated in the recess of a window, awaited him. "Well," said he to D'Artagnan, as he saw him enter.

"Well," said the latter, "M. de Wardes has done me the honor to pay me a visit, in company with some of his own friends, as well as of ours." In fact, behind the musketeer appeared De Wardes and Manicamp, followed by De Guiche and Buckingham, who looked surprised, not knowing what was expected of them. Raoul was accompanied by two or three gentlemen; and, as he entered, glanced round the room, and perceiving the count, he went and placed himself by his side. D'Artagnan received his visitors with all the courtesy he was capable of; he preserved his unmoved and unconcerned look. All the persons present were men of distinction, occupying posts of honor and credit at the court. After he had apologized to each of them for any inconvenience he might have put them to, he turned towards De Wardes, who, in spite of his customary self-command, could not prevent his face betraying some surprise mingled with not a little uneasiness.

"Now, monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "since we are no longer within the precincts of the king's palace, and since we can speak out without failing in respect to propriety, I will inform you why I have taken the liberty to request you to visit me here, and why I have invited these gentlemen to be present at the same time. My friend, the Comte de la Fere, has acquainted me with the injurious reports you are spreading about myself. You have stated that you regard me as your mortal enemy, because I was, so you affirm, that of your father."

“Perfectly true, monsieur, I have said so,” replied De Wardes, whose pallid face became slightly tinged with color.

“You accuse me, therefore, of a crime, or a fault, or of some mean and cowardly act. Have the goodness to state your charge against me in precise terms.”

“In the presence of witnesses?”

“Most certainly in the presence of witnesses; and you see I have selected them as being experienced in affairs of honor.”

“You do not appreciate my delicacy, monsieur. I have accused you, it is true; but I have kept the nature of the accusation a perfect secret. I entered into no details; but have rested satisfied by expressing my hatred in the presence of those on whom a duty was almost imposed to acquaint you with it. You have not taken the discreetness I have shown into consideration, although you were interested in remaining silent. I can hardly recognize your habitual prudence in that, M. d’Artagnan.”

D’Artagnan, who was quietly biting the corner of his moustache, said, “I have already had the honor to beg you to state the particulars of the grievances you say you have against me.”

“Aloud?”

“Certainly, aloud.”

“In that case, I will speak.”

“Speak, monsieur,” said D’Artagnan, bowing; “we are all listening to you.”

“Well, monsieur, it is not a question of a personal injury towards myself, but one towards my father.”

“That you have already stated.”

“Yes; but there are certain subjects which are only approached with hesitation.”

“If that hesitation, in your case, really does exist, I entreat you to overcome it.”

“Even if it refer to a disgraceful action?”

“Yes; in every and any case.”

Those who were present at this scene had, at first, looked at each other with a good deal of uneasiness. They were reassured, however, when they saw that D’Artagnan manifested no emotion whatever.

De Wardes still maintained the same unbroken silence. “Speak, monsieur,” said the musketeer; “you see you are keeping us waiting.”

“Listen, then:—My father loved a lady of noble birth, and this lady loved my father.” D’Artagnan and Athos exchanged looks. De Wardes continued: “M. d’Artagnan found some letters which indicated a rendezvous, substituted himself, under disguise, for the person who was expected, and took advantage of the darkness.”

“That is perfectly true,” said D’Artagnan.

A slight murmur was heard from those present. “Yes, I was guilty of that dishonorable action. You should have added, monsieur, since you are so impartial, that, at the period when the circumstance which you have just related happened, I was not one-and-twenty years of age.”

A renewed murmur was heard, but this time of astonishment, and almost of doubt.

“It was a most shameful deception, I admit,” said D’Artagnan, “and I have not waited for M. de Wardes’s reproaches to reproach myself for it, and very bitterly, too. Age has, however, made me more reasonable, and, above all, more upright; and this injury has been atoned for by a long and lasting regret. But I appeal to you, gentlemen; this affair took place in 1626, at a period, happily for yourselves, known to you by tradition only, at a period when love was not over-scrupulous, when consciences did not distill, as in the present day, poison and bitterness. We were young soldiers, always fighting, or being attacked, our swords always in our hands, or at least ready to be drawn from their sheaths. Death then always stared us in the face, war hardened us, and the cardinal pressed us sorely. I have repented of it, and more than that—I still repent it, M. de Wardes.”

“I can well understand that, monsieur, for the action itself needed repentance; but you were not the less the cause of that lady’s disgrace. She, of whom you have been speaking, covered with shame, borne down by the affront you brought upon her, fled, quitted France, and no one ever knew what became of her.”

“Stay,” said the Comte de la Fere, stretching his hand towards De Wardes, with a peculiar smile upon his face, “you are mistaken; she was seen; and there are persons even now present, who, having often heard her spoken of, will easily recognize her by the description I am about to give. She was about five-and-twenty years of age, slender in form, of a pale complexion, and fair-haired; she was married in England.”

“Married?” exclaimed De Wardes.

“So, you were not aware she was married? You see we are far better informed than yourself. Do you happen to know she was usually styled ‘My Lady,’ without the addition of any name to that description?”

“Yes, I know that.”

“Good Heavens!” murmured Buckingham.

“Very well, monsieur. That woman, who came from England, returned to England after having thrice attempted M. d’Artagnan’s life. That was but just, you will say, since M. d’Artagnan had insulted her. But that which was not just was, that, when in England, this woman, by her seductions, completely enslaved a young man in the service of Lord de Winter, by name Felton. You change color, my lord,” said Athos, turning to the Duke of Buckingham, “and your eyes kindle with anger and sorrow. Let your Grace finish the recital, then, and tell M. de Wardes who this woman was who placed the knife in the hand of your father’s murderer.”

A cry escaped from the lips of all present. The young duke passed his handkerchief across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. A dead silence ensued among the spectators.

“You see, M. de Wardes,” said D’Artagnan, whom this recital had impressed more and more, as his own recollection revived as Athos spoke, “you see that my crime did not cause the destruction of any one’s soul, and that the soul in question may fairly be considered to have been altogether lost before my regret. It is, however, an act of conscience on my part. Now this matter is settled, therefore, it remains for me to ask, with the greatest humility, your forgiveness for this shameless action, as most certainly I should have asked it of your father, if he were still alive, and if I had met him after my return to France, subsequent to the death of King Charles I.”

“That is too much, M. d’Artagnan,” exclaimed many voices, with animation.

“No, gentlemen,” said the captain. “And now, M. de Wardes, I hope all is finished between us, and that you will have no further occasion to speak ill of me again. Do you consider it completely settled?”

De Wardes bowed, and muttered to himself inarticulately.

“I trust also,” said D’Artagnan, approaching the young man closely, “that you will no longer speak ill of any one, as it seems you have the unfortunate habit of doing; for a man so puritanically conscientious as you are, who can reproach an old soldier for a youthful freak five-and-thirty years after it happened, will allow me to ask whether you, who advocate such excessive purity of conscience, will undertake on your side to do nothing contrary either to conscience or the principle of honor. And now, listen attentively to what I am going to say, M. de Wardes, in conclusion. Take care that no tale, with which your name may be associated, reaches my ear.”

“Monsieur,” said De Wardes, “it is useless threatening to no purpose.”

“I have not yet finished, M. de Wardes, and you must listen to me still further.” The circle of listeners, full of eager curiosity, drew closer. “You spoke just now of the honor of a woman, and of the honor of your father. We were glad to hear you speak in that manner; for it is pleasing to think that such a sentiment of delicacy and rectitude, and which did not exist,

it seems, in *our* minds, lives in our children; and it is delightful, too, to see a young man, at an age when men from habit become the destroyers of the honor of women, respect and defend it."

De Wardes bit his lip and clenched his hands, evidently much disturbed to learn how this discourse, the commencement of which was announced in so threatening a manner, would terminate.

"How did it happen, then, that you allowed yourself to say to M. de Bragelonne that he did not know who his mother was?"

Raoul's eyes flashed, as, darting forward, he exclaimed,—"Chevalier, this is a personal affair of my own!" At which exclamation, a smile, full of malice, passed across De Wardes's face.

D'Artagnan put Raoul aside, saying,—"Do not interrupt me, young man." And looking at De Wardes in an authoritative manner, he continued:—"I am now dealing with a matter which cannot be settled by means of the sword. I discuss it before men of honor, all of whom have more than once had their swords in their hands in affairs of honor. I selected them expressly. These gentlemen well know that every secret for which men fight ceases to be a secret. I again put my question to M. de Wardes. What was the subject of conversation when you offended this young man, in offending his father and mother at the same time?"

"It seems to me," returned De Wardes, "that liberty of speech is allowed, when it is supported by every means which a man of courage has at his disposal."

"Tell me what the means are by which a man of courage can sustain a slanderous expression."

"The sword."

"You fail, not only in logic, in your argument, but in religion and honor. You expose the lives of many others, without referring to your own, which seems to be full of hazard. Besides, fashions pass away, monsieur, and the fashion of duelling has passed away, without referring in any way to the edicts of his majesty which forbid it. Therefore, in order to be consistent with your own chivalrous notions, you will at once

apologize to M. de Bragelonne; you will tell him how much you regret having spoken so lightly, and that the nobility and purity of his race are inscribed, not in his heart alone, but still more in every action of his life. You will do and say this, M. de Wardes, as I, an old officer, did and said just now to your boy's moustache."

"And if I refuse?" inquired De Wardes.

"In that case the result will be—"

"That which you think you will prevent," said De Wardes, laughing; "the result will be that your conciliatory address will end in a violation of the king's prohibition."

"Not so," said the captain, "you are quite mistaken."

"What will be the result, then?"

"The result will be that I shall go to the king, with whom I am on tolerably good terms, to whom I have been happy enough to render certain services, dating from a period when you were not born, and who, at my request, has just sent me an order in blank for M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun, governor of the Bastile; and I shall say to the king: 'Sire, a man has in a most cowardly way insulted M. de Bragelonne by insulting his mother; I have written this man's name upon the *lettre de cachet* which your majesty has been kind enough to give me, so that M. de Wardes is in the Bastile for three years." And D'Artagnan, drawing the order signed by the king from his pocket, held it towards De Wardes.

Remarking that the young man was not quite convinced, and received the warning as an idle threat, he shrugged his shoulders and walked leisurely towards the table, upon which lay a writing-case and a pen, the length of which would have terrified the topographical Porthos. De Wardes then saw that nothing could well be more seriously intended than the threat in question, for the Bastile, even at that period, was already held in dread. He advanced a step towards Raoul, and, in an almost unintelligible voice, said,—"I offer my apologies in the terms which M. d'Artagnan just now dictated, and which I am forced to make to you."

“One moment, monsieur,” said the musketeer, with the greatest tranquillity, “you mistake the terms of the apology. I did not say, ‘and which I am forced to make’; I said, ‘and which my conscience induces me to make.’ This latter expression, believe me, is better than the former; and it will be far preferable, since it will be the most truthful expression of your own sentiments.”

“I subscribe to it,” said De Wardes; “but submit, gentlemen, that a thrust of the sword through the body, as was the custom formerly, was far better than tyranny like this.”

“No, monsieur,” replied Buckingham; “for the sword-thrust, when received, was no indication that a particular person was right or wrong; it only showed that he was more or less skillful in the use of the weapon.”

“Monsieur!” exclaimed De Wardes.

“There, now,” interrupted D’Artagnan, “you are going to say something very rude, and I am rendering a service by stopping you in time.”

“Is that all, monsieur?” inquired De Wardes.

“Absolutely everything,” replied D’Artagnan; “and these gentlemen, as well as myself, are quite satisfied with you.”

“Believe me, monsieur, that your reconciliations are not successful.”

“In what way?”

“Because, as we are now about to separate, I would wager that M. de Bragelonne and myself are greater enemies than ever.”

“You are deceived, monsieur, as far as I am concerned,” returned Raoul; “for I do not retain the slightest animosity in my heart against you.”

This last blow overwhelmed De Wardes. He cast his eyes around him like a man bewildered. D’Artagnan saluted most courteously the gentlemen who had been present at the explanation; and every one, on leaving the room, shook hands with him; but not one hand was held out towards De Wardes. “Oh!” exclaimed the young man, “can I not find some one on whom to wreak my vengeance?”

“You can, monsieur, for I am here,” whispered a voice full of menace in his ear.

De Wardes turned round, and saw the Duke of Buckingham, who, having probably remained behind with that intention, had just approached him. “You, monsieur?” exclaimed De Wardes.

“Yes, I! I am no subject of the king of France; I am not going to remain on the territory, since I am about setting off for England. I have accumulated in my heart such a mass of despair and rage, that I, too, like yourself, need to revenge myself upon some one. I approve M. d’Artagnan’s principles profoundly, but I am not bound to apply them to you. I am an Englishman, and, in my turn, I propose to you what you proposed to others to no purpose. Since you, therefore, are so terribly incensed, take me as a remedy. In thirty-four hours’ time I shall be at Calais. Come with me; the journey will appear shorter if together, than if alone. We will fight, when we get there, upon the sands which are covered by the rising tide, and which form part of the French territory during six hours of the day, but belong to the territory of Heaven during the other six.”

“I accept willingly,” said De Wardes.

“I assure you,” said the duke, “that if you kill me, you will be rendering me an infinite service.”

“I will do my utmost to make myself agreeable to you, duke,” said De Wardes.

“It is agreed, then, that I carry you off with me?”

“I shall be at your commands. I needed some real danger and some mortal risk to run, to tranquilize me.”

“In that case, I think you have met with what you are looking for. Farewell, M. de Wardes; to-morrow morning, my valet will tell you the exact hour of our departure; we can travel together like two excellent friends. I generally travel as fast as I can. Adieu.”

Buckingham saluted De Wardes, and returned towards the king's apartments; De Wardes, irritated beyond measure, left the Palais Royal, and hurried through the streets homeward to the house where he lodged.

Chapter XXI. Baisemeaux de Montlezun.

After the austere lesson administered to De Wardes, Athos and D'Artagnan together descended the staircase which led to the courtyard of the Palais Royal. "You perceive," said Athos to D'Artagnan, "that Raoul cannot, sooner or later, avoid a duel with De Wardes, for De Wardes is as brave as he is vicious and wicked."

"I know such fellows well," replied D'Artagnan; "I had an affair with the father. I assure you that, although at that time I had good muscles and a sort of brute courage—I assure you that the father did me some mischief. But you should have seen how I fought it out with him. Ah, Athos, such encounters never take place in these times! I had a hand which could never remain at rest, a hand like quicksilver,—you knew its quality, for you have seen me at work. My sword was no longer than a piece of steel; it was a serpent that assumed every form and every length, seeking where it might thrust its head; in other words, where it might fix its bite. I advanced half a dozen paces, then three, and then, body to body, I pressed my antagonist closely, then I darted back again ten paces. No human power could resist that ferocious ardor. Well, De Wardes the father, with the bravery of his race, with his dogged courage, occupied a good deal of my time; and my fingers, at the end of the engagement, were, I well remember, tired enough."

"It is, then, as I said," resumed Athos, "the son will always be looking out for Raoul, and will end by meeting him; and Raoul can easily be found when he is sought for."

"Agreed; but Raoul calculates well; he bears no grudge against De Wardes,—he has said so; he will wait until he is provoked, and in that case his position is a good one. The king will not be able to get out of

temper about the matter; besides we shall know how to pacify his majesty. But why so full of these fears and anxieties? You don't easily get alarmed."

"I will tell you what makes me anxious; Raoul is to see the king to-morrow, when his majesty will inform him of his wishes respecting a certain marriage. Raoul, loving as he does, will get out of temper, and once in an angry mood, if he were to meet De Wardes, the shell would explode."

"We will prevent the explosion."

"Not I," said Athos, "for I must return to Blois. All this gilded elegance of the court, all these intrigues, sicken me. I am no longer a young man who can make terms with the meanness of the day. I have read in the Great Book many things too beautiful and too comprehensive to longer take any interest in the trifling phrases which these men whisper among themselves when they wish to deceive others. In one word, I am weary of Paris wherever and whenever you are not with me; and as I cannot have you with me always, I wish to return to Blois."

"How wrong you are, Athos; how you gainsay your origin and the destiny of your noble nature. Men of your stamp are created to continue, to the very last moment, in full possession of their great faculties. Look at my sword, a Spanish blade, the one I wore at La Rochelle; it served me for thirty years without fail; one day in the winter it fell upon the marble floor on the Louvre and was broken. I had a hunting-knife made of it which will last a hundred years yet. You, Athos, with your loyalty, your frankness, your cool courage, and your sound information, are the very man kings need to warn and direct them. Remain here; Monsieur Fouquet will not last as long as my Spanish blade."

"Is it possible," said Athos, smiling, "that my friend, D'Artagnan, who, after having raised me to the skies, making me an object of worship, casts me down from the top of Olympus, and hurls me to the ground? I have more exalted ambition, D'Artagnan. To be a minister—to be a slave, —never! Am I not still greater? I am nothing. I remember having heard

you occasionally call me ‘the great Athos’; I defy you, therefore, if I were minister, to continue to bestow that title upon me. No, no; I do not yield myself in this manner.”

“We will not speak of it any more, then; renounce everything, even the brotherly feeling which unites us.”

“It is almost cruel what you say.”

D’Artagnan pressed Athos’s hand warmly. “No, no; renounce everything without fear. Raoul can get on without you. I am at Paris.”

“In that case I shall return to Blois. We will take leave of each other to-night; to-morrow at daybreak I shall be on my horse again.”

“You cannot return to your hotel alone; why did you not bring Grimaud with you?”

“Grimaud takes his rest now; he goes to bed early, for my poor old servant gets easily fatigued. He came from Blois with me, and I compelled him to remain within doors; for if, in retracing the forty leagues which separate us from Blois, he needed to draw breath even, he would die without a murmur. But I don’t want to lose Grimaud.”

“You shall have one of my musketeers to carry a torch for you. *Hola!* some one there,” called out D’Artagnan, leaning over the gilded balustrade. The heads of seven or eight musketeers appeared. “I wish some gentleman, who is so disposed, to escort the Comte de la Fere,” cried D’Artagnan.

“Thank you for your readiness, gentlemen,” said Athos; “I regret to have occasion to trouble you in this manner.”

“I would willingly escort the Comte de la Fere,” said some one, “if I had not to speak to Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Who is that?” said D’Artagnan, looking into the darkness.

“I, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Heaven forgive me, if that is not Monsieur Baisemeaux’s voice.”

“It is, monsieur.”

“What are you doing in the courtyard, my dear Baisemeaux?”

“I am waiting your orders, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Wretch that I am,” thought D’Artagnan; “true, you have been told, I suppose, that some one was to be arrested, and have come yourself, instead of sending an officer?”

“I came because I had occasion to speak to you.”

“You did not send to me?”

“I waited until you were disengaged,” said Monsieur Baisemeaux, timidly.

“I leave you, D’Artagnan,” said Athos.

“Not before I have present Monsieur Baisemeaux de Montlezun, the governor of the Bastile.”

Baisemeaux and Athos saluted each other.

“Surely you must know each other,” said D’Artagnan.

“I have an indistinct recollection of Monsieur Baisemeaux,” said Athos.

“You remember, my dear, Baisemeaux, the king’s guardsman with whom we used formerly to have such delightful meetings in the cardinal’s time?”

“Perfectly,” said Athos, taking leave of him with affability.

“Monsieur le Comte de la Fere, whose *nom de guerre* was Athos,” whispered D’Artagnan to Baisemeaux.

“Yes, yes, a brave man, one of the celebrated four.”

“Precisely so. But, my dear Baisemeaux, shall we talk now?”

“If you please.”

“In the first place, as for the orders—there are none. The king does not intend to arrest the person in question.

“So much the worse,” said Baisemeaux with a sigh.

“What do you mean by so much the worse?” exclaimed D’Artagnan, laughing.

“No doubt of it,” returned the governor, “my prisoners are my income.”

“I beg your pardon, I did not see it in that light.”

“And so there are no orders,” repeated Baisemeaux with a sigh. “What an admirable situation yours is, captain,” he continued, after a pause; “captain-lieutenant of the musketeers.”

“Oh, it is good enough; but I don’t see why you should envy me; you, governor of the Bastile, the first castle in France.”

“I am well aware of that,” said Baisemeaux, in a sorrowful tone of voice.

“You say that like a man confessing his sins. I would willingly exchange my profits for yours.”

“Don’t speak of profits to me, if you wish to save me the bitterest anguish of mind.”

“Why do you look first on one side and then on the other, as if you were afraid of being arrested yourself, you whose business it is to arrest others?”

“I was looking to see whether any one could see or listen to us; it would be safer to confer more in private, if you would grant me such a favor.”

“Baisemeaux, you seem to forget we are acquaintances of five and thirty years’ standing. Don’t assume such sanctified airs; make yourself quite comfortable; I don’t eat governors of the Bastile raw.”

“Heaven be praised!”

“Come into the courtyard with me; it’s a beautiful moonlit night; we will walk up and down, arm in arm, under the trees, while you tell me your pitiful tale.” He drew the doleful governor into the courtyard, took him by the arm as he had said, and, in his rough, good-humored way, cried: “Out with it, rattle away, Baisemeaux; what have you got to say?”

“It’s a long story.”

“You prefer your own lamentations, then; my opinion is, it will be longer than ever. I’ll wager you are making fifty thousand francs out of your pigeons in the Bastile.”

“Would to heaven that were the case, M. d’Artagnan.”

“You surprise me, Baisemeaux; just look at you, acting the anchorite. I should like to show you your face in a glass, and you would see how plump and florid-looking you are, as fat and round as a cheese, with eyes like lighted coals; and if it were not for that ugly wrinkle you try to cultivate on your forehead, you would hardly look fifty years old, and you are sixty, if I am not mistaken.”

“All quite true.”

“Of course I knew it was true, as true as the fifty thousand francs profit you make;” at which remark Baisemeaux stamped on the ground.

“Well, well,” said D’Artagnan, “I will add up your accounts for you: you were captain of M. Mazarin’s guards; and twelve thousand francs a year would in twelve years amount to one hundred and forty thousand francs.”

“Twelve thousand francs! Are you mad?” cried Baisemeaux; “the old miser gave me no more than six thousand, and the expenses of the post amounted to six thousand five hundred francs. M. Colbert, who deducted the other six thousand francs, condescended to allow me to take fifty thousand francs as a gratification; so that, if it were not for my little estate at Montlezun, which brings me in twelve thousand francs a year, I could not have met my engagements.”

“Well, then, how about the fifty thousand francs from the Bastile? There, I trust, you are boarded and lodged, and get your six thousand francs salary besides.”

“Admitted!”

“Whether the year be good or bad, there are fifty prisoners, who, on the average, bring you in a thousand francs a year each.”

“I don’t deny it.”

“Well, there is at once an income of fifty thousand francs; you have held the post three years, and must have received in that time one hundred and fifty thousand francs.”

“You forget one circumstance, dear M. d’Artagnan.”

“What is that?”

“That while you received your appointment as captain from the king himself, I received mine as governor from Messieurs Tremblay and Louviere.”

“Quite right, and Tremblay was not a man to let you have the post for nothing.”

“Nor Louviere either: the result was, that I gave seventy-five thousand francs to Tremblay as his share.”

“Very agreeable that! and to Louviere?”

“The very same.”

“Money down?”

“No: that would have been impossible. The king did not wish, or rather M. Mazarin did not wish, to have the appearance of removing those two gentlemen, who had sprung from the barricades; he permitted them, therefore, to make certain extravagant conditions for their retirement.”

“What were those conditions?”

“Tremble... three years’ income for the good-will.”

“The deuce! so that the one hundred and fifty thousand francs have passed into their hands.”

“Precisely so.”

“And beyond that?”

“A sum of one hundred and fifty thousand francs, or fifteen thousand pistoles, whichever you please, in three payments.”

“Exorbitant.”

“Yes, but that is not all.”

“What besides?”

“In default of the fulfillment by me of any one of those conditions, those gentlemen enter upon their functions again. The king has been induced to sign that.”

“It is monstrous, incredible!”

“Such is the fact, however.”

“I do indeed pity you, Baisemeaux. But why, in the name of fortune, did M. Mazarin grant you this pretended favor? It would have been far better to have refused you altogether.”

“Certainly, but he was strongly persuaded to do so by my protector.”

“Who is he?”

“One of your own friends, indeed; M. d’Herblay.”

“M. d’Herblay! Aramis!”

“Just so; he has been very kind towards me.”

“Kind! to make you enter into such a bargain!”

“Listen! I wished to leave the cardinal’s service. M. d’Herblay spoke on my behalf to Louviere and Tremblay—they objected; I wished to have the appointment very much, for I knew what it could be made to produce; in my distress I confided in M. d’Herblay, and he offered to become my surety for the different payments.”

“You astound me! Aramis became your surety?”

“Like a man of honor; he procured the signature; Tremblay and Louviere resigned their appointments; I have paid every year twenty-five thousand francs to these two gentlemen; on the thirty-first of May, every year, M. d’Herblay himself comes to the Bastile, and brings me five thousand pistoles to distribute between my crocodiles.”

“You owe Aramis one hundred and fifty thousand francs, then?”

“That is the very thing which is the cause of my despair, for I only owe him one hundred thousand.”

“I don’t quite understand you.”

“He came and settled with the vampires only two years. To-day, however, is the thirty-first of May, and he has not been yet, and to-morrow, at midday, the payment falls due; if, therefore, I don’t pay to-morrow, those gentlemen can, by the terms of the contract, break off the bargain; I shall be stripped of everything; I shall have worked for three years, and given two hundred and fifty thousand francs for nothing, absolutely for nothing at all, dear M. d’Artagnan.”

“This is very strange,” murmured D’Artagnan.

“You can now imagine that I may well have wrinkles on my forehead, can you not?”

“Yes, indeed!”

“And you can imagine, too, that notwithstanding I may be as round as a cheese, with a complexion like an apple, and my eyes like coals on fire, I may almost be afraid that I shall not have a cheese or an apple left me to eat, and that my eyes will be left me only to weep with.”

“It is really a very grievous affair.”

“I have come to you, M. d’Artagnan, for you are the only man who can get me out of my trouble.”

“In what way?”

“You are acquainted with the Abbe d’Herblay, and you know that he is a somewhat mysterious gentleman.”

“Yes.”

“Well, you can, perhaps, give me the address of his presbytery, for I have been to Noisy-le-Sec, and he is no longer there.”

“I should think not, indeed. He is Bishop of Vannes.”

“What! Vannes in Bretagne?”

“Yes.”

The little man began to tear his hair, saying, “How can I get to Vannes from here by midday to-morrow? I am a lost man.”

“Your despair quite distresses me.”

“Vannes, Vannes!” cried Baisemeaux.

“But listen; a bishop is not always a resident. M. d’Herblay may not possibly be so far away as you fear.”

“Pray tell me his address.”

“I really don’t know it.”

“In that case I am lost. I will go and throw myself at the king’s feet.”

“But, Baisemeaux, I can hardly believe what you tell me; besides, since the Bastile is capable of producing fifty thousand francs a year, why have you not tried to screw one hundred thousand out of it?”

“Because I am an honest man, M. d’Artagnan, and because my prisoners are fed like ambassadors.”

“Well, you’re in a fair way to get out of your difficulties; give yourself a good attack of indigestion with your excellent living, and put yourself out of the way between this and midday to-morrow.”

“How can you be hard-hearted enough to laugh?”

“Nay, you really afflict me. Come, Baisemeaux, if you can pledge me your word of honor, do so, that you will not open your lips to any one about what I am going to say to you.”

“Never, never!”

“You wish to put your hands on Aramis?”

“At any cost!”

“Well, go and see where M. Fouquet is.”

“Why, what connection can there be—”

“How stupid you are! Don’t you know that Vannes is in the diocese of Belle-Isle, or Belle-Isle in the diocese of Vannes? Belle-Isle belongs to M. Fouquet, and M. Fouquet nominated M. d’Herblay to that bishopric!”

“I see, I see; you restore me to life again.”

“So much the better. Go and tell M. Fouquet very simply that you wish to speak to M. d’Herblay.”

“Of course, of course,” exclaimed Baisemeaux, delightedly.

“But,” said D’Artagnan, checking him by a severe look, “your word of honor?”

“I give you my sacred word of honor,” replied the little man, about to set off running.

“Where are you going?”

“To M. Fouquet’s house.”

“It is useless doing that; M. Fouquet is playing at cards with the king. All you can do is to pay M. Fouquet a visit early to-morrow morning.”

“I will do so. Thank you.”

“Good luck attend you,” said D’Artagnan.

“Thank you.”

“This is a strange affair,” murmured D’Artagnan, as he slowly ascended the staircase after he had left Baisemeaux. “What possible interest can Aramis have in obliging Baisemeaux in this manner? Well, I suppose we shall learn some day or another.”

Chapter XXII. The King's Card-Table.

Fouquet was present, as D'Artagnan had said, at the king's card-table. It seemed as if Buckingham's departure had shed a balm on the lacerated hearts of the previous evening. Monsieur, radiant with delight, made a thousand affectionate signs to his mother. The Count de Guiche could not separate himself from Buckingham, and while playing, conversed with him upon the circumstance of his projected voyage. Buckingham, thoughtful, and kind in his manner, like a man who has adopted a resolution, listened to the count, and from time to time cast a look full of regret and hopeless affection at Madame. The princess, in the midst of her elation of spirits, divided her attention between the king, who was playing with her, Monsieur, who quietly joked her about her enormous winnings, and De Guiche, who exhibited an extravagant delight. Of Buckingham she took but little notice; for her, this fugitive, this exile, was now simply a remembrance, no longer a man. Light hearts are thus constituted; while they themselves continue untouched, they roughly break off with every one who may possibly interfere with their little calculations of self comfort. Madame had received Buckingham's smiles and attentions and sighs while he was present; but what was the good of sighing, smiling, and kneeling at a distance? Can one tell in what direction the winds in the Channel, which toss mighty vessels to and fro, carry such sighs as these? The duke could not fail to mark this change, and his heart was cruelly hurt. Of a sensitive character, proud and susceptible of deep attachment, he cursed the day on which such a passion had entered his heart. The looks he cast, from time to time at Madame, became colder by degrees at the chilling complexion of his thoughts. He could hardly yet despair, but he was strong enough to impose silence upon the tumultuous outcries of his heart. In exact

proportion, however, as Madame suspected this change of feeling, she redoubled her activity to regain the ray of light she was about to lose; her timid and indecisive mind was displayed in brilliant flashes of wit and humor. At any cost she felt that she must be remarked above everything and every one, even above the king himself. And she was so, for the queens, notwithstanding their dignity, and the king, despite the respect which etiquette required, were all eclipsed by her. The queens, stately and ceremonious, were softened and could not restrain their laughter. Madame Henriette, the queen-mother, was dazzled by the brilliancy which cast distinction upon her family, thanks to the wit of the granddaughter of Henry IV. The king, jealous, as a young man and as a monarch, of the superiority of those who surrounded him, could not resist admitting himself vanquished by a petulance so thoroughly French in its nature, whose energy more than ever increased by English humor. Like a child, he was captivated by her radiant beauty, which her wit made still more dazzling. Madame's eyes flashed like lightning. Wit and humor escaped from her scarlet lips like persuasion from the lips of Nestor of old. The whole court, subdued by her enchanting grace, noticed for the first time that laughter could be indulged in before the greatest monarch in the world, like people who merited their appellation of the wittiest and most polished people in Europe.

Madame, from that evening, achieved and enjoyed a success capable of bewildering all not born to those altitudes termed thrones; which, in spite of their elevation, are sheltered from such giddiness. From that very moment Louis XIV. acknowledged Madame as a person to be recognized. Buckingham regarded her as a coquette deserving the cruelest tortures, and De Guiche looked upon her as a divinity; the courtiers as a star whose light might some day become the focus of all favor and power. And yet Louis XIV., a few years previously, had not even condescended to offer his hand to that "ugly girl" for a ballet; and Buckingham had worshipped this coquette "on both knees." De Guiche had once looked upon this divinity as a mere woman; and the courtiers had not dared to extol this star in her upward progress, fearful to disgust the monarch whom such a dull star had formerly displeased.

Let us see what was taking place during this memorable evening at the king's card-table. The young queen, although Spanish by birth, and the niece of Anne of Austria, loved the king, and could not conceal her affection. Anne of Austria, a keen observer, like all women, and imperious, like every queen, was sensible of Madame's power, and acquiesced in it immediately, a circumstance which induced the young queen to raise the siege and retire to her apartments. The king hardly paid any attention to her departure, notwithstanding the pretended symptoms of indisposition by which it was accompanied. Encouraged by the rules of etiquette, which he had begun to introduce at the court as an element of every relation of life, Louis XIV. did not disturb himself; he offered his hand to Madame without looking at Monsieur his brother, and led the young princess to the door of her apartments. It was remarked, that at the threshold of the door, his majesty, freed from every restraint, or not equal to the situation, sighed very deeply. The ladies present—nothing escapes a woman's glance—Mademoiselle Montalais, for instance—did not fail to say to each other, "the king sighed," and "Madame sighed too." This had been indeed the case. Madame had sighed very noiselessly, but with an accompaniment very far more dangerous for the king's repose. Madame had sighed, first closing her beautiful black eyes, next opening them, and then, laden, as they were, with an indescribable mournfulness of expression, she had raised them towards the king, whose face at that moment visibly heightened in color. The consequence of these blushes, of those interchanged sighs, and of this royal agitation, was, that Montalais had committed an indiscretion which had certainly affected her companion, for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, less clear sighted, perhaps, turned pale when the king blushed; and her attendance being required upon Madame, she tremblingly followed the princess without thinking of taking the gloves, which court etiquette required her to do. True it is that the young country girl might allege as her excuse the agitation into which the king seemed to be thrown, for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, busily engaged in closing the door, had involuntarily fixed her eyes upon the king, who, as he retired backwards, had his face towards it. The king returned to the room where

the card-tables were set out. He wished to speak to the different persons there, but it was easy to see that his mind was absent. He jumbled different accounts together, which was taken advantage of by some of the noblemen who had retained those habits since the time of Monsieur Mazarin—who had a poor memory, but was a good calculator. In this way, Monsieur Manicamp, with a thoughtless and absent air—for M. Manicamp was the honestest man in the world, appropriated twenty thousand francs, which were littering the table, and which did not seem to belong to any person in particular. In the same way, Monsieur de Wardes, whose head was doubtless a little bewildered by the occurrences of the evening, somehow forgot to leave behind him the sixty double louis which he had won for the Duke of Buckingham, and which the duke, incapable, like his father, of soiling his hands with coin of any sort, had left lying on the table before him. The king only recovered his attention in some degree at the moment that Monsieur Colbert, who had been narrowly observant for some minutes, approached, and, doubtless, with great respect, yet with much perseverance, whispered a counsel of some sort into the still tingling ears of the king. The king, at the suggestion, listened with renewed attention and immediately looking around him, said, “Is Monsieur Fouquet no longer here?”

“Yes, sire, I am here,” replied the superintendent, till then engaged with Buckingham, and approached the king, who advanced a step towards him with a smiling yet negligent air. “Forgive me,” said Louis, “if I interrupt your conversation; but I claim your attention wherever I may require your services.”

“I am always at the king’s service,” replied Fouquet.

“And your cash-box, too,” said the king, laughing with a false smile.

“My cash-box more than anything else,” said Fouquet, coldly.

“The fact is, I wish to give a *fete* at Fontainebleau—to keep open house for fifteen days, and I shall require—” and he stopped, glancing at Colbert. Fouquet waited without showing discomposure; and the king resumed, answering Colbert’s icy smile, “four million francs.”

“Four million,” repeated Fouquet, bowing profoundly. And his nails, buried in his bosom, were thrust into his flesh, but the tranquil expression of his face remained unaltered. “When will they be required, sire?”

“Take your time,—I mean—no, no; as soon as possible.”

“A certain time will be necessary, sire.”

“Time!” exclaimed Colbert, triumphantly.

“The time, monsieur,” said the superintendent, with the haughtiest disdain, “simply to *count the money*; a million can only be drawn and weighed in a day.”

“Four days, then,” said Colbert.

“My clerks,” replied Fouquet, addressing himself to the king, “will perform wonders on his majesty’s service, and the sum shall be ready in three days.”

It was for Colbert now to turn pale. Louis looked at him astonished. Fouquet withdrew without any parade or weakness, smiling at his numerous friends, in whose countenances alone he read the sincerity of their friendship—an interest partaking of compassion. Fouquet, however, should not be judged by his smile, for, in reality, he felt as if he had been stricken by death. Drops of blood beneath his coat stained the fine linen that clothed his chest. His dress concealed the blood, and his smile the rage which devoured him. His domestics perceived, by the manner in which he approached his carriage, that their master was not in the best of humors: the result of their discernment was, that his orders were executed with that exactitude of maneuver which is found on board a man-of-war, commanded during a storm by an ill-tempered captain. The carriage, therefore, did not simply roll along—it flew. Fouquet had hardly time to recover himself during the drive; on his arrival he went at once to Aramis, who had not yet retired for the night. As for Porthos, he had supped very agreeably off a roast leg of mutton, two pheasants, and a perfect heap of cray-fish; he then directed his body to be anointed with perfumed oils, in the manner of the wrestlers of old; and when this anointment was completed, he had himself wrapped in

flannels and placed in a warm bed. Aramis, as we have already said, had not retired. Seated at his ease in a velvet dressing-gown, he wrote letter after letter in that fine and hurried handwriting, a page of which contained a quarter of a volume. The door was thrown hurriedly open, and the superintendent appeared, pale, agitated, anxious. Aramis looked up: “Good-evening,” said he; and his searching look detected his host’s sadness and disordered state of mind. “Was your play as good as his majesty’s?” asked Aramis, by way of beginning the conversation.

Fouquet threw himself upon a couch, and then pointed to the door to the servant who had followed him; when the servant had left he said, “Excellent.”

Aramis, who had followed every movement with his eyes, noticed that he stretched himself upon the cushions with a sort of feverish impatience. “You have lost as usual?” inquired Aramis, his pen still in his hand.

“Even more than usual,” replied Fouquet.

“You know how to support losses?”

“Sometimes.”

“What, Monsieur Fouquet a bad player!”

“There is play and play, Monsieur d’Herblay.”

“How much have you lost?” inquired Aramis, with a slight uneasiness.

Fouquet collected himself a moment, and then, without the slightest emotion, said, “The evening has cost me four millions,” and a bitter laugh drowned the last vibration of these words.

Aramis, who did not expect such an amount, dropped his pen. “Four millions,” he said; “you have lost four millions,—impossible!”

“Monsieur Colbert held my cards for me,” replied the superintendent, with a similar bitter laugh.

“Ah, now I understand; so, so, a new application for funds?”

“Yes, and from the king’s own lips. It was impossible to ruin a man with a more charming smile. What do you think of it?”

“It is clear that your destruction is the object in view.”

“That is your opinion?”

“Still. Besides, there is nothing in it which should astonish you, for we have foreseen it all along.”

“Yes; but I did not expect four millions.”

“No doubt the amount is serious, but, after all, four millions are not quite the death of a man, especially when the man in question is Monsieur Fouquet.”

“My dear D’Herblay, if you knew the contents of my coffers, you would be less easy.”

“And you promised?”

“What could I *do?*”

“That’s true.”

“The very day I refuse, Colbert will procure the money; whence I know not, but he *will* procure it: and I shall be lost.”

“There is no doubt of that. In how many days did you promise the four millions?”

“In three days. The king seemed exceedingly pressed.”

“*In three days?*”

“When I think,” resumed Fouquet, “that just now as I passed along the streets, the people cried out, ‘There is the rich Monsieur Fouquet,’ it is enough to turn my brain.”

“Stay, monsieur, the matter is not worth so much trouble,” said Aramis, calmly, sprinkling some sand over the letter he had just written.

“Suggest a remedy, then, for this evil without a remedy.”

“There is only one remedy for you,—pay.”

“But it is very uncertain whether I have the money. Everything must be exhausted; Belle-Isle is paid for; the pension has been paid; and money, since the investigation of the accounts of those who farm the revenue, is scarce. Besides, admitting that I pay this time, how can I do so on another occasion? When kings have tasted money, they are like

tigers who have tasted flesh, they devour everything. The day will arrive —*must* arrive—when I shall have to say, 'Impossible, sire,' and on that very day I am a lost man."

Aramis raised his shoulders slightly, saying:

"A man in your position, my lord, is only lost when he wishes to be so."

"A man, whatever his position may be, cannot hope to struggle against a king."

"Nonsense; when I was young I wrestled successfully with the Cardinal Richelieu, who was king of France,—nay more—cardinal."

"Where are my armies, my troops, my treasures? I have not even Belle-Isle."

"Bah! necessity is the mother of invention, and when you think all is lost, something will be discovered which will retrieve everything."

"Who will discover this wonderful something?"

"Yourself."

"I! I resign my office of inventor."

"Then *I* will."

"Be it so. But set to work without delay."

"Oh! we have time enough!"

"You kill me, D'Herblay, with your calmness," said the superintendent, passing his handkerchief over his face.

"Do you not remember that I one day told you not to make yourself uneasy, if you possessed courage? *Have* you any?"

"I believe so."

"Then don't make yourself uneasy."

"It is decided then, that, at the last moment, you will come to my assistance."

"It will only be the repayment of a debt I owe you."

"It is the vocation of financiers to anticipate the wants of men such as yourself, D'Herblay."

“If obligingness is the vocation of financiers, charity is the virtue of the clergy. Only, on this occasion, do you act, monsieur. You are not yet sufficiently reduced, and at the last moment we will see what is to be done.”

“We shall see, then, in a very short time.”

“Very well. However, permit me to tell you that, personally, I regret exceedingly that you are at present so short of money, because I myself was about to ask you for some.”

“For yourself?”

“For myself, or some of my people, for mine or for ours.”

“How much do you want?”

“Be easy on that score; a roundish sum, it is true, but not too exorbitant.”

“Tell me the amount.”

“Fifty thousand francs.”

“Oh! a mere nothing. Of course one has always fifty thousand francs. Why the deuce cannot that knave Colbert be as easily satisfied as you are —and I should give myself far less trouble than I do. When do you need this sum?”

“To-morrow morning; but you wish to know its destination?”

“Nay, nay, chevalier, I need no explanation.”

“To-morrow is the first of June.”

“Well?”

“One of our bonds becomes due.”

“I did not know we had any bonds.”

“Certainly, to-morrow we pay our last third instalment.”

“What third?”

“Of the one hundred and fifty thousand francs to Baisemeaux.”

“Baisemeaux? Who is he?”

“The governor of the Bastile.”

“Yes, I remember. On what grounds am I to pay one hundred and fifty thousand francs for that man.”

“On account of the appointment which he, or rather we, purchased from Louviere and Tremblay.”

“I have a very vague recollection of the matter.”

“That is likely enough, for you have so many affairs to attend to. However, I do not believe you have any affair in the world of greater importance than this one.”

“Tell me, then, why we purchased this appointment.”

“Why, in order to render him a service in the first place, and afterwards ourselves.”

“Ourselves? You are joking.”

“Monseigneur, the time may come when the governor of the Bastile may prove a very excellent acquaintance.”

“I have not the good fortune to understand you, D’Herblay.”

“Monseigneur, we had our own poets, our own engineer, our own architect, our own musicians, our own printer, and our own painters; we needed our own governor of the Bastile.”

“Do you think so?”

“Let us not deceive ourselves, monseigneur; we are very much opposed to paying the Bastile a visit,” added the prelate, displaying, beneath his pale lips, teeth which were still the same beautiful teeth so much admired thirty years previously by Marie Michon.

“And you think it is not too much to pay one hundred and fifty thousand francs for that? I thought you generally put out money at better interest than that.”

“The day will come when you will admit your mistake.”

“My dear D’Herblay, the very day on which a man enters the Bastile, he is no longer protected by his past.”

“Yes, he is, if the bonds are perfectly regular; besides, that good fellow Baisemeaux has not a courtier’s heart. I am certain, my lord, that he will not remain ungrateful for that money, without taking into account, I repeat, that I retain the acknowledgements.”

“It is a strange affair! usury in a matter of benevolence.”

“Do not mix yourself up with it, monseigneur; if there be usury, it is I who practice it, and both of us reap the advantage from it—that is all.”

“Some intrigue, D’Herblay?”

“I do not deny it.”

“And Baisemeaux an accomplice in it?”

“Why not?—there are worse accomplices than he. May I depend, then, upon the five thousand pistoles to-morrow?”

“Do you want them this evening?”

“It would be better, for I wish to start early; poor Baisemeaux will not be able to imagine what has be become of me, and must be upon thorns.”

“You shall have the amount in an hour. Ah, D’Herblay, the interest of your one hundred and fifty thousand francs will never pay my four millions for me.”

“Why not, monseigneur?”

“Good-night, I have business to transact with my clerks before I retire.”

“A good night’s rest, monseigneur.”

“D’Herblay, you wish things that are impossible.”

“Shall I have my fifty thousand francs this evening?”

“Yes.”

“Go to sleep, then, in perfect safety—it is I who tell you to do so.”

Notwithstanding this assurance, and the tone in which it was given, Fouquet left the room shaking his head, and heaving a sigh.

Chapter XXIII. M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun's Accounts.

The clock of St. Paul was striking seven as Aramis, on horseback, dressed as a simple citizen, that is to say, in colored suit, with no distinctive mark about him, except a kind of hunting-knife by his side, passed before the Rue du Petit-Musc, and stopped opposite the Rue des Tournelles, at the gate of the Bastile. Two sentinels were on duty at the gate; they made no difficulty about admitting Aramis, who entered without dismounting, and they pointed out the way he was to go by a long passage with buildings on both sides. This passage led to the drawbridge, or, in other words, to the real entrance. The drawbridge was down, and the duty of the day was about being entered upon. The sentinel at the outer guardhouse stopped Aramis's further progress, asking him, in a rough tone of voice, what had brought him there. Aramis explained, with his usual politeness, that a wish to speak to M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun had occasioned his visit. The first sentinel then summoned a second sentinel, stationed within an inner lodge, who showed his face at the grating, and inspected the new arrival most attentively. Aramis reiterated the expression of his wish to see the governor; whereupon the sentinel called to an officer of lower grade, who was walking about in a tolerably spacious courtyard and who, in turn, on being informed of his object, ran to seek one of the officers of the governor's staff. The latter, after having listened to Aramis's request, begged him to wait a moment, then went away a short distance, but returned to ask his name. "I cannot tell it you, monsieur," said Aramis; "I need only mention that I have matters of such importance to communicate to the governor, that I can only rely beforehand upon one thing, that M. de Baisemeaux will be delighted to see me; nay, more than

that, when you have told him that it is the person whom he expected on the first of June, I am convinced he will hasten here himself." The officer could not possibly believe that a man of the governor's importance should put himself out for a person of so little importance as the citizen-looking visitor on horseback. "It happens most fortunately, monsieur," he said, "that the governor is just going out, and you can perceive his carriage with the horses already harnessed, in the courtyard yonder; there will be no occasion for him to come to meet you, as he will see you as he passes by." Aramis bowed to signify his assent; he did not wish to inspire others with too exalted an opinion of himself, and therefore waited patiently and in silence, leaning upon the saddle-bow of his horse. Ten minutes had hardly elapsed when the governor's carriage was observed to move. The governor appeared at the door, and got into the carriage, which immediately prepared to start. The same ceremony was observed for the governor himself as with a suspected stranger; the sentinel at the lodge advanced as the carriage was about to pass under the arch, and the governor opened the carriage-door, himself setting the example of obedience to orders; so that, in this way, the sentinel could convince himself that no one quitted the Bastile improperly. The carriage rolled along under the archway, but at the moment the iron-gate was opened, the officer approached the carriage, which had again been stopped, and said something to the governor, who immediately put his head out of the door-way, and perceived Aramis on horseback at the end of the drawbridge. He immediately uttered almost a shout of delight, and got out, or rather darted out of his carriage, running towards Aramis, whose hands he seized, making a thousand apologies. He almost embraced him. "What a difficult matter to enter the Bastile!" said Aramis. "Is it the same for those who are sent here against their wills, as for those who come of their own accord?"

"A thousand pardons, my lord. How delighted I am to see your Grace!"

"Hush! What are you thinking of, my dear M. Baisemeaux? What do you suppose would be thought of a bishop in my present costume?"

“Pray, excuse me, I had forgotten. Take this gentleman’s horse to the stables,” cried Baisemeaux.

“No, no,” said Aramis; “I have five thousand pistoles in the saddle-bags.”

The governor’s countenance became so radiant, that if the prisoners had seen him they would have imagined some prince of the royal blood had arrived. “Yes, you are right, the horse shall be taken to the government house. Will you get into the carriage, my dear M. d’Herblay? and it shall take us back to my house.”

“Get into a carriage to cross a courtyard! do you believe I am so great an invalid? No, no, we will go on foot.”

Baisemeaux then offered his arm as a support, but the prelate did not accept it. They arrived in this manner at the government house, Baisemeaux rubbing his hands and glancing at the horse from time to time, while Aramis was looking at the bleak bare walls. A tolerably handsome vestibule and a staircase of white stone led to the governor’s apartments, who crossed the ante-chamber, the dining-room, where breakfast was being prepared, opened a small side door, and closeted himself with his guest in a large cabinet, the windows of which opened obliquely upon the courtyard and the stables. Baisemeaux installed the prelate with that all-inclusive politeness of which a good man, or a grateful man, alone possesses the secret. An arm-chair, a footstool, a small table beside him, on which to rest his hand, everything was prepared by the governor himself. With his own hands, too, he placed upon the table, with much solicitude, the bag containing the gold, which one of the soldiers had brought up with the most respectful devotion; and the soldier having left the room, Baisemeaux himself closed the door after him, drew aside one of the window-curtains, and looked steadfastly at Aramis to see if the prelate required anything further.

“Well, my lord,” he said, still standing up, “of all men of their word, you still continue to be the most punctual.”

“In matters of business, dear M. de Baisemeaux, exactitude is not a virtue only, it is a duty as well.”

“Yes, in matters of business, certainly; but what you have with me is not of that character; it is a service you are rendering me.”

“Come, confess, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that, notwithstanding this exactitude, you have not been without a little uneasiness.”

“About your health, I certainly have,” stammered out Baisemeaux.

“I wished to come here yesterday, but I was not able, as I was too fatigued,” continued Aramis. Baisemeaux anxiously slipped another cushion behind his guest’s back. “But,” continued Aramis, “I promised myself to come and pay you a visit to-day, early in the morning.”

“You are really very kind, my lord.”

“And it was a good thing for me I was punctual, I think.”

“What do you mean?”

“Yes, you were going out.” At which latter remark Baisemeaux colored and said, “It is true I was going out.”

“Then I prevent you,” said Aramis; whereupon the embarrassment of Baisemeaux became visibly greater. “I am putting you to inconvenience,” he continued, fixing a keen glace upon the poor governor; “if I had known that, I should not have come.”

“How can your lordship imagine that you could ever inconvenience me?”

“Confess you were going in search of money.”

“No,” stammered out Baisemeaux, “no! I assure you I was going to—”

“Does the governor still intend to go to M. Fouquet?” suddenly called out the major from below. Baisemeaux ran to the window like a madman. “No, no,” he exclaimed in a state of desperation, “who the deuce is speaking of M. Fouquet? are you drunk below there? why am I interrupted when I am engaged on business?”

“You were going to M. Fouquet’s,” said Aramis, biting his lips, “to M. Fouquet, the abbe, or the superintendent?”

Baisemeaux almost made up his mind to tell an untruth, but he could not summon courage to do so. “To the superintendent,” he said.

“It is true, then, that you were in want of money, since you were going to a person who gives it away!”

“I assure you, my lord—”

“You were afraid?”

“My dear lord, it was the uncertainty and ignorance in which I was as to where you were to be found.”

“You would have found the money you require at M. Fouquet’s, for he is a man whose hand is always open.”

“I swear that I should never have ventured to ask M. Fouquet for money. I only wished to ask him for your address.”

“To ask M. Fouquet for my address?” exclaimed Aramis, opening his eyes in real astonishment.

“Yes,” said Baisemeaux, greatly disturbed by the glance which the prelate fixed upon him,—“at M. Fouquet’s certainly.”

“There is no harm in that, dear M. Baisemeaux, only I would ask, why ask my address of M. Fouquet?”

“That I might write to you.”

“I understand,” said Aramis smiling, “but that is not what I meant; I do not ask you what you required my address for: I only ask why you should go to M. Fouquet for it?”

“Oh!” said Baisemeaux, “as Belle-Isle is the property of M. Fouquet, and as Belle-Isle is in the diocese of Vannes, and as you are bishop of Vannes—”

“But, my dear Baisemeaux, since you knew I was bishop of Vannes, you had no occasion to ask M. Fouquet for my address.”

“Well, monsieur,” said Baisemeaux, completely at bay, “if I have acted indiscreetly, I beg your pardon most sincerely.”

“Nonsense,” observed Aramis calmly: “how can you possibly have acted indiscreetly?” And while he composed his face, and continued to smile cheerfully on the governor, he was considering how Baisemeaux, who was not aware of his address, knew, however, that Vannes was his

residence. “I shall clear all this up,” he said to himself; and then speaking aloud, added,—“Well, my dear governor shall we now arrange our little accounts?”

“I am at your orders, my lord; but tell me beforehand, my lord, whether you will do me the honor to breakfast with me as usual?”

“Very willingly, indeed.”

“That’s well,” said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell before him three times.

“What does that mean?” inquired Aramis.

“That I have some one to breakfast with me, and that preparations are to be made accordingly.”

“And you rang thrice. Really, my dear governor, I begin to think you are acting ceremoniously with me.”

“No, indeed. Besides, the least I can do is to receive you in the best way I can.”

“But why so?”

“Because not even a prince could have done what you have done for me.”

“Nonsense! nonsense!”

“Nay, I assure you—”

“Let us speak of other matters,” said Aramis. “Or rather, tell me how your affairs here are getting on.”

“Not over well.”

“The deuce!”

“M. de Mazarin was not hard enough.”

“Yes, I see; you require a government full of suspicion—like that of the old cardinal, for instance.”

“Yes; matters went on better under him. The brother of his ‘gray eminence’ made his fortune here.”

“Believe me, my dear governor,” said Aramis, drawing closer to Baisemeaux, “a young king is well worth an old cardinal. Youth has its suspicions, its fits of anger, its prejudices, as old age has its hatreds, its precautions, and its fears. Have you paid your three years’ profits to Louvidre and Tremblay?”

“Most certainly I have.”

“So that you have nothing more to give them than the fifty thousand francs I have brought with me?”

“Nothing.”

“Have you not saved anything, then?”

“My lord, in giving the fifty thousand francs of my own to these gentlemen, I assure you that I gave them everything I gain. I told M. d’Artagnan so yesterday evening.”

“Ah!” said Aramis, whose eyes sparkled for a moment, but became immediately afterwards as unmoved as before; “so you have been to see my old friend D’Artagnan; how was he?”

“Wonderfully well.”

“And what did you say to him, M. de Baisemeaux?”

“I told him,” continued the governor, not perceiving his own thoughtlessness; “I told him that I fed my prisoners too well.”

“How many have you?” inquired Aramis, in an indifferent tone of voice.

“Sixty.”

“Well, that is a tolerably round number.”

“In former times, my lord, there were, during certain years, as many as two hundred.”

“Still a minimum of sixty is not to be grumbled at.”

“Perhaps not; for, to anybody but myself, each prisoner would bring in two hundred and fifty pistoles; for instance, for a prince of the blood I have fifty francs a day.”

“Only you have no prince of the blood; at least, I suppose so,” said Aramis, with a slight tremor in his voice.

“No, thank heaven!—I mean, no, unfortunately.”

“What do you mean by unfortunately?”

“Because my appointment would be improved by it. So fifty francs per day for a prince of the blood, thirty-six for a marechal of France—”

“But you have as many marechals of France, I suppose, as you have princes of the blood?”

“Alas! no more. It is true lieutenant-generals and brigadiers pay twenty-six francs, and I have two of them. After that, come councilors of parliament, who bring me fifteen francs, and I have six of them.”

“I did not know,” said Aramis, “that councilors were so productive.”

“Yes; but from fifteen francs I sink at once to ten francs; namely, for an ordinary judge, and for an ecclesiastic.”

“And you have seven, you say; an excellent affair.”

“Nay, a bad one, and for this reason. How can I possibly treat these poor fellows, who are of some good, at all events, otherwise than as a councilor of parliament?”

“Yes, you are right; I do not see five francs difference between them.”

“You understand; if I have a fine fish, I pay four or five francs for it; if I get a fine fowl, it cost me a franc and a half. I fatten a good deal of poultry, but I have to buy grain, and you cannot imagine the army of rats that infest this place.”

“Why not get half a dozen cats to deal with them?”

“Cats, indeed; yes, they eat them, but I was obliged to give up the idea because of the way in which they treated my grain. I have been obliged to have some terrier dogs sent me from England to kill the rats. These dogs, unfortunately, have tremendous appetites; they eat as much as a prisoner of the fifth order, without taking into account the rabbits and fowls they kill.”

Was Aramis really listening or not? No one could have told; his downcast eyes showed the attentive man, but the restless hand betrayed the man absorbed in thought—Aramis was meditating.

"I was saying," continued Baisemeaux, "that a good-sized fowl costs me a franc and a half, and that a fine fish costs me four or five francs. Three meals are served at the Bastile, and, as the prisoners, having nothing to do, are always eating, a ten-franc man costs me seven francs and a half."

"But did you not say that you treated those at ten francs like those at fifteen?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Very well! Then you gain seven francs and a half upon those who pay you fifteen francs."

"I *must* compensate myself somehow," said Baisemeaux, who saw how he had been snapped up.

"You are quite right, my dear governor; but have you no prisoners below ten francs?"

"Oh, yes! we have citizens and barristers at five francs."

"And do they eat, too?"

"Not a doubt about it; only you understand that they do not get fish or poultry, nor rich wines at every meal; but at all events thrice a week they have a good dish at their dinner."

"Really, you are quite a philanthropist, my dear governor, and you will ruin yourself."

"No; understand me; when the fifteen-franc has not eaten his fowl, or the ten-franc has left his dish unfinished, I send it to the five-franc prisoner; it is a feast for the poor devil, and one must be charitable, you know."

"And what do you make out of your five-franc prisoners?"

"A franc and a half."

"Baisemeaux, you're an honest fellow; in honest truth I say so."

“Thank you, my lord. But I feel most for the small tradesmen and bailiffs’ clerks, who are rated at three francs. They do not often see Rhine carp or Channel sturgeon.”

“But do not the five-franc gentlemen sometimes leave some scraps?”

“Oh! my lord, do not believe I am so stingy as that; I delight the heart of some poor little tradesman or clerk by sending him a wing of a red partridge, a slice of venison, or a slice of a truffled pasty, dishes which he never tasted except in his dreams; these are the leavings of the twenty-four-franc prisoners; and as he eats and drinks, at dessert he cries ‘Long live the King,’ and blesses the Bastile; with a couple bottles of champagne, which cost me five sous, I make him tipsy every Sunday. That class of people call down blessings upon me, and are sorry to leave the prison. Do you know that I have remarked, and it does me infinite honor, that certain prisoners, who have been set at liberty, have, almost immediately afterwards, got imprisoned again? Why should this be the case, unless it be to enjoy the pleasures of my kitchen? It is really the fact.”

Aramis smiled with an expression of incredulity.

“You smile,” said Baisemeaux.

“I do,” returned Aramis.

“I tell you that we have names which have been inscribed on our books thrice in the space of two years.”

“I must see it before I believe it,” said Aramis.

“Well, I can show it to you, although it is prohibited to communicate the registers to strangers; and if you really wish to see it with your own eyes—”

“I should be delighted, I confess.”

“Very well,” said Baisemeaux, and he took out of a cupboard a large register. Aramis followed him most anxiously with his eyes, and Baisemeaux returned, placed the register upon the table, and turned over the leaves for a minute, and stayed at the letter M.

“Look here,” said he, “Martinier, January, 1659; Martinier, June, 1660; Martinier, March, 1661. Mazarinades, etc.; you understand it was only a pretext; people were not sent to the Bastile for jokes against M. Mazarin; the fellow denounced himself in order to get imprisoned here.”

“And what was his object?”

“None other than to return to my kitchen at three francs a day.”

“Three francs—poor devil!”

“The poet, my lord, belongs to the lowest scale, the same style of board as the small tradesman and bailiff’s clerk; but I repeat, it is to those people that I give these little surprises.”

Aramis mechanically turned over the leaves of the register, continuing to read the names, but without appearing to take any interest in the names he read.

“In 1661, you perceive,” said Baisemeaux, “eighty entries; and in 1659, eighty also.”

“Ah!” said Aramis. “Seldon; I seem to know that name. Was it not you who spoke to me about a certain young man?”

“Yes, a poor devil of a student, who made—What do you call that where two Latin verses rhyme together?”

“A distich.”

“Yes; that is it.”

“Poor fellow; for a distich.”

“Do you know that he made this distich against the Jesuits?”

“That makes no difference; the punishment seems very severe. Do not pity him; last year you seemed to interest yourself in him.”

“Yes, I did so.”

“Well, as your interest is all-powerful here, my lord, I have treated him since that time as a prisoner at fifteen francs.”

“The same as this one, then,” said Aramis, who had continued turning over the leaves, and who had stopped at one of the names which followed Martinier.

“Yes, the same as that one.”

“Is that Marchiali an Italian?” said Aramis, pointing with his finger to the name which had attracted his attention.

“Hush!” said Baisemeaux.

“Why hush?” said Aramis, involuntarily clenching his white hand.

“I thought I had already spoken to you about that Marchiali.”

“No, it is the first time I ever heard his name pronounced.”

“That may be, but perhaps I have spoken to you about him without naming him.”

“Is he an old offender?” asked Aramis, attempting to smile.

“On the contrary, he is quite young.”

“Is his crime, then, very heinous?”

“Unpardonable.”

“Has he assassinated any one?”

“Bah!”

“An incendiary, then?”

“Bah!”

“Has he slandered any one?”

“No, no! It is he who—” and Baisemeaux approached Aramis’s ear, making a sort of ear-trumpet of his hands, and whispered: “It is he who presumes to resemble the—”

“Yes, yes,” said Aramis; “I now remember you already spoke about it last year to me; but the crime appeared to me so slight.”

“Slight, do you say?”

“Or rather, so involuntary.”

“My lord, it is not involuntarily that such a resemblance is detected.”

“Well, the fact is, I had forgotten it. But, my dear host,” said Aramis, closing the register, “if I am not mistaken, we are summoned.”

Baisemeaux took the register, hastily restored it to its place in the closet, which he locked, and put the key in his pocket. “Will it be agreeable to your lordship to breakfast now?” said he; “for you are right in supposing that breakfast was announced.”

“Assuredly, my dear governor,” and they passed into the dining-room.

Chapter XXIV. The Breakfast at Monsieur de Baisemeaux's.

Aramis was generally temperate; but on this occasion, while taking every care of his constitution, he did ample justice to Baisemeaux's breakfast, which, in all respects, was most excellent. The latter on his side, was animated with the wildest gayety; the sight of the five thousand pistoles, which he glanced at from time to time, seemed to open his heart. Every now and then he looked at Aramis with an expression of the deepest gratitude; while the latter, leaning back in his chair, took a few sips of wine from his glass, with the air of a connoisseur. "Let me never hear any ill words against the fare of the Bastile," said he, half closing his eyes; "happy are the prisoners who can get only half a bottle of such Burgundy every day."

"All those at fifteen francs drink it," said Baisemeaux. "It is very old Volnay."

"Does that poor student, Seldon, drink such good wine?"

"Oh, no!"

"I thought I heard you say he was boarded at fifteen francs."

"He! no, indeed; a man who makes districts—distichs I mean—at fifteen francs! No, no! it is his neighbor who is at fifteen francs."

"Which neighbor?"

"The other, second Bertaudiere."

"Excuse me, my dear governor; but you speak a language which requires quite an apprenticeship to understand."

"Very true," said the governor. "Allow me to explain: second Bertaudiere is the person who occupies the second floor of the tower of the Bertaudiere."

“So that Bertaudiere is the name of one of the towers of the Bastile? The fact is, I think I recollect hearing that each tower has a name of its own. Whereabouts is the one you are speaking of?”

“Look,” said Baisemeaux, going to the window. “It is that tower to the left—the second one.”

“Is the prisoner at fifteen francs there?”

“Yes.”

“Since when?”

“Seven or eight years, nearly.”

“What do you mean by nearly? Do you not know the dates more precisely?”

“It was not in my time, M. d’Herblay.”

“But I should have thought that Louviere or Tremblay would have told you.”

“The secrets of the Bastile are never handed over with the keys of the governorship.”

“Indeed! Then the cause of his imprisonment is a mystery—a state secret.”

“Oh, no! I do not suppose it is a state secret, but a secret—like everything that happens at the Bastile.”

“But,” said Aramis, “why do you speak more freely of Seldon than of second Bertaudiere?”

“Because, in my opinion, the crime of the man who writes a distich is not so great as that of the man who resembles—”

“Yes, yes; I understand you. Still, do not the turnkeys talk with your prisoners?”

“Of course.”

“The prisoners, I suppose, tell them they are not guilty?”

“They are *always* telling them that; it is a matter of course; the same song over and over again.”

“But does not the resemblance you were speaking about just now strike the turnkeys?”

“My dear M. d’Herblay, it is only for men attached to the court, as you are, to take trouble about such matters.”

“You’re right, you’re right, my dear M. Baisemeaux. Let me give you another taste of this Volnay.”

“Not a taste merely, a full glass; fill yours too.”

“Nay, nay! You are a musketeer still, to the very tips of your fingers, while I have become a bishop. A taste for me; a glass for yourself.”

“As you please.” And Aramis and the governor nodded to each other, as they drank their wine. “But,” said Aramis, looking with fixed attention at the ruby-colored wine he had raised to the level of his eyes, as if he wished to enjoy it with all his senses at the same moment, “but what you might call a resemblance, another would not, perhaps, take any notice of.”

“Most certainly he would, though, if it were any one who knew the person he resembles.”

“I really think, dear M. Baisemeaux, that it can be nothing more than a resemblance of your own creation.”

“Upon my honor, it is not so.”

“Stay,” continued Aramis. “I have seen many persons very like the one we are speaking of; but, out of respect, no one ever said anything about it.”

“Very likely; because there is resemblance and resemblance. This is a striking one, and, if you were to see him, you would admit it to be so.”

“If I were to see him, indeed,” said Aramis, in an indifferent tone; “but in all probability I never shall.”

“Why not?”

“Because if I were even to put my foot inside one of those horrible dungeons, I should fancy I was buried there forever.”

“No, no; the cells are very good places to live in.”

“I really do not, and cannot believe it, and that is a fact.”

“Pray do not speak ill of second Bertaudiere. It is really a good room, very nicely furnished and carpeted. The young fellow has by no means been unhappy there; the best lodging the Bastile affords has been his. There is a chance for you.”

“Nay, nay,” said Aramis, coldly; “you will never make me believe there are any good rooms in the Bastile; and, as for your carpets, they exist only in your imagination. I should find nothing but spiders, rats, and perhaps toads, too.”

“Toads?” cried Baisemeaux.

“Yes, in the dungeons.”

“Ah! I don’t say there are not toads in the dungeons,” replied Baisemeaux. “But—will you be convinced by your own eyes?” he continued, with a sudden impulse.

“No, certainly not.”

“Not even to satisfy yourself of the resemblance which you deny, as you do the carpets?”

“Some spectral-looking person, a mere shadow; an unhappy, dying man.”

“Nothing of the kind—as brisk and vigorous a young fellow as ever lived.”

“Melancholy and ill-tempered, then?”

“Not at all; very gay and lively.”

“Nonsense; you are joking.”

“Will you follow me?” said Baisemeaux.

“What for?”

“To go the round of the Bastile.”

“Why?”

“You will then see for yourself—see with your own eyes.”

“But the regulations?”

“Never mind them. To-day my major has leave of absence; the lieutenant is visiting the post on the bastions; we are sole masters of the situation.”

“No, no, my dear governor; why, the very idea of the sound of the bolts makes me shudder. You will only have to forget me in second or fourth Bertaudiere, and then—”

“You are refusing an opportunity that may never present itself again. Do you know that, to obtain the favor I propose to you gratis, some of the princes of the blood have offered me as much as fifty thousand francs.”

“Really! he must be worth seeing, then?”

“Forbidden fruit, my lord; forbidden fruit. You who belong to the church ought to know that.”

“Well, if had any curiosity, it would be to see the poor author of the distich.”

“Very well, we will see him, too; but if I were at all curious, it would be about the beautiful carpeted room and its lodger.”

“Furniture is very commonplace; and a face with no expression in it offers little or no interest.”

“But a boarder at fifteen francs is always interesting.”

“By the by, I forgot to ask you about that. Why fifteen francs for him, and only three francs for poor Seldon?”

“The distinction made in that instance was a truly noble act, and one which displayed the king’s goodness of heart to great advantage.”

“The king’s, you say.”

“The cardinal’s, I mean. ‘This unhappy man,’ said M. Mazarin, ‘is destined to remain in prison forever.’”

“Why so?”

“Why, it seems that his crime is a lasting one; and, consequently, his punishment ought to be so, too.”

“Lasting?”

“No doubt of it, unless he is fortunate enough to catch the small-pox, and even that is difficult, for we never get any impure air here.”

“Nothing can be more ingenious than your train of reasoning, my dear M. Baisemeaux. Do you, however, mean to say that this unfortunate man must suffer without interruption or termination?”

“I did not say he was to suffer, my lord; a fifteen-franc boarder does not suffer.”

“He suffers imprisonment, at all events.”

“No doubt; there is no help for that, but this suffering is sweetened for him. You must admit that this young fellow was not born to eat all the good things he does eat; for instance, such things as we have on the table now; this pasty that has not been touched, these crawfish from the River Marne, of which we have hardly taken any, and which are almost as large as lobsters; all these things will at once be taken to second Bertaudiere, with a bottle of that Volnay which you think so excellent. After you have seen it you will believe it, I hope.”

“Yes, my dear governor, certainly; but all this time you are thinking only of your very happy fifteen-franc prisoner, and you forget poor Seldon, my *protege*.”

“Well, out of consideration for you, it shall be a gala day for him; he shall have some biscuits and preserves with this small bottle of port.”

“You are a good-hearted fellow; I have said so already, and I repeat it, my dear Baisemeaux.”

“Well, let us set off, then,” said the governor, a little bewildered, partly from the wine he had drunk, and partly from Aramis’s praises.

“Do not forget that I only go to oblige you,” said the prelate.

“Very well; but you will thank me when you get there.”

“Let us go, then.”

“Wait until I have summoned the jailer,” said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell twice; at which summons a man appeared. “I am going to visit the towers,” said the governor. “No guards, no drums, no noise at all.”

“If I were not to leave my cloak here,” said Aramis, pretending to be alarmed, “I should really think I was going to prison on my own account.”

The jailer preceded the governor, Aramis walking on his right hand; some of the soldiers who happened to be in the courtyard drew themselves up in a line, as stiff as posts, as the governor passed along. Baisemeaux led the way down several steps which conducted to a sort of esplanade; thence they arrived at the drawbridge, where the sentinels on duty received the governor with the proper honors. The governor turned toward Aramis, and, speaking in such a tone that the sentinels could not lose a word, he observed,—“I hope you have a good memory, monsieur?”

“Why?” inquired Aramis.

“On account of your plans and your measurements, for you know that no one is allowed, not architects even, to enter where the prisoners are, with paper, pens or pencil.”

“Good,” said Aramis to himself, “it seems I am an architect, then. It sounds like one of D’Artagnan’s jokes, who perceived in me the engineer of Belle-Isle.” Then he added aloud: “Be easy on that score, monsieur; in our profession, a mere glance and a good memory are quite sufficient.”

Baisemeaux did not change countenance, and the soldiers took Aramis for what he seemed to be. “Very well; we will first visit la Bertaudiere,” said Baisemeaux, still intending the sentinels to hear him. Then, turning to the jailer, he added: “You will take the opportunity of carrying to No. 2 the few dainties I pointed out.”

“Dear M. de Baisemeaux,” said Aramis, “you are always forgetting No. 3.”

“So I am,” said the governor; and upon that, they began to ascend. The number of bolts, gratings, and locks for this single courtyard would have sufficed for the safety of an entire city. Aramis was neither an imaginative nor a sensitive man; he had been somewhat of a poet in his youth, but his heart was hard and indifferent, as the heart of every man of fifty-five years of age is, who has been frequently and passionately attached to women in his lifetime, or rather who has been passionately

loved by them. But when he placed his foot upon the worn stone steps, along which so many unhappy wretches had passed, when he felt himself impregnated, as it were, with the atmosphere of those gloomy dungeons, moistened with tears, there could be but little doubt he was overcome by his feelings, for his head was bowed and his eyes became dim, as he followed Baisemeaux without a syllable.

Chapter XXV. The Second Floor of la Bertaudiere.

On the second flight of stairs, whether from fatigue or emotion, the breathing of the visitor began to fail him, and he leaned against the wall. “Will you begin with this one?” said Baisemeaux; “for since we are going to both, it matters very little whether we ascend from the second to the third story, or descend from the third to the second.”

“No, no,” exclaimed Aramis, eagerly, “higher, if you please; the one above is the more urgent.” They continued their ascent. “Ask the jailer for the keys,” whispered Aramis. Baisemeaux did so, took the keys, and, himself, opened the door of the third room. The jailer was the first to enter; he placed upon the table the provisions, which the kind-hearted governor called dainties, and then left the room. The prisoner had not stirred; Baisemeaux then entered, while Aramis remained at the threshold, from which place he saw a youth about eighteen years of age, who, raising his head at the unusual noise, jumped off the bed, as he perceived the governor, and clasping his hands together, began to cry out, “My mother, my mother,” in tones which betrayed such deep distress that Aramis, despite his command over himself, felt a shudder pass through his frame. “My dear boy,” said Baisemeaux, endeavoring to smile, “I have brought you a diversion and an extra,—the one for the mind, the other for the body; this gentleman has come to take your measure, and here are some preserves for your dessert.”

“Oh, monsieur!” exclaimed the young man, “keep me in solitude for a year, let me have nothing but bread and water for a year, but tell me that at the end of a year I shall leave this place, tell me that at the end of a year I shall see my mother again.”

“But I have heard you say that your mother was very poor, and that you were very badly lodged when you were living with her, while here—upon my word!”

“If she were poor, monsieur, the greater reason to restore her only means of support to her. Badly lodged with her! Oh, monsieur, every one is always well lodged when he is free.”

“At all events, since you yourself admit you have done nothing but write that unhappy distich—”

“But without any intention, I swear. Let me be punished—cut off the hand which wrote it, I will work with the other—but restore my mother to me.”

“My boy,” said Baisemeaux, “you know very well that it does not depend upon me; all I can do for you is to increase your rations, give you a glass of port wine now and then, slip in a biscuit for you between a couple of plates.”

“Great heaven!” exclaimed the young man, falling backward and rolling on the ground.

Aramis, unable to bear this scene any longer, withdrew as far as the landing. “Unhappy, wretched man,” he murmured.

“Yes, monsieur, he is indeed very wretched,” said the jailer; “but it is his parents’ fault.”

“In what way?”

“No doubt. Why did they let him learn Latin? Too much knowledge, you see; it is that which does harm. Now I, for instance, can’t read or write, and therefore I am not in prison.” Aramis looked at the man, who seemed to think that being a jailer in the Bastile was not being in prison. As for Baisemeaux, noticing the little effect produced by his advice and his port wine, he left the dungeon quite upset. “You have forgotten to close the door,” said the jailer.

“So I have,” said Baisemeaux; “there are the keys, do you do it.”

“I will solicit the pardon of that poor boy,” said Aramis.

“And if you do not succeed,” said Baisemeaux, “at least beg that he may be transferred to the ten-franc list, by which both he and I shall be gainers.”

“If the other prisoner calls out for his mother in a similar manner,” said Aramis, “I prefer not to enter at all, but will take my measure from outside.”

“No fear of that, monsieur architect, the one we are now going to see is as gentle as a lamb; before he could call after his mother he must open his lips, and he never says a word.”

“Let us go in, then,” said Aramis, gloomily.

“Are you the architect of the prisons, monsieur?” said the jailer.

“I am.”

“It is odd, then, that you are not more accustomed to all this.”

Aramis perceived that, to avoid giving rise to any suspicions, he must summon all his strength of mind to his assistance. Baisemeaux, who carried the keys, opened the door. “Stay outside,” he said to the jailer, “and wait for us at the bottom of the steps.” The jailer obeyed and withdrew.

Baisemeaux entered first, and opened the second door himself. By the light which filtered through the iron-barred window, could be seen a handsome young man, short in stature, with closely cut hair, and a beard beginning to grow; he was sitting on a stool, his elbow resting on an armchair, and with all the upper part of his body reclining against it. His dress, thrown upon the bed, was of rich black velvet, and he inhaled the fresh air which blew in upon his breast through a shirt of the very finest cambric. As the governor entered, the young man turned his head with a look full of indifference; and on recognizing Baisemeaux, he arose and saluted him courteously. But when his eyes fell upon Aramis, who remained in the background, the latter trembled, turned pale, and his hat, which he held in his hand, fell upon the ground, as if all his muscles had become relaxed at once. Baisemeaux, habituated to the presence of his prisoner, did not seem to share any of the sensations which Aramis

experienced, but, with all the zeal of a good servant, he busied himself in arranging on the table the pasty and crawfish he had brought with him. Occupied in this manner, he did not remark how disturbed his guest had become. When he had finished, however, he turned to the young prisoner and said: “You are looking very well,—are you so?”

“Quite well, I thank you, monsieur,” replied the young man.

The effect of the voice was such as almost to overpower Aramis, and notwithstanding his control over himself, he advanced a few steps towards him, with his eyes wide open and his lips trembling. The movement he made was so marked that Baisemeaux, notwithstanding his preoccupation, observed it. “This gentleman is an architect who has come to examine your chimney,” said Baisemeaux; “does it smoke?”

“Never, monsieur.”

“You were saying just now,” said the governor, rubbing his hands together, “that it was not possible for a man to be happy in prison; here, however, is one who is so. You have nothing to complain of, I hope?”

“Nothing.”

“Do you ever feel weary?” said Aramis.

“Never.”

“Ha, ha,” said Baisemeaux, in a low tone of voice; “was I right?”

“Well, my dear governor, it is impossible not to yield to evidence. Is it allowed to put any question to him?”

“As many as you like.”

“Very well; be good enough to ask him if he knows why he is here.”

“This gentleman requests me to ask you,” said Baisemeaux, “if you are aware of the cause of your imprisonment?”

“No, monsieur,” said the young man, unaffectedly, “I am not.”

“That is hardly possible,” said Aramis, carried away by his feelings in spite of himself; “if you were really ignorant of the cause of your detention, you would be furious.”

“I was so during the early days of my imprisonment.”

“Why are you not so now?”

“Because I have reflected.”

“That is strange,” said Aramis.

“Is it not odd?” said Baisemeaux.

“May one venture to ask you, monsieur, on what you have reflected?”

“I felt that as I had committed no crime, Heaven could not punish me.”

“What is a prison, then,” inquired Aramis, “if it be not a punishment.”

“Alas! I cannot tell,” said the young man; “all that I can tell you now is the very opposite of what I felt seven years ago.”

“To hear you converse, to witness your resignation, one might almost believe that you liked your imprisonment?”

“I endure it.”

“In the certainty of recovering your freedom some day, I suppose?”

“I have no certainty; hope, I have, and that is all; and yet I acknowledge that this hope becomes less every day.”

“Still, why should you not again be free, since you have already been so?”

“That is precisely the reason,” replied the young man, “which prevents me from expecting liberty; why should I have been imprisoned at all if it had been intended to release me afterwards?”

“How old are you?”

“I do not know.”

“What is your name?”

“I have forgotten the name by which I was called.”

“Who are your parents?”

“I never knew them.”

“But those who brought you up?”

“They did not call me their son.”

“Did you ever love any one before coming here?”

“I loved my nurse, and my flowers.”

“Was that all?”

“I also loved my valet.”

“Do you regret your nurse and your valet?”

“I wept very much when they died.”

“Did they die since you have been here, or before you came?”

“They died the evening before I was carried off.”

“Both at the same time?”

“Yes, both at the same time.”

“In what manner were you carried off?”

“A man came for me, directed me to get into a carriage, which was closed and locked, and brought me here.”

“Would you be able to recognize that man again?”

“He was masked.”

“Is this not an extraordinary tale?” said Baisemeaux, in a low tone of voice, to Aramis, who could hardly breathe.

“It is indeed extraordinary,” he murmured.

“But what is still more extraordinary is, that he has never told me so much as he has just told you.”

“Perhaps the reason may be that you have never questioned him,” said Aramis.

“It’s possible,” replied Baisemeaux; “I have no curiosity. Have you looked at the room? it’s a fine one, is it not?”

“Very much so.”

“A carpet—”

“Beautiful.”

“I’ll wager he had nothing like it before he came here.”

“I think so, too.” And then again turning towards the young man, he said, “Do you not remember to have been visited at some time or another by a strange lady or gentleman?”

“Yes, indeed; thrice by a woman, who each time came to the door in a carriage, and entered covered with a veil, which she raised when we were together and alone.”

“Do you remember that woman?”

“Yes.”

“What did she say to you?”

The young man smiled mournfully, and then replied, “She inquired, as you have just done, if I were happy, and if I were getting weary.”

“What did she do on arriving, and on leaving you?”

“She pressed me in her arms, held me in her embrace, and kissed me.”

“Do you remember her?”

“Perfectly.”

“Do you recall her features distinctly?”

“Yes.”

“You would recognize her, then, if accident brought her before you, or led you into her person?”

“Most certainly.”

A flush of fleeting satisfaction passed across Aramis’s face. At this moment Baisemeaux heard the jailer approaching. “Shall we leave?” he said, hastily, to Aramis.

Aramis, who probably had learnt all that he cared to know, replied, “When you like.”

The young man saw them prepare to leave, and saluted them politely. Baisemeaux replied merely by a nod of the head, while Aramis, with a respect, arising perhaps from the sight of such misfortune, saluted the prisoner profoundly. They left the room, Baisemeaux closing the door behind them.

“Well,” said Baisemeaux, as they descended the staircase, “what do you think of it all?”

“I have discovered the secret, my dear governor,” he said.

“Bah! what is the secret, then?”

“A murder was committed in that house.”

“Nonsense.”

“But attend; the valet and nurse died the same day.”

“Well.”

“And by poison. What do you think?”

“That is very likely to be true.”

“What! that that young man is an assassin?”

“Who said that? What makes you think that poor young fellow could be an assassin?”

“The very thing I was saying. A crime was committed in his house,” said Aramis, “and that was quite sufficient; perhaps he saw the criminals, and it was feared that he might say something.”

“The deuce! if I only thought that—”

“Well?”

“I would redouble the surveillance.”

“Oh, he does not seem to wish to escape.”

“You do not know what prisoners are.”

“Has he any books?”

“None; they are strictly prohibited, and under M. de Mazarin’s own hand.”

“Have you the writing still?”

“Yes, my lord; would you like to look at it as you return to take your cloak?”

“I should, for I like to look at autographs.”

“Well, then, this one is of the most unquestionable authenticity; there is only one erasure.”

“Ah, ah! an erasure; and in what respect?”

“With respect to a figure. At first there was written: ‘To be boarded at fifty francs.’”

“As princes of the blood, in fact?”

“But the cardinal must have seen his mistake, you understand; for he canceled the zero, and has added a one before the five. But, by the by—”

“What?”

“You do not speak of the resemblance.”

“I do not speak of it, dear M. de Baisemeaux, for a very simple reason — because it does not exist.”

“The deuce it doesn’t.”

“Or, if it does exist, it is only in your own imagination; but, supposing it were to exist elsewhere, I think it would be better for you not to speak of about it.”

“Really.”

“The king, Louis XIV.—you understand—would be excessively angry with you, if he were to learn that you contributed in any way to spread the report that one of his subjects has the effrontery to resemble him.”

“It is true, quite true,” said Baisemeaux, thoroughly alarmed; “but I have not spoken of the circumstance to any one but yourself, and you understand, monseigneur, that I perfectly rely on your discretion.”

“Oh, be easy.”

“Do you still wish to see the note?”

“Certainly.”

While engaged in this manner in conversation, they had returned to the governor’s apartments; Baisemeaux took from the cupboard a private register, like the one he had already shown Aramis, but fastened by a lock, the key which opened it being one of a small bunch which Baisemeaux always carried with him. Then placing the book upon the table, he opened it at the letter “M,” and showed Aramis the following note in the column of observations: “No books at any time; all linen and clothes of the finest and best quality to be procured; no exercise; always the same jailer; no communications with any one. Musical instruments; every liberty and every indulgence which his welfare may require; to be boarded at fifteen francs. M. de Baisemeaux can claim more if the fifteen francs be not sufficient.”

“Ah,” said Baisemeaux, “now I think of it, I shall claim it.”

Aramis shut the book. “Yes,” he said, “it is indeed M. de Mazarin’s handwriting; I recognize it well. Now, my dear governor,” he continued, as if this last communication had exhausted his interest, “let us now turn over to our own little affairs.”

“Well, what time for repayment do you wish me to take? Fix it yourself.”

“There need not be any particular period fixed; give me a simple acknowledgement for one hundred and fifty thousand francs.”

“When to be made payable?”

“When I require it; but, you understand, I shall only wish it when you yourself do.”

“Oh, I am quite easy on that score,” said Baisemeaux, smiling; “but I have already given you two receipts.”

“Which I now destroy,” said Aramis; and after having shown the two receipts to Baisemeaux, he destroyed them. Overcome by so great a mark of confidence, Baisemeaux unhesitatingly wrote out an acknowledgement of a debt of one hundred and fifty thousand francs, payable at the pleasure of the prelate. Aramis, who had, by glancing over the governor’s shoulder, followed the pen as he wrote, put the acknowledgement into his pocket without seeming to have read it, which made Baisemeaux perfectly easy. “Now,” said Aramis, “you will not be angry with me if I were to carry off one of your prisoners?”

“What do you mean?”

“By obtaining his pardon, of course. Have I not already told you that I took a great interest in poor Seldon?”

“Yes, quite true, you did so.”

“Well?”

“That is your affair; do as you think proper. I see you have an open hand, and an arm that can reach a great way.”

“Adieu, adieu.” And Aramis left, carrying with him the governor’s best wishes.

Chapter XXVI. The Two Friends.

At the very time M. de Baisemeaux was showing Aramis the prisoners in the Bastile, a carriage drew up at Madame de Belliere's door, and, at that still early hour, a young woman alighted, her head muffled in a silk hood. When the servants announced Madame Vanel to Madame de Belliere, the latter was engaged, or rather was absorbed, in reading a letter, which she hurriedly concealed. She had hardly finished her morning toilette, her maid being still in the next room. At the name—at the footsteps of Marguerite Vanel, Madame de Belliere ran to meet her. She fancied she could detect in her friend's eyes a brightness which was neither that of health nor of pleasure. Marguerite embraced her, pressed her hands, and hardly allowed her time to speak. "Dearest," she said, "have you forgotten me? Have you quite given yourself up to the pleasures of the court?"

"I have not even seen the marriage *fetes*."

"What are you doing with yourself, then?"

"I am getting ready to leave for Belliere."

"For Belliere?"

"Yes."

"You are becoming rustic in your tastes, then; I delight to see you so disposed. But you are pale."

"No, I am perfectly well."

"So much the better; I was becoming uneasy about you. You do not know what I have been told."

"People say so many things."

"Yes, but this is very singular."

"How well you know how to excite curiosity, Marguerite."

“Well, I was afraid of vexing you.”

“Never; you have yourself always admired me for my evenness of temper.”

“Well, then, it is said that—no, I shall never be able to tell you.”

“Do not let us talk about it, then,” said Madame de Belliere, who detected the ill-nature that was concealed by all these prefaces, yet felt the most anxious curiosity on the subject.

“Well, then, my dear marquise, it is said, for some time past, you no longer continue to regret Monsieur de Belliere as you used to.”

“It is an ill-natured report, Marguerite. I do regret, and shall always regret, my husband; but it is now two years since he died. I am only twenty-eight years old, and my grief at his loss ought not always to control every action and thought of my life. You, Marguerite, who are the model of a wife, would not believe me if I were to say so.”

“Why not? Your heart is so soft and yielding,” she said, spitefully.

“Yours is so, too, Marguerite, and yet I did not perceive that you allowed yourself to be overcome by grief when your heart was wounded.” These words were in direct allusion to Marguerite’s rupture with the superintendent, and were also a veiled but direct reproach made against her friend’s heart.

As if she only awaited this signal to discharge her shaft, Marguerite exclaimed, “Well, Elise, it is said you are in love.” And she looked fixedly at Madame de Belliere, who blushed against her will.

“Women can never escape slander,” replied the marquise, after a moment’s pause.

“No one slanders you, Elise.”

“What!—people say that I am in love, and yet they do not slander me!”

“In the first place, if it be true, it is no slander, but simply a scandal-loving report. In the next place—for you did not allow me to finish what I was saying—the public does not assert that you have abandoned yourself to this passion. It represents you, on the contrary, as a virtuous but loving woman, defending yourself with claws and teeth, shutting

yourself up in your own house as in a fortress; in other respects, as impenetrable as that of Danae, notwithstanding Danae's tower was made of brass."

"You are witty, Marguerite," said Madame de Belliere, angrily.

"You always flatter me, Elise. In short, however, you are reported to be incorruptible and unapproachable. You cannot decide whether the world is calumniating you or not; but what is it you are musing about while I am speaking to you?"

"I?"

"Yes; you are blushing and do not answer me."

"I was trying," said the marquise, raising her beautiful eyes brightened with an indication of growing temper, "I was trying to discover to what you could possibly have alluded, you who are so learned in mythological subjects, in comparing me to Danae."

"You were trying to guess that?" said Marguerite, laughing.

"Yes; do you not remember that at the convent, when we were solving our problems in arithmetic—ah! what I have to tell you is learned also, but it is my turn—do you not remember, that if one of the terms were given, we were to find the other? Therefore do *you* guess now?"

"I cannot conjecture what you mean."

"And yet nothing is more simple. You pretend that I am in love, do you not?"

"So it is said."

"Very well; it is not said, I suppose, that I am in love with an abstraction. There must surely be a name mentioned in this report."

"Certainly, a name is mentioned."

"Very well; it is not surprising, then, that I should try to guess this name, since you do not tell it."

"My dear marquise, when I saw you blush, I did not think you would have to spend much time in conjectures."

“It was the word Danae which you used that surprised me. Danae means a shower of gold, does it not?”

“That is to say that the Jupiter of Danae changed himself into a shower of gold for her.”

“My lover, then, he whom you assign me—”

“I beg your pardon; I am your friend, and assign you no one.”

“That may be; but those who are ill disposed towards me.”

“Do you wish to hear the name?”

“I have been waiting this half hour for it.”

“Well, then, you shall hear it. Do not be shocked; he is a man high in power.”

“Good,” said the marquise, as she clenched her hands like a patient at the approach of the knife.

“He is a very wealthy man,” continued Marguerite; “the wealthiest, it may be. In a word, it is—”

The marquise closed her eyes for a moment.

“It is the Duke of Buckingham,” said Marguerite, bursting into laughter. This perfidy had been calculated with extreme ability; the name that was pronounced, instead of the name which the marquise awaited, had precisely the same effect upon her as the badly sharpened axes, that had hacked, without destroying, Messieurs de Chalais and de Thou upon the scaffold. She recovered herself, however, and said, “I was perfectly right in saying you were a witty woman, for you are making the time pass away most agreeably. This joke is a most amusing one, for I have never seen the Duke of Buckingham.”

“Never?” said Marguerite, restraining her laughter.

“I have never even left my own house since the duke has been at Paris.”

“Oh!” resumed Madame Vanel, stretching out her foot towards a paper which was lying on the carpet near the window; “it is not necessary for people to see each other, since they can write.” The marquise trembled,

for this paper was the envelope of the letter she was reading as her friend had entered, and was sealed with the superintendent's arms. As she leaned back on the sofa on which she was sitting, Madame de Belliere covered the paper with the thick folds of her large silk dress, and so concealed it.

"Come, Marguerite, tell me, is it to tell me all these foolish reports that you have come to see me so early in the day?"

"No; I came to see you, in the first place, and to remind you of those habits of our earlier days, so delightful to remember, when we used to wander about together at Vincennes, and, sitting beneath an oak, or in some sylvan shade, used to talk of those we loved, and who loved us."

"Do you propose that we should go out together now?"

"My carriage is here, and I have three hours at my disposal."

"I am not dressed yet, Marguerite; but if you wish that we should talk together, we can, without going to the woods of Vincennes, find in my own garden here, beautiful trees, shady groves, a green sward covered with daisies and violets, the perfume of which can be perceived from where we are sitting."

"I regret your refusal, my dear marquise, for I wanted to pour out my whole heart into yours."

"I repeat again, Marguerite, my heart is yours just as much in this room, or beneath the lime-trees in the garden here, as it would be under the oaks in the woods yonder."

"It is not the same thing for me. In approaching Vincennes, marquise, my ardent aspirations approach nearer to that object towards which they have for some days past been directed." The marquise suddenly raised her head. "Are you surprised, then, that I am still thinking of Saint-Mande?"

"Of Saint-Mande?" exclaimed Madame de Belliere; and the looks of both women met each other like two resistless swords.

"You, so proud!" said the marquise, disdainfully.

“I, so proud!” replied Madame Vanel. “Such is my nature. I do not forgive neglect—I cannot endure infidelity. When I leave any one who weeps at my abandonment, I feel induced still to love him; but when others forsake me and laugh at their infidelity, I love distractedly.”

Madame de Belliere could not restrain an involuntary movement.

“She is jealous,” said Marguerite to herself.

“Then,” continued the marquise, “you are quite enamored of the Duke of Buckingham—I mean of M. Fouquet?” Elise felt the allusion, and her blood seemed to congeal in her heart. “And you wished to go to Vincennes,—to Saint-Mande, even?”

“I hardly know what I wished: you would have advised me perhaps.”

“In what respect?”

“You have often done so.”

“Most certainly I should not have done so in the present instance, for I do not forgive as you do. I am less loving, perhaps; when my heart has been once wounded, it remains so always.”

“But M. Fouquet has not wounded you,” said Marguerite Vanel, with the most perfect simplicity.

“You perfectly understand what I mean. M. Fouquet has not wounded me; I do not know of either obligation or injury received at his hands, but you have reason to complain of him. You are my friend, and I am afraid I should not advise you as you would like.”

“Ah! you are prejudging the case.”

“The sighs you spoke of just now are more than indications.”

“You overwhelm me,” said the young woman suddenly, as if collecting her whole strength, like a wrestler preparing for a last struggle; “you take only my evil dispositions and my weaknesses into calculation, and do not speak of my pure and generous feelings. If, at this moment, I feel instinctively attracted towards the superintendent, if I even make an advance to him, which, I confess, is very probable, my motive for it is, that M. Fouquet’s fate deeply affects me, and because he is, in my opinion, one of the most unfortunate men living.”

“Ah!” said the marquise, placing her hand upon her heart, “something new, then, has occurred?”

“Do you not know it?”

“I am utterly ignorant of everything about him,” said Madame de Belliere, with the poignant anguish that suspends thought and speech, and even life itself.

“In the first place, then, the king’s favor is entirely withdrawn from M. Fouquet, and conferred on M. Colbert.”

“So it is stated.”

“It is very clear, since the discovery of the plot of Belle-Isle.”

“I was told that the discovery of the fortifications there had turned out to M. Fouquet’s honor.”

Marguerite began to laugh in so cruel a manner that Madame de Belliere could at that moment have delightedly plunged a dagger in her bosom. “Dearest,” continued Marguerite, “there is no longer any question of M. Fouquet’s honor; his safety is concerned. Before three days are passed the ruin of the superintendent will be complete.”

“Stay,” said the marquise, in her turn smiling, “that is going a little fast.”

“I said three days, because I wish to deceive myself with a hope; but probably the catastrophe will be complete within twenty-four hours.”

“Why so?”

“For the simplest of all reasons,—that M. Fouquet has no more money.”

“In matters of finance, my dear Marguerite, some are without money to-day, who to-morrow can procure millions.”

“That might be M. Fouquet’s case when he had two wealthy and clever friends who amassed money for him, and wrung it from every possible or impossible source; but those friends are dead.”

“Money does not die, Marguerite; it may be concealed, but it can be looked for, bought and found.”

“You see things on the bright side, and so much the better for you. It is really very unfortunate that you are not the Egeria of M. Fouquet; you might now show him the source whence he could obtain the millions which the king asked him for yesterday.”

“Millions!” said the marquise, in terror.

“Four—an even number.”

“Infamous!” murmured Madame de Belliere, tortured by her friend’s merciless delight.

“M. Fouquet, I should think, must certainly have four millions,” she replied, courageously.

“If he has those which the king requires to-day,” said Marguerite, “he will not, perhaps, possess those which the king will demand in a month or so.”

“The king will exact money from him again, then?”

“No doubt; and that is my reason for saying that the ruin of poor M. Fouquet is inevitable. Pride will induce him to furnish the money, and when he has no more, he will fall.”

“It is true,” said the marquise, trembling; “the plan is a bold one; but tell me, does M. Colbert hate M. Fouquet so very much?”

“I think he does not like him. M. Colbert is powerful; he improves on close acquaintance; he has gigantic ideas, a strong will, and discretion; he will rise.”

“He will be superintendent?”

“It is probable. Such is the reason, my dear marquise, why I felt myself impressed in favor of that poor man, who once loved, and even adored me; and why, when I see him so unfortunate, I forgive his infidelity, which I have reason to believe he also regrets; and why, moreover, I should not have been disinclined to afford him some consolation, or some good advice; he would have understood the step I had taken, and would have thought kindly of me for it. It is gratifying to be loved, you know. Men value love more highly when they are no longer blinded by its influence.”

The marquise, bewildered and overcome by these cruel attacks, which had been calculated with the greatest nicety and precision, hardly knew what to answer in return; she even seemed to have lost all power of thought. Her perfidious friend's voice had assumed the most affectionate tone; she spoke as a woman, but concealed the instincts of a wolf.

"Well," said Madame de Belliere, who had a vague hope that Marguerite would cease to overwhelm a vanquished enemy, "why do you not go and see M. Fouquet?"

"Decidedly, marquise, you have made me reflect. No, it would be unbecoming for me to make the first advance. M. Fouquet no doubt loves me, but he is too proud. I cannot expose myself to an affront.... besides, I have my husband to consider. You tell me nothing? Very well, I shall consult M. Colbert on the subject." Marguerite rose smilingly, as though to take leave, but the marquise had not the strength to imitate her. Marguerite advanced a few paces, in order that she might continue to enjoy the humiliating grief in which her rival was plunged, and then said, suddenly,—"You do not accompany me to the door, then?" The marquise rose, pale and almost lifeless, without thinking of the envelope, which had occupied her attention so greatly at the commencement of the conversation, and which was revealed at the first step she took. She then opened the door of her oratory, and without even turning her head towards Marguerite Vanel, entered it, closing the door after her. Marguerite said, or rather muttered a few words, which Madame de Belliere did not even hear. As soon, however, as the marquise had disappeared, her envious enemy, not being able to resist the desire to satisfy herself that her suspicions were well founded, advanced stealthily like a panther, and seized the envelope. "Ah!" she said, gnashing her teeth, "it was indeed a letter from M. Fouquet she was reading when I arrived," and then darted out of the room. During this interval, the marquise, having arrived behind the rampart, as it were, of her door, felt that her strength was failing her; for a moment she remained rigid, pale and motionless as a statue, and then, like a statue shaken on its base by

an earthquake, tottered and fell inanimate on the carpet. The noise of the fall resounded at the same moment as the rolling of Marguerite's carriage leaving the hotel.

Chapter XXVII. Madame de Belliere's Plate.

The blow had been the more painful on account of its being unexpected. It was some time before the marquise recovered herself; but once recovered, she began to reflect upon the events so heartlessly announced to her. She therefore returned, at the risk even of losing her life in the way, to that train of ideas which her relentless friend had forced her to pursue. Treason, then—deep menaces, concealed under the semblance of public interest—such were Colbert's maneuvers. A detestable delight at an approaching downfall, untiring efforts to attain this object, means of seduction no less wicked than the crime itself—such were the weapons Marguerite employed. The crooked atoms of Descartes triumphed; to the man without compassion was united a woman without heart. The marquise perceived, with sorrow rather than indignation, that the king was an accomplice in the plot which betrayed the duplicity of Louis XIII. in his advanced age, and the avarice of Mazarin at a period of life when he had not had the opportunity of gorging himself with French gold. The spirit of this courageous woman soon resumed its energy, no longer overwhelmed by indulgence in compassionate lamentations. The marquise was not one to weep when action was necessary, nor to waste time in bewailing a misfortune as long as means still existed of relieving it. For some minutes she buried her face in her cold fingers, and then, raising her head, rang for her attendants with a steady hand, and with a gesture betraying a fixed determination of purpose. Her resolution was taken.

"Is everything prepared for my departure?" she inquired of one of her female attendants who entered.

"Yes, madame; but it was not expected that your ladyship would leave for Belliere for the next few days."

“All my jewels and articles of value, then, are packed up?”

“Yes, madame; but hitherto we have been in the habit of leaving them in Paris. Your ladyship does not generally take your jewels with you into the country.”

“But they are all in order, you say?”

“Yes, in your ladyship’s own room.”

“The gold plate?”

“In the chest.”

“And the silver plate?”

“In the great oak closet.”

The marquise remained silent for a few moments, and then said calmly, “Let my goldsmith be sent for.”

Her attendants quitted the room to execute the order. The marquise, however, had entered her own room, and was inspecting her casket of jewels with the greatest attention. Never, until now, had she bestowed such close attention upon riches in which women take so much pride; never, until now, had she looked at her jewels, except for the purpose of making a selection according to their settings or their colors. On this occasion, however, she admired the size of the rubies and the brilliancy of the diamonds; she grieved over every blemish and every defect; she thought the gold light, and the stones wretched. The goldsmith, as he entered, found her thus occupied. “M. Faucheux,” she said, “I believe you supplied me with my gold service?”

“I did, your ladyship.”

“I do not now remember the amount of the account.”

“Of the new service, madame, or of that which M. de Belliere presented to you on your marriage? for I have furnished both.”

“First of all, the new one.”

“The covers, the goblets, and the dishes, with their covers, the *eau-epergne*, the ice-pails, the dishes for the preserves, and the tea and coffee urns, cost your ladyship sixty thousand francs.”

“No more?”

“Your ladyship thought the account very high.”

“Yes, yes; I remember, in fact, that it was dear; but it was the workmanship, I suppose?”

“Yes, madame; the designs, the chasings—all new patterns.”

“What proportion of the cost does the workmanship form? Do not hesitate to tell me.”

“A third of its value, madame.”

“There is the other service, the old one, that which belonged to my husband?”

“Yes, madame; there is less workmanship in that than in the other. Its intrinsic value does not exceed thirty thousand francs.”

“Thirty thousand,” murmured the marquise. “But, M. Faucheux, there is also the service which belonged to my mother; all that massive plate which I did not wish to part with, on account of the associations connected with it.”

“Ah! madame, that would indeed be an excellent resource for those who, unlike your ladyship, might not be in position to keep their plate. In chasing that they worked in solid metal. But that service is no longer in fashion. Its weight is its only advantage.”

“That is all I care about. How much does it weigh?”

“Fifty thousand livres at the very least. I do not allude to the enormous vases for the buffet, which alone weigh five thousand livres, or ten thousand the pair.”

“One hundred and thirty,” murmured the marquise. “You are quite sure of your figures, M. Faucheux?”

“The amount is entered in my books. Your ladyship is extremely methodical, I am aware.”

“Let us now turn to another subject,” said Madame de Belliere; and she opened one of her jewel-boxes.

“I recognize these emeralds,” said M. Faucheux; “for it was I who had the setting of them. They are the most beautiful in the whole court. No, I am mistaken; Madame de Chatillon has the most beautiful set; she had them from Messieurs de Guise; but your set, madame, comes next.”

“What are they worth?”

“Mounted?”

“No; supposing I wished to sell them.”

“I know very well who would buy them,” exclaimed M. Faucheux.

“That is the very thing I ask. They could be sold, then?”

“All your jewels could be sold, madame. It is well known that you possess the most beautiful jewels in Paris. You are not changeable in your tastes; when you make a purchase it is of the very best; and what you purchase you do not part with.”

“What could these emeralds be sold for, then?”

“A hundred and thirty thousand francs.”

The marquise wrote down upon her tablets the amount which the jeweler mentioned. “The ruby necklace?” she said.

“Are they balas-rubies, madame?”

“Here they are.”

“They are beautiful—magnificent. I did not know your ladyship had these stones.”

“What is their value?”

“Two hundred thousand francs. The center one is alone worth a hundred thousand.”

“I thought so,” said the marquise. “As for diamonds, I have them in numbers; rings, necklaces, sprigs, ear-rings, clasps. Tell me their value, M. Faucheux.”

The jeweler took his magnifying-glass and scales, weighed and inspected them, and silently made his calculations. “These stones,” he said, “must have cost your ladyship an income of forty thousand francs.”

“You value them at eight hundred thousand francs?”

“Nearly so.”

“It is about what I imagined—but the settings are not included?”

“No, madame; but if I were called upon to sell or to buy, I should be satisfied with the gold of the settings alone as my profit upon the transaction. I should make a good twenty-five thousand francs.”

“An agreeable sum.”

“Very much so, madame.”

“Will you then accept that profit, then, on condition of converting the jewels into money?”

“But you do not intend to sell you diamonds, I suppose, madame?” exclaimed the bewildered jeweler.

“Silence, M. Faucheux, do not disturb yourself about that; give me an answer simply. You are an honorable man, with whom my family has dealt for thirty years; you knew my father and mother, whom your own father and mother served. I address you as a friend; will you accept the gold of the settings in return for a sum of ready money to be placed in my hands?”

“Eight hundred thousand francs! it is enormous.”

“I know it.”

“Impossible to find.”

“Not so.”

“But reflect, madame, upon the effect which will be produced by the sale of your jewels.”

“No one need know it. You can get sets of false jewels made for me, similar to the real. Do not answer a word; I insist upon it. Sell them separately, sell the stones only.”

“In that way it is easy. Monsieur is looking out for some sets of jewels as well as single stones for Madame’s toilette. There will be a competition for them. I can easily dispose of six hundred thousand francs’ worth to Monsieur. I am certain yours are the most beautiful.”

“When can you do so?”

“In less than three days’ time.”

“Very well, the remainder you will dispose of among private individuals. For the present, make me out a contract of sale, payment to be made in four days.”

“I entreat you to reflect, madame; for if you force the sale, you will lose a hundred thousand francs.”

“If necessary, I will lose two hundred; I wish everything to be settled this evening. Do you accept?”

“I do, your ladyship. I will not conceal from you that I shall make fifty thousand francs by the transaction.”

“So much the better for you. In what way shall I have the money?”

“Either in gold, or in bills of the bank of Lyons, payable at M. Colbert’s.”

“I agree,” said the marquise, eagerly; “return home and bring the sum in question in notes, as soon as possible.”

“Yes, madame, but for Heaven’s sake—”

“Not a word, M. Faucheux. By the by, I was forgetting the silver plate. What is the value of that which I have?”

“Fifty thousand francs, madame.”

“That makes a million,” said the marquise to herself. “M. Faucheux, you will take away with you both the gold and silver plate. I can assign, as a pretext, that I wish it remodeled on patters more in accordance with my own taste. Melt it down, and return me its value in money, at once.”

“It shall be done, your ladyship.”

“You will be good enough to place the money in a chest, and direct one of your clerks to accompany the chest, and without my servants seeing him; and order him to wait for me in a carriage.”

“In Madame de Faucheux’s carriage?” said the jeweler.

“If you will allow it, and I will call for it at your house.”

“Certainly, your ladyship.”

"I will direct some of my servants to convey the plate to your house." The marquise rung. "Let the small van be placed at M. Faucheux's disposal," she said. The jeweler bowed and left the house, directing that the van should follow him closely, saying aloud, that the marquise was about to have her plate melted down in order to have other plate manufactured of a more modern style. Three hours afterwards she went to M. Faucheux's house and received from him eight hundred francs in gold inclosed in a chest, which one of the clerks could hardly carry towards Madame Faucheux's carriage—for Madame Faucheux kept her carriage. As the daughter of a president of accounts, she had brought a marriage portion of thirty thousand crowns to her husband, who was syndic of the goldsmiths. These thirty thousand crowns had become very fruitful during twenty years. The jeweler, though a *millionaire*, was a modest man. He had purchased a substantial carriage, built in 1648, ten years after the king's birth. This carriage, or rather house upon wheels, excited the admiration of the whole quarter in which he resided—it was covered with allegorical paintings, and clouds scattered over with stars. The marquise entered this somewhat extraordinary vehicle, sitting opposite the clerk, who endeavored to put his knees out of the way, afraid even of touching the marquise's dress. It was the clerk, too, who told the coachman, who was very proud of having a marquise to drive, to take the road to Saint-Mande.

Chapter XXVIII. The Dowry.

Monsieur Faucheux's horses were serviceable animals, with thickset knees and legs that had some difficulty in moving. Like the carriage, they belonged to the earlier part of the century. They were not as fleet as the English horses of M. Fouquet, and consequently it took two hours to get to Saint-Mande. Their progress, it might be said, was majestic. Majesty, however, precludes hurry. The marquise stopped the carriage at the door so well known to her, although she had seen it only once, under circumstances, it will now be remembered, no less painful than those which brought her now to it again. She drew a key from her pocket, and inserted it into the lock, pushed open the door, which noiselessly yielded to her touch, and directed the clerk to carry the chest upstairs to the first floor. The weight of the chest was so great that the clerk was obliged to get the coachman to assist him with it. They placed it in a small cabinet, ante-room, or boudoir rather, adjoining the saloon where we once saw M. Fouquet at the marquise's feet. Madame de Belliere gave the coachman a louis, smiled gracefully at the clerk, and dismissed them both. She closed the door after them, and waited in the room, alone and barricaded. There was no servant to be seen about the rooms, but everything was prepared as though some invisible genius had divined the wishes and desires of an expected guest. The fire was laid, candles in the candelabra, refreshments upon the table, books scattered about, fresh-cut flowers in the vases. One might almost have imagined it an enchanted house.

The marquise lighted the candles, inhaled the perfume of the flowers, sat down, and was soon plunged in profound thought. Her deep musings, melancholy though they were, were not untinged with a certain vague joy. Spread out before her was a treasure, a million wrung from

her fortune as a gleaner plucks the blue corn-flower from her crown of flowers. She conjured up the sweetest dreams. Her principal thought, and one that took precedence of all others, was to devise means of leaving this money for M. Fouquet without his possibly learning from whom the gift had come. This idea, naturally enough, was the first to present itself to her mind. But although, on reflection, it appeared difficult to carry out, she did not despair of success. She would then ring to summon M. Fouquet and make her escape, happier than if, instead of having given a million, she had herself found one. But, being there, and having seen the boudoir so coquettishly decorated that it might almost be said the least particle of dust had but the moment before been removed by the servants; having observed the drawing-room, so perfectly arranged that it might almost be said her presence there had driven away the fairies who were its occupants, she asked herself if the glance or gaze of those whom she had displaced—whether spirits, fairies, elves, or human creatures—had not already recognized her. To secure success, it was necessary that some steps should be seriously taken, and it was necessary also that the superintendent should comprehend the serious position in which he was placed, in order to yield compliance with the generous fancies of a woman; all the fascinations of an eloquent friendship would be required to persuade him, and, should this be insufficient, the maddening influence of a devoted passion, which, in its resolute determination to carry conviction, would not be turned aside. Was not the superintendent, indeed, known for his delicacy and dignity of feeling? Would he allow himself to accept from any woman that of which she had stripped herself? No! He would resist, and if any voice in the world could overcome his resistance, it would be the voice of the woman he loved.

Another doubt, and that a cruel one, suggested itself to Madame de Belliere with a sharp, acute pain, like a dagger thrust. Did he really love her? Would that volatile mind, that inconstant heart, be likely to be fixed for a moment, even were it to gaze upon an angel? Was it not the same with Fouquet, notwithstanding his genius and his uprightness of conduct, as with those conquerors on the field of battle who shed tears

when they have gained a victory? “I must learn if it be so, and must judge of that for myself,” said the marquise. “Who can tell whether that heart, so coveted, is not common in its impulses, and full of alloy? Who can tell if that mind, when the touchstone is applied to it, will not be found of a mean and vulgar character? Come, come,” she said, “this is doubting and hesitation too much—to the proof,” she said, looking at the timepiece. “It is now seven o’clock,” she said; “he must have arrived; it is the hour for signing his papers.” With a feverish impatience she rose and walked towards the mirror, in which she smiled with a resolute smile of devotedness; she touched the spring and drew out the handle of the bell. Then, as if exhausted beforehand by the struggle she had just undergone, she threw herself on her knees, in utter abandonment, before a large couch, in which she buried her face in her trembling hands. Ten minutes afterwards she heard the spring of the door sound. The door moved upon invisible hinges, and Fouquet appeared. He looked pale, and seemed bowed down by the weight of some bitter reflection. He did not hurry, but simply came at the summons. The preoccupation of his mind must indeed have been very great, that a man, so devoted to pleasure, for whom indeed pleasure meant everything, should obey such a summons so listlessly. The previous night, in fact, fertile in melancholy ideas, had sharpened his features, generally so noble in their indifference of expression, and had traced dark lines of anxiety around his eyes. Handsome and noble he still was, and the melancholy expression of his mouth, a rare expression with men, gave a new character to his features, by which his youth seemed to be renewed. Dressed in black, the lace in front of his chest much disarranged by his feverishly restless hand, the looks of the superintendent, full of dreamy reflection, were fixed upon the threshold of the room which he had so frequently approached in search of expected happiness. This gloomy gentleness of manner, this smiling sadness of expression, which had replaced his former excessive joy, produced an indescribable effect upon Madame de Belliere, who was regarding him at a distance.

A woman's eye can read the face of the man she loves, its every feeling of pride, its every expression of suffering; it might almost be said that Heaven has graciously granted to women, on account of their very weakness, more than it has accorded to other creatures. They can conceal their own feelings from a man, but from them no man can conceal his. The marquise divined in a single glace the whole weight of the unhappiness of the superintendent. She divined a night passed without sleep, a day passed in deceptions. From that moment she was firm in her own strength, and she felt that she loved Fouquet beyond everything else. She arose and approached him, saying, "You wrote to me this morning to say you were beginning to forget me, and that I, whom you had not seen lately, had no doubt ceased to think of you. I have come to undeceive you, monsieur, and the more completely so, because there is one thing I can read in your eyes."

"What is that, madame?" said Fouquet, astonished.

"That you have never loved me so much as at this moment; in the same manner you can read, in my present step towards you, that I have not forgotten you."

"Oh! madame," said Fouquet, whose face was for a moment lighted up by a sudden gleam of joy, "you are indeed an angel, and no man can suspect you. All he can do is to humble himself before you and entreat forgiveness."

"Your forgiveness is granted, then," said the marquise. Fouquet was about to throw himself upon his knees. "No, no," she said, "sit here by my side. Ah! that is an evil thought which has just crossed your mind."

"How do you detect it, madame?"

"By the smile that has just marred the expression of your countenance. Be candid, and tell me what your thought was—no secrets between friends."

"Tell me, then, madame, why you have been so harsh these three or four months past?"

"Harsh?"

“Yes; did you not forbid me to visit you?”

“Alas!” said Madame de Belliere, sighing, “because your visit to me was the cause of your being visited with a great misfortune; because my house is watched; because the same eyes that have seen you already might see you again; because I think it less dangerous for you that I should come here than that you should come to my house; and, lastly, because I know you to be already unhappy enough not to wish to increase your unhappiness further.”

Fouquet started, for these words recalled all the anxieties connected with his office of superintendent—he who, for the last few minutes, had indulged in all the wild aspirations of the lover. “I unhappy?” he said, endeavoring to smile: “indeed, marquise, you will almost make me believe I am so, judging from your own sadness. Are your beautiful eyes raised upon me merely in pity? I was looking for another expression from them.”

“It is not I who am sad, monsieur; look in the mirror, there—it is yourself.”

“It is true I am somewhat pale, marquise; but it is from overwork; the king yesterday required a supply of money from me.”

“Yes, four millions; I am aware of it.”

“You know it?” exclaimed Fouquet, in a tone of surprise; “how can you have learnt it? It was after the departure of the queen, and in the presence of one person only, that the king—”

“You perceive that I do know it; is that not sufficient? Well, go on, monsieur, the money the king has required you to supply—”

“You understand, marquise, that I have been obliged to procure it, then to get it counted, afterwards registered—altogether a long affair. Since Monsieur de Mazarin’s death, financial affairs occasion some little fatigue and embarrassment. My administration is somewhat overtaxed, and this is the reason why I have not slept during the past night.”

“So you have the amount?” inquired the marquise, with some anxiety.

“It would indeed be strange, marquise,” replied Fouquet, cheerfully, “if a superintendent of finances were not to have a paltry four millions in his coffers.”

“Yes, yes, I believe you either have, or will have them.”

“What do you mean by saying I shall have them?”

“It is not very long since you were required to furnish two millions.”

“On the contrary, it seems almost an age; but do not let us talk of money matters any longer.”

“On the contrary, we will continue to speak of them, for that is my only reason for coming to see you.”

“I am at a loss to compass your meaning,” said the superintendent, whose eyes began to express an anxious curiosity.

“Tell me, monsieur, is the office of superintendent a permanent position?”

“You surprise me, marchioness, for you speak as if you had some motive or interest in putting the question.”

“My reason is simple enough; I am desirous of placing some money in your hands, and naturally I wish to know if you are certain of your post.”

“Really, marquise, I am at a loss what to reply; I cannot conceive your meaning.”

“Seriously, then, dear M. Fouquet, I have certain funds which somewhat embarrass me. I am tired of investing my money in lands, and am anxious to intrust it to some friend who will turn it to account.”

“Surely it does not press,” said M. Fouquet.

“On the contrary, it is very pressing.”

“Very well, we will talk of that by and by.”

“By and by will not do, for my money is there,” returned the marquise, pointing out the coffer to the superintendent, and showing him, as she opened it, the bundles of notes and heaps of gold. Fouquet, who had risen from his seat at the same moment as Madame de Belliere, remained for a moment plunged in thought; then suddenly starting

back, he turned pale, and sank down in his chair, concealing his face in his hands. “Madame, madame,” he murmured, “what opinion can you have of me, when you make me such an offer?”

“Of you!” returned the marquise. “Tell me, rather, what you yourself think of the step I have taken.”

“You bring me this money for myself, and you bring it because you know me to be embarrassed. Nay, do not deny it, for I am sure of it. Can I not read your heart?”

“If you know my heart, then, can you not see that it is my heart I offer you?”

“I have guessed rightly, then,” exclaimed Fouquet. “In truth, madame, I have never yet given you the right to insult me in this manner.”

“Insult you,” she said, turning pale, “what singular delicacy of feeling! You tell me you love me; in the name of that affection you wish me to sacrifice my reputation and my honor, yet, when I offer you money which is my own, you refuse me.”

“Madame, you are at liberty to preserve what you term your reputation and your honor. Permit me to preserve mine. Leave me to my ruin, leave me to sink beneath the weight of the hatreds which surround me, beneath the faults I have committed, beneath the load, even, of my remorse, but, for Heaven’s sake, madame, do not overwhelm me with this last infliction.”

“A short time since, M. Fouquet, you were wanting in judgment; now you are wanting in feeling.”

Fouquet pressed his clenched hand upon his breast, heaving with emotion, saying: “overwhelm me, madame, for I have nothing to reply.”

“I offered you my friendship, M. Fouquet.”

“Yes, madame, and you limited yourself to that.”

“And what I am now doing is the act of a friend.”

“No doubt it is.”

“And you reject this mark of my friendship?”

“I do reject it.”

“Monsieur Fouquet, look at me,” said the marquise, with glistening eyes, “I now offer you my love.”

“Oh, madame,” exclaimed Fouquet.

“I have loved you for a long while past; women, like men, have a false delicacy at times. For a long time past I have loved you, but would not confess it. Well, then, you have implored this love on your knees, and I have refused you; I was blind, as you were a little while since; but as it was my love that you sought, it is my love I now offer you.”

“Oh! madame, you overwhelm me beneath a load of happiness.”

“Will you be happy, then, if I am yours—entirely?”

“It will be the supremest happiness for me.”

“Take me, then. If, however, for your sake I sacrifice a prejudice, do you, for mine, sacrifice a scruple.”

“Do not tempt me.”

“Do not refuse me.”

“Think seriously of what you are proposing.”

“Fouquet, but one word. Let it be ‘No,’ and I open this door,” and she pointed to the door which led into the streets, “and you will never see me again. Let that word be ‘Yes,’ and I am yours entirely.”

“Elise! Elise! But this coffer?”

“Contains my dowry.”

“It is your ruin,” exclaimed Fouquet, turning over the gold and papers; “there must be a million here.”

“Yes, my jewels, for which I care no longer if you do not love me, and for which, equally, I care no longer if you love me as I love you.”

“This is too much,” exclaimed Fouquet. “I yield, I yield, even were it only to consecrate so much devotion. I accept the dowry.”

“And take the woman with it,” said the marquise, throwing herself into his arms.

Chapter XXIX. Le Terrain de Dieu.

During the progress of these events Buckingham and De Wardes traveled in excellent companionship, and made the journey from Paris to Calais in undisturbed harmony together. Buckingham had hurried his departure, so that the greater part of his *adieux* were very hastily made. His visit to Monsieur and Madame, to the young queen, and to the queen-dowager, had been paid collectively—a precaution on the part of the queen-mother which saved him the distress of any private conversation with Monsieur, and also the danger of seeing Madame again. The carriages containing the luggage had already been sent on beforehand, and in the evening he set off in his traveling carriage with his attendants.

De Wardes, irritated at finding himself dragged away in so abrupt a manner by this Englishman, had sought in his subtle mind for some means of escaping from his fetters; but no one having rendered him any assistance in this respect, he was absolutely obliged, therefore, to submit to the burden of his own evil thoughts and caustic spirit.

Such of his friends in whom he had been able to confide, had, in their character of wits, rallied him upon the duke's superiority. Others, less brilliant, but more sensible, had reminded him of the king's orders prohibiting dueling. Others, again, and they the larger number, who, in virtue of charity, or national vanity, might have rendered him assistance, did not care to run the risk of incurring disgrace, and would, at the best, have informed the ministers of a departure which might end in a massacre on a small scale. The result was, that, after having fully deliberated upon the matter, De Wardes packed up his luggage, took a couple of horses, and, followed only by one servant, made his way towards the barrier, where Buckingham's carriage was to await him.

The duke received his adversary as he would have done an intimate acquaintance, made room beside him on the same seat with himself, offered him refreshments, and spread over his knees the sable cloak that had been thrown on the front seat. They then conversed of the court, without alluding to Madame; of Monsieur, without speaking of domestic affairs; of the king, without speaking of his brother's wife; of the queen-mother, without alluding to her daughter-in-law; of the king of England, without alluding to his sister; of the state of the affections of either of the travelers, without pronouncing any name that might be dangerous. In this way the journey, which was performed by short stages, was most agreeable, and Buckingham, almost a Frenchman from wit and education, was delighted at having so admirably selected his traveling companion. Elegant repasts were served, of which they partook but lightly; trials of horses made in the beautiful meadows that skirted the road; coursing indulged in, for Buckingham had his greyhounds with him; and in such ways did they pass away the pleasant time. The duke somewhat resembled the beautiful river Seine, which folds France a thousand times in its loving embrace, before deciding upon joining its waters with the ocean. In quitting France, it was her recently adopted daughter he had brought to Paris whom he chiefly regretted; his every thought was a remembrance of her—his every memory a regret. Therefore, whenever, now and then, despite his command over himself, he was lost in thought, De Wardes left him entirely to his musings. This delicacy might have touched Buckingham, and changed his feelings towards De Wardes, if the latter, while preserving silence, had shown a glance less full of malice, and a smile less false. Instinctive dislikes, however, are relentless; nothing appeases them; a few ashes may, sometimes, apparently, extinguish them; but beneath those ashes the smothered embers rage more furiously. Having exhausted every means of amusement the route offered, they arrived, as we have said, at Calais towards the end of the sixth day. The duke's attendants, since the previous evening, had traveled in advance, and now chartered a boat, for

the purpose of joining the yacht, which had been tacking about in sight, or bore broadside on, whenever it felt its white wings wearied, within cannon-shot of the jetty.

The boat was destined for the transport of the duke's equipages from the shore to the yacht. The horses had been embarked, having been hoisted from the boat upon the deck in baskets, expressly made for the purpose, and wadded in such a manner that their limbs, even in the most violent fits of terror or impatience, were always protected by the soft support which the sides afforded, and their coats not even turned. Eight of these baskets, placed side by side, filled the ship's hold. It is well known that, in short voyages horses refuse to eat, but remain trembling all the while, with the best of food before them, such as they would have greatly coveted on land. By degrees, the duke's entire equipage was transported on board the yacht; he was then informed that everything was in readiness, and that they only waited for him, whenever he would be disposed to embark with the French gentleman; for no one could possibly imagine that the French gentleman would have any other accounts to settle with his Grace other than those of friendship. Buckingham desired the captain to be told to hold himself in readiness, but that, as the sea was beautiful, and as the day promised a splendid sunset, he did not intend to go on board until nightfall, and would avail himself of the evening to enjoy a walk on the strand. He added also, that, finding himself in such excellent company, he had not the least desire to hasten his embarkation.

As he said this he pointed out to those who surrounded him the magnificent spectacle which the sky presented, of deepest azure in the horizon, the amphitheatre of fleecy clouds ascending from the sun's disc to the zenith, assuming the appearance of a range of snowy mountains, whose summits were heaped one upon another. The dome of clouds was tinged at its base with, as it were, the foam of rubies, fading away into opal and pearly tints, in proportion as the gaze was carried from base to summit. The sea was gilded with the same reflection, and upon the crest of every sparkling wave danced a point of light, like a diamond by

lamplight. The mildness of the evening, the sea breezes, so dear to contemplative minds, setting in from the east and blowing in delicious gusts; then, in the distance, the black outline of the yacht with its rigging traced upon the empurpled background of the sky—while, dotting the horizon, might be seen, here and there, vessels with their trimmed sails, like the wings of a seagull about to plunge; such a spectacle indeed well merited admiration. A crowd of curious idlers followed the richly dressed attendants, amongst whom they mistook the steward and the secretary for the master and his friend. As for Buckingham, who was dressed very simply, in a gray satin vest, and doublet of violet-colored velvet, wearing his hat thrust over his eyes, and without orders or embroidery, he was taken no more notice of than De Wardes, who was in black, like an attorney.

The duke's attendants had received directions to have a boat in readiness at the jetty head, and to watch the embarkation of their master, without approaching him until either he or his friend should summon them,—"whatever may happen," he had added, laying a stress upon these words, so that they might not be misunderstood. Having walked a few paces upon the strand, Buckingham said to De Wardes, "I think it is now time to take leave of each other. The tide, you perceive, is rising; ten minutes hence it will have soaked the sands where we are now walking in such a manner that we shall not be able to keep our footing."

"I await your orders, my lord, but—"

"But, you mean, we are still upon soil which is part of the king's territory."

"Exactly."

"Well, do you see yonder a kind of little island surrounded by a circle of water? The pool is increasing every minute, and the isle is gradually disappearing. This island, indeed, belongs to Heaven, for it is situated between two seas, and is not shown on the king's charts. Do you observe it?"

"Yes; but we can hardly reach it now, without getting our feet wet."

“Yes; but observe that it forms an eminence tolerably high, and that the tide rises up on every side, leaving the top free. We shall be admirably placed upon that little theatre. What do you think of it?”

“I shall be perfectly happy wherever I may have the honor of crossing my sword with your lordship’s.”

“Very well, then, I am distressed to be the cause of your wetting your feet, M. de Wardes, but it is most essential you should be able to say to the king: ‘Sire, I did not fight upon your majesty’s territory.’ Perhaps the distinction is somewhat subtle, but, since Port-Royal, your nation delights in subtleties of expression. Do not let us complain of this, however, for it makes your wit very brilliant, and of a style peculiarly your own. If you do not object, we will hurry ourselves, for the sea, I perceive, is rising fast, and night is setting in.”

“My reason for not walking faster was, that I did not wish to precede your Grace. Are you still on dry land, my lord?”

“Yes, at present I am. Look yonder! My servants are afraid we shall be drowned, and have converted the boat into a cruiser. Do you remark how curiously it dances upon the crests of the waves? But, as it makes me feel sea-sick, would you permit me to turn my back towards them?”

“You will observe, my lord, that in turning your back to them, you will have the sun full in your face.”

“Oh, its rays are very feeble at this hour and it will soon disappear; do not be uneasy on that score.”

“As you please, my lord; it was out of consideration for your lordship that I made the remark.”

“I am aware of that, M. de Wardes, and I fully appreciate your kindness. Shall we take off our doublets?”

“As you please, my lord.”

“Do not hesitate to tell me, M. de Wardes, if you do not feel comfortable upon the wet sand, or if you think yourself a little too close to French territory. We could fight in England, or even upon my yacht.”

“We are exceedingly well placed here, my lord; only I have the honor to remark that, as the sea is rising fast, we have hardly time—”

Buckingham made a sign of assent, took off his doublet and threw it on the ground, a proceeding which De Wardes imitated. Both their bodies, which seemed like phantoms to those who were looking at them from the shore, were thrown strongly into relief by a dark red violet-colored shadow with which the sky became overspread.

“Upon my word, your Grace,” said De Wardes, “we shall hardly have time to begin. Do you not perceive how our feet are sinking into the sand?”

“I have sunk up to the ankles,” said Buckingham, “without reckoning that the water is even now breaking in upon us.”

“It has already reached me. As soon as you please, therefore, your Grace,” said De Wardes, who drew his sword, a movement imitated by the duke.

“M. de Wardes,” said Buckingham, “one final word. I am about to fight you because I do not like you,—because you have wounded me in ridiculing a certain devotional regard I have entertained, and one which I acknowledge that, at this moment, I still retain, and for which I would very willingly die. You are a bad and heartless man, M. de Wardes, and I will do my very utmost to take your life; for I feel assured that, if you survive this engagement, you will, in the future, work great mischief towards my friends. That is all I have to remark, M. de Wardes,” concluded Buckingham as he saluted him.

“And I, my lord, have only this to reply to you: I have not disliked you hitherto, but, since you give me such a character, I hate you, and will do all I possibly can to kill you;” and De Wardes saluted Buckingham.

Their swords crossed at the same moment, like two flashes of lightning on a dark night. The swords seemed to seek each other, guessed their position, and met. Both were practiced swordsmen, and the earlier passes were without any result. The night was fast closing in, and it was so dark that they attacked and defended themselves almost

instinctively. Suddenly De Wardes felt his word arrested,—he had just touched Buckingham's shoulder. The duke's sword sunk, as his arm was lowered.

"You are wounded, my lord," said De Wardes, drawing back a step or two.

"Yes, monsieur, but only slightly."

"Yet you quitted your guard."

"Only from the first effect of the cold steel, but I have recovered. Let us go on, if you please." And disengaging his sword with a sinister clashing of the blade, the duke wounded the marquis in the breast.

"A hit?" he said.

"No," cried De Wardes, not moving from his place.

"I beg your pardon, but observing that your shirt was stained—" said Buckingham.

"Well," said De Wardes furiously, "it is now your turn."

And with a terrible lunge, he pierced Buckingham's arm, the sword passing between the two bones. Buckingham feeling his right arm paralyzed, stretched out his left, seized his sword, which was about falling from his nerveless grasp, and before De Wardes could resume his guard, he thrust him through the breast. De Wardes tottered, his knees gave way beneath him, and leaving his sword still fixed in the duke's arm, he fell into the water, which was soon crimsoned with a more genuine reflection than that which it had borrowed from the clouds. De Wardes was not dead; he felt the terrible danger that menaced him, for the sea rose fast. The duke, too, perceived the danger. With an effort and an exclamation of pain he tore out the blade which remained in his arm, and turning towards De Wardes said, "Are you dead, marquis?"

"No," replied De Wardes, in a voice choked by the blood which rushed from his lungs to his throat, "but very near it."

"Well, what is to be done; can you walk?" said Buckingham, supporting him on his knee.

“Impossible,” he replied. Then falling down again, said, “call to your people, or I shall be drowned.”

“Halloa! boat there! quick, quick!”

The boat flew over the waves, but the sea rose faster than the boat could approach. Buckingham saw that De Wardes was on the point of being again covered by a wave; he passed his left arm, safe and unwounded, round his body and raised him up. The wave ascended to his waist, but did not move him. The duke immediately began to carry his late antagonist towards the shore. He had hardly gone ten paces, when a second wave, rushing onwards higher, more furious and menacing than the former, struck him at the height of his chest, threw him over and buried him beneath the water. At the reflux, however, the duke and De Wardes were discovered lying on the strand. De Wardes had fainted. At this moment four of the duke’s sailors, who comprehended the danger, threw themselves into the sea, and in a moment were close beside him. Their terror was extreme when they observed how their master became covered with blood, in proportion to the water, with which it was impregnated, flowed towards his knees and feet; they wished to carry him.

“No, no,” exclaimed the duke, “take the marquis on shore first.”

“Death to the Frenchman!” cried the English sullenly.

“Wretched knaves!” exclaimed the duke, drawing himself up with a haughty gesture, which sprinkled them with blood, “obey directly! M. de Wardes on shore! M. de Wardes’s safety to be looked to first, or I will have you all hanged!”

The boat had by this time reached them; the secretary and steward leaped into the sea, and approached the marquis, who no longer showed any sign of life.

“I commit him to your care, as you value your lives,” said the duke. “Take M. de Wardes on shore.” They took him in their arms, and carried him to the dry sand, where the tide never rose so high. A few idlers and five or six fishermen had gathered on the shore, attracted by the strange spectacle of two men fighting with the water up to their knees. The

fishermen, observing a group of men approaching carrying a wounded man, entered the sea until the water was up to their waists. The English transferred the wounded man to them, at the very moment the latter began to open his eyes again. The salt water and the fine sand had got into his wounds, and caused him the acutest pain. The duke's secretary drew out a purse filled with gold from his pocket, and handed it to the one among those present who appeared of most importance, saying: "From my master, his Grace the Duke of Buckingham, in order that every possible care may be taken of the Marquis de Wardes."

Then, followed by those who had accompanied him, he returned to the boat, which Buckingham had been enabled to reach with the greatest difficulty, but only after he had seen De Wardes out of danger. By this time it was high tide; embroidered coats, and silk sashes were lost; many hats, too, had been carried away by the waves. The flow of the tide had borne the duke's and De Wardes's clothes to the shore, and De Wardes was wrapped in the duke's doublet, under the belief that it was his own, when the fishermen carried him in their arms towards the town.

Chapter XXX. Threefold Love.

As soon as Buckingham departed, Guiche imagined the coast would be perfectly clear for him without any interference. Monsieur, who no longer retained the slightest feeling of jealousy, and who, besides, permitted himself to be monopolized by the Chevalier de Lorraine, allowed as much liberty and freedom in his house as the most exacting could desire. The king, on his side, who had conceived a strong predilection for his sister-in-law's society, invented a variety of amusements, in quick succession to each other, in order to render her residence in Paris as cheerful as possible, so that in fact, not a day passed without a ball at the Palais Royal, or a reception in Monsieur's apartments. The king had directed that Fontainebleau should be prepared for the reception of the court, and every one was using his utmost interest to get invited. Madame led a life of incessant occupation; neither her voice nor her pen were idle for a moment. The conversations with De Guiche were gradually assuming a tone of interest which might unmistakably be recognized as the prelude of a deep-seated attachment. When eyes look languishingly while the subject under discussion happens to be colors of materials for dresses; when a whole hour is occupied in analyzing the merits and the perfume of a *sachet* or a flower; —there are words in this style of conversation which every one might listen to, but there are gestures and sighs that every one cannot perceive. After Madame had talked for some time with De Guiche, she conversed with the king, who paid her a visit regularly every day. They played, wrote verses, or selected mottoes or emblematical devices; this spring was not only the Maytide of nature, it was the youth of an entire people, of which those at court were the head. The king was handsome, young, and of unequaled gallantry. All women were passionately loved by him,

even the queen, his wife. This mighty monarch was, however, more timid and more reserved than any other person in the kingdom, to such a degree, indeed, that he did not confess his sentiments even to himself. This timidity of bearing restrained him within the limits of ordinary politeness, and no woman could boast of having any preference shown her beyond that shown to others. It might be foretold that the day when his real character would be displayed would be the dawn of a new sovereignty; but as yet he had not declared himself. M. de Guiche took advantage of this, and constituted himself the sovereign prince of the whole laughter-loving court. It had been reported that he was on the best of terms with Mademoiselle de Montalais; that he had been assiduously attentive to Mademoiselle de Chatillon; but now he was not even barely civil to any of the court beauties. He had eyes and ears for one person alone. In this manner, and, as it were, without design, he devoted himself to Monsieur, who had a great regard for him, and kept him as much as possible in his own apartments. Unsociable from natural disposition, he had estranged himself too much previous to the arrival of Madame, but, after her arrival, he did not estrange himself sufficiently. This conduct, which every one had observed, had been particularly remarked by the evil genius of the house, the Chevalier de Lorraine, for whom Monsieur exhibited the warmest attachment because he was of a very cheerful disposition, even in his remarks most full of malice, and because he was never at a loss how to wile the time away. The Chevalier de Lorraine, therefore, having noticed that he was threatened with being supplanted by De Guiche, resorted to strong measures. He disappeared from the court, leaving Monsieur much embarrassed. The first day of his absence, Monsieur hardly inquired about him, for he had De Guiche with him, and, except that the time given to conversation with Madame, his days and nights were rigorously devoted to the prince. On the second day, however, Monsieur, finding no one near him, inquired where the chevalier was. He was told that no one knew.

De Guiche, after having spent the morning in selecting embroideries and fringes with Madame, went to console the prince. But after dinner, as there were some amethysts to be looked at, De Guiche returned to

Madame's cabinet. Monsieur was left quite to himself during the time devoted to dressing and decorating himself; he felt that he was the most miserable of men, and again inquired whether there was any news of the chevalier, in reply to which he was told that no one could tell where the chevalier was to be found. Monsieur, hardly knowing in what direction to inflict his weariness, went to Madame's apartments dressed in his morning-gown. He found a large assemblage of people there, laughing and whispering in every part of the room; at one end, a group of women around one of the courtiers, talking together, amid smothered bursts of laughter; at the other end, Manicamp and Malicorne were being pillaged at cards by Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, while two others were standing by, laughing. In another part were Madame, seated upon some cushions on the floor, and De Guiche, on his knees beside her, spreading out a handful of pearls and precious stones, while the princess, with her white and slender fingers pointed out such among them as pleased her the most. Again, in another corner of the room, a guitar player was playing some of the Spanish seguedillas, to which Madame had taken the greatest fancy ever since she had heard them sung by the young queen with a melancholy expression of voice. But the songs which the Spanish princess had sung with tears in her eyes, the young Englishwoman was humming with a smile that well displayed her beautiful teeth. The cabinet presented, in fact, the most perfect representation of unrestrained pleasure and amusement. As he entered, Monsieur was struck at beholding so many persons enjoying themselves without him. He was so jealous at the sight that he could not resist exclaiming, like a child, "What! you are amusing yourselves here, while I am sick and tired of being alone!"

The sound of his voice was like a clap of thunder coming to interrupt the warbling of birds under the leafy covert of the trees; a dead silence ensued. De Guiche was on his feet in a moment. Malicorne tried to hide himself behind Montalais. Manicamp stood bolt upright, and assumed a very ceremonious demeanor. The guitar player thrust his instrument under a table, covering it with a piece of carpet to conceal it from the

prince's observation. Madame was the only one who did not move, and smiling at her husband, said, "Is not this the hour you usually devote to your toilette?"

"An hour which others select, it seems, for amusing themselves," replied the prince, grumblingly.

This untoward remark was the signal for a general rout; the women fled like a flock of terrified starlings; the guitar player vanished like a shadow; Malicorne, still protected by Montalais, who purposely widened out her dress, glided behind the hanging tapestry. As for Manicamp, he went to the assistance of De Guiche, who naturally remained near Madame, and both of them, with the princess herself, courageously sustained the attack. The count was too happy to bear malice against the husband; but Monsieur bore a grudge against his wife. Nothing was wanting but a quarrel; he sought it, and the hurried departure of the crowd, which had been so joyous before he arrived, and was so disturbed by his entrance, furnished him with a pretext.

"Why do they run away at the very sight of me?" he inquired, in a supercilious tone; to which remark Madame replied, that, "whenever the master of the house made his appearance, the family kept aloof out of respect." As she said this, she made so funny and so pretty a grimace, that De Guiche and Manicamp could not control themselves; they burst into a peal of laugher; Madame followed their example, and even Monsieur himself could not resist it, and he was obliged to sit down, as, for laughing, he could scarcely keep his equilibrium. However, he very soon left off, but his anger had increased. He was still more furious because he had permitted himself to laugh, than from having seen others laugh. He looked at Manicamp steadily, not venturing to show his anger towards De Guiche; but, at a sign which displayed no little amount of annoyance, Manicamp and De Guiche left the room, so that Madame, left alone, began sadly to pick up her pearls and amethysts, no longer smiling, and speaking still less.

“I am very happy,” said the duke, “to find myself treated as a stranger here, Madame,” and he left the room in a passion. On his way out, he met Montalais, who was in attendance in the ante-room. “It is very agreeable to pay you a visit here, but outside the door.”

Montalais made a very low obeisance. “I do not quite understand what your royal highness does me the honor to say.”

“I say that when you are all laughing together in Madame’s apartment, he is an unwelcome visitor who does not remain outside.”

“Your royal highness does not think, and does not speak so, of yourself?”

“On the contrary, it is on my own account that I do speak and think. I have no reason, certainly, to flatter myself about the reception I meet with here at any time. How is it that, on the very day there is music and a little society in Madame’s apartments—in my own apartments, indeed, for they are mine—on the very day that I wish to amuse myself a little in my turn, every one runs away? Are they afraid to see me, that they all take wing as soon as I appear? Is there anything wrong, then, going on in my absence?”

“Yet nothing has been done to-day, monseigneur, which is not done every day.”

“What! do they laugh like that every day?”

“Why, yes, monseigneur.”

“The same group of people simpering and the same singing and strumming going on every day?”

“The guitar, monseigneur, was introduced to-day; but when we have no guitars, we have violins and flutes; ladies soon weary without music.”

“The deuce!—and the men?”

“What men, monseigneur?”

“M. de Guiche, M. de Manicamp, and the rest of them?”

“They all belong to your highness’s household.”

“Yes, yes, you are right,” said the prince, as he returned to his own apartments, full of thought. He threw himself into the largest of his arm-chairs, without looking at himself in the glass. “Where can the chevalier be?” said he. One of the prince’s attendants happened to be near him, overheard his remark, and replied,—

“No one knows, your highness.”

“Still the same answer. The first one who answers me again, ‘I do not know,’ I will discharge.” Every one at this remark hurried out of his apartments, in the same manner as the others had fled from Madame’s apartments. The prince then flew into the wildest rage. He kicked over a chiffonier, which tumbled on the carpet, broken into pieces. He next went into the galleries, and with the greatest coolness threw down, one after another, an enameled vase, a porphyry ewer, and a bronze candelabrum. The noise summoned every one to the various doors.

“What is your highness’s pleasure?” said the captain of the guards, timidly.

“I am treating myself to some music,” replied the prince, gnashing his teeth.

The captain of the guards desired his royal highness’s physician to be sent for. But before he came, Malicorne arrived, saying to the prince, “Monseigneur, the Chevalier de Lorraine is here.”

The duke looked at Malicorne, and smiled graciously at him, just as the chevalier entered.

Chapter XXXI. M. de Lorraine's Jealousy.

The Duc d'Orleans uttered a cry of delight on perceiving the Chevalier de Lorraine. "This is fortunate, indeed," he said; "by what happy chance do I see you? Had you indeed disappeared, as every one assured me?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"A caprice?"

"I to venture upon caprices with your highness! The respect—"

"Put respect out of the way, for you fail in it every day. I absolve you; but why did you leave me?"

"Because I felt that I was of no further use to you."

"Explain yourself."

"Your highness has people about you who are far more amusing that *I* can ever be. I felt I was not strong enough to enter into contest with them, and I therefore withdrew."

"This extreme diffidence shows a want of common sense. Who are those with whom you cannot contend? De Guiche?"

"I name no one."

"This is absurd. Does De Guiche annoy you?"

"I do not say he does; do not force me to speak, however; you know very well that De Guiche is one of our best friends."

"Who is it, then?"

"Excuse me, monseigneur, let us say no more about it." The chevalier knew perfectly well that curiosity is excited in the same way as thirst — by removing that which quenches it; or in other words, by denying an explanation.

"No, no," said the prince; "I wish to know why you went away."

“In that case, monseigneur, I will tell you; but do not get angry. I remarked that my presence was disagreeable.”

“To whom?”

“To Madame.”

“What do you mean?” said the duke in astonishment.

“It is simple enough; Madame is very probably jealous of the regard you are good enough to testify for me.”

“Has she shown it to you?”

“Madame never addresses a syllable to me, particularly since a certain time.”

“Since *what* time?”

“Since the time when, M. de Guiche having made himself more agreeable to her than I could, she receives him at every and any hour.”

The duke colored. “At any hour, chevalier; what do you mean by that?”

“You see, your highness, I have already displeased you; I was quite sure I should.”

“I am not displeased; but what you say is rather startling. In what respect does Madame prefer De Guiche to you?”

“I shall say no more,” said the chevalier, saluting the prince ceremoniously.

“On the contrary, I require you to speak. If you withdraw on that account, you must indeed be very jealous.”

“One cannot help being jealous, monseigneur, when one loves. Is not your royal highness jealous of Madame? Would you not, if you saw some one always near Madame, and always treated with great favor, take umbrage at it? One’s friends are as one’s lovers. Your highness has sometimes conferred the distinguished honor upon me of calling me your friend.”

“Yes, yes,; but you used a phrase which has a very equivocal significance; you are unfortunate in your phrases.”

“What phrase, monseigneur?”

“You said, ‘treated with great favor.’ What do you mean by favor?”

“Nothing can be more simple,” said the chevalier, with an expression of great frankness; “for instance, whenever a husband remarks that his wife summons such and such a man near her; whenever this man is always to be found by her side, or in attendance at the door of her carriage; whenever the bouquet of the one is always the same color as the ribbons of the other; when music and supper parties are held in private apartments; whenever a dead silence takes place immediately the husband makes his appearance in his wife’s rooms; and when the husband suddenly finds that he has, as a companion, the most devoted and the kindest of men, who, a week before, was with him as little as possible; why, then—”

“Well, finish.”

“Why, then, I say, monseigneur, one possibly may get jealous. But all these details hardly apply; for our conversation had nothing to do with them.”

The duke was evidently very much agitated, and seemed to struggle with himself a good deal. “You have not told me,” he then remarked, “why you absented yourself. A little while ago you said it was from a fear of intruding; you added, even, that you had observed a disposition on Madame’s part to encourage De Guiche.”

“Pardon me, monseigneur, I did not say that.”

“You did, indeed.”

“Well, if I did say so, I observed nothing but what was very inoffensive.”

“At all events, you remarked something.”

“You embarrass me, monseigneur.”

“What does that matter? Answer me. If you speak the truth, why should you feel embarrassed?”

“I always speak the truth, monseigneur; but I also always hesitate when it is a question of repeating what others say.”

“Ah! repeat? It appears that it is talked about, then?”

“I acknowledge that others have spoken to me on the subject.”

“Who?” said the prince.

The chevalier assumed almost an angry air, as he replied, “Monseigneur, you are subjecting me to cross-examination; you treat me as a criminal at the bar; the rumors which idly pass by a gentleman’s ears do not remain there. Your highness wishes me to magnify rumors until it attains the importance of an event.”

“However,” said the duke, in great displeasure, “the fact remains that you withdrew on account of this report.”

“To speak the truth, others have talked to me of the attentions of M. de Guiche to Madame, nothing more; perfectly harmless, I repeat, and more than that, allowable. But do not be unjust, monseigneur, and do not attach any undue importance to it. It does not concern you.”

“M. de Guiche’s attentions to Madame do not concern me?”

“No, monseigneur; and what I say to you I would say to De Guiche himself, so little do I think of the attentions he pays Madame. Nay, I would say it even to Madame herself. Only you understand what I am afraid of—I am afraid of being thought jealous of the favor shown, when I am only jealous as far as friendship is concerned. I know your disposition; I know that when you bestow your affections you become exclusively attached. You love Madame—and who, indeed, would *not* love her? Follow me attentively as I proceed:—Madame has noticed among your friends the handsomest and most fascinating of them all; she will begin to influence you on his behalf in such a way that you will neglect the others. Your indifference would kill me; it is already bad enough to have to support Madame’s indifference. I have, therefore, made up my mind to give way to the favorite whose happiness I envy, even while I acknowledge my sincere friendship and sincere admiration for him. Well, monseigneur, do you see anything to object to in this reasoning? Is it not that of a man of honor? Is my conduct that of a sincere friend? Answer me, at least, after having so closely questioned me.”

The duke had seated himself, with his head buried in his hands. After a silence long enough to enable the chevalier to judge the effect of this oratorical display, the duke arose, saying, “Come, be candid.”

“As I always am.”

“Very well. You know that we already observed something respecting that mad fellow, Buckingham.”

“Do not say anything against Madame, monseigneur, or I shall take my leave. It is impossible you can be suspicious of Madame?”

“No, no, chevalier; I do not suspect Madame; but in fact, I observe—I compare—”

“Buckingham was a madman, monseigneur.”

“A madman about whom, however, you opened my eyes thoroughly.”

“No, no,” said the chevalier, quickly; “it was not I who opened your eyes, it was De Guiche. Do not confound us, I beg.” And he began to laugh in so harsh a manner that it sounded like the hiss of a serpent.

“Yes, yes; I remember. You said a few words, but De Guiche showed the most jealousy.”

“I should think so,” continued the chevalier, in the same tone. “He was fighting for home and altar.”

“What did you say?” said the duke, haughtily, thoroughly roused by this insidious jest.

“Am I not right? for does not M. de Guiche hold the chief post of honor in your household?”

“Well,” replied the duke, somewhat calmed, “had this passion of Buckingham been remarked?”

“Certainly.”

“Very well. Do people say that M. de Guiche’s is remarked as much?”

“Pardon me, monseigneur; you are again mistaken; no one says that M. de Guiche entertains anything of the sort.”

“Very good.”

“You see, monseigneur, that it would have been better, a hundred times better, to have left me in my retirement, than to have allowed you to conjure up, by aid of any scruples I may have had, suspicions which Madame will regard as crimes, and she would be in the right, too.”

“What would you do?”

“Act reasonably.”

“In what way?”

“I should not pay the slightest attention to the society of these new Epicurean philosophers; and, in that way, the rumors will cease.”

“Well, I will see; I will think it over.”

“Oh, you have time enough; the danger is not great; and then, besides, it is not a question of danger or of passion. It all arose from a fear I had to see your friendship for me decrease. From the very moment you restore it, with so kind an assurance of its existence, I have no longer any other idea in my head.”

The duke shook his head as if he meant to say: “If you have no more ideas, I have, though.” It being now the dinner hour, the prince sent to inform Madame of it; but she returned a message to the effect that she could not be present, but would dine in her own apartment.

“That is not my fault,” said the duke. “This morning, having taken them by surprise in the midst of a musical party, I got jealous; and so they are in the sulks with me.”

“We will dine alone,” said the chevalier, with a sigh; “I regret De Guiche is not here.”

“Oh! De Guiche will not remain long in the sulks; he is a very good-natured fellow.”

“Monseigneur,” said the chevalier, suddenly, “an excellent idea has struck me, in our conversation just now. I may have exasperated your highness, and caused you some dissatisfaction. It is but fitting that I should be the mediator. I will go and look for the count, and bring him back with me.”

“Ah! chevalier, you are really a very good-natured fellow.”

“You say that as if you were surprised.”

“Well, you are not so tender-hearted every day.”

“That may be; but confess that I know how to repair a wrong I may have done.”

“I confess that.”

“Will your highness do me the favor to wait here a few minutes?”

“Willingly; be off, and I will try on my Fontainebleau costume.”

The chevalier left the room, called his different attendant with the greatest care, as if he were giving them different orders. All went off in various directions; but he retained his *valet de chambre*. “Ascertain, and immediately, too, of M. de Guiche is not in Madame’s apartments. How can one learn it?”

“Very easily, monsieur. I will ask Malicorne, who will find out from Mlle. de Montalais. I may as well tell you, however, that the inquiry will be useless; for all M. de Guiche’s attendants are gone, and he must have left with them.”

“Ascertain, nevertheless.”

Ten minutes had hardly passed, when the valet returned. He beckoned his master mysteriously towards the servants’ staircase, and showed him into a small room with a window looking out upon the garden. “What is the matter?” said the chevalier; “why so many precautions?”

“Look, monsieur,” said the valet, “look yonder, under the walnut-tree.”

“Ah?” said the chevalier. “I see Manicamp there. What is he waiting for?”

“You will see in a moment, monsieur, if you wait patiently. There, do you see now?”

“I see one, two, four musicians with their instruments, and behind them, urging them on, De Guiche himself. What is he doing there, though?”

“He is waiting until the little door of the staircase, belonging to the ladies of honor, is opened; by that staircase he will ascend to Madame’s apartments, where some new pieces of music are going to be performed during dinner.”

“This is admirable news you tell me.”

“Is it not, monsieur?”

“Was it M. de Malicorne who told you this?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“He likes you, then?”

“No, monsieur, it is Monsieur that he likes.”

“Why?”

“Because he wishes to belong to his household.”

“And most certainly he shall. How much did he give you for that?”

“The secret which I now dispose of to you, monsieur.”

“And which I buy for a hundred pistoles. Take them.”

“Thank you, monsieur. Look, look, the little door opens; a woman admits the musicians.”

“It is Montalais.”

“Hush, monseigneur; do not call out her name; whoever says Montalais says Malicorne. If you quarrel with the one, you will be on bad terms with the other.”

“Very well; I have seen nothing.”

“And I,” said the valet, pocketing the purse, “have received nothing.”

The chevalier, being now certain that Guiche had entered, returned to the prince, whom he found splendidly dressed and radiant with joy, as with good looks. “I am told,” he exclaimed, “that the king has taken the sun as his device; really, monseigneur, it is you whom this device would best suit.”

“Where is De Guiche?”

“He cannot be found. He has fled—has evaporated entirely. Your scolding of this morning terrified him. He could not be found in his apartments.”

“Bah! the hair-brained fellow is capable of setting off post-haste to his own estates. Poor man! we will recall him. Come, let us dine now.”

“Monseigneur, to-day is a very festival of ideas; I have another.”

“What is it?”

“Madame is angry with you, and she has reason to be so. You owe her revenge; go and dine with her.”

“Oh! that would be acting like a weak and whimsical husband.”

“It is the duty of a good husband to do so. The princess is no doubt wearied enough; she will be weeping in her plate, and here eyes will get quite red. A husband who is the cause of his wife’s eyes getting red is an odious creature. Come, monseigneur, come.”

“I cannot; for I have directed dinner to be served here.”

“Yet see, monseigneur, how dull we shall be; I shall be low-spirited because I know that Madame will be alone; you, hard and savage as you wish to appear, will be sighing all the while. Take me with you to Madame’s dinner, and that will be a delightful surprise. I am sure we shall be very merry; you were in the wrong this morning.”

“Well, perhaps I was.”

“There is no perhaps at all, for it is a fact you were so.”

“Chevalier, chevalier, your advice is not good.”

“Nay, my advice is good; all the advantages are on your own side. Your violet-colored suit, embroidered with gold, becomes you admirably. Madame will be as much vanquished by the man as by the action. Come, monseigneur.”

“You decide me; let us go.”

The duke left his room, accompanied by the chevalier and went towards Madame’s apartments. The chevalier hastily whispered to the valet, “Be sure there are some people before that little door, so that no

one can escape in that direction. Run, run!" And he followed the duke towards the ante-chambers of Madame's suite of apartments, and when the ushers were about to announce them, the chevalier said, laughing, "His highness wishes to surprise Madame."

Chapter XXXII. Monsieur is Jealous of Guiche.

Monsieur entered the room abruptly, as persons do who mean well and think they confer pleasure, or as those who hope to surprise some secret, the terrible reward of jealous people. Madame, almost out of her senses with joy at the first bars of music, was dancing in the most unrestrained manner, leaving the dinner, which had been already begun, unfinished. Her partner was M. de Guiche, who, with his arms raised, and his eyes half closed, was kneeling on one knee, like the Spanish dancers, with looks full of passion, and gestures of the most caressing character. The princess was dancing round him with a responsive smile, and the same air of alluring seductiveness. Montalais stood by admiringly; La Vallière, seated in a corner of the room, looked on thoughtfully. It is impossible to describe the effect which the presence of the prince produced upon this gleeful company, and it would be equally impossible to describe the effect which the sight of their happiness produced upon Philip. The Comte de Guiche had no power to move; Madame remained in the middle of one of the figures and of an attitude, unable to utter a word. The Chevalier de Lorraine, leaning his back against the doorway, smiled like a man in the very height of the frankest admiration. The pallor of the prince, and the convulsive twitching of his hands and limbs, were the first symptoms that struck those present. A dead silence succeeded the merry music of the dance. The Chevalier de Lorraine took advantage of this interval to salute Madame and De Guiche most respectfully, affecting to join them together in his reverences as though they were the master and mistress of the house. Monsieur then approached them, saying, in a hoarse tone of voice, “I am delighted; I came here expecting to find you ill and low-spirited, and I

find you abandoning yourself to new amusements; really, it is most fortunate. My house is the pleasantest in the kingdom." Then turning towards De Guiche, "Comte," he said, "I did not know you were so good a dancer." And, again addressing his wife, he said, "Show a little more consideration for me, Madame; whenever you intend to amuse yourselves here, invite me. I am a prince, unfortunately, very much neglected."

Guiche had now recovered his self-possession, and with the spirited boldness which was natural to him, and sat so well upon him, he said, "Your highness knows very well that my very life is at your service, and whenever there is a question of its being needed, I am ready; but to-day, as it is only a question of dancing to music, I dance."

"And you are perfectly right," said the prince, coldly. "But, Madame," he continued, "you do not remark that your ladies deprive me of my friends; M. de Guiche does not belong to you, Madame, but to me. If you wish to dine without me you have your ladies. When I dine alone I have my gentlemen; do not strip me of *everything*."

Madame felt the reproach and the lesson, and the color rushed to her face. "Monsieur," she replied, "I was not aware, when I came to the court of France, that princesses of my rank were to be regarded as the women in Turkey are. I was not aware that we were not allowed to be seen; but, since such is your desire, I will conform myself to it; pray do not hesitate, if you should wish it, to have my windows barred, even."

This repartee, which made Montalais and De Guiche smile, rekindled the prince's anger, no inconsiderable portion of which had already evaporated in words.

"Very well," he said, in a concentrated tone of voice, "this is the way in which I am respected in my own house."

"Monseigneur, monseigneur," murmured the chevalier in the duke's ear, in such a manner that every one could observe he was endeavoring to calm him.

“Come,” replied the prince, as his only answer to the remark, hurrying him away, and turning round with so hasty a movement that he almost ran against Madame. The chevalier followed him to his own apartment, where the prince had no sooner seated himself than he gave free vent to his fury. The chevalier raised his eyes towards the ceiling, joined his hands together, and said not a word.

“Give me your opinion,” exclaimed the prince.

“Upon what?”

“Upon what is taking place here.”

“Oh, monseigneur, it is a very serious matter.”

“It is abominable! I cannot live in this manner.”

“How miserable all this is,” said the chevalier. “We hoped to enjoy tranquillity after that madman Buckingham had left.”

“And this is worse.”

“I do not say that, monseigneur.”

“Yes, but I say it; for Buckingham would never have ventured upon a fourth part of what we have just now seen.”

“What do you mean?”

“To conceal oneself for the purposes of dancing, and to feign indisposition in order to dine *tete-a-tete*.”

“No, no, monseigneur.”

“Yes, yes,” exclaimed the prince, exciting himself like a self-willed child; “but I will not endure it any longer, I must learn what is really going on.”

“Oh, monseigneur, an exposure—”

“By Heaven, monsieur, *shall* I put myself out of the way, when people show so little consideration for me? Wait for me here, chevalier, wait for me here.” The prince disappeared in the neighboring apartment and inquired of the gentleman in attendance if the queen-mother had returned from chapel.

Anne of Austria felt that her happiness was now complete; peace restored to her family, a nation delighted with the presence of a young monarch who had shown an aptitude for affairs of great importance; the revenues of the state increased; external peace assured; everything seemed to promise a tranquil future. Her thoughts recurred, now and then, to the poor young nobleman whom she had received as a mother, and had driven away as a hard-hearted step-mother, and she sighed as she thought of him.

Suddenly the Duc d'Orleans entered her room. "Dear mother," he exclaimed hurriedly, closing the door, "things cannot go on as they are now."

Anne of Austria raised her beautiful eyes towards him, and with an unmoved suavity of manner, said, "What do you allude to?"

"I wish to speak of Madame."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, madame."

"I suppose that silly fellow Buckingham has been writing a farewell letter to her."

"Oh! yes, madame; of course, it is a question of Buckingham."

"Of whom else could it be, then? for that poor fellow was, wrongly enough, the object of your jealousy, and I thought—"

"My wife, madame, has already replaced the Duke of Buckingham."

"Philip, what are you saying? You are speaking very heedlessly."

"No, no. Madame has so managed matters, that I am still jealous."

"Of whom, in Heaven's name?"

"Is it possible you have not remarked it? Have you not noticed that M. de Guiche is always in her apartments—always with her?"

The queen clapped her hands together, and began to laugh. "Philip," she said, "your jealousy is not merely a defect, it is a disease."

"Whether a defect or a disease, madame, I am the sufferer from it."

“And do you imagine that a complaint which exists only in your own imagination can be cured? You wish it to be said you are right in being jealous, when there is no ground whatever for your jealousy.”

“Of course, you will begin to say for this gentleman what you already said on the behalf of the other.”

“Because, Philip,” said the queen dryly, “what you did for the other, you are going to do for this one.”

The prince bowed, slightly annoyed. “If I give you facts,” he said, “will you believe me?”

“If it regarded anything else but jealousy, I would believe you without your bringing facts forward; but as jealousy is the case, I promise nothing.”

“It is just the same as if your majesty were to desire me to hold my tongue, and sent me away unheard.”

“Far from it; you are my son, I owe you a mother’s indulgence.”

“Oh, say what you think; you owe me as much indulgence as a madman deserves.”

“Do not exaggerate, Philip, and take care how you represent your wife to me as a woman of depraved mind—”

“But facts, mother, facts!”

“Well, I am listening.”

“This morning at ten o’clock they were playing music in Madame’s apartments.”

“No harm in that, surely.”

“M. de Guiche was talking with her alone—Ah! I forgot to tell you, that, during the last ten days, he has never left her side.”

“If they were doing any harm they would hide themselves.”

“Very good,” exclaimed the duke, “I expected you to say that. Pray remember with precision the words you have just uttered. This morning I took them by surprise, and showed my dissatisfaction in a very marked manner.”

“Rely upon it, that is quite sufficient; it was, perhaps, even a little too much. These young women easily take offense. To reproach them for an error they have not committed is, sometimes, almost equivalent to telling them they might be guilty of even worse.”

“Very good, very good; but wait a minute. Do not forget what you have just this moment said, that this morning’s lesson ought to have been sufficient, and that if they had been doing what was wrong, they would have hidden themselves.”

“Yes, I said so.”

“Well, just now, repenting of my hastiness of the morning, and imagining that Guiche was sulking in his own apartments, I went to pay Madame a visit. Can you guess what, or whom, I found there? Another set of musicians; more dancing, and Guiche himself—he was concealed there.”

Anne of Austria frowned. “It was imprudent,” she said. “What did Madame say?”

“Nothing.”

“And Guiche?”

“As much—oh, no! he muttered some impertinent remark or another.”

“Well, what is your opinion, Philip?”

“That I have been made a fool of; that Buckingham was only a pretext, and that Guiche is the one who is really to blame in the matter.”

Anne shrugged her shoulders. “Well,” she said, “what else?”

“I wish De Guiche to be dismissed from my household, as Buckingham was, and I shall ask the king, unless—”

“Unless what?”

“Unless you, my dear mother, who are so clever and so kind, will execute the commission yourself.”

“I will not do it, Philip.”

“What, madame?”

“Listen, Philip; I am not disposed to pay people ill compliments every day; I have some influence over young people, but I cannot take advantage of it without running the chances of losing it altogether. Besides, there is nothing to prove that M. de Guiche is guilty.”

“He has displeased me.”

“That is your own affair.”

“Very well, I know what I shall do,” said the prince, impetuously.

Anne looked at him with some uneasiness. “What do you intend to do?” she said.

“I will have him drowned in my fish-pond the very next time I find him in my apartments again.” Having launched this terrible threat, the prince expected his mother would be frightened out of her senses; but the queen was unmoved.

“Do so,” she said.

Philip was as weak as a woman, and began to cry out, “Every one betrays me,—no one cares for me; my mother, even, joins my enemies.”

“Your mother, Philip, sees further in the matter than you do, and does not care about advising you, since you will not listen to her.”

“I will go to the king.”

“I was about to propose that to you. I am now expecting his majesty; it is the hour he usually pays me a visit; explain the matter to him yourself.”

She had hardly finished when Philip heard the door of the ante-room open with some noise. He began to feel nervous. At the sound of the king’s footsteps, which could be heard upon the carpet, the duke hurriedly made his escape. Anne of Austria could not resist laughing, and was laughing still when the king entered. He came very affectionately to inquire after the even now uncertain health of the queen-mother, and to announce to her that the preparations for the journey to Fontainebleau were complete. Seeing her laugh, his uneasiness on her account diminished, and he addressed her in a

vivacious tone himself. Anne of Austria took him by the hand, and, in a voice full of playfulness, said, “Do you know, sire that I am proud of being a Spanish woman?”

“Why, madame?”

“Because Spanish women are worth more than English women at least.”

“Explain yourself.”

“Since your marriage you have not, I believe, had a single reproach to make against the queen.”

“Certainly not.”

“And you, too, have been married some time. Your brother, on the contrary, has been married but a fortnight.”

“Well?”

“He is now finding fault with Madame a second time.”

“What, Buckingham still?”

“No, another.”

“Who?”

“Guiche.”

“Really? Madame is a coquette, then?”

“I fear so.”

“My poor brother,” said the king, laughing.

“You don’t object to coquettes, it seems?”

“In Madame, certainly I do; but Madame is not a coquette at heart.”

“That may be, but your brother is excessively angry about it.”

“What does he want?”

“He wants to drown Guiche.”

“That is a violent measure to resort to.”

“Do not laugh; he is extremely irritated. Think of what can be done.”

“To save Guiche—certainly.”

“Of, if your brother heard you, he would conspire against you as your uncle did against your father.”

“No; Philip has too much affection for me for that, and I, on my side, have too great a regard for him; we shall live together on very good terms. But what is the substance of his request?”

“That you will prevent Madame from being a coquette and Guiche from being amiable.”

“Is that all? My brother has an exalted idea of sovereign power. To reform a man, not to speak about reforming a woman!”

“How will you set about it?”

“With a word to Guiche, who is a clever fellow, I will undertake to convince him.”

“But Madame?”

“That is more difficult; a word will not be enough. I will compose a homily and read it to her.”

“There is no time to be lost.”

“Oh, I will use the utmost diligence. There is a repetition of the ballet this afternoon.”

“You will read her a lecture while you are dancing?”

“Yes, madame.”

“You promise to convert her?”

“I will root out the heresy altogether, either by convincing her, or by extreme measures.”

“That is all right, then. Do not mix me up in the affair; Madame would never forgive me all her life, and as a mother-in-law, I ought to desire to live on good terms with my new-found daughter.”

“The king, madame, will take all upon himself. But let me reflect.”

“What about?”

“It would be better, perhaps, if I were to go and see Madame in her own apartment.”

“Would that not seem a somewhat serious step to take?”

“Yes; but seriousness is not unbecoming in preachers, and the music of the ballet would drown half my arguments. Besides, the object is to prevent any violent measures on my brother’s part, so that a little precipitation may be advisable. Is Madame in her own apartment?”

“I believe so.”

“What is my statement of grievances to consist of?”

“In a few words, of the following: music uninterruptedly; Guiche’s assiduity; suspicions of treasonable plots and practices.”

“And the proofs?”

“There *are* none.”

“Very well; I will go at once to see Madame.” The king turned to look in the mirrors at his costume, which was very rich, and his face, which was radiant as the morning. “I suppose my brother is kept a little at a distance,” said the king.

“Fire and water cannot be more opposite.”

“That will do. Permit me, madame, to kiss your hands, the most beautiful hands in France.”

“May you be successful, sire, as the family peacemaker.”

“I do not employ an ambassador,” said Louis, “which is as much as to say that I shall succeed.” He laughed as he left the room, and carelessly adjusted his ruffles as he went along.

Chapter XXXIII. The Mediator.

When the king made his appearance in Madame's apartments, the courtiers, whom the news of a conjugal misunderstanding had dispersed through the various apartments, began to entertain the most serious apprehensions. A storm was brewing in that direction, the elements of which the Chevalier de Lorraine, in the midst of the different groups, was analyzing with delight, contributing to the weaker, and acting, according to his own wicked designs, in such a manner with regard to the stronger, as to produce the most disastrous consequences possible. As Anne of Austria had herself said, the presence of the king gave a solemn and serious character to the event. Indeed, in the year 1662, the dissatisfaction of Monsieur with Madame, and the king's intervention in the private affairs of Monsieur, was a matter of no inconsiderable moment. 3

The boldest, even, who had been the associates of the Comte de Guiche, had, from the first moment, held aloof from him, with a sort of nervous apprehension; and the comte himself, infected by the general panic, retired to his own room. The king entered Madame's private apartments, acknowledging and returning the salutations, as he was always in the habit of doing. The ladies of honor were ranged in a line on his passage along the gallery. Although his majesty was very much preoccupied, he gave the glance of a master at the two rows of young and beautiful girls, who modestly cast down their eyes, blushing as they felt the king's gaze fall upon them. One only of the number, whose long hair fell in silken masses upon the most beautiful skin imaginable, was pale, and could hardly sustain herself, notwithstanding the knocks which her companion gave her with her elbow. It was La Vallière whom Montalais supported in that manner by whispering some of that courage to her

with which she herself was so abundantly provided. The king could not resist turning round to look at them again. Their faces, which had already been raised, were again lowered, but the only fair head among them remained motionless, as if all the strength and intelligence she had left had abandoned her. When he entered Madame's room, Louis found his sister-in-law reclining upon the cushions of her cabinet. She rose and made a profound reverence, murmuring some words of thanks for the honor she was receiving. She then resumed her seat, overcome by a sudden weakness, which was no doubt assumed, for a delightful color animated her cheeks, and her eyes, still red from the tears she had recently shed, never had more fire in them. When the king was seated, as soon as he had remarked, with that accuracy of observation which characterized him, the disorder of the apartment, and the no less great disorder of Madame's countenance, he assumed a playful manner, saying, "My dear sister, at what hour to-day would you wish the repetition of the ballet to take place?"

Madame, shaking her charming head, slowly and languishingly said: "Ah! sire, will you graciously excuse my appearance at the repetition? I was about to send to inform you that I could not attend to-day."

"Indeed," said the king, in apparent surprise; "are you not well?"

"No, sire."

"I will summon your medical attendants, then."

"No, for they can do nothing for my indisposition."

"You alarm me."

"Sire, I wish to ask your majesty's permission to return to England."

The king started. "Return to England," he said; "do you really say what you mean?"

"I say it reluctantly, sire," replied the grand-daughter of Henry IV., firmly, her beautiful black eyes flashing. "I regret to have to confide such matters to your majesty, but I feel myself too unhappy at your majesty's court; and I wish to return to my own family."

"Madame, madame," exclaimed the king, as he approached her.

“Listen to me, sire,” continued the young woman, acquiring by degrees that ascendency over her interrogator which her beauty and her nervous nature conferred; “young as I am, I have already suffered humiliation, and have endured disdain here. Oh! do not contradict me, sire,” she said, with a smile. The king colored.

“Then,” she continued, “I had reasoned myself into the belief that Heaven called me into existence with that object—I, the daughter of a powerful monarch; that since my father had been deprived of life, Heaven could well smite my pride. I have suffered greatly; I have been the cause, too, of my mother suffering much; but I vowed that if Providence ever placed me in a position of independence, even were it that of a workman of the lower classes, who gains her bread by her labor, I would never suffer humiliation again. That day has now arrived; I have been restored to the fortune due to my rank and to my birth; I have even ascended again the steps of a throne, and I thought that, in allying myself with a French prince, I should find in him a relation, a friend, an equal; but I perceive I have found only a master, and I rebel. My mother shall know nothing of it; you whom I respect, and whom I—love—”

The king started; never had any voice so gratified his ear.

“You, sire, who know all, since you have come here; you will, perhaps, understand me. If you had not come, I should have gone to you. I wish for permission to go away. I leave it to your delicacy of feeling to exculpate and to protect me.”

“My dear sister,” murmured the king, overpowered by this bold attack, “have you reflected upon the enormous difficulty of the project you have conceived?”

“Sire, I do not reflect, I feel. Attacked, I instinctively repel the attack, nothing more.”

“Come, tell me, what have they done to you?” said the king.

The princess, it will have been seen, by this peculiarly feminine maneuver, had escaped every reproach, and advanced on her side a far more serious one; from the accused she became the accuser. It is an infallible sign of guilt; but notwithstanding that, all women, even the

least clever of the sex, invariably know how to derive some such means of turning the tables. The king had forgotten that he was paying her a visit in order to say to her, “What have you done to my brother?” and he was reduced to weakly asking her, “What have they done to you?”

“What have they done to me?” replied Madame. “One must be a woman to understand it, sire—they have made me shed tears;” and, with one of her fingers, whose slenderness and perfect whiteness were unequaled, she pointed to her brilliant eyes swimming with unshed drops, and again began to weep.

“I implore you, my dear sister!” said the king, advancing to take her warm and throbbing hand, which she abandoned to him.

“In the first place, sire, I was deprived of the presence of my brother’s friend. The Duke of Buckingham was an agreeable, cheerful visitor; my own countryman, who knew my habits; I will say almost a companion, so accustomed had we been to pass our days together, with our other friends, upon the beautiful piece of water at St. James’s.”

“But Villiers was in love with you.”

“A pretext! What does it matter,” she said, seriously, “whether the duke was in love with me or not? Is a man in love so very dangerous for me? Ah! sire, it is not sufficient for a man to love a woman.” And she smiled so tenderly, and with so much archness, that the king felt his heart swell and throb in his breast.

“At all events, if my brother were jealous?” interrupted the king.

“Very well, I admit that is a reason; and the duke was sent away accordingly.”

“No, not sent away.”

“Driven away, dismissed, expelled, then, if you prefer it, sire. One of the first gentlemen of Europe obliged to leave the court of the King of France, of Louis XIV., like a beggar, on account of a glance or a bouquet. It was little worthy of a most gallant court; but forgive me, sire; I forgot, that, in speaking thus, I am attacking your sovereign power.”

“I assure you, my dear sister, it was not I who dismissed the Duke of Buckingham; I was charmed with him.”

“It was not you?” said Madame; “ah! so much the better;” and she emphasized the “so much the better,” as if she had instead said, “so much the worse.”

A few minutes’ silence ensued. She then resumed: “The Duke of Buckingham having left—I now know why and by whose means—I thought I should have recovered my tranquillity; but not at all, for all at once Monsieur found another pretext; all at once—”

“All at once,” said the king, playfully, “some one else presents himself. It is but natural; you are beautiful, and will always meet with men who will madly love you.”

“In that case,” exclaimed the princess, “I will create a solitude around me, which indeed seems to be what is wished, and what is being prepared for me. But no, I prefer to return to London. There I am known and appreciated. I shall have friends, without fearing they may be regarded as my lovers. Shame! it is a disgraceful suspicion, and unworthy a gentleman. Monsieur has lost everything in my estimation, since he has shown me he can be a tyrant to a woman.”

“Nay, nay, my brother’s only fault is that of loving you.”

“Love me! Monsieur love me! Ah! sire,” and she burst out laughing. “Monsieur will never love any woman,” she said; “Monsieur loves himself too much; no, unhappily for me, Monsieur’s jealousy is of the worst kind—he is jealous without love.”

“Confess, however,” said the king, who began to be excited by this varied and animated conversation; “confess that Guiche loves you.”

“Ah! sire, I know nothing about that.”

“You must have perceived it. A man who loves readily betrays himself.”

“M. de Guiche has not betrayed himself.”

“My dear sister, you are defending M. de Guiche.”

“I, indeed! Ah, sire, I only needed a suspicion from yourself to crown my wretchedness.”

“No, madame, no,” returned the king, hurriedly; “do not distress yourself. Nay, you are weeping. I implore you to calm yourself.”

She wept, however, and large tears fell upon her hands; the king took one of her hands in his, and kissed the tears away. She looked at him so sadly and with so much tenderness that he felt his heart giving way under her gaze.

“You have no kind of feeling, then, for Guiche?” he said, more disturbed than became his character of mediator.

“None—absolutely none.”

“Then I can reassure my brother in that respect?”

“Nothing will satisfy him, sire. Do not believe he is jealous. Monsieur has been badly advised by some one, and he is of nervous disposition.”

“He may well be so when you are concerned,” said the king.

Madame cast down her eyes, and was silent; the king did so likewise, still holding her hand all the while. Their momentary silence seemed to last an age. Madame gently withdrew her hand, and from that moment, she felt her triumph was certain, and that the field of battle was her own.

“Monsieur complains,” said the king, “that you prefer the society of private individuals to his own conversation and society.”

“But Monsieur passes his life in looking at his face in the glass, and in plotting all sorts of spiteful things against women with the Chevalier de Lorraine.”

“Oh, you are going somewhat too far.”

“I only tell you what is true. Do you observe for yourself, sire, and you will see that I am right.”

“I will observe; but, in the meantime, what satisfaction can I give my brother?”

“My departure.”

“You repeat that word,” exclaimed the king, imprudently, as if, during the last ten minutes, such a change had been produced that Madame would have had all her ideas on the subject thoroughly changed.

“Sire, I cannot be happy here any longer,” she said. “M. de Guiche annoys Monsieur. Will he be sent away, too?”

“If it be necessary, why not?” replied the king, smiling.

“Well; and after M. de Guiche—whom, by the by, I shall regret—I warn you, sire.”

“Ah, you will regret him?”

“Certainly; he is amiable, he has a great friendship for me, and he amuses me.”

“If Monsieur were only to hear you,” said the king, slightly annoyed, “do you know I would not undertake to make it up again between you; nay, I would not even attempt it.”

“Sire, can you, even now, prevent Monsieur from being jealous of the first person who may approach? I know very well that M. de Guiche is not the first.”

“Again I warn you that as a good brother I shall take a dislike to De Guiche.”

“Ah, sire, do not, I entreat you, adopt either the sympathies or the dislikes of Monsieur. Remain king; better for yourself and for every one else.”

“You jest charmingly, madame; and I can well understand how the people you attack must adore you.”

“And is that the reason why you, sire, whom I had regarded as my defender, are about to join these who persecute me?” said Madame.

“I your persecutor! Heaven forbid!”

“Then,” she continued, languishingly, “grant me a favor.”

“Whatever you wish.”

“Let me return to England.”

“Never, never!” exclaimed Louis XIV.

“I am a prisoner, then?”

“In France—if France is a prison—yes.”

“What must I do, then?”

“I will tell you. Instead of devoting yourself to friendships which are somewhat unstable, instead of alarming us by your retirement, remain always in our society, do not leave us, let us live as a united family. M. de Guiche is certainly very amiable; but if, at least, we do not possess his wit—”

“Ah, sire, you know very well you are pretending to be modest.”

“No, I swear to you. One may be a king, and yet feel that he possesses fewer chances of pleasing than many other gentlemen.”

“I am sure, sire, that you do not believe a single word you are saying.”

The king looked at Madame tenderly, and said, “Will you promise me one thing?”

“What is it?”

“That you will no longer waste upon strangers, in your own apartments, the time which you owe us. Shall we make an offensive and defensive alliance against the common enemy?”

“An alliance with you, sire?”

“Why not? Are you not a sovereign power?”

“But are you, sire, a reliable ally?”

“You shall see, madame.”

“And when shall this alliance commence?”

“This very day.”

“I will draw up the treaty, and you shall sign it.”

“Blindly.”

“Then, sire, I promise you wonders; you are the star of the court, and when you make your appearance, everything will be resplendent.”

“Oh, madame, madame,” said Louis XIV., “you know well that there is no brilliancy that does not proceed from yourself, and that if I assume the sun as my device, it is only an emblem.”

“Sire, you flatter your ally, and you wish to deceive her,” said Madame, threatening the king with her finger menacingly raised.

“What! you believe I am deceiving you, when I assure you of my affection?”

“Yes.”

“What makes you so suspicious?”

“One thing.”

“What is it? I shall indeed be unhappy if I do not overcome it.”

“That one thing in question, sire, is not in your power, not even in the power of Heaven.”

“Tell me what it is.”

“The past.”

“I do not understand, madame,” said the king, precisely because he had understood her but too well.

The princess took his hand in hers. “Sire,” she said, “I have had the misfortune to displease you for so long a period, that I have almost the right to ask myself to-day why you were able to accept me as a sister-in-law.”

“Displease me! You have displeased me?”

“Nay, do not deny it, for I remember it well.”

“Our alliance shall date from to-day,” exclaimed the king, with a warmth that was not assumed. “You will not think any more of the past, will you? I myself am resolved that I will not. I shall always remember the present; I have it before my eyes; look.” And he led the princess before a mirror, in which she saw herself reflected, blushing and beautiful enough to overcome a saint.

“It is all the same,” she murmured; “it will not be a very worthy alliance.”

“Must I swear?” inquired the king, intoxicated by the voluptuous turn the whole conversation had taken.

“Oh, I will not refuse to witness a resounding oath,” said Madame; “it has always the *semblance* of security.”

The king knelt upon a footstool and took Madame’s hand. She, with a smile that no painter could ever succeed in depicting, and which a poet might only imagine, gave him both her hands, in which he hid his burning face. Neither of them could utter a syllable. The king felt Madame withdraw her hands, caressing his face while she did so. He rose immediately and left the apartment. The courtiers remarked his heightened color, and concluded that the scene had been a stormy one. The Chevalier de Lorraine, however, hastened to say, “Nay, be comforted, gentlemen, his majesty is always pale when he is angry.”

Chapter XXXIV. The Advisers.

The king left Madame in a state of agitation it would have been difficult even for himself to have explained. It is impossible, in fact, to depict the secret play of those strange sympathies which, suddenly and apparently without any cause, are excited, after many years passed in the greatest calmness and indifference, by two hearts destined to love each other. Why had Louis formerly disdained, almost hated, Madame? Why did he now find the same woman so beautiful, so captivating? And why, not only were his thoughts occupied about her, but still more, why were they so continuously occupied about her? Why, in fact, had Madame, whose eyes and mind were sought for in another direction, shown during the last week towards the king a semblance of favor which encouraged the belief of still greater regard. It must not be supposed that Louis proposed to himself any plan of seduction; the tie which united Madame to his brother was, or at least, seemed to him, an insuperable barrier; he was even too far removed from that barrier to perceive its existence. But on the downward path of those passions in which the heart rejoices, towards which youth impels us, no one can decide where to stop, not even the man who has in advance calculated all the chances of his own success or another's submission. As far as Madame was concerned, her regard for the king may easily be explained: she was young, a coquette, and ardently fond of admiration. Hers was one of those buoyant, impetuous natures, which upon a theatre would leap over the greatest obstacles to obtain an acknowledgement of applause from the spectators. It was not surprising, then, that, after having been adored by Buckingham, by De Guiche, who was superior to Buckingham, even if it were only from that negative merit, so much appreciated by women, that is to say, novelty—it was not surprising, we say, that the princess should

raise her ambition to being admired by the king, who not only was the first person in the kingdom, but was one of the handsomest and cleverest men in Europe. As for the sudden passion with which Louis was inspired for his sister-in-law, physiology would perhaps supply an explanation by some hackneyed commonplace reasons, and nature by means of her mysterious affinity of characters. Madame had the most beautiful black eyes in the world; Louis, eyes as beautiful, but blue. Madame was laughter-loving and unreserved in her manners; Louis, melancholy and diffident. Summoned to meet each other for the first time upon the grounds of interest and common curiosity, these two opposite natures were mutually influenced by the mingling of their reciprocal contradictions of character. Louis, when he returned to his own rooms, acknowledged to himself that Madame was the most attractive woman of his court. Madame, left alone, delightedly thought that she had made a great impression on the king. This feeling with her must remain passive, whilst the king could not but act with all the natural vehemence of the heated fancies of a young man, and of a young man who has but to express a wish to see his wish fulfilled.

The first thing the king did was to announce to Monsieur that everything was quietly arranged; that Madame had the greatest respect, the sincerest affection for him; but that she was of a proud, impetuous character, and that her susceptibilities were so acute as to require very careful management.

Monsieur replied in the reticent tone of voice he generally adopted with his brother, that he could not very well understand the susceptibilities of a woman whose conduct might, in his opinion, expose her to censorious remarks, and that if any one had a right to feel wounded, it was he, Monsieur himself. To this the king replied in a quick tone of voice, which showed the interest he took in his sister-in-law, “Thank Heaven, Madame is above censure.”

“The censure of others, certainly, I admit,” said Monsieur; “but not above mine, I presume.”

“Well,” said the king, “all I have to say, Philip, is that Madame’s conduct does not deserve your censure. She certainly is heedless and singular, but professes the best feelings. The English character is not always well understood in France, and the liberty of English manners sometimes surprises those who do not know the extent to which this liberty is enriched by innocence.”

“Ah!” said Monsieur, more and more piqued, “from the very moment that your majesty absolves my wife, whom I accuse, my wife is not guilty, and I have nothing more to say.”

“Philip,” replied the king hastily, for he felt the voice of conscience murmuring softly in his heart, that Monsieur was not altogether wrong, “what I have done, and what I have said, has been only for your happiness. I was told that you complained of a want of confidence and attention on Madame’s part, and I did not wish your uneasiness to be prolonged. It is part of my duty to watch over your household, as over that of the humblest of my subjects. I have satisfied myself, therefore, with the sincerest pleasure, that your apprehensions have no foundation.”

“And,” continued Monsieur, in an interrogative tone of voice, and fixing his eyes upon his brother, “what your majesty has discovered for Madame —and I bow myself to your superior judgment—have you verified for those who have been the cause of the scandal of which I complain?”

“You are right, Philip,” said the king; “I will reserve that point for future consideration.”

These words comprised an order as well as a consolation; the prince felt it to be so, and withdrew.

As for Louis, he went to seek his mother, for he felt that he had need of a more complete absolution than that he had just received from his brother. Anne of Austria did not entertain for M. de Guiche the same reasons for indulgence she had had for Buckingham. She perceived, at the very first words he pronounced, that Louis was not disposed to be severe.

To appear in a contradictory humor was one of the stratagems of the good queen, in order to succeed in ascertaining the truth. But Louis was no longer in his apprenticeship; already for more than a year past he had been king, and during that year he had learned how to dissemble. Listening to Anne of Austria, in order to permit her to disclose her own thoughts, testifying his approval only by look and gesture, he became convinced, from certain piercing glances, and from certain skillful insinuations, that the queen, so clear-sighted in matters of gallantry, had, if not guessed, at least suspected, his weakness for Madame. Of all his auxiliaries, Anne of Austria would be the most important to secure; of all his enemies, Anne of Austria would prove most dangerous. Louis, therefore, changed his maneuvers. He complained of Madame, absolved Monsieur, listened to what his mother had to say of De Guiche, as he had previously listened to what she had to say of Buckingham, and then, when he saw that she thought she had gained a complete victory over him, he left her.

The whole of the court, that is to say, all the favorites and more intimate associates, and they were numerous, since there were already five masters, were assembled in the evening for the repetition of the ballet. This interval had been occupied by poor De Guiche in receiving visits; among the number was one which he hoped and feared nearly to an equal extent. It was that of the Chevalier de Lorraine. About three o'clock in the afternoon the chevalier entered De Guiche's rooms. His looks were of the most reassuring character. "Monsieur," said he to De Guiche, "was in an excellent humor, and no none could say that the slightest cloud had passed across the conjugal sky. Besides, Monsieur was not one to bear ill-feeling."

For a long time past, during his residence at the court, the Chevalier de Lorraine had decided, that of Louis XIII.'s two sons, Monsieur was the one who had inherited the father's character—an uncertain, irresolute character; impulsively good, indifferently disposed at bottom; but certainly a cipher for his friends. He especially cheered De Guiche,

by pointing out to him that Madame would, before long, succeed in governing her husband, and that, consequently, that man would govern Monsieur who should succeed in influencing Madame.

To this, De Guiche full of mistrust and presence of mind, replied, “Yes, chevalier; but I believe Madame to be a very dangerous person.”

“In what respect?”

“She has perceived that Monsieur is not very passionately inclined towards women.”

“Quite true,” said the Chevalier de Lorraine, laughing.

“In that case, Madame will choose the first one who approaches, in order to make him the object of her preference, and to bring back her husband by jealousy.”

“Deep! deep!” exclaimed the chevalier.

“But true,” replied De Guiche.

Neither the one nor the other expressed his real thought. De Guiche, at the very moment he thus attacked Madame’s character, mentally asked her forgiveness from the bottom of his heart. The chevalier, while admiring De Guiche’s penetration, was leading him, blindfolded, to the brink of the precipice. De Guiche then questioned him more directly upon the effect produced by the scene of the morning, and upon the still more serious effect produced by the scene at dinner.

“But I have already told you they are all laughing at it,” replied the Chevalier de Lorraine, “and Monsieur himself at the head of them.”

“Yet,” hazarded De Guiche, “I have heard that the king paid Madame a visit.”

“Yes, precisely so. Madame was the only one who did not laugh, and the king went to her in order to make her laugh, too.”

“So that—”

“So that nothing is altered in the arrangements of the day,” said the chevalier.

“And is there a repetition of the ballet this evening?”

“Certainly.”

“Are you sure?”

“Quite,” returned the chevalier.

At this moment of the conversation between the two young men, Raoul entered, looking full of anxiety. As soon as the chevalier, who had a secret dislike for him, as for every other noble character, perceived him enter, he rose from his seat.

“What do you advise me to do, then?” inquired De Guiche of the chevalier.

“I advise you to go to sleep in perfect tranquillity, my dear count.”

“And my advice, De Guiche,” said Raoul, “is the very opposite.”

“What is that?”

“To mount your horse and set off at once for one of your estates; on your arrival, follow the chevalier’s advice, if you like; and, what is more, you can sleep there as long and as tranquilly as you please.”

“What! set off!” exclaimed the chevalier, feigning surprise; “why should De Guiche set off?”

“Because, and you cannot be ignorant of it—you particularly so—because every one is talking about the scene which has passed between Monsieur and De Guiche.”

De Guiche turned pale.

“Not at all,” replied the chevalier, “not at all; and you have been wrongly informed, M. de Bragelonne.”

“I have been perfectly well informed, on the contrary, monsieur,” replied Raoul, “and the advice I give De Guiche is that of a friend.”

During this discussion, De Guiche, somewhat shaken, looked alternately first at one and then at the other of his advisers. He inwardly felt that a game, important in all its consequences for the rest of his life, was being played at that moment.

“Is it not fact,” said the chevalier, putting the question to the count himself, “is it not fact, De Guiche, that the scene was not so tempestuous as the Vicomte de Bragelonne seems to think, and who, moreover, was not himself there?”

“Whether tempestuous or not,” persisted Raoul, “it is not precisely of the scene itself that I am speaking, but of the consequences that may ensue. I know that Monsieur has threatened, I know that Madame has been in tears.”

“Madame in tears!” exclaimed De Guiche, imprudently clasping his hands.

“Ah!” said the chevalier, laughing, “this is indeed a circumstance I was not acquainted with. You are decidedly better informed than I am, Monsieur de Bragelonne.”

“And it is because I am better informed than yourself, chevalier, that I insist upon De Guiche leaving.”

“No, no; I regret to differ from you, vicomte; but his departure is unnecessary. Why, indeed, should he leave? tell us why.”

“The king!”

“The king!” exclaimed De Guiche.

“Yes; I tell you the king has taken up the affair.”

“Bah!” said the chevalier, “the king likes De Guiche, and particularly his father; reflect, that, if the count were to leave, it would be an admission that he had done something which merited rebuke.”

“Why so?”

“No doubt of it; when one runs away, it is either from guilt or fear.”

“Sometimes, because a man is offended; often because he is wrongfully accused,” said Bragelonne. “We will assign as a reason for his departure, that he feels hurt and injured—nothing will be easier; we will say that we both did our utmost to keep him, and you, at least, will not be speaking otherwise than the truth. Come, De Guiche, you are innocent, and, being so, the scene of to-day must have wounded you. So set off.”

“No, De Guiche, remain where you are,” said the chevalier; “precisely as M. de Bragelonne has put it, because you are innocent. Once more, forgive me, vicomte; but my opinion is the very opposite to your own.”

“And you are at perfect liberty to maintain it, monsieur; but be assured that the exile which De Guiche will voluntarily impose upon himself will be of short duration. He can terminate it whenever he pleases, and returning from his voluntary exile, he will meet with smiles from all lips; while, on the contrary, the anger of the king may now draw down a storm upon his head, the end of which no one can foresee.”

The chevalier smiled, and muttered to himself, “That is the very thing I wish.” And at the same time he shrugged his shoulders, a movement which did not escape the count, who dreaded, if he quitted the court, to seem to yield to a feeling of fear.

“No, no; I have decided, Bragelonne; I stay.”

“I prophesy, then,” said Raoul, sadly, “that misfortune will befall you, De Guiche.”

“I, too, am a prophet, but not a prophet of evil; on the contrary, count, I say to you, ‘remain.’”

“Are you sure,” inquired De Guiche, “that the repetition of the ballet still takes place?”

“Quite sure.”

“Well, you see, Raoul,” continued De Guiche, endeavoring to smile, “you see, the court is not so very sorrowful, or so readily disposed for internal dissensions, when dancing is carried on with such assiduity. Come, acknowledge that,” said the count to Raoul, who shook his head, saying, “I have nothing to add.”

“But,” inquired the chevalier, curious to learn whence Raoul had obtained his information, the exactitude of which he was inwardly forced to admit, “since you say you are well informed, vicomte, how can you be better informed than myself, who am one of the prince’s most intimate companions?”

“To such a declaration I submit. You certainly ought to be perfectly well informed, I admit; and, as a man of honor is incapable of saying anything but what he knows to be true, or of speaking otherwise than what he thinks, I will say no more, but confess myself defeated, and leave you in possession of the field of battle.”

Whereupon Raoul, who now seemed only to care to be left quiet, threw himself upon a couch, whilst the count summoned his servants to aid him in dressing. The chevalier, finding that time was passing away, wished to leave; but he feared, too, that Raoul, left alone with De Guiche, might yet influence him to change his mind. He therefore made use of his last resource.

“Madame,” he said, “will be brilliant; she appears to-day in her costume of Pomona.”

“Yes, that is so,” exclaimed the count.

“And she has just given directions in consequence,” continued the chevalier. “You know, Monsieur de Bragelonne, that the king is to appear as Spring.”

“It will be admirable,” said De Guiche; “and that is a better reason for me to remain than any you have yet given, because I am to appear as Autumn, and shall have to dance with Madame. I cannot absent myself without the king’s orders, since my departure would interrupt the ballet.”

“I,” said the chevalier, “am to be only a simple *egypan*; true, it is, I am a bad dancer, and my legs are not well made. Gentlemen, adieu. Do not forget the basket of fruit, which you are to offer to Pomona, count.”

“Rest assured,” said De Guiche, delightedly, “I shall forget nothing.”

“I am now quite certain that he will remain,” murmured the Chevalier de Lorraine to himself.

Raoul, when the chevalier had left, did not even attempt to dissuade his friend, for he felt that it would be trouble thrown away; he merely observed to the comte, in his melancholy and melodious voice, “You are

embarking in a most dangerous enterprise. I know you well; you go to extremes in everything, and the lady you love does so, too. Admitting for an instant that she should at last love you—"

"Oh, never!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Why do you say never?"

"Because it would be a great misfortune for both of us."

"In that case, instead of regarding you simply imprudent, I cannot but consider you absolutely mad."

"Why?"

"Are you perfectly sure—mind, answer me frankly—that you do not wish her whom you love to make any sacrifice for you?"

"Yes, yes; quite sure."

"Love her, then, at a distance."

"What! at a distance?"

"Certainly; what matters being present or absent, since you expect nothing from her? Love her portrait, a memento."

"Raoul!"

"Love is a shadow, an illusion, a chimera; be devoted to the affection itself, in giving a name to your ideality."

"Ah!"

"You turn away; your servants approach. I will say no more. In good or bad fortune, De Guiche, depend on me."

"Indeed I shall do so."

"Very well; that is all I had to say to you. Spare no pains in your person, De Guiche, and look your very best. Adieu."

"You will not be present, then, at the ballet, vicomte?"

"No; I shall have a visit to pay in town. Farewell, De Guiche."

The reception was to take place in the king's apartments. In the first place, there were the queens, then Madame, and a few ladies of the court, who had been carefully selected. A great number of courtiers, also selected, occupied the time, before the dancing commenced, in

conversing, as people knew how to converse in those times. None of the ladies who had received invitations appeared in the costumes of the *fete*, as the Chevalier de Lorraine had predicted, but many conversations took place about the rich and ingenious toilettes designed by different painters for the ballet of "The Demi-Gods," for thus were termed the kings and queens of which Fontainebleau was about to become the Pantheon. Monsieur arrived, holding in his hand a drawing representing his character; he looked somewhat anxious; he bowed courteously to the young queen and his mother, but saluted Madame almost cavalierly. His notice of her and his coldness of manner were observed by all. M. de Guiche indemnified the princess by a look of passionate devotion, and it must be admitted that Madame, as she raised her eyes, returned it to him with interest. It is unquestionable that De Guiche had never looked so handsome, for Madame's glance had its customary effect of lighting up the features of the son of the Marshal de Gramont. The king's sister-in-law felt a storm mustering above her head; she felt, too, that during the whole of the day, so fruitful in future events, she had acted unjustly, if not treasonably, towards one who loved her with such a depth of devotion. In her eyes the moment seemed to have arrived for an acknowledgement to the poor victim of the injustice of the morning. Her heart spoke, and murmured the name of De Guiche; the count was sincerely pitied and accordingly gained the victory over all others. Neither Monsieur, nor the king, nor the Duke of Buckingham, was any longer thought of; De Guiche at that moment reigned without a rival. But although Monsieur also looked very handsome, still he could not be compared to the count. It is well known—indeed all women say so—that a wide difference invariably exists between the good looks of a lover and those of a husband. Besides, in the present case, after Monsieur had left, and after the courteous and affectionate recognition of the young queen and of the queen-mother, and the careless and indifferent notice of Madame, which all the courtiers had remarked; all these motives gave the lover the advantage over the husband. Monsieur was too great a personage to notice these details. Nothing is so certain as a well settled idea of superiority to prove the inferiority of the man who has that

opinion of himself. The king arrived. Every one looked for what might possibly happen in the glance, which began to bestir the world, like the brow of Jupiter Tonans. Louis had none of his brother's gloominess, but was perfectly radiant. Having examined the greater part of the drawings which were displayed for his inspection on every side, he gave his opinion or made his remarks upon them, and in this manner rendered some happy and others wretched by a single word. Suddenly his glance, which was smilingly directed towards Madame, detected the slight correspondence established between the princess and the count. He bit his lips, but when he opened them again to utter a few commonplace remarks, he said, advancing towards the queens:—

"I have just been informed that everything is now prepared at Fontainebleau, in accordance with my directions." A murmur of satisfaction arose from the different groups, and the king perceived on every face the greatest anxiety to receive an invitation for the *fetes*. "I shall leave to-morrow," he added. Whereupon the profoundest silence immediately ensued. "And I invite," said the king, finishing, "all those who are now present to get ready to accompany me."

Smiling faces were now everywhere visible, with the exception of Monsieur, who seemed to retain his ill-humor. The different noblemen and ladies of the court thereupon defiled before the king, one after the other, in order to thank his majesty for the great honor which had been conferred upon them by the invitation. When it came to De Guiche's turn, the king said, "Ah! M. de Guiche, I did not see you."

The comte bowed, and Madame turned pale. De Guiche was about to open his lips to express his thanks, when the king said, "Comte, this is the season for farming purposes in the country; I am sure your tenants in Normandy will be glad to see you."

The king, after this pitiless attack, turned his back on the poor comte, whose turn it was now to become pale; he advanced a few steps towards the king, forgetting that the king is never spoken to except in reply to questions addressed.

"I have perhaps misunderstood your majesty," he stammered out.

The king turned his head slightly, and with a cold and stern glance, which plunged like a sword relentlessly into the hearts of those under disgrace, repeated, “I said retire to your estates,” allowing every syllable to fall slowly one by one.

A cold perspiration bedewed the comte’s face, his hands convulsively opened, and his hat, which he held between his trembling fingers, fell to the ground. Louis sought his mother’s glance, as though to show her that he was master; he sought his brother’s triumphant look, as if to ask him if he were satisfied with the vengeance taken; and lastly, his eyes fell upon Madame; but the princess was laughing and smiling with Madame de Noailles. She heard nothing, or rather had pretended not to hear at all. The Chevalier de Lorraine looked on also, with one of those looks of fixed hostility that seemed to give to a man’s glance the power of a lever when it raises an obstacle, wrests it away, and casts it to a distance. M. de Guiche was left alone in the king’s cabinet, the whole of the company having departed. Shadows seemed to dance before his eyes. He suddenly broke through the settled despair that overwhelmed him, and flew to hide himself in his own room, where Raoul awaited him, immovable in his own sad presentiments.

“Well?” he murmured, seeing his friend enter, bareheaded, with a wild gaze and tottering gait.

“Yes, yes, it is true,” said De Guiche, unable to utter more, and falling exhausted upon the couch.

“And she?” inquired Raoul.

“She,” exclaimed his unhappy friend, as he raised his hand clenched in anger, towards Heaven. “She!—”

“What did she say and do?”

“She said that her dress suited her admirably, and then she laughed.”

A fit of hysteric laughter seemed to shatter his nerves, for he fell backwards, completely overcome.

Chapter XXXV. Fontainebleau.

For four days, every kind of enchantment brought together in the magnificent gardens of Fontainebleau had converted this spot into a place of the most perfect enjoyment. M. Colbert seemed gifted with ubiquity. In the morning there were the accounts of the previous night's expenses to settle; during the day, programmes, essays, enrolments, payments. M. Colbert had amassed four millions of francs, and dispersed them with sleepless economy. He was horrified at the expenses which mythology involved; not a wood nymph, nor a dryad, that cost less than a hundred francs a day! The dress alone amounted to three hundred francs. The expense of powder and sulphur for fireworks amounted, every night, to a hundred thousand francs. In addition to these, the illuminations on the borders of the sheet of water cost thirty thousand francs every evening. The *fetes* had been magnificent; and Colbert could not restrain his delight. From time to time, he noticed Madame and the king setting forth on hunting expeditions, or preparing for the reception of different fantastic personages, solemn ceremonials, which had been extemporized a fortnight before, and in which Madame's sparkling wit and the king's magnificence were equally well displayed.

For Madame, the heroine of the *fete*, replied to the addresses of the deputations from unknown races—Garamanths, Scythians, Hyperboreans, Caucasians, and Patagonians, who seemed to issue from the ground for the purpose of approaching her with their congratulations; and upon every representative of these races the king bestowed a diamond, or some other article of value. Then the deputies, in verses more or less amusing, compared the king to the sun, Madame to Phoebe, the sun's sister, and the queen and Monsieur were no more spoken of than if the king had married Henrietta of England, and not

Maria Theresa of Austria. The happy pair, hand in hand, imperceptibly pressing each other's fingers, drank in deep draughts the sweet beverage of adulation, by which the attractions of youth, beauty, power and love are enhanced. Every one at Fontainebleau was amazed at the extent of the influence which Madame had so rapidly acquired over the king, and whispered among themselves that Madame was, in point of fact, the true queen; and in effect, the king himself proclaimed its truth by his every thought, word, and look. He formed his wishes, he drew his inspirations from Madame's eyes, and his delight was unbounded when Madame deigned to smile upon him. And was Madame, on her side, intoxicated with the power she wielded, as she beheld every one at her feet? This was a question she herself could hardly answer; but what she did know was, that she could frame no wish, and that she felt herself to be perfectly happy. The result of all these changes, the source of which emanated from the royal will, was that Monsieur, instead of being the second person in the kingdom, had, in reality, become the third. And it was now far worse than in the time when De Guiche's guitars were heard in Madame's apartments; for, then, at least, Monsieur had the satisfaction of frightening those who annoyed him. Since the departure, however, of the enemy, who had been driven away by means of his alliance with the king, Monsieur had to submit to a burden, heavier, but in a very different sense, to his former one. Every evening Madame returned home quite exhausted. Horse-riding, bathing in the Seine, spectacles, dinners under the leafy covert of the trees, balls on the banks of the grand canal, concerts, etc., etc.; all this would have been sufficient to have killed, not a slight and delicate woman, but the strongest porter in the *chateau*. It is perfectly true that, with regard to dancing, concerts, and promenades, and such matters, a woman is far stronger than the most robust of porters. But, however great a woman's strength may be, there is a limit to it, and she cannot hold out long under such a system. As for Monsieur, he had not even the satisfaction of witnessing Madame's abdication of her royalty in the evening, for she lived in the royal pavilion with the young queen and the queen-mother. As a matter of course, the Chevalier de Lorraine did not quit Monsieur, and did not

fail to distil drops of gall into every wound the latter received. The result was, that Monsieur—who had at first been in the highest spirits, and completely restored since Guiche's departure—subsided into his melancholy state three days after the court was installed at Fontainebleau.

It happened, however, that, one day, about two o'clock in the afternoon, Monsieur, who had risen late, and had bestowed upon his toilet more than his usual attention,—it happened, we repeat, that Monsieur, who had not heard of any plans having been arranged for the day, formed the project of collecting his own court, and of carrying Madame off with him to Moret, where he possessed a charming country house. He accordingly went to the queen's pavilion, and was astonished, on entering, to find none of the royal servants in attendance. Quite alone, therefore, he entered the rooms, a door on the left opening to Madame's apartment, the one on the right to the young queen's. In his wife's apartment, Monsieur was informed, by a sempstress who was working there, that every one had left at eleven o'clock, for the purpose of bathing in the Seine, that a grand *fete* was to be made of the expedition, that all the carriages had been placed at the park gates, and that they had all set out more than an hour ago.

"Very good," said Monsieur, "the idea is a good one; the heat is very oppressive, and I have no objection to bathe, too."

He summoned his servants, but no one came. He summoned those in attendance on Madame, but everybody had gone out. He went to the stables, where he was informed by a groom that there were no carriages of any description. He desired that a couple of horses should be saddled, one for himself and the other for his valet. The groom told him that all the horses had been sent away. Monsieur, pale with anger, again descended towards the queen's apartments, and penetrated as far as Anne of Austria's oratory, where he perceived, through the half-opened tapestry-hangings, his young and beautiful sister on her knees before the queen-mother, who appeared weeping bitterly. He had not been either seen or heard. He cautiously approached the opening, and listened, the

sight of so much grief having aroused his curiosity. Not only was the young queen weeping, but she was complaining also. “Yes,” she said, “the king neglects me, the king devotes himself to pleasures and amusements only, in which I have no share.”

“Patience, patience, my daughter,” said Anne of Austria, in Spanish; and then, also in Spanish, added some words of advice, which Monsieur did not understand. The queen replied by accusations, mingled with sighs and sobs, among which Monsieur often distinguished the word *banos*, which Maria Theresa accentuated with spiteful anger.

“The baths,” said Monsieur to himself; “it seems it is the baths that have put her out.” And he endeavored to put together the disconnected phrases which he had been able to understand. It was easy to guess that the queen was complaining bitterly, and that, if Anne of Austria did not console her, she at least endeavored to do so. Monsieur was afraid to be detected listening at the door and he therefore made up his mind to cough; the two queens turned round at the sound and Monsieur entered. At sight of the prince, the young queen rose precipitately, and dried her tears. Monsieur, however, knew the people he had to deal with too well, and was naturally too polite to remain silent, and he accordingly saluted them. The queen-mother smiled pleasantly at him, saying, “What do you want, Philip?”

“I?—nothing,” stammered Monsieur. “I was looking for—”

“Whom?”

“I was looking for Madame.”

“Madame is at the baths.”

“And the king?” said Monsieur, in a tone which made the queen tremble.

“The king also, the whole court as well,” replied Anne of Austria.

“Except you, madame,” said Monsieur.

“Oh! I,” said the young queen, “I seem to terrify all those who amuse themselves.”

“And so do I,—judging from appearances,” rejoined Monsieur.

Anne of Austria made a sigh to her daughter-in-law, who withdrew, weeping.

Monsieur's brows contracted, as he remarked aloud, "What a cheerless house. What do you think of it, mother?"

"Why, no; everybody here is pleasure-hunting."

"Yes, indeed, that is the very thing that makes those dull who do not care for pleasure."

"In what a tone you say that, Philip."

"Upon my word, madame, I speak as I think."

"Explain yourself; what is the matter?"

"Ask my sister-in-law, rather, who, just now, was detailing all her grievances to you."

"Her grievances, what—"

"Yes, I was listening; accidentally, I confess, but still I listened—so that I heard only too well my sister complain of those famous baths of Madame—"

"Ah! folly!"

"No, no, no; people are not always foolish when they weep. The queen said *banos*, which means baths."

"I repeat, Philip," said Anne of Austria, "that your sister is childishly jealous."

"In that case, madame," replied the prince, "I, too, must with great humility accuse myself of possessing the same defect."

"You also, Philip?"

"Certainly."

"Are you really jealous of these baths?"

"And why not, madame, when the king goes to the baths with my wife, and does not take the queen? Why not, when Madame goes to the baths with the king, and does not do me the honor to even invite me? And you enjoin my sister-in-law to be satisfied, and require me to be satisfied, too."

“You are raving, my dear Philip,” said Anne of Austria; “you have driven the Duke of Buckingham away; you have been the cause of M. de Guiche’s exile; do you now wish to send the king away from Fontainebleau?”

“I do not pretend to anything of the kind, madame,” said Monsieur, bitterly; “but, at least, I can withdraw, and I shall do so.”

“Jealous of the king—jealous of your brother?”

“Yes, madame, I am jealous of the king—of my own brother, and remarkably jealous, too.”

“Really, Monsieur,” exclaimed Anne of Austria, affecting to be indignant, “I begin to believe you are mad, and a sworn enemy to my repose. I therefore abandon the place to you, for I have no means of defending myself against such monomanias.”

She arose and left Monsieur a prey to the most extravagant transport of passion. He remained for a moment completely bewildered; then, recovering himself, again went to the stables, found the groom, once more asked him for a carriage or a horse, and upon his reply that there was neither the one or the other, Monsieur snatched a long whip from the hand of a stable-boy, and began to pursue the poor devil of a groom all round the servants’ courtyard, whipping him the while, in spite of his cries and excuses; then, quite out of breath, covered with perspiration, and trembling in every limb, he returned to his own apartments, broke in pieces some beautiful specimens of porcelain, and then got into bed, booted and spurred as he was, crying out for some one to come to him. 4

Chapter XXXVI. The Bath.

At Vulaines, beneath the impenetrable shade of flowering osiers and willows, which, as they bent down their green heads, dipped the extremities of their branches in the blue waters, a long and flat-bottomed boat, with ladders covered with long blue curtains, served as a refuge for the bathing Dianas, who, as they left the water, were watched by twenty plumed Acteons, who, eagerly, and full of admiration, galloped up and down the flowery banks of the river. But Diana herself, even the chaste Diana, clothed in her long chlamys, was less beautiful—less impenetrable, than Madame, as young and beautiful as that goddess herself. For, notwithstanding the fine tunic of the huntress, her round and delicate knee can be seen; and notwithstanding the sonorous quiver, her brown shoulders can be detected; whereas, in Madame's case, a long white veil enveloped her, wrapping her round and round a hundred times, as she resigned herself into the hands of her female attendants, and thus was rendered inaccessible to the most indiscreet, as well as to the most penetrating gaze. When she ascended the ladder, the poets were present—and all were poets when Madame was the subject of discussion—the twenty poets who were galloping about, stopped, and with one voice, exclaimed that pearls, and not drops of water, were falling from her person, to be lost again in the happy river. The king, the center of these effusions, and of this respectful homage, imposed silence upon those expatiators, for whom it seemed impossible to exhaust their raptures, and he rode away, for fear of offending, even through the silken curtains, the modesty of the woman and the dignity of the princess. A great blank thereupon ensued in the scene, and perfect

silence in the boat. From the movements on board—from the flutterings and agitations of the curtains—the goings to and fro of the female attendants engaged in their duties, could be guessed.

The king smilingly listened to the conversation of the courtiers around him, but it could easily be perceived that he gave but little, if any, attention to their remarks. In fact, hardly had the sound of the rings drawn along the curtain-rods announced that Madame was dressed, and that the goddess was about to make her reappearance, than the king, returning to his former post immediately, and running quite close to the river-bank, gave the signal for all those to approach whose duty or pleasure summoned them to Madame's side. The pages hurried forward, conducting the led horses; the carriages, which had remained sheltered under the trees, advanced towards the tent, followed by a crowd of servants, bearers, and female attendants, who, while their masters had been bathing, had mutually exchanged their own observations, critical remarks, and the discussion of matters personal—the fugitive journal of that period, of which no one now remembers anything, not even by the waves, the witnesses of what went on that day—themselves now sublimed into immensity, as the actors have vanished into eternity.

A crowd of people swarming upon the banks of the river, without reckoning the groups of peasants drawn together by their anxiety to see the king and the princess, was, for many minutes, the most disorderly, but the most agreeable, mob imaginable. The king dismounted from his horse, a movement which was imitated by all the courtiers, and offered his hat to Madame, whose rich riding-habit displayed her fine figure, which was set off to great advantage by that garment, made of fine woolen cloth embroidered with silver. Her hair, still damp and blacker than jet, hung in heavy masses upon her white and delicate neck. Joy and health sparkled in her beautiful eyes; composed, yet full of energy, she inhaled the air in deep draughts, under a lace parasol, which was borne by one of her pages. Nothing could be more charming, more graceful, more poetical, than these two figures buried under the rose-colored shade of the parasol, the king, whose white teeth were displayed

in continual smiles, and Madame, whose black eyes sparkled like carbuncles in the glittering reflection of the changing hues of the silk. When Madame approached her horse, a magnificent animal of Andalusian breed, of spotless white, somewhat heavy, perhaps, but with a spirited and splendid head, in which the mixture, happily combined, of Arabian and Spanish blood could be readily traced, and whose long tail swept the ground; and as the princess affected difficulty in mounting, the king took her in his arms in such a manner that Madame's arm was clasped like a circlet of alabaster around the king's neck. Louis, as he withdrew, involuntarily touched with his lips the arm, which was not withheld, and the princess having thanked her royal equerry, every one sprang to his saddle at the same moment. The king and Madame drew aside to allow the carriages, the outriders, and runners, to pass by. A fair proportion of the cavaliers, released from the restraint etiquette had imposed upon them, gave the rein to their horses, and darted after the carriages which bore the maids of honor, as blooming as so many virgin huntresses around Diana, and the human whirlwind, laughing, chattering, and noisy, passed onward.

The king and Madame, however, kept their horses in hand at a foot-pace. Behind his majesty and his sister-in-law, certain of the courtiers — those, at least, who were seriously disposed or were anxious to be within reach, or under the eyes, of the king—followed at a respectful distance, restraining their impatient horses, regulating their pace by that of the king and Madame, and abandoned themselves to all the delight and gratification which is to be found in the conversation of clever people, who can, with perfect courtesy, make a thousand atrocious, but laughable remarks about their neighbors. In their stifled laughter, and in the little reticences of their sardonic humor, Monsieur, the poor absentee, was not spared. But they pitied, and bewailed greatly, the fate of De Guiche, and it must be confessed that their compassion, as far as he was concerned, was not misplaced. The king and Madame having breathed the horses, and repeated a hundred times over such remarks as the courtiers, who supplied them with talk, suggested to them, set off at a hand gallop, and the leafy coverts of the forest resounded to the

footfalls of the mounted party. To the conversations beneath the shade of the trees,—to remarks made in the shape of confidential communications, and observations, mysteriously exchanged, succeeded the noisiest bursts of laughter;—from the very outriders to royalty itself, merriment seemed to spread. Every one began to laugh and to cry out. The magpies and the jays fluttered away uttering their guttural cries, beneath the waving avenues of oaks; the cuckoo staid his monotonous cry in the recesses of the forest; the chaffinch and tomtit flew away in clouds; while the terrified deer bounded riverwards from the midst of the thickets. This crowd, spreading joy, confusion, and light wherever it passed, was heralded, it may be said, to the chateau by its own clamor. As the king and Madame entered the village, they were received by the acclamations of the crowd. Madame hastened to look for Monsieur, for she instinctively understood that he had been far too long kept from sharing in this joy. The king went to rejoin the queens; he knew he owed them—one especially—a compensation for his long absence. But Madame was not admitted to Monsieur's apartments, and she was informed that Monsieur was asleep. The king, instead of being met by Maria Theresa smiling, as was usual with her, found Anne of Austria in the gallery watching for his return, who advanced to meet him, and taking him by the hand, led him to her own apartment. No one ever knew what was the nature of the conversation which took place between them, or rather what it was that the queen-mother said to Louis XIV.; but the general tenor of the interview might certainly be guessed from the annoyed expression of the king's face as he left her.

But we, whose mission it is to interpret all things, as it is also to communicate our interpretations to our readers,—we should fail in our duty, if we were to leave them in ignorance of the result of this interview. It will be found sufficiently detailed, at least we hope so, in the following chapter.

Chapter XXXVII. The Butterfly-Chase.

The king, on retiring to his apartments to give some directions and to arrange his ideas, found on his toilette-glass a small note, the handwriting of which seemed disguised. He opened it and read—"Come quickly, I have a thousand things to say to you." The king and Madame had not been separated a sufficiently long time for these thousand things to be the result of the three thousand which they had been saying to each other during the route which separated Vulaines from Fontainebleau. The confused and hurried character of the note gave the king a great deal to reflect upon. He occupied himself but slightly with his toilette, and set off to pay his visit to Madame. The princess, who did not wish to have the appearance of expecting him, had gone into the gardens with the ladies of her suite. When the king was informed that Madame had left her apartments and had gone for a walk in the gardens, he collected all the gentlemen he could find, and invited them to follow him. He found Madame engaged in chasing butterflies, on a large lawn bordered with heliotrope and flowering broom. She was looking on as the most adventurous and youngest of her ladies ran to and fro, and with her back turned to a high hedge, very impatiently awaited the arrival of the king, with whom she had appointed the rendezvous. The sound of many feet upon the gravel walk made her turn round. Louis XIV. was hatless, he had struck down with his cane a peacock butterfly, which Monsieur de Saint-Aignan had picked up from the ground quite stunned.

"You see, Madame," said the king, as he approached her, "that I, too, am hunting on your behalf!" and then, turning towards those who had accompanied him, said, "Gentlemen, see if each of you cannot obtain as much for these ladies," a remark which was a signal for all to retire. And thereupon a curious spectacle might have been observed; old and

corpulent courtiers were seen running after butterflies, losing their hats as they ran, and with their raised canes cutting down the myrtles and the furze, as they would have done the Spaniards.

The king offered Madame his arm, and they both selected, as the center of observation, a bench with a roof of boards and moss, a kind of hut roughly designed by the modest genius of one of the gardeners who had inaugurated the picturesque and fanciful amid the formal style of the gardening of that period. This sheltered retreat, covered with nasturtiums and climbing roses, screened the bench, so that the spectators, insulated in the middle of the lawn, saw and were seen on every side, but could not be heard, without perceiving those who might approach for the purpose of listening. Seated thus, the king made a sign of encouragement to those who were running about; and then, as if he were engaged with Madame in a dissertation upon the butterfly, which he had thrust through with a gold pin and fastened on his hat, said to her, “How admirably we are placed here for conversations.”

“Yes, sire, for I wished to be heard by you alone, and yet to be seen by every one.”

“And I also,” said Louis.

“My note surprised you?”

“Terrified me rather. But what I have to tell you is more important.”

“It cannot be, sire. Do you know that Monsieur refuses to see me?”

“Why so?”

“Can you not guess why?”

“Ah, Madame! in that case we have both the same thing to say to each other.”

“What has happened to you, then?”

“You wish me to begin?”

“Yes, for I have told you all.”

“Well, then, as soon as I returned, I found my mother waiting for me, and she led me away to her own apartments.”

“The queen-mother?” said Madame, with some anxiety, “the matter is serious then.”

“Indeed it is, for she told me... but, in the first place, allow me to preface what I have to say with one remark. Has Monsieur ever spoken to you about me?”

“Often.”

“Has he ever spoken to you about his jealousy?”

“More frequently still.”

“Of his jealousy of me?”

“No, but of the Duke of Buckingham and De Guiche.”

“Well, Madame, Monsieur’s present idea is a jealousy of myself.”

“Really,” replied the princess, smiling archly.

“And it really seems to me,” continued the king, “that we have never given any ground—”

“Never! at least *I* have not. But who told you that Monsieur was jealous?”

“My mother represented to me that Monsieur entered her apartments like a madman, that he uttered a thousand complaints against you, and —forgive me for saying it—against your coquetry. It appears that Monsieur indulges in injustice, too.”

“You are very kind, sire.”

“My mother reassured him; but he pretended that people reassure him too often, and that he had had quite enough of it.”

“Would it not be better for him not to make himself uneasy in any way?”

“The very thing I said.”

“Confess, sire, that the world is very wicked. Is it possible that a brother and sister cannot converse together, or take pleasure in each other’s company, without giving rise to remarks and suspicions? For

indeed, sire, we are doing no harm, and have no intention of doing any." And she looked at the king with that proud yet provoking glance that kindles desire in the coldest and wisest of men.

"No!" sighed the king, "that is true."

"You know very well, sire, that if it were to continue, I should be obliged to make a disturbance. Do you decide upon our conduct, and say whether it has, or has not, been perfectly correct."

"Oh, certainly—perfectly correct."

"Often alone together,—for we delight in the same things,—we might possibly be led away into error, but *have* we been? I regard you as a brother, and nothing more."

The king frowned. She continued:

"Your hand, which often meets my own, does not excite in me that agitation and emotion which is the case with those who love each other, for instance—"

"Enough," said the king, "enough, I entreat you. You have no pity—you are killing me."

"What is the matter?"

"In fact, then, you distinctly say you experience nothing when near me."

"Oh, sire! I don't say that—my affection—"

"Enough, Henrietta, I again entreat you. If you believe me to be marble, as you are, undeceive yourself."

"I do not understand you, sire."

"Very well," said the king, casting down his eyes. "And so our meetings, the pressure of each other's hand, the looks we have exchanged—Yes, yes; you are right, and I understand your meaning," and he buried his face in his hands.

"Take care, sire," said Madame, hurriedly, "Monsieur de Saint-Aignan is looking at you."

“Of course,” said Louis, angrily; “never even the shadow of liberty! never any sincerity in my intercourse with any one! I imagine I have found a friend, who is nothing but a spy; a dearer friend, who is only a—sister!”

Madame was silent, and cast down her eyes.

“My husband is jealous,” she murmured, in a tone of which nothing could equal its sweetness and charm.

“You are right,” exclaimed the king, suddenly.

“You see,” she said, looking at him in a manner that set his heart on fire, “you are free, you are not suspected, the peace of your house is not disturbed.”

“Alas,” said the king, “as yet you know nothing, for the queen is jealous.”

“Maria Theresa!”

“Stark mad with jealousy! Monsieur’s jealousy arises from hers; she was weeping and complaining to my mother, and was reproaching us for those bathing parties, which have made me so happy.”

“And me too,” answered Madame, by a look.

“When, suddenly,” continued the king, “Monsieur, who was listening, heard the word ‘*banos*,’ which the queen pronounced with some degree of bitterness, that awakened his attention; he entered the room, looking quite wild, broke into the conversation, and began to quarrel with my mother so bitterly that she was obliged to leave him; so that, while you have a jealous husband to deal with, I shall have perpetually present before me a specter of jealousy with swollen eyes, a cadaverous face, and sinister looks.”

“Poor king,” murmured Madame, as she lightly touched the king’s hand. He retained her hand in his, and in order to press it without exciting suspicion in the spectators, who were not so much taken up with the butterflies that they could not occupy themselves about other matters, and who perceived clearly enough that there was some mystery in the king’s and Madame’s conversation, Louis placed the dying

butterfly before his sister-in-law, and bent over it as if to count the thousand eyes of its wings, or the particles of golden dust which covered it. Neither of them spoke; however, their hair mingled, their breaths united, and their hands feverishly throbbed in each other's grasp. Five minutes passed in this manner.

Chapter XXXVIII. What Was Caught after the Butterflies.

The two young people remained for a moment with their heads bent down, bowed, as it were, beneath the double thought of the love which was springing up in their hearts, and which gives birth to so many happy fancies in the imaginations of twenty years of age. Henrietta gave a side glance, from time to time, at the king. Hers was one of those finely-organized natures capable of looking inwardly at itself, as well as at others at the same moment. She perceived Love lying at the bottom of Louis's heart, as a skillful diver sees a pearl at the bottom of the sea. She knew Louis was hesitating, if not in doubt, and that his indolent or timid heart required aid and encouragement. "And so?" she said, interrogatively, breaking the silence.

"What do you mean?" inquired Louis, after a moment's pause.

"I mean, that I shall be obliged to return to the resolution I had formed."

"To what resolution?"

"To that which I have already submitted to your majesty."

"When?"

"On the very day we had a certain explanation about Monsieur's jealousies."

"What did you say to me then?" inquired Louis, with some anxiety.

"Do you not remember, sire?"

"Alas! if it be another cause of unhappiness, I shall recollect it soon enough."

“A cause of unhappiness for myself alone, sire,” replied Madame Henrietta; “but as it is necessary, I must submit to it.”

“At least, tell me what it is,” said the king.

“Absence.”

“Still that unkind resolve?”

“Believe me, sire, I have not found it without a violent struggle with myself; it is absolutely necessary I should return to England.”

“Never, never will I permit you to leave France,” exclaimed the king.

“And yet, sire,” said Madame, affecting a gentle yet sorrowful determination, “nothing is more urgently necessary; nay, more than that, I am persuaded it is your mother’s desire I should do so.”

“Desire!” exclaimed the king; “that is a very strange expression to use to me.”

“Still,” replied Madame Henrietta, smilingly, “are you not happy in submitting to the wishes of so good a mother?”

“Enough, I implore you; you rend my very soul.”

“I?”

“Yes; for you speak of your departure with tranquillity.”

“I was not born for happiness, sire,” replied the princess, dejectedly; “and I acquired, in very early life, the habit of seeing my dearest wishes disappointed.”

“Do you speak truly?” said the king. “Would your departure gainsay any one of your cherished thoughts?”

“If I were to say ‘yes,’ would you begin to take your misfortune patiently?”

“How cruel you are!”

“Take care, sire; some one is coming.”

The king looked all round him, and said, “No, there is no one,” and then continued: “Come, Henrietta, instead of trying to contend against Monsieur’s jealousy by a departure which would kill me—”

Henrietta slightly shrugged her shoulders like a woman unconvinced. “Yes,” repeated Louis, “which would kill me, I say. Instead of fixing your mind on this departure, does not your imagination—or rather does not your heart—suggest some expedient?”

“What is it you wish my heart to suggest?”

“Tell me, how can one prove to another that it is wrong to be jealous?”

“In the first place, sire, by giving no motive for jealousy; in other words, in loving no one but the person in question.”

“Oh! I expected more than that.”

“What did you expect?”

“That you would simply tell me that jealous people are pacified by concealing the affection which is entertained for the object of jealousy.”

“Dissimulation is difficult, sire.”

“Yet it is only be means of conquering difficulties that any happiness is attained. As far as I am concerned, I swear I will give the lie to those who are jealous of me by pretending to treat you like any other woman.”

“A bad, as well as unsafe, means,” said the young princess, shaking her pretty head.

“You seem to think everything bad, dear Henrietta,” said Louis, discontentedly. “You negative everything I propose. Suggest, at least, something else in its stead. Come, try and think. I trust implicitly to a woman’s invention. Do you invent in your turn?”

“Well, sire, I have hit upon something. Will you listen to it?”

“Can you ask me? You speak of a matter of life or death to me, and then ask if I will listen.”

“Well, I judge of it by my own case. If my husband intended to put me on the wrong scent with regard to another woman, one thing would reassure me more than anything else.”

“What would that be?”

“In the first place to see that he never took any notice of the woman in question.”

“Exactly. That is precisely what I said just now.”

“Very well; but in order to be perfectly reassured on the subject, I should like to see him occupy himself with some one else.”

“Ah! I understand you,” replied Louis, smiling. “But confess, dear Henrietta, if the means is at least ingenious, it is hardly charitable.”

“Why so?”

“In curing the dread of a wound in a jealous person’s mind, you inflict one upon the heart. His fear ceases, it is true; but the evil still exists; and that seems to me to be far worse.”

“Agreed; but he does not detect, he does not suspect the real enemy; he does no prejudice to love itself; he concentrates all his strength on the side where his strength will do no injury to anything or any one. In a word, sire, my plan, which I confess I am surprised to find you dispute, is mischievous to jealous people, it is true; but to lovers it is full of advantage. Besides, let me ask, sire, who, except yourself, has ever thought of pitying jealous people? Are they not a melancholy crew of grumblers always equally unhappy, whether with or without a cause? You may remove that cause, but you never can remove their sufferings. It is a disease which lies in the imagination, and, like all imaginary disorders, it is incurable. By the by, I remember an aphorism upon this subject, of poor Dr. Dawley, a clever and amusing man, who, had it not been for my brother, who could not do without him, I should have with me now. He used to say, ‘Whenever you are likely to suffer from two affections, choose that which will give you the least trouble, and I will allow you to retain it; for it is positive,’ he said, ‘that that very ailment is of the greatest service to me, in order to enable me to get rid of the other.’”

“Well and judiciously remarked, Henrietta,” replied the king, smiling.

“Oh! we have some clever people in London, sire.”

“And those clever people produce adorable pupils. I will grant this Daley, Darley, Dawley, or whatever you call him, a pension for his aphorism; but I entreat you, Henrietta, to begin by choosing the least of

your evils. You do not answer—you smile. I guess that the least of your bugbears is your stay in France. I will allow you to retain this information; and, in order to begin with the cure of the other, I will this very day begin to look out for a subject which shall divert the attention of the jealous members of either sex who persecute us both."

"Hush! this time some one is really coming," said Madame; and she stooped to gather a flower from the thick grass at her feet. Some one, in fact, was approaching; for, suddenly, a bevy of young girls ran down from the top of the hillock, following the cavaliers—the cause of this interruption being a magnificent hawk-moth, with wings like rose-leaves. The prey in question had fallen into the net of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who displayed it with some pride to her less successful rivals. The queen of the chase had seated herself some twenty paces from the bank on which Louis and Madame Henrietta were reclining; and leaned her back against a magnificent oak-tree entwined with ivy, and stuck the butterfly on the long cane she carried in her hand. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was very beautiful, and the gentlemen, accordingly, deserted her companions, and under the pretext of complimenting her upon her success, pressed in a circle around her. The king and princess looked gloomily at this scene, as spectators of maturer age look on at the games of little children. "They seem to be amusing themselves there," said the king.

"Greatly, sire; I have always found that people are amused wherever youth and beauty are to be found."

"What do you think of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, Henrietta?" inquired the king.

"I think she has rather too much flax-yellow and lily-whiteness in her complexion," replied Madame, fixing in a moment upon the only fault it was possible to find in the almost perfect beauty of the future Madame de Montespan."

"Rather too fair, yes; but beautiful, I think, in spite of that."

"Is that your opinion, sire?"

"Yes, really."

“Very well; and it is mine, too.”

“And she seems to be much sought after.”

“On, that is a matter of course. Lovers flutter from one to another. If we had hunted for lovers instead of butterflies, you can see, from those who surround her, what successful sport we should have had.”

“Tell me, Henrietta, what would be said if the king were to make himself one of those lovers, and let his glance fall in that direction? Would some one else be jealous, in such a case?”

“Oh! sire, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is a very efficacious remedy,” said Madame, with a sigh. “She would cure a jealous man, certainly; but she might possibly make a woman jealous, too.”

“Henrietta,” exclaimed Louis, “you fill my heart with joy. Yes, yes; Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is far too beautiful to serve as a cloak.”

“A king’s cloak,” said Madame Henrietta, smiling, “ought to be beautiful.”

“Do you advise me to do it, then?” inquired Louis.

“I! what should I say, sire, except that to give such an advice would be to supply arms against myself? It would be folly or pride to advise you to take, for the heroine of an assumed affection, a woman more beautiful than the one for whom you pretend to feel real regard.”

The king tried to take Madame’s hand in his own; his eyes sought hers; and then he murmured a few words so full of tenderness, but pronounced in so low a tone, that the historian, who ought to hear everything, could not hear them. Then, speaking aloud, he said, “Do you yourself choose for me the one who is to cure our jealous friend. To her, then, all my devotion, all my attention, all the time that I can spare from my occupations, shall be devoted. For her shall be the flower that I may pluck for you, the fond thoughts with which you have inspired me. Towards her I will direct the glance I dare not bestow upon you, and which ought to be able to rouse you from your indifference. But, be careful in your selection, lest, in offering her the rose which I may have

plucked, I find myself conquered by you; and my looks, my hand, my lips, turn immediately towards you, even were the whole world to guess my secret."

While these words escaped from the king's lips, in a stream of wild affection, Madame blushed, breathless, happy, proud, almost intoxicated with delight. She could find nothing to say in reply; her pride and her thirst for homage were satisfied. "I shall fail," she said, raising her beautiful black eyes, "but not as you beg me, for all this incense which you wish to burn on the altar of another divinity. Ah! sire, I too shall be jealous of it, and want restored to me; and would not that a particle of it should be lost in the way. Therefore, sire, with your royal permission, I will choose one who shall appear to me the least likely to distract your attention, and who will leave my image intact and unshadowed in your heart."

"Happily for me," said the king, "your heart is not hard and unfeeling. If it were so, I should be alarmed at the threat you hold out. Precautions were taken on this point, and around you, as around myself, it would be difficult to meet with a disagreeable-looking face."

Whilst the king was speaking, Madame had risen from her seat, looked around the greensward, and after a careful and silent examination, she called the king to her side, and said, "See yonder, sire, upon the declivity of that little hill, near that group of Guelder roses, that beautiful girl walking alone, her head down, her arms hanging by her side, with her eyes fixed upon the flowers, which she crushes beneath her feet, like one who is lost in thought."

"Mademoiselle de Vallière, do you mean?" remarked the king.

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"Will she not suit you, sire?"

"Why, look how thin the poor child is. She has hardly any flesh upon her bones."

"Nay: am I stout then?"

“She is so melancholy.”

“The greater contrast to myself, who am accused of being too lively.”

“She is lame.”

“Do you really think so?”

“No doubt of it. Look; she has allowed every one to pass by her, through fear of her defect being remarked.”

“Well, she will not run so fast as Daphne, and will not be as able to escape Apollo.”

“Henrietta,” said the king, out of temper; “of all your maids of honor, you have really selected for me the one most full of defects.”

“Still she is one of my maids of honor.”

“Of course; but what do you mean?”

“I mean that, in order to visit this new divinity, you will not be able to do so without paying a visit to my apartments, and that, as propriety will forbid your conversing with her in private, you will be compelled to see her in my circle, to speak, as it were, at me, while speaking to her. I mean, in fact, that those who may be jealous, will be wrong if they suppose you come to my apartments for my sake, since you will go there for Mademoiselle de la Vallière.”

“Who happens to be lame.”

“Hardly that.”

“Who never opens her lips.”

“But who, when she does open them, displays a beautiful set of teeth.”

“Who may serve as a model for an osteologist.”

“Your favor will change her appearance.”

“Henrietta!”

“At all events you allowed me to choose.”

“Alas! yes.”

“Well, my choice is made: I impose her upon you, and you must submit.”

“Oh! I would accept one of the furies, if you were to insist upon it.”

“La Vallière is as gentle as a lamb: do not fear she will ever contradict you when you tell her you love her,” said Madame, laughing.

“You are not afraid, are you, that I shall say too much to her?”

“It would be for my sake.”

“The treaty is agreed to, then?”

“Not only so, but signed. You will continue to show me the friendship of a brother, the attention of a brother, the gallantry of a monarch, will you not?”

“I will preserve for you intact a heart that has already become accustomed to beat only at your command.”

“Very well, do you not see that we have guaranteed the future by this means?”

“I hope so.”

“Will your mother cease to regard me as an enemy?”

“Yes.”

“Will Maria Theresa leave off speaking in Spanish before Monsieur, who has a horror of conversation held in foreign languages, because he always thinks he is being ill spoken of? and lastly,” continued the princess, “will people persist in attributing a wrongful affection to the king when the truth is, we can offer nothing to each other, except absolute sympathy, free from mental reservation?”

“Yes, yes,” said the king, hesitatingly. “But other things may still be said of us.”

“What can be said, sire? shall we never be left in tranquillity?”

“People will say I am deficient in taste; but what is my self-respect in comparison with your tranquillity?”

“In comparison with my honor, sire, and that of our family, you mean. Besides, I beg you to attend, do not be so hastily prejudiced against La Vallière. She is slightly lame, it is true, but she is not deficient in good sense. Moreover, all that the king touches is converted into gold.”

“Well, Madame, rest assured of one thing, namely, that I am still grateful to you: you might even yet make me pay dearer for your stay in France.”

“Sire, some one approaches.”

“Well!”

“One last word.”

“Say it.”

“You are prudent and judicious, sire; but in the present instance you will be obliged to summon to your aid all your prudence, and all your judgment.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Louis, laughing, “from this very day I shall begin to act my part, and you shall see whether I am not quite fit to represent the character of a tender swain. After luncheon, there will be a promenade in the forest, and then there is supper and the ballet at ten o’clock.”

“I know it.”

“The ardor of my passion shall blaze more brilliantly than the fireworks, shall shine more steadily than our friend Colbert’s lamps; it shall shine so dazzlingly that the queens and Monsieur will be almost blinded by it.”

“Take care, sire, take care.”

“In Heaven’s name, what have I done, then?”

“I shall begin to recall the compliments I paid you just now. You prudent! you wise! did I say? Why, you begin by the most reckless inconsistencies! Can a passion be kindled in this manner, like a torch, in a moment? Can a monarch, such as you are, without any preparation, fall at the feet of a girl like La Vallière?”

“Ah! Henrietta, now I understand you. We have not yet begun the campaign, and you are plundering me already.”

“No, I am only recalling you to common-sense ideas. Let your passion be kindled gradually, instead of allowing it to burst forth so suddenly. Jove’s thunders and lightnings are heard and seen before the palace is set on fire. Everything has its commencements. If you are so easily

excited, no one will believe you are really captivated, and every one will think you out of your senses—if even, indeed, the truth itself not be guessed. The public is not so fatuous as they seem."

The king was obliged to admit that Madame was an angel for sense, and the very reverse for cleverness. He bowed, and said: "Agreed, Madame, I will think over my plan of attack: great military men—my cousin De Conde for instance—grow pale in meditation upon their strategical plans, before they move one of the pawns, which people call armies; I therefore wish to draw up a complete plan of campaign; for you know that the tender passion is subdivided in a variety of ways. Well, then, I shall stop at the village of Little Attentions, at the hamlet of Love-Letters, before I follow the road of Visible Affection; the way is clear enough, you know, and poor Madame de Scudery would never forgive me for passing though a halting-place without stopping."

"Oh! now we have returned to our proper senses, shall we say adieu, sire?"

"Alas! it must be so, for see, we are interrupted."

"Yes, indeed," said Henrietta, "they are bringing Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and her sphinx butterfly in grand procession this way."

"It is perfectly well understood, that this evening, during the promenade, I am to make my escape into the forest, and find La Vallière without you."

"I will take care to send her away."

"Very well! I will speak to her when she is with her companions, and I will then discharge my first arrow at her."

"Be skillful," said Madame, laughing, "and do not miss the heart."

Then the princess took leave of the king, and went forward to meet the merry troop, which was advancing with much ceremony, and a great many pretended flourishes of trumpets, imitated with their mouths.

Chapter XXXIX. The Ballet of the Seasons.

At the conclusion of the banquet, which was served at five o'clock, the king entered his cabinet, where his tailors were awaiting him for the purpose of trying on the celebrated costume representing Spring, which was the result of so much imagination, and had cost so many efforts of thought to the designers and ornament-workers of the court. As for the ballet itself, every person knew the part he had to take in it, and how to perform it. The king had resolved to make it surprise. Hardly, therefore, had he finished his conference, and entered his own apartment, than he desired his two masters of the ceremonies, Villeroy and Saint-Aignan, to be sent for. Both replied that they only awaited his orders, and that everything was ready to begin, but that it was necessary to be sure of fine weather and a favorable night before these orders could be carried out. The king opened his window; the pale-gold hues of the evening were visible on the horizon through the vistas of the wood, and the moon, white as snow, was already mounting the heavens. Not a ripple could be noticed on the surface of the green waters; the swans themselves, even, reposing with folded wings like ships at anchor, seemed inspirations of the warmth of the air, the freshness of the water, and the silence of the beautiful evening. The king, having observed all these things, and contemplated the magnificent picture before him, gave the order which De Villeroy and De Saint-Aignan awaited; but with a view of insuring the execution of this order in a royal manner, one last question was necessary, and Louis XIV. put it to the two gentlemen in the following manner:—"Have you any money?"

"Sire," replied Saint-Aignan, "we have arranged everything with M. Colbert."

"Ah! very well!"

“Yes, sire, and M. Colbert said he would wait upon your majesty, as soon as your majesty should manifest an intention of carrying out the *fetes*, of which he has furnished the programme.”

“Let him come in, then,” said the king; and as if Colbert had been listening at the door for the purpose of keeping himself *au courant* with the conversation, he entered as soon as the king had pronounced his name to the two courtiers.

“Ah! M. Colbert,” said the king. “Gentlemen, to your posts,” whereupon Saint-Aignan and Villeroy took their leave. The king seated himself in an easy-chair near the window, saying: “The ballet will take place this evening, M. Colbert.”

“In that case, sire, I will pay all accounts to-morrow.”

“Why so?”

“I promised the tradespeople to pay their bills the day following that on which the ballet should take place.”

“Very well, M. Colbert, pay them, since you have promised to do so.”

“Certainly, sire; but I must have money to do that.”

“What! have not the four millions, which M. Fouquet promised, been sent? I forgot to ask you about it.”

“Sire, they were sent at the hour promised.”

“Well?”

“Well, sire, the colored lamps, the fireworks, the musicians, and the cooks, have swallowed up four millions in eight days.”

“Entirely?”

“To the last penny. Every time your majesty directed the banks of the grand canal to be illuminated, as much oil was consumed as there was water in the basins.”

“Well, well, M. Colbert; the fact is, then, you have no more money?”

“I have no more, sire, but M. Fouquet has,” Colbert replied, his face darkening with a sinister expression of pleasure.

“What do you mean?” inquired Louis.

“We have already made M. Fouquet advance six millions. He has given them with too much grace not to have others still to give, if they are required, which is the case at the present moment. It is necessary, therefore, that he should comply.”

The king frowned. “M. Colbert,” said he, accentuating the financier’s name, “that is not the way I understood the matter; I do not wish to make use, against any of my servants, of a means of pressure which may oppress him and fetter his services. In eight days M. Fouquet has furnished six millions; that is a good round sum.”

Colbert turned pale. “And yet,” he said, “your majesty did not use this language some time ago, when the news about Belle-Isle arrived, for instance.”

“You are right, M. Colbert.”

“Nothing, however, has changed since then; on the contrary, indeed.”

“In my thoughts, monsieur, everything has changed.”

“Does your majesty then no longer believe the disloyal attempt?”

“My affairs concern myself alone, monsieur; and I have already told you I transact them without interference.”

“Then, I perceive,” said Colbert, trembling with anger and fear, “that I have had the misfortune to fall into disgrace with your majesty.”

“Not at all; you are, on the contrary, most agreeable to me.”

“Yet, sire,” said the minister, with a certain affected bluntness, so successful when it was a question of flattering Louis’s self-esteem, “what use is there in being agreeable to your majesty, if one can no longer be of any use?”

“I reserve your services for a better occasion; and believe me, they will only be the better appreciated.”

“Your majesty’s plan, then, in this affair, is—”

“You want money, M. Colbert?”

“Seven hundred thousand francs, sire.”

“You will take them from my private treasure.” Colbert bowed. “And,” added Louis, “as it seems a difficult matter for you, notwithstanding your economy, to defray, with so limited a sum, the expenses which I intend to incur, I will at once sign an order for three millions.”

The king took a pen and signed an order immediately, then handed it to Colbert. “Be satisfied, M. Colbert, the plan I have adopted is one worthy of a king,” said Louis XIV., who pronounced these words with all the majesty he knew how to assume in such circumstances; and dismissed Colbert for the purpose of giving an audience to his tailors.

The order issued by the king was known throughout the whole of Fontainebleau; it was already known, too, that the king was trying on his costume, and that the ballet would be danced in the evening. The news circulated with the rapidity of lightning; during its progress it kindled every variety of coquetry, desire, and wild ambition. At the same moment, as if by enchantment, every one who knew how to hold a needle, every one who could distinguish a coat from a pair of trousers, was summoned to the assistance of those who had received invitations. The king had completed his toilette by nine o’clock; he appeared in an open carriage decorated with branches of trees and flowers. The queens had taken their seats upon a magnificent dias or platform, erected upon the borders of the lake, in a theater of wonderful elegance of construction. In the space of five hours the carpenters had put together all the different parts connected with the building; the upholsterers had laid down the carpets, erected the seats; and, as if at the wave of an enchanter’s wand, a thousand arms, aiding, instead of interfering with each other, had constructed the building, amidst the sound of music; whilst, at the same time, other workmen illuminated the theater and the shores of the lake with an incalculable number of lamps. As the heavens, set with stars, were perfectly unclouded, as not even a breath of air could be heard in the woods, and as if Nature itself had yielded complacently to the king’s fancies, the back of the theater had been left open; so that, behind the foreground of the scenes, could be seen as a background the beautiful sky, glittering with stars; the sheet of water, illuminated by the

lights which were reflected in it; and the bluish outline of the grand masses of woods, with their rounded tops. When the king made his appearance, the theater was full, and presented to the view one vast group, dazzling with gold and precious stones; in which, however, at the first glance, no single face could be distinguished. By degrees, as the sight became accustomed to so much brilliancy, the rarest beauties appeared to the view, as in the evening sky the stars appear one by one to him who closes his eyes and then opens them again.

The theater represented a grove of trees; a few fauns lifting up their cloven feet were jumping about; a dryad made her appearance on the scene, and was immediately pursued by them; others gathered round her for her defense, and they quarrelled as they danced. Suddenly, for the purpose of restoring peace and order, Spring, accompanied by his whole court, made his appearance. The Elements, subaltern powers of mythology, together with their attributes, hastened to follow their gracious sovereign. The Seasons, allies of Spring, followed him closely, to form a quadrille, which, after many words of more or less flattering import, was the commencement of the dance. The music, hautboys, flutes, and viols, was delightfully descriptive of rural delights. The king had already made his appearance, amid thunders of applause. He was dressed in a tunic of flowers, which set off his graceful and well-formed figure to advantage. His legs, the best-shaped at court, were displayed to great advantage in flesh-colored silken hose, of silk so fine and so transparent that it seemed almost like flesh itself. The most beautiful pale-lilac satin shoes, with bows of flowers and leaves, imprisoned his small feet. The bust of the figure was in harmonious keeping with the base; Louis's waving hair floated on his shoulders, the freshness of his complexion was enhanced by the brilliancy of his beautiful blue eyes, which softly kindled all hearts; a mouth with tempting lips, which deigned to open in smiles. Such was the prince of that period: justly that evening styled "The King of all the Loves." There was something in his carriage which resembled the buoyant movements of an immortal, and

he did not dance so much as seem to soar along. His entrance produced, therefore, the most brilliant effect. Suddenly the Comte de Saint-Aignan was observed endeavoring to approach either the king or Madame.

The princess—who was robed in a long dress, diaphanous and light as the finest network tissue from the hands of skillful Mechlin workers, one knee occasionally revealed beneath the folds of the tunic, and her little feet encased in silken slippers decked with pearls—advanced radiant with beauty, accompanied by her *cortege* of Bacchantes, and had already reached the spot assigned to her in the dance. The applause continued so long that the comte had ample leisure to join the king.

"What is the matter, Saint-Aignan?" said Spring.

"Nothing whatever," replied the courtier, as pale as death; "but your majesty has not thought of Fruits."

"Yes; it is suppressed."

"Far from it, sire; your majesty having given no directions about it, the musicians have retained it."

"How excessively annoying," said the king. "This figure cannot be performed, since M. de Guiche is absent. It must be suppressed."

"Ah, sire, a quarter of an hour's music without any dancing will produce an effect so chilling as to ruin the success of the ballet."

"But, come, since—"

"Oh, sire, that is not the greatest misfortune; for, after all, the orchestra could still just as well cut it out, if it were necessary; but—"

"But what?"

"Why, M. de Guiche is here."

"Here?" replied the king, frowning, "here? Are you sure?"

"Yes, sire; and ready dressed for the ballet."

The king felt himself color deeply, and said, "You are probably mistaken."

"So little is that the case, sire, that if your majesty will look to the right, you will see that the comte is in waiting."

Louis turned hastily towards the side, and in fact, on his right, brilliant in his character of Autumn, De Guiche awaited until the king should look at him, in order that he might address him. To give an idea of the stupefaction of the king, and that of Monsieur, who was moving about restlessly in his box,—to describe also the agitated movement of the heads in the theater, and the strange emotion of Madame, at the sight of her partner,—is a task we must leave to abler hands. The king stood almost gaping with astonishment as he looked at the comte, who, bowing lowly, approached Louis with the profoundest respect.

"Sire," he said, "your majesty's most devoted servant approaches to perform a service on this occasion with similar zeal that he has already shown on the field of battle. Your majesty, in omitting the dance of the Fruits, would be losing the most beautiful scene in the ballet. I did not wish to be the substance of so dark a shadow to your majesty's elegance, skill, and graceful invention; and I have left my tenants in order to place my services at your majesty's commands."

Every word fell distinctly, in perfect harmony and eloquence, upon Louis XIV.'s ears. Their flattery pleased, as much as De Guiche's courage had astonished him, and he simply replied: "I did not tell you to return, comte."

"Certainly not, sire; but your majesty did not tell me to remain."

The king perceived that time was passing away, that if this strange scene were prolonged it would complicate everything, and that a single cloud upon the picture would eventually spoil the whole. Besides, the king's heart was filled with two or three new ideas; he had just derived fresh inspiration from the eloquent glances of Madame. Her look had said to him: "Since they are jealous of you, divide their suspicions, for the man who distrusts two rivals does not object to either in particular." So that Madame, by this clever diversion, decided him. The king smiled upon De Guiche, who did not comprehend a word of Madame's dumb language, but he remarked that she pretended not to look at him, and he attributed the pardon which had been conferred upon him to the princess's kindness of heart. The king seemed only pleased with every

one present. Monsieur was the only one who did not understand anything about the matter. The ballet began; the effect was more than beautiful. When the music, by its bursts of melody, carried away these illustrious dancers, when the simple, untutored pantomime of that period, only the more natural on account of the very indifferent acting of the august actors, had reached its culminating point of triumph, the theater shook with tumultuous applause.

De Guiche shone like a sun, but like a courtly sun, that is resigned to fill a subordinate part. Disdainful of a success of which Madame showed no acknowledgement, he thought of nothing but boldly regaining the marked preference of the princess. She, however, did not bestow a single glance upon him. By degrees all his happiness, all his brilliancy, subsided into regret and uneasiness; so that his limbs lost their power, his arms hung heavily by his sides, and his head drooped as though he was stupefied. The king, who had from this moment become in reality the principal dancer in the quadrille, cast a look upon his vanquished rival. De Guiche soon ceased to sustain even the character of the courtier; without applause, he danced indifferently, and very soon could not dance at all, by which accident the triumph of the king and of Madame was assured.

Chapter XL: The Nymphs of the Park of Fontainebleau.

The king remained for a moment to enjoy a triumph as complete as it could possibly be. He then turned towards Madame, for the purpose of admiring her also a little in her turn. Young persons love with more vivacity, perhaps with greater ardor and deeper passion, than others more advanced in years; but all the other feelings are at the same time developed in proportion to their youth and vigor: so that vanity being with them almost always the equivalent of love, the latter feeling, according to the laws of equipoise, never attains that degree of perfection which it acquires in men and women from thirty to five and thirty years of age. Louis thought of Madame, but only after he had studiously thought of himself; and Madame carefully thought of herself, without bestowing a single thought upon the king. The victim, however, of all these royal affections and affectations, was poor De Guiche. Every one could observe his agitation and prostration—a prostration which was, indeed, the more remarkable since people were not accustomed to see him with his arms hanging listlessly by his side, his head bewildered, and his eyes with all their bright intelligence bedimmed. It rarely happened that any uneasiness was excited on his account, whenever a question of elegance or taste was under discussion; and De Guiche's defeat was accordingly attributed by the greater number present to his courtier-like tact and ability. But there were others—keen-sighted observers are always to be met with at court—who remarked his paleness and his altered looks; which he could neither feign nor conceal, and their conclusion was that De Guiche was not acting the part of a flatterer. All these sufferings, successes, and remarks were blended, confounded, and lost in the uproar of applause. When, however, the queens expressed

their satisfaction and the spectators their enthusiasm, when the king had retired to his dressing-room to change his costume, and whilst Monsieur, dressed as a woman, as he delighted to be, was in his turn dancing about, De Guiche, who had now recovered himself, approached Madame, who, seated at the back of the theater, was waiting for the second part, and had quitted the others for the purpose of creating a sort of solitude for herself in the midst of the crowd, to meditate, as it were, beforehand, upon chorographic effects; and it will be perfectly understood that, absorbed in deep meditation, she did not see, or rather pretended not to notice, anything that was passing around her. De Guiche, observing that she was alone, near a thicket constructed of painted cloth, approached her. Two of her maids of honor, dressed as hamadryads, seeing De Guiche advance, drew back out of respect., whereupon De Guiche proceeded towards the middle of the circle and saluted her royal highness; but, whether she did or did not observe his salutations, the princess did not even turn her head. A cold shiver passed through poor De Guiche; he was unprepared for such utter indifference, for he had neither seen nor been told of anything that had taken place, and consequently could guess nothing. Remarking, therefore, that his obeisance obtained him no acknowledgement, he advanced one step further, and in a voice which he tried, though vainly, to render calm, said: “I have the honor to present my most humble respects to your royal highness.”

Upon this Madame deigned to turn her eyes languishingly towards the comte, observing. “Ah! M. de Guiche, is that you? good day!”

The comte’s patience almost forsook him, as he continued,—“Your royal highness danced just now most charmingly.”

“Do you think so?” she replied with indifference.

“Yes; the character which your royal highness assumed is in perfect harmony with your own.”

Madame again turned round, and, looking De Guiche full in the face with a bright and steady gaze, said,—“Why so?”

“Oh! there can be no doubt of it.”

“Explain yourself?”

“You represented a divinity, beautiful, disdainful, inconstant.”

“You mean Pomona, comte?”

“I allude to the goddess.”

Madame remained silent for a moment, with her lips compressed, and then observed,—“But, comte, you, too, are an excellent dancer.”

“Nay, Madame, I am only one of those who are never noticed, or who are soon forgotten if they ever happen to be noticed.”

With this remark, accompanied by one of those deep sighs which affect the remotest fibers of one’s being, his heart burdened with sorrow and throbbing fast, his head on fire, and his gaze wandering, he bowed breathlessly, and withdrew behind the thicket. The only reply Madame condescended to make was by slightly raising her shoulders, and, as her ladies of honor had discreetly retired while the conversation lasted, she recalled them by a look. The ladies were Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Mademoiselle de Montalais.

“Did you hear what the Comte de Guiche said?” the princess inquired.

“No.”

“It really is very singular,” she continued, in a compassionate tone, “how exile has affected poor M. de Guiche’s wit.” And then, in a louder voice, fearful lest her unhappy victim might lose a syllable, she said,—“In the first place he danced badly, and afterwards his remarks were very silly.”

She then rose, humming the air to which she was presently going to dance. De Guiche had overheard everything. The arrow pierced his heart and wounded him mortally. Then, at the risk of interrupting the progress of the *fete* by his annoyance, he fled from the scene, tearing his beautiful costume of Autumn in pieces, and scattering, as he went along, the branches of vines, mulberry and almond trees, with all the other artificial attributes of his assumed divinity. A quarter of an hour afterwards he returned to the theater; but it will be readily believed that it was only a powerful effort of reason over his great excitement that

enabled him to go back; or perhaps, for love is thus strangely constituted, he found it impossible even to remain much longer separated from the presence of one who had broken his heart. Madame was finishing her figure. She saw, but did not look at De Guiche, who, irritated and revengeful, turned his back upon her as she passed him, escorted by her nymphs, and followed by a hundred flatterers. During this time, at the other end of the theater, near the lake, a young woman was seated, with her eyes fixed upon one of the windows of the theater, from which were issuing streams of light—the window in question being that of the royal box. As De Guiche quitted the theater for the purpose of getting into the fresh air he so much needed, he passed close to this figure and saluted her. When she perceived the young man, she rose, like a woman surprised in the midst of ideas she was desirous of concealing from herself. De Guiche stopped as he recognized her, and said hurriedly,—"Good evening, Mademoiselle de la Vallière; I am indeed fortunate in meeting you."

"I, also, M. de Guiche, am glad of this accidental meeting," said the young girl, as she was about to withdraw.

"Pray do not leave me," said De Guiche, stretching out his hand towards her, "for you would be contradicting the kind words you have just pronounced. Remain, I implore you: the evening is most lovely. You wish to escape from the merry tumult, and prefer your own society. Well, I can understand it; all women who are possessed of any feeling do, and one never finds them dull or lonely when removed from the giddy vortex of these exciting amusements. Oh! Heaven!" he exclaimed, suddenly.

"What is the matter, monsieur le comte?" inquired La Vallière, with some anxiety. "You seem agitated."

"I! oh, no!"

"Will you allow me, M. de Guiche, to return you the thanks I had proposed to offer you on the very first opportunity? It is to your recommendation, I am aware, that I owe my admission among the number of Madame's maids of honor."

“Indeed! Ah! I remember now, and I congratulate myself. Do you love any one?”

“I!” exclaimed La Vallière.

“Forgive me, I hardly know what I am saying; a thousand times forgive me; Madame was right, quite right, this brutal exile has completely turned my brain.”

“And yet it seemed to me that the king received you with kindness.”

“Do you think so? Received me with kindness—perhaps so—yes—”

“There cannot be a doubt he received you kindly, for, in fact, you returned without his permission.”

“Quite true, and I believe you are right. But have you not seen M. de Bragelonne here?”

La Vallière started at the name. “Why do you ask?” she inquired.

“Have I offended you again?” said De Guiche. “In that case I am indeed unhappy, and greatly to be pitied.”

“Yes, very unhappy, and very much to be pitied, Monsieur de Guiche, for you seem to be suffering terribly.”

“Oh! mademoiselle, why have I not a devoted sister, or a true friend, such as yourself?”

“You have friends, Monsieur de Guiche, and the Vicomte de Bragelonne, of whom you spoke just now, is, I believe, one of the most devoted.”

“Yes, yes, you are right, he is one of my best friends. Farewell, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, farewell.” And he fled, like one possessed, along the banks of the lake. His dark shadow glided, lengthening as it disappeared, among the illumined yews and glittering undulations of the water. La Vallière looked after him, saying,—“Yes, yes, he, too, is suffering, and I begin to understand why.”

She had hardly finished when her companions, Mademoiselle de Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, ran forward. They were released from their attendance, and had changed their costumes of

nymphs; delighted with the beautiful night, and the success of the evening, they returned to look after their companion.

“What, already here!” they said to her. “We thought we should be first at the rendezvous.”

“I have been here this quarter of an hour,” replied La Vallière.

“Did not the dancing amuse you?”

“No.”

“But surely the enchanting spectacle?”

“No more than the dancing. As far as beauty is concerned, I much prefer that which these dark woods present, in whose depths can be seen, now in one direction and again in another, a light passing by, as though it were an eye, in color like a midnight rainbow, sometimes open, at others closed.”

“La Vallière is quite a poetess,” said Tonnay-Charente.

“In other words,” said Montalais, “she is insupportable. Whenever there is a question of laughing a little or of amusing ourselves, La Vallière begins to cry; whenever we girls have reason to cry, because, perhaps, we have mislaid our dresses, or because our vanity as been wounded, or our costume fails to produce an effect, La Vallière laughs.”

“As far as I am concerned, that is not my character,” said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente. “I am a woman; and there are few like me; whoever loves me, flatters me; whoever flatters me, pleases me; and whoever pleases—”

“Well!” said Montalais, “you do not finish.”

“It is too difficult,” replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, laughing loudly. “Do you, who are so clever, finish for me.”

“And you, Louise?” said Montalais, “does any one please you?”

“That is a matter that concerns no one but myself,” replied the young girl, rising from the mossy bank on which she had been reclining during the whole time the ballet lasted. “Now, mesdemoiselles, we have agreed to amuse ourselves to-night without any one to overlook us, and without any escort. We are three in number, we like one another, and the night is

lovely. Look yonder, do you not see the moon slowly rising, silvering the topmost branches of the chestnuts and the oaks. Oh, beautiful walk! sweet liberty! exquisite soft turf of the woods, the happiness which your friendship confers upon me! let us walk arm in arm towards those large trees. Out yonder all are at this moment seated at table and fully occupied, or preparing to adorn themselves for a set and formal promenade; horses are being saddled, or harnessed to the carriages—the queen's mules or Madame's four white ponies. As for ourselves, we shall soon reach some retired spot where no eyes can see us and no step follow ours. Do you not remember, Montalais, the woods of Cheverny and of Chambord, the innumerable rustling poplars of Blois, where we exchanged our mutual hopes?"

"And confidences too?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "I also think a good deal; but I take care—"

"To say nothing," said Montalais, "so that when Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente thinks, Athenais is the only one who knows it."

"Hush!" said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "I hear steps approaching from this side."

"Quick, quick, then, among the high reed-grass," said Montalais; "stoop, Athenais, you are so tall."

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente stooped as she was told, and, almost at the same moment, they saw two gentlemen approaching, their heads bent down, walking arm in arm, on the fine gravel walk running parallel with the bank. The young girls had, indeed, made themselves small—indeed invisible.

"It is Monsieur de Guiche," whispered Montalais in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's ear.

"It is Monsieur de Bragelonne," whispered the latter to La Vallière.

The two young men approached still closer, conversing in animated tones. “She was here just now,” said the count. “If I had only seen her, I should have declared it to be a vision, but I spoke to her.”

“You are positive, then?”

“Yes; but perhaps I frightened her.”

“In what way?”

“Oh! I was still half crazy at you know what; so that she could hardly have understood what I was saying, and must have grown alarmed.”

“Oh!” said Bragelonne, “do not make yourself uneasy: she is all kindness, and will excuse you; she is clear-sighted, and will understand.”

“Yes, but if she should have understood, and understood too well, she may talk.”

“You do not know Louise, count,” said Raoul. “Louise possesses every virtue, and has not a single fault.” And the two young men passed on, and, as they proceeded, their voices were soon lost in the distance.

“How is it, La Vallière,” said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, “that the Vicomte de Bragelonne spoke of you as Louise?”

“We were brought up together,” replied Louise, blushing; “M. de Bragelonne has honored me by asking my hand in marriage, but—”

“Well?”

“It seems the king will not consent to it.”

“Eh! Why the king? and what has the king to do with it?” exclaimed Aure, sharply. “Good gracious! has the king any right to interfere in matters of that kind? Politics are politics, as M. de Mazarin used to say; but love is love. If, therefore, you love M. de Bragelonne, marry him. *I* give *my* consent.”

Athenais began to laugh.

“Oh! I am speaking seriously,” replied Montalais, “and my opinion in this case is quite as good as the king’s, I suppose; is it not, Louise?”

“Come,” said La Vallière, “these gentlemen have passed; let us take advantage of our being alone to cross the open ground and so take refuge in the woods.”

“So much the better,” said Athenais, “because I see the torches setting out from the chateau and the theater, and they seem as if they were preceding some person of distinction.”

“Let us run, then,” said all three. And, gracefully lifting up the long skirts of their silk dresses, they lightly ran across the open space between the lake and the thickest covert of the park. Montalais agile as a deer, Athenais eager as a young wolf, bounded through the dry grass, and, now and then, some bold Acteon might, by the aid of the faint light, have perceived their straight and well-formed limbs somewhat displayed beneath the heavy folds of their satin petticoats. La Vallière, more refined and more bashful, allowed her dress to flow around her; retarded also by the lameness of her foot, it was not long before she called out to her companions to halt, and, left behind, she obliged them both to wait for her. At this moment, a man, concealed in a dry ditch planted with young willow saplings, scrambled quickly up its shelving side, and ran off in the direction of the chateau. The three young girls, on their side, reached the outskirts of the park, every path of which they well knew. The ditches were bordered by high hedges full of flowers, which on that side protected the foot-passengers from being intruded upon by the horses and carriages. In fact, the sound of Madame’s and the queen’s carriages could be heard in the distance upon the hard dry ground of the roads, followed by the mounted cavaliers. Distant music reached them in response, and when the soft notes died away, the nightingale, with throat of pride, poured forth his melodious chants, and his most complicated, learned, and sweetest compositions to those who had met beneath the thick covert of the woods. Near the songster, in the dark background of the large trees, could be seen the glistening eyes of an owl, attracted by the harmony. In this way the *fete* of the whole court was a *fete* also for the mysterious inhabitants of the forest; for certainly the deer in the brake, the pheasant on the branch, the fox in its hole,

were all listening. One could realize the life led by this nocturnal and invisible population from the restless movements that suddenly took place among the leaves. Our sylvan nymphs uttered a slight cry, but, reassured immediately afterwards, they laughed, and resumed their walk. In this manner they reached the royal oak, the venerable relic of a tree which in its prime has listened to the sighs of Henry II. for the beautiful Diana of Poitiers, and later still to those of Henry IV. for the lovely Gabrielle d'Estrees. Beneath this oak the gardeners had piled up the moss and turf in such a manner that never had a seat more luxuriously rested the wearied limbs of man or monarch. The trunk, somewhat rough to recline against, was sufficiently large to accommodate the three young girls, whose voices were lost among the branches, which stretched upwards to the sky.

Chapter XLI. What Was Said under the Royal Oak.

The softness of the air, the stillness of the foliage, tacitly imposed upon these young girls an engagement to change immediately their giddy conversation for one of a more serious character. She, indeed, whose disposition was the most lively,—Montalais, for instance,—was the first to yield to the influence; and she began by heaving a deep sigh, and saying:—"What happiness to be here alone, and at liberty, with every right to be frank, especially towards one another."

"Yes," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; "for the court, however brilliant it may be, has always some falsehood concealed beneath the folds of its velvet robes, or the glitter of its diamonds."

"I," replied La Vallière, "I never tell a falsehood; when I cannot speak the truth, I remain silent."

"You will not long remain in favor," said Montalais; "it is not here as it was at Blois, where we told the dowager Madame all our little annoyances, and all our longings. There were certain days when Madame remembered that she herself had been young, and, on those days, whoever talked with her found in her a sincere friend. She related to us her flirtations with Monsieur, and we told her of the flirtations she had had with others, or, at least, the rumors of them that had spread abroad. Poor woman, so simple-minded! she laughed at them, as we did. Where is she now?"

"Ah, Montalais,—laughter-loving Montalais!" cried La Vallière; "you see you are sighing again; the woods inspire you, and you are almost reasonable this evening."

“You ought not, either of you,” said Athenais, “to regret the court at Blois so much, unless you do not feel happy with us. A court is a place where men and women resort to talk of matters which mothers, guardians, and especially confessors, severely denounce.”

“Oh, Athenais!” said Louise, blushing.

“Athenais is frank to-night,” said Montalais; “let us avail ourselves of it.”

“Yes, let us take advantage of it, for this evening I could divulge the softest secrets of my heart.”

“Ah, if M. Montespan were here!” said Montalais.

“Do you think that I care for M. de Montespan?” murmured the beautiful young girl.

“He is handsome, I believe?”

“Yes. And that is no small advantage in my eyes.”

“There now, you see—”

“I will go further, and say, that of all the men whom one sees here, he is the handsomest, and the most—”

“What was that?” said La Vallière, starting suddenly from the mossy bank.

“A deer hurrying by, perhaps.”

“I am only afraid of men,” said Athenais.

“When they do not resemble M. de Montespan.”

“A truce to raillery. M. de Montespan is attentive to me, but that does not commit me in any way. Is not M. de Guiche here, he who is so devoted to Madame?”

“Poor fellow!” said La Vallière.

“Why to be pitied? Madame is sufficiently beautiful, and of high enough rank, I suppose.”

La Vallière shook her head sorrowfully, saying, “When one loves, it is neither beauty nor rank;—when one loves it should be the heart, or the eyes only, of him, or of her whom one loves.”

Montalais began to laugh loudly. “Heart, eyes,” she said; “oh, sugar-plums!”

“I speak for myself;” replied La Vallière.

“Noble sentiments,” said Athenais, with an air of protection, but with indifference.

“Are they not your own?” asked Louise.

“Perfectly so; but to continue: how can one pity a man who bestows his attentions upon such a woman as Madame? If any disproportion exists, it is on the count’s side.”

“Oh! no, no,” returned La Vallière; “it is on Madame’s side.”

“Explain yourself.”

“I will. Madame has not even a wish to know what love is. She diverts herself with the feeling, as children do with fireworks, form which a spark might set a palace on fire. It makes a display, and that is all she cares about. Besides, pleasure forms the tissue of which she wishes her life to be woven. M. de Guiche loves this illustrious personage, but she will never love him.”

Athenais laughed disdainfully. “Do people really ever love?” she said. “Where are the noble sentiments you just now uttered? Does not a woman’s virtue consist in the uncompromising refusal of every intrigue that might compromise her? A properly regulated woman, endowed with a natural heart, ought to look at men, make herself loved—adored, even, by them, and say at the very utmost but once in her life, ‘I begin to think that I ought not to have been what I am,—I should have detested this one less than others.’”

“Therefore,” exclaimed La Vallière, “that is what M. de Montespan has to expect.”

“Certainly; he, as well as every one else. What! have I not said that I admit he possesses a certain superiority, and would not that be enough? My dear child, a woman is a queen during the entire period nature permits her to enjoy sovereign power—from fifteen to thirty-five years of age. After that, we are free to have a heart, when we only have that left—”

“Oh, oh!” murmured La Vallière.

“Excellent,” cried Montalais; “a very masterly woman; Athenais, you will make your way in the world.”

“Do you not approve of what I say?”

“Completely,” replied her laughing companion.

“You are not serious, Montalais?” said Louise.

“Yes, yes; I approve everything Athenais has just said; only—”

“Only *what?*”

“Well, I cannot carry it out. I have the firmest principles; I form resolutions beside which the laws of the Stadtholder and of the King of Spain are child’s play; but when the moment arrives to put them into execution, nothing comes of them.”

“Your courage fails?” said Athenais, scornfully.

“Miserably so.”

“Great weakness of nature,” returned Athenais. “But at least you make a choice.”

“Why, no. It pleases fate to disappoint me in everything; I dream of emperors, and I find only—”

“Aure, Aure!” exclaimed La Vallière, “for pity’s sake, do not, for the pleasure of saying something witty, sacrifice those who love you with such devoted affection.”

“Oh, I do not trouble myself much about that; those who love me are sufficiently happy that I do not dismiss them altogether. So much the worse for myself if I have a weakness for any one, but so much the worse for others if I revenge myself upon them for it.”

“You are right,” said Athenais, “and, perhaps, you too will reach the goal. In other words, young ladies, that is termed being a coquette. Men, who are very silly in most things, are particularly so in confounding, under the term of coquetry, a woman’s pride, and love of changing her sentiments as she does her dress. I, for instance, am proud; that is to say, impregnable. I treat my admirers harshly, but without any

pretention to retain them. Men call me a coquette, because they are vain enough to think I care for them. Other women—Montalais, for instance—have allowed themselves to be influenced by flattery; they would be lost were it not for that most fortunate principle of instinct which urges them to change suddenly, and punish the man whose devotion they so recently accepted."

"A very learned dissertation," said Montalais, in the tone of thorough enjoyment.

"It is odious!" murmured Louise.

"Thanks to that sort of coquetry, for, indeed, that is genuine coquetry," continued Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; "the lover who, a little while since, was puffed up with pride, in a minute afterwards is suffering at every pore of his vanity and self-esteem. He was, perhaps, already beginning to assume the airs of a conqueror, but now he retreats defeated; he was about to assume an air of protection towards us, but he is obliged to prostrate himself once more. The result of all this is, that, instead of having a husband who is jealous and troublesome, free from restraint in his conduct towards us, we have a lover always trembling in our presence, always fascinated by our attractions, always submissive; and for this simple reason, that he finds the same woman never twice of the same mind. Be convinced, therefore, of the advantages of coquetry. Possessing that, one reigns a queen among women in cases where Providence has withheld that precious faculty of holding one's heart and mind in check."

"How clever you are," said Montalais, "and how well you understand the duty women owe themselves!"

"I am only settling a case of individual happiness," said Athenais modestly; "and defending myself, like all weak, loving dispositions, against the oppressions of the stronger."

"La Vallière does not say a word."

"Does she not approve of what we are saying?"

“Nay; only I do not understand it,” said Louise. “You talk like people not called upon to live in this world of ours.”

“And very pretty your world is,” said Montalais.

“A world,” returned Athenais, “in which men worship a woman until she has fallen,—and insult her when she has fallen.”

“Who spoke to you of falling?” said Louise.

“Yours is a new theory, then; will you tell us how you intend to resist yielding to temptation, if you allow yourself to be hurried away by feelings of affection?”

“Oh!” exclaimed the young girl, raising towards the dark heavens her beautiful large eyes filled with tears, “if you did but know what a heart is, I would explain, and convince you; a loving heart is stronger than all your coquetry, more powerful than all your pride. A woman is never truly loved, I believe; a man never loves with idolatry, unless he feels sure he is loved in return. Let old men, whom we read of in comedies, fancy themselves adored by coquettes. A young man is conscious of, and knows them; if he has a fancy, or a strong desire, and an absorbing passion, for a coquette, he cannot mistake her; a coquette may drive him out of his senses, but will never make him fall in love. Love, such as I conceive it to be, is an incessant, complete, and perfect sacrifice; but it is not the sacrifice of one only of the two persons thus united. It is the perfect abnegation of two who are desirous of blending their beings into one. If ever I love, I shall implore my lover to leave me free and pure; I will tell him, and he will understand, that my heart was torn by my refusal, and he, in his love for me, aware of the magnitude of my sacrifice,—he, in his turn, I say, will store his devotion for me,—will respect me, and will not seek my ruin, to insult me when I shall have fallen, as you said just now, whilst uttering your blasphemies against love, such as I understand it. That is my idea of love. And now you will tell me, perhaps, that my love will despise me; I defy him to do so, unless he be the vilest of men, and my heart assures me that it is not such a

man I would choose. A look from me will repay him for the sacrifices he makes, or will inspire him with the virtues which he would never think he possessed."

"But, Louise," exclaimed Montalais, "you tell us this, and do not carry it into practice."

"What do you mean?"

"You are adored by Raoul de Bragelonne, who worships you on both knees. The poor fellow is made the victim of your virtue, just as he would be— nay, more than he would be, even—of my coquetry, or Athenais's pride."

"All this is simply a different shade of coquetry," said Athenais; "and Louise, I perceive, is a coquette without knowing it."

"Oh!" said La Vallière.

"Yes, you may call it instinct, if you please, keenest sensibility, exquisite refinement of feeling, perpetual play of restrained outbreaks of affection, which end in smoke. It is very artful too, and very effective. I should even, now that I reflect upon it, have preferred this system of tactics to my own pride, for waging war on members of the other sex, because it offers the advantage sometimes of thoroughly convincing them; but, at the present moment, without utterly condemning myself, I declare it to be superior to the non-complex coquetry of Montalais." And the two young girls began to laugh.

La Vallière alone preserved silence, and quietly shook her head. Then, a moment after, she added, "If you were to tell me, in the presence of a man, but a fourth part of what you have just said, or even if I were assured that you think it, I should die of shame and grief where I am now."

"Very well; die, poor tender little darling," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; "for if there are no men here, there are at least two women, your own friends, who declare you to be attained and convicted of being a coquette from instinct; in other words, the most dangerous kind of coquette the world possesses."

“Oh! mesdemoiselles,” replied La Vallière, blushing, and almost ready to weep. Her two companions again burst out laughing.

“Very well! I will ask Bragelonne to tell me.”

“Bragelonne?” said Athenais.

“Yes! Bragelonne, who is as courageous as Caesar, and as clever and witty as M. Fouquet. Poor fellow! for twelve years he has known you, loved you, and yet—one can hardly believe it—he has never even kissed the tips of your fingers.”

“Tell us the reason of this cruelty, you who are all heart,” said Athenais to La Vallière.

“Let me explain it by a single word—virtue. You will perhaps deny the existence of virtue?”

“Come, Louise, tell us the truth,” said Aure, taking her by the hand.

“What do you wish me to tell you?” cried La Vallière.

“Whatever you like; but it will be useless for you to say anything, for I persist in my opinion of you. A coquette from instinct; in other words, as I have already said, and I say it again, the most dangerous of all coquettes.”

“Oh! no, no; for pity’s sake do not believe that!”

“What! twelve years of extreme severity.”

“How can that be, since twelve years ago I was only five years old? The frivolity of the child cannot surely be placed to the young girl’s account.”

“Well! you are now seventeen; three years instead of twelve. During those three years you have remained constantly and unchangeably cruel. Against you are arrayed the silent shades of Blois, the meetings when you diligently conned the stars together, the evening wanderings beneath the plantain-trees, his impassioned twenty years speaking to your fourteen summers, the fire of his glances addressed to yourself.”

“Yes, yes; but so it is!”

“Impossible!”

“But why impossible?”

“Tell us something credible and we will believe you.”

“Yet, if you were to suppose one thing.”

“What is that?”

“Suppose that I thought I was in love, and that I am not.”

“What! not in love!”

“Well, then! if I have acted in a different manner to what others do when they are in love, it is because I do not love; and because my hour has not yet come.”

“Louise, Louise,” said Montalais, “take care or I will remind you of the remark you made just now. Raoul is not here; do not overwhelm him while he is absent; be charitable, and if, on closer inspection, you think you do not love him, tell him so, poor fellow!” and she began to laugh.

“Louise pitied M. de Guiche just now,” said Athenais; “would it be possible to detect an explanation of her indifference for the one in this compassion for the other?”

“Say what you please,” said La Vallière, sadly; “upbraid me as you like, since you do not understand me.”

“Oh! oh!” replied Montalais, “temper, sorrow, tears; we are jesting, Louise, and are not, I assure you, quite the monsters you suppose. Look at the proud Athenais, as she is called; she does not love M. de Montespan, it is true, but she would be in despair if M. de Montespan did not continue to love her. Look at me; I laugh at M. Malicorne, but the poor fellow whom I laugh at knows precisely when he will be permitted to press his lips upon my hand. And yet the eldest of us is not twenty yet. What a future before us!”

“Silly, silly girls!” murmured Louise.

“You are quite right,” said Montalais; “and you alone have spoken words of wisdom.”

“Certainly.”

“I do not dispute it,” replied Athenais. “And so it is clear you do not love poor M. de Bragelonne?”

“Perhaps she does,” said Montalais; “she is not yet quite certain of it. But, in any case, listen, Athenais; if M. de Bragelonne is ever free, I will give you a little friendly advice.”

“What is that?”

“To look at him well before you decide in favor of M. de Montespan.”

“Oh! in that way of considering the subject, M. de Bragelonne is not the only one whom one could look at with pleasure; M. de Guiche, for instance, has his value also.”

“He did not distinguish himself this evening,” said Montalais; “and I know from very good authority that Madame thought him insupportable.”

“M. de Saint-Aignan produced a most brilliant effect, and I am sure that more than one person who saw him dance this evening will not soon forget him. Do you not think so, La Vallière?”

“Why do you ask me? I did not see him, nor do I know him.”

“What! you did not see M. de Saint-Aignan? Don’t you know him?”

“No.”

“Come, come, do not affect a virtue more extravagantly excessive than our vanity!—you have eyes, I suppose?”

“Excellent.”

“Then you must have seen all those who danced this evening.”

“Yes, nearly all.”

“That is a very impertinent ‘nearly all’ for somebody.”

“You must take it for what it is worth.”

“Very well; now, among all those gentlemen whom you saw, which do you prefer?”

“Yes,” said Montalais, “is it M. de Saint-Aignan, or M. de Guiche, or M. —”

“I prefer no one; I thought them all about the same.”

“Do you mean, then, that among that brilliant assembly, the first court in the world, no one pleased you?”

"I do not say that."

"Tell us, then, who your ideal is?"

"It is not an ideal being."

"He exists, then?"

"In very truth," exclaimed La Vallière, aroused and excited; "I cannot understand you at all. What! you who have a heart as I have, eyes as I have, and yet you speak of M. de Guiche, of M. de Saint-Aignan, when the king was there." These words, uttered in a precipitate manner, and in an agitated, fervid tone of voice, made her two companions, between whom she was seated, exclaim in a manner that terrified her, "*The king!*"

La Vallière buried her face in her hands. "Yes," she murmured; "the king! the king! Have you ever seen any one to be compared to the king?"

"You were right just now in saying you had excellent eyes, Louise, for you see a great distance; too far, indeed. Alas! the king is not one upon whom our poor eyes have a right to hinge themselves."

"That is too true," cried La Vallière; "it is not the privilege of all eyes to gaze upon the sun; but I will look upon him, even were I to be blinded in doing so." At this moment, and as though caused by the words which had just escaped La Vallière's lips, a rustling of leaves, and of what sounded like some silken material, was heard behind the adjoining bushes. The young girls hastily rose, almost terrified out of their senses. They distinctly saw the leaves move, without being able to see what it was that stirred them.

"It is a wolf or a wild boar," cried Montalais; "fly! fly!" The three girls, in the extremity of terror, fled by the first path that presented itself, and did not stop until they had reached the verge of the wood. There, breathless, leaning against each other, feeling their hearts throb wildly, they endeavored to collect their senses, but could only succeed in doing so after the lapse of some minutes. Perceiving at last the lights from the windows of the chateau, they decided to walk towards them. La Vallière was exhausted with fatigue, and Aure and Athenais were obliged to support her.

“We have escaped well,” said Montalais.

“I am greatly afraid,” said La Vallière, “that it was something worse than a wolf. For my part, and I speak as I think, I should have preferred to have run the risk of being devoured alive by some wild animal than to have been listened to and overheard. Fool, fool that I am! How could I have thought, how could I have said what I did?” And saying this her head bowed like the water tossed plume of a bulrush; she felt her limbs fail, and her strength abandoning her, and, gliding almost inanimate from the arms of her companions, sank down upon the turf.

Chapter XLII. The King's Uneasiness.

Let us leave poor La Vallière, who had fainted in the arms of her two companions, and return to the precincts of the royal oak. The young girls had hardly run twenty paces, when the sound which had so much alarmed them was renewed among the branches. A man's figure might indistinctly be perceived, and putting the branches of the bushes aside, he appeared upon the verge of the wood, and perceiving that the place was empty, burst out into a peal of laughter. It is almost superfluous to add that the form in question was that of a young and handsome cavalier, who immediately made a sign to another, who thereupon made his appearance.

"What, sire," said the second figure, advancing timidly, "has your majesty put our young sentimentalists to flight?"

"It seems so," said the king, "and you can show yourself without fear."

"Take care, sire, you will be recognized."

"But I tell you they are flown."

"This is a most fortunate meeting, sire; and, if I dared offer an opinion to your majesty, we ought to follow them."

"They are far enough away by this time."

"They would quickly allow themselves to be overtaken, especially if they knew who were following them."

"What do you mean by that, coxcomb that you are?"

"Why, one of them seems to have taken a fancy to me, and another compared you to the sun."

"The greater reason why we should not show ourselves, Saint-Aignan. The sun never shows itself in the night-time."

“Upon my word, sire, your majesty seems to have very little curiosity. In your place, I should like to know who are the two nymphs, the two dryads, the two hamadryads, who have so good an opinion of us.”

“I shall know them again very well, I assure you, without running after them.”

“By what means?”

“By their voices, of course. They belong to the court, and the one who spoke of me had a remarkably sweet voice.”

“Ah! your majesty permits yourself to be influenced by flattery.”

“No one will ever say it is a means *you* make use of.”

“Forgive my stupidity, sire.”

“Come; let us go and look where I told you.”

“Is the passion, then, which your majesty confided to me, already forgotten?”

“Oh! no, indeed. How is it possible to forget such beautiful eyes as Mademoiselle de la Vallière has?”

“Yet the other one has a beautiful voice.”

“Which one?”

“The lady who has fallen in love with the sun.”

“M. de Saint-Aignan!”

“Forgive me, sire.”

“Well, I am not sorry you should believe me to be an admirer of sweet voices as well as of beautiful eyes. I know you to be a terrible talker, and to-morrow I shall have to pay for the confidence I have shown you.”

“What do you mean, sire?”

“That to-morrow every one will know that I have designs upon this little La Vallière; but be careful, Saint-Aignan, I have confided my secret to no one but you, and if any one should speak to me about it, I shall know who has betrayed my secret.”

“You are angry, sire.”

“No; but you understand I do not wish to compromise the poor girl.”

“Do not be afraid, sire.”

“You promise me, then?”

“I give you my word of honor.”

“Excellent,” thought the king, laughing to himself; “now every one will know to-morrow that I have been running about after La Vallière to-night.”

Then, endeavoring to see where he was, he said: “Why we have lost ourselves.”

“Not quite so bad as that, sire.”

“Where does that gate lead to?”

“To Rond-Point, sire.”

“Where were we going when we heard the sound of women’s voices?”

“Yes, sire, and the termination of a conversation in which I had the honor of hearing my own name pronounced by the side of your majesty’s.”

“You return to that subject too frequently, Saint-Aignan.”

“Your majesty will forgive me, but I am delighted to know that a woman exists whose thoughts are occupied about me, without my knowledge, and without my having done anything to deserve it. Your majesty cannot comprehend this satisfaction, for your rank and merit attract attention, and compel regard.”

“No, no, Saint-Aignan, believe me or not, as you like,” said the king, leaning familiarly upon Saint-Aignan’s arm and taking the path he thought would lead them to the chateau; “but this candid confession, this perfectly disinterested preference of one who will, perhaps, never attract my attention—in one word, the mystery of this adventure excites me, and the truth is, that if I were not so taken with La Vallière—”

“Do not let that interfere with your majesty’s intentions: you have time enough before you.”

“What do you mean?”

“La Vallière is said to be very strict in her ideas.”

“You excite my curiosity and I am anxious to see her again. Come, let us walk on.”

The king spoke untruly, for nothing, on the contrary, could make him less anxious, but he had a part to play, and so he walked on hurriedly. Saint-Aignan followed him at a short distance. Suddenly the king stopped; the courtier followed his example.

“Saint-Aignan,” he said, “do you not hear some one moaning?”

“Yes, sire, and weeping, too, it seems.”

“It is in this direction,” said the king. “It sounds like the tears and sobs of a woman.”

“Run,” said the king; and, following a by-path, they ran across the grass. As they approached, the cries were more distinctly heard.

“Help, help,” exclaimed two voices. The king and his companion redoubled their speed, and, as they approached nearer, the sighs they had heard were changed into loud sobs. The cry of “Help! help!” was again repeated; at the sound of which, the king and Saint-Aignan increased the rapidity of their pace. Suddenly at the other side of a ditch, under the branches of a willow, they perceived a woman on her knees, holding another in her arms who seemed to have fainted. A few paces from them, a third, standing in the middle of the path, was calling for assistance. Perceiving the two gentlemen, whose rank she could not tell, her cries for assistance were redoubled. The king, who was in advance of his companion, leaped across the ditch, and reached the group at the very moment when, from the end of the path which led to the chateau, a dozen persons were approaching, who had been drawn to the spot by the same cries that had attracted the attention of the king and M. de Saint-Aignan.

“What is the matter, young ladies?” said Louis.

“The king!” exclaimed Mademoiselle de Montalais, in her astonishment, letting La Vallière’s head fall upon the ground.

“Yes, it is the king; but that is no reason why you should abandon your companion. Who is she?”

“It is Mademoiselle de la Vallière, sire.”

“Mademoiselle de la Vallière!”

“Yes, sire, she has just fainted.”

“Poor child!” said the king. “Quick, quick, fetch a surgeon.” But however great the anxiety with which the king had pronounced these words may have seemed to others, he had not so carefully schooled himself but that they appeared, as well as the gesture which accompanied them, somewhat cold to Saint-Aignan, to whom the king had confided the sudden love with which she had inspired him.

“Saint-Aignan,” continued the king, “watch over Mademoiselle de la Vallière, I beg. Send for a surgeon. I will hasten forward and inform Madame of the accident which has befallen one of her maids of honor.” And, in fact, while M. de Saint-Aignan was busily engaged in making preparations for carrying Mademoiselle de la Vallière to the chateau, the king hurried forward, happy to have an opportunity of approaching Madame, and of speaking to her under a colorable pretext. Fortunately, a carriage was passing; the coachman was told to stop, and the persons who were inside, having been informed of the accident, eagerly gave up their seats to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. The current of fresh air produced by the rapid motion of the carriage soon recalled her to her senses. Having reached the chateau, she was able, though very weak, to alight from the carriage, and, with the assistance of Athenais and of Montalais, to reach the inner apartments. They made her sit down in one of the rooms of the ground floor. After a while, as the accident had not produced much effect upon those who had been walking, the promenade was resumed. During this time, the king had found Madame beneath a tree with overhanging branches, and had seated himself by her side.

“Take care, sire,” said Henrietta to him, in a low tone, “you do not show yourself as indifferent as you ought to be.”

“Alas!” replied the king, in the same tone, “I much fear we have entered into an agreement above our strength to keep.” He then added aloud, “You have heard of the accident, I suppose?”

“What accident?”

“Oh! in seeing you I forgot I hurried here expressly to tell you of it. I am, however, painfully affected by it; one of your maids of honor, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, has just fainted.”

“Indeed! poor girl,” said the princess, quietly, “what was the cause of it?”

She then added in an undertone, “You forget, sire, that you wish others to believe in your passion for this girl, and yet you remain here while she is almost dying, perhaps, elsewhere.”

“Ah! Madame,” said the king, sighing, “how much more perfect you are in your part than I am, and how actively you think of everything.”

He then rose, saying loud enough for every one to hear him, “Permit me to leave you, Madame; my uneasiness is very great, and I wish to be quite certain, myself, that proper attention has been given to Mademoiselle de la Vallière.” And the king left again to return to La Vallière, while those who had been present commented upon the king’s remark:—“My uneasiness is very great.”

Chapter XLIII. The King's Secret.

On his way Louis met the Comte de Saint-Aignan. "Well, Saint-Aignan," he inquired, with affected interest, "how is the invalid."

"Really, sire," stammered Saint-Aignan, "to my shame, I confess I do not know."

"What! you do not know?" said the king, pretending to take in a serious manner this want of attention for the object of his predilection.

"Will your majesty pardon me; but I have just met one of our three loquacious wood-nymphs, and I confess that my attention has been taken away from other matters."

"Ah!" said the king, eagerly, "you have found, then—"

"The one who deigned to speak of me in such advantageous terms; and, having found mine, I was searching for yours, sire, when I had the happiness to meet your majesty."

"Very well; but Mademoiselle de la Vallière before everything else," said the king, faithful to the character he had assumed.

"Oh! our charming invalid!" said Saint-Aignan; "how fortunately her fainting fit came on, since your majesty had already occupied yourself about her."

"What is the name of your fair lady, Saint-Aignan? Is it a secret?"

"It ought to be a secret, and a very great one, even; but your majesty is well aware that no secret can possibly exist for you."

"Well, what is her name?"

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Is she pretty?"

“Exceedingly, sire; and I recognized the voice which pronounced my name in such tender accents. I accosted her, questioned her as well as I was able to do, in the midst of the crowd; and she told me, without suspecting anything, that a little while ago she was under the great oak, with her two friends, when the sound of a wolf or a robber had terrified them, and made them run away.”

“But,” inquired the king, anxiously, “what are the names of these two friends?”

“Sire,” said Saint-Aignan, “will your majesty send me forthwith to the Bastile?”

“What for?”

“Because I am an egotist and a fool. My surprise was so great at such a conquest, and at so fortunate a discovery, that I went no further in my inquiries. Besides, I did not think that your majesty would attach any very great importance to what you heard, knowing how much your attention was taken up by Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and then, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente left me precipitately, to return to Mademoiselle de la Vallière.”

“Let us hope, then, that I shall be as fortunate as yourself. Come, Saint-Aignan.”

“Your majesty is ambitions, I perceive, and does not wish to allow any conquest to escape you. Well, I assure you that I will conscientiously set about my inquiries; and, moreover, from one or the other of those Three Graces we shall learn the names of the rest, and by the names their secrets.”

“I, too,” said the king, “only require to hear her voice to know it again. Come, let us say no more about it, but show me where poor La Vallière is.”

“Well,” thought Saint-Aignan, “the king’s regard is beginning to display itself, and for that girl too. It is extraordinary; I should never have believed it.” And with this thought passing through his mind, he showed the king the room to which La Vallière had been carried; the

king entered, followed by Saint-Aignan. In a low chamber, near a large window looking out upon the gardens, La Vallière, reclining in a large armchair, was inhaling deep draughts of the perfumed evening breeze. From the loosened body of her dress, the lace fell in tumbled folds, mingling with the tresses of her beautiful fair hair, which lay scattered upon her shoulders. Her languishing eyes were filled with tears; she seemed as lifeless as those beautiful visions of our dreams, that pass before the mental eye of the sleeper, half-opening their wings without moving them, unclosing their lips without a sound escaping them. The pearl-like pallor of La Vallière possessed a charm it would be impossible to describe. Mental and bodily suffering had produced upon her features a soft and noble expression of grief; from the perfect passiveness of her arms and bust, she more resembled one whose soul had passed away, than a living being; she seemed not to hear either of the whisperings which arose from the court. She seemed to be communing within herself; and her beautiful, delicate hands trembled from time to time as though at the contact of some invisible touch. She was so completely absorbed in her reverie, that the king entered without her perceiving him. At a distance he gazed upon her lovely face, upon which the moon shed its pure silvery light.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, with a terror he could not control, "she is dead."

"No, sire," said Montalais, in a low voice; "on the contrary, she is better. Are you not better, Louise?"

But Louise did not answer. "Louise," continued Montalais, "the king has deigned to express his uneasiness on your account."

"The king!" exclaimed Louise, starting up abruptly, as if a stream of fire had started through her frame to her heart; "the king uneasy about me?"

"Yes," said Montalais.

"The king is here, then?" said La Vallière, not venturing to look round her.

"That voice! that voice!" whispered Louis, eagerly, to Saint-Aignan.

“Yes, it is so,” replied Saint-Aignan; “your majesty is right; it is she who declared her love for the sun.”

“Hush!” said the king. And then approaching La Vallière, he said, “You are not well, Mademoiselle de la Vallière? Just now, indeed, in the park, I saw that you had fainted. How were you attacked?”

“Sire,” stammered out the poor child, pale and trembling, “I really do not know.”

“You have been walking too far,” said the king; “and fatigue, perhaps —”

“No, sire,” said Montalais, eagerly, answering for her friend, “it could not be from fatigue, for we passed most of the evening seated beneath the royal oak.”

“Under the royal oak?” returned the king, starting. “I was not deceived; it is as I thought.” And he directed a look of intelligence at the comte.

“Yes,” said Saint-Aignan, “under the royal oak, with Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.”

“How do you know that?” inquired Montalais.

“In a very simple way. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente told me so.”

“In that case, she probably told you the cause of Mademoiselle de la Vallière’s fainting?”

“Why, yes; she told me something about a wolf or a robber. I forget precisely which.” La Vallière listened, her eyes fixed, her bosom heaving, as if, gifted with an acuteness of perception, she foresaw a portion of the truth. Louis imagined this attitude and agitation to be the consequence of a terror only partially reassured. “Nay, fear nothing,” he said, with a rising emotion which he could not conceal; “the wolf which terrified you so much was simply a wolf with two legs.”

“It was a man, then!” said Louise; “it was a man who was listening?”

“Suppose it was so, mademoiselle, what great harm was there in his having listened? Is it likely that, even in your own opinion, you would have said anything which could not have been listened to?”

La Vallière wrung her hands, and hid her face in them, as if to hide her blushes. “In Heaven’s name,” she said, “who was concealed there? Who was listening?”

The king advanced towards her, to take hold of one of her hands. “It was I,” he said, bowing with marked respect. “Is it likely I could have frightened you?” La Vallière uttered a loud cry; for the second time her strength forsook her; and moaning in utter despair, she again fell lifeless in her chair. The king had just time to hold out his arm; so that she was partially supported by him. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Montalais, who stood a few paces from the king and La Vallière, motionless and almost petrified at the recollection of their conversation with La Vallière, did not even think of offering their assistance, feeling restrained by the presence of the king, who, with one knee on the ground, held La Vallière round the waist with his arm.

“You heard, sire!” murmured Athenais. But the king did not reply; he remained with his eyes fixed upon La Vallière’s half-closed eyes, and held her quiescent hand in his own.

“Of course,” replied Saint-Aignan, who, on his side, hoping that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, too, would faint, advancing towards her, holding his arms extended,—“of course; we did not even lose a single word.” But the haughty Athenais was not a woman to faint easily; she darted a terrible look at Saint-Aignan, and fled. Montalais, with more courage, advanced hurriedly towards Louise, and received her from the king’s hands, who was already fast losing his presence of mind, as he felt his face covered by the perfumed tresses of the seemingly dying girl. “Excellent,” whispered Saint-Aignan. “This is indeed an adventure; and it will be my own fault if I am not the first to relate it.”

The king approached him, and, with a trembling voice and a passionate gesture, said, “Not a syllable, comte.”

The poor king forgot that, only an hour before, he had given him a similar recommendation, but with the very opposite intention; namely, that the comte should be indiscreet. It followed, as a matter of course, that he latter recommendation was quite as unnecessary as the former.

Half an hour afterwards, everybody in Fontainebleau knew that Mademoiselle de la Vallière had had a conversation under the royal oak with Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, and that in this conversation she had confessed her affection for the king. It was known, also, that the king, after having manifested the uneasiness with which Mademoiselle de la Vallière's health had inspired him, had turned pale, and trembled very much as he received the beautiful girl fainting into his arms; so that it was quite agreed among the courtiers, that the greatest event of the period had just been revealed; that his majesty loved Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and that, consequently, Monsieur could now sleep in perfect tranquillity. It was this, even, that the queen-mother, as surprised as the others by the sudden change, hastened to tell the young queen and Philip d'Orleans. Only she set to work in a different manner, by attacking them in the following way:—To her daughter-in-law she said, "See, now, Therese, how very wrong you were to accuse the king; now it is said he is devoted to some other person; why should there be any greater truth in the report of to-day than in that of yesterday, or in that of yesterday than in that of to-day?" To Monsieur, in relating to him the adventure of the royal oak, she said, "Are you not very absurd in your jealousies, my dear Philip? It is asserted that the king is madly in love with that little La Vallière. Say nothing of it to your wife; for the queen will know all about it very soon." This latter confidential communication had an immediate result. Monsieur, who had regained his composure, went triumphantly to look after his wife, and it was not yet midnight and the *fete* was to continue until two in the morning, he offered her his hand for a promenade. At the end of a few paces, however, the first thing he did was to disobey his mother's injunctions.

"Do not tell any one, the queen least of all," he said mysteriously, "what people say about the king."

"What do they say about him?" inquired Madame.

"That my brother has suddenly fallen in love."

"With whom?"

"With Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

As it was dark, Madame could smile at her ease.

“Ah!” she said, “and how long is it since this has been the case?”

“For some days, it seems. But that was nothing but nonsense; it is only this evening that he has revealed his passion.”

“The king shows his good taste,” said Madame; “in my opinion she is a very charming girl.”

“I verily believe you are jesting.”

“I! in what way?”

“In any case this passion will make some one very happy, even if it be only La Vallière herself.”

“Really,” continued the princess, “you speak as if you had read into the inmost recesses of La Vallière’s heart. Who has told you that she agrees to return the king’s affection?”

“And who has told you that she will not return it?”

“She loves the Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“You think so?”

“She is even affianced to him.”

“She was so.”

“What do you mean?”

“When they went to ask the king’s permission to arrange the marriage, he refused his permission.”

“Refused?”

“Yes, although the request was preferred by the Comte de la Fere himself, for whom the king has the greatest regard, on account of the part he took in your royal brother’s restoration, and in other events, also, which happened a long time ago.”

“Well! the poor lovers must wait until the king is pleased to change his opinion; they are young, and there is time enough.”

“But, dear me,” said Philip, laughing, “I perceive you do not know the best part of the affair.”

“No!”

“That by which the king was most deeply touched.”

“The king, do you say, has been deeply touched?”

“To the very quick of his heart.”

“But how?—in what manner?—tell me directly.”

“By an adventure, the romance of which cannot be equalled.”

“You know how I love to hear of such adventures, and yet you keep me waiting,” said the princess, impatiently.

“Well, then—” and Monsieur paused.

“I am listening.”

“Under the royal oak—you know where the royal oak is?”

“What can that matter? Under the royal oak, you were saying?”

“Well! Mademoiselle de la Vallière, fancying herself to be alone with her two friends, revealed to them her affection for the king.”

“Ah!” said Madame, beginning to be uneasy, “her affection for the king?”

“Yes.”

“When was this?”

“About an hour ago.”

Madame started, and then said, “And no one knew of this affection?”

“No one.”

“Not even his majesty?”

“Not even his majesty. The artful little puss kept her secret strictly to herself, when suddenly it proved stronger than herself, and so escaped her.”

“And from whom did you get this absurd tale?”

“Why, as everybody else did, from La Vallière herself, who confessed her love to Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, who were her companions.”

Madame stopped suddenly, and by a hasty movement let go her husband’s hand.

“Did you say it was an hour ago she made this confession?” Madame inquired.

“About that time.”

“Is the king aware of it?”

“Why, that is the very thing which constitutes the perfect romance of the affair, for the king was behind the royal oak with Saint-Aignan, and heard the whole of the interesting conversation without losing a single word of it.”

Madame felt struck to the heart, saying incautiously, “But I have seen the king since, and he never told me a word about it.”

“Of course,” said Monsieur; “he took care not to speak of it to you himself, since he recommended every one not to say a word about it.”

“What do you mean?” said Madame, growing angry.

“I mean that they wished to keep you in ignorance of the affair altogether.”

“But why should they wish to conceal it from me?”

“From the fear that your friendship for the young queen might induce you to say something about it to her, nothing more.”

Madame hung down her head; her feelings were grievously wounded. She could not enjoy a moment’s repose until she had met the king. As a king is, most naturally, the very last person in his kingdom who knows what is said about him, in the same way that a lover is the only one who is kept in ignorance of what is said about his mistress, therefore, when the king perceived Madame, who was looking for him, he approached her in some perturbation, but still gracious and attentive in his manner. Madame waited for him to speak about La Vallière first; but as he did not speak of her, she said, “And the poor girl?”

“What poor girl?” said the king.

“La Vallière. Did you not tell me, sire, that she had fainted?”

“She is still very ill,” said the king, affecting the greatest indifference.

“But surely that will prejudicially affect the rumor you were going to spread, sire?”

“What rumor?”

“That your attention was taken up by her.”

“Oh!” said the king, carelessly, “I trust it will be reported all the same.”

Madame still waited; she wished to know if the king would speak to her of the adventure of the royal oak. But the king did not say a word about it. Madame, on her side, did not open her lips about it; so that the king took leave of her without having reposed the slightest confidence in her. Hardly had she watched the king move away, than she set out in search of Saint-Aignan. Saint-Aignan was never very difficult to find; he was like the smaller vessels that always follow in the wake of, and as tenders to, the larger ships. Saint-Aignan was the very man whom Madame needed in her then state of mind. And as for him, he only looked for worthier ears than others he had found to have an opportunity of recounting the event in all its details. And so he did not spare Madame a single word of the whole affair. When he had finished, Madame said to him, “Confess, now, that is his all a charming invention.”

“Invention, no; a true story, yes.”

“Confess, whether invention or true story, that it was told to you as you have told it to me, but that you were not there.”

“Upon my honor, Madame, I was there.”

“And you think that these confessions may have made an impression on the king?”

“Certainly, as those of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did upon me,” replied Saint-Aignan; “do not forget, Madame, that Mademoiselle de la Vallière compared the king to the sun; that was flattering enough.”

“The king does not permit himself to be influenced by such flatteries.”

“Madame, the king is just as much Adonis as Apollo; and I saw plain enough just now when La Vallière fell into his arms.”

“La Vallière fell into the king’s arms!”

“Oh! it was the most graceful picture possible; just imagine, La Vallière had fallen back fainting, and—”

“Well! what did you see?—tell me—speak!”

“I saw what ten other people saw at the same time as myself; I saw that when La Vallière fell into his arms, the king almost fainted himself.”

Madame smothered a subdued cry, the only indication of her smothered anger.

“Thank you,” she said, laughing in a convulsive manner, “you relate stories delightfully, M. de Saint-Aignan.” And she hurried away, alone, and almost suffocated by painful emotion, towards the chateau.

Chapter XLIV. Courses de Nuit.

Monsieur quitted the princess in the best possible humor, and feeling greatly fatigued, retired to his apartments, leaving every one to finish the night as he chose. When in his room, Monsieur began to dress for the night with careful attention, which displayed itself from time to time in paroxysms of satisfaction. While his attendants were engaged in curling his hair, he sang the principal airs of the ballet which the violins had played, and to which the king had danced. He then summoned his tailors, inspected his costumes for the next day, and, in token of his extreme satisfaction, distributed various presents among them. As, however, the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had seen the prince return to the chateau, entered the room, Monsieur overwhelmed him with kindness. The former, after having saluted the prince, remained silent for a moment, like a sharpshooter who deliberates before deciding in what direction he will renew his fire; then, seeming to make up his mind, he said, “Have you remarked a very singular coincidence, monseigneur?”

“No; what is it?”

“The bad reception which his majesty, in appearance, gave the Comte de Guiche.”

“In appearance?”

“Yes, certainly; since, in reality, he has restored him to favor.”

“I did not notice it,” said the prince.

“What, did you not remark, that, instead of ordering him to go away again into exile, as was natural, he encouraged him in his opposition by permitting him to resume his place in the ballet?”

“And you think the king was wrong, chevalier?” said the prince.

“Are you not of my opinion, prince?”

“Not altogether so, my dear chevalier; and I think the king was quite right not to have made a disturbance against a poor fellow whose want of judgment is more to be complained of than his intention.”

“Really,” said the chevalier, “as far as I am concerned, I confess that this magnanimity astonishes me to the highest degree.”

“Why so?” inquired Philip.

“Because I should have thought the king had been more jealous,” replied the chevalier, spitefully. During the last few minutes Monsieur had felt there was something of an irritating nature concealed under his favorite’s remarks; this last word, however, ignited the powder.

“Jealous!” exclaimed the prince. “Jealous! what do you mean? Jealous of what, if you please—or jealous of whom?”

The chevalier perceived that he had allowed an excessively mischievous remark to escape him, as he was in the habit of doing. He endeavored, therefore, apparently to recall it while it was still possible to do so. “Jealous of his authority,” he said, with an assumed frankness; “of what else would you have the king jealous?”

“Ah!” said the prince, “that’s very proper.”

“Did your royal highness,” continued the chevalier, “solicit dear De Guiche’s pardon?”

“No, indeed,” said Monsieur. “De Guiche is an excellent fellow, and full of courage; but as I do not approve of his conduct with Madame, I wish him neither harm nor good.”

The chevalier had assumed a bitterness with regard to De Guiche, as he had attempted to do with regard to the king; but he thought he perceived that the time for indulgence, and even for the utmost indifference, had arrived, and that, in order to throw some light on the question, it might be necessary for him to put the lamp, as the saying is, beneath the husband’s very nose.

“Very well, very well,” said the chevalier to himself, “I must wait for De Wardes; he will do more in one day than I in a month; for I verily believe he is even more envious than I. Then, again, it is not De Wardes I

require so much as that some event or another should happen; and in the whole of this affair I see none. That De Guiche returned after he had been sent away is certainly serious enough, but all its seriousness disappears when I learn that De Guiche has returned at the very moment Madame troubles herself no longer about him. Madame, in fact, is occupied with the king, that is clear; but she will not be so much longer if, as it is asserted, the king has ceased to trouble his head about her. The moral of the whole matter is, to remain perfectly neutral, and await the arrival of some new caprice and let that decide the whole affair." And the chevalier thereupon settled himself resignedly in the armchair in which Monsieur permitted him to seat himself in his presence, and, having no more spiteful or malicious remarks to make, the consequence was that De Lorraine's wit seemed to have deserted him. Most fortunately Monsieur was in high good-humor, and he had enough for two, until the time arrived for dismissing his servants and gentlemen of the chamber, and he passed into his sleeping-apartment. As he withdrew, he desired the chevalier to present his compliments to Madame, and say that, as the night was cool, Monsieur, who was afraid of the toothache, would not venture out again into the park during the remainder of the evening. The chevalier entered the princess's apartments at the very moment she came in herself. He acquitted himself faithfully of the commission intrusted to him, and, in the first place, remarked all the indifference and annoyance with which Madame received her husband's communication—a circumstance which appeared to him fraught with something fresh. If Madame had been about to leave her apartments with that strangeness of manner, he would have followed her; but she was returning to them; there was nothing to be done, therefore he turned upon his heel like an unemployed heron, appearing to question earth, air, and water about it; shook his head, and walked away mechanically in the direction of the gardens. He had hardly gone a hundred paces when he met two young men, walking arm in arm, with their heads bent down, and idly kicking the small stones out of their path as they walked on, plunged in thought. It was De Guiche and De Bragelonne, the sight of whom, as it always did, produced upon the

chevalier, instinctively, a feeling of repugnance. He did not, however, the less, on that account, salute them with a very low bow, which they returned with interest. Then, observing that the park was nearly deserted, that the illuminations began to burn out, and that the morning breeze was setting in, he turned to the left, and entered the chateau again, by one of the smaller courtyards. The others turned aside to the right, and continued on their way towards the large park. As the chevalier was ascending the side staircase, which led to the private entrance, he saw a woman, followed by another, make her appearance under the arcade which led from the small to the large courtyard. The two women walked so fast that the rustling of their dresses could be distinguished through the silence of the night. The style of their mantles, their graceful figures, a mysterious yet haughty carriage which distinguished them both, especially the one who walked first, struck the chevalier.

"I certainly know those two," he said to himself, pausing upon the top step of the small staircase. Then, as with the instinct of a bloodhound he was about to follow them, one of the servants who had been running after him arrested his attention.

"Monsieur," he said, "the courier has arrived."

"Very well," said the chevalier, "there is time enough; to-morrow will do."

"There are some urgent letters which you would be glad to see, perhaps."

"Where from?" inquired the chevalier.

"One from England, and the other from Calais; the latter arrived by express, and seems of great importance."

"From Calais! Who the deuce can have to write to me from Calais?"

"I think I recognize the handwriting of Monsieur le Comte de Wardes."

"Oh!" cried the chevalier, forgetting his intention of acting the spy, "in that case I will come up at once." This he did, while the two unknown beings disappeared at the end of the court opposite to the one by which

they had just entered. We shall now follow them, and leave the chevalier undisturbed to his correspondence. When they had arrived at the grove of trees, the foremost of the two halted, somewhat out of breath, and, cautiously raising her hood, said, “Are we still far from the tree?”

“Yes, Madame, more than five hundred paces; but pray rest awhile, you will not be able to walk much longer at this rate.”

“You are right,” said the princes, for it was she; and she leaned against a tree. “And now,” she resumed, after having recovered her breath, “tell me the whole truth, and conceal nothing from me.”

“Oh, Madame,” cried the young girl, “you are already angry with me.”

“No, my dear Athenais, reassure yourself, I am in no way angry with you. After all, these things do not concern me personally. You are anxious about what you may have said under the oak; you are afraid of having offended the king, and I wish to tranquillize you by ascertaining myself if it were possible you could have been overheard.”

“Oh, yes, Madame, the king was close to us.”

“Still, you were not speaking so loud that some of your remarks may not have been lost.”

“We thought we were quite alone, Madame.”

“There were three of you, you say?”

“Yes; La Vallière, Montalais, and myself.”

“And *you*, individually, spoke in a light manner of the king?”

“I am afraid so. Should such be the case, will your highness have the kindness to make my peace with his majesty?”

“If there should be any occasion for it, I promise you I will do so. However, as I have already told you, it will be better not to anticipate evil. The night is now very dark, and the darkness is still greater under the trees. It is not likely you were recognized by the king. To inform him of it, by being the first to speak, is to denounce yourself.”

“Oh, Madame, Madame! if Mademoiselle de la Vallière were recognized, I must have been recognized also. Besides, M. de Saint-Aignan left no doubt on the subject.”

“Did you, then, say anything very disrespectful of the king?”

“Not at all; it was one of the others who made some very flattering speeches about the king; and my remarks must have been much in contrast with hers.”

“Montalais is such a giddy girl,” said Madame.

“It was not Montalais. Montalais said nothing; it was La Vallière.”

Madame started as if she had not known it perfectly well already. “No, no,” she said, “the king cannot have heard. Besides, we will now try the experiment for which we came out. Show me the oak. Do you know where it is?” she continued.

“Alas! Madame, yes.”

“And you can find it again?”

“With my eyes shut.”

“Very well; sit down on the bank where you were, where La Vallière was, and speak in the same tone and to the same effect as you did before; I will conceal myself in the thicket, and if I can hear you, I will tell you so.”

“Yes, Madame.”

“If, therefore, you really spoke loud enough for the king to have heard you, in that case—”

Athenais seemed to await the conclusion of the sentence with some anxiety.

“In that case,” said Madame, in a suffocated voice, arising doubtless from her hurried progress, “in that case, I forbid you—” And Madame again increased her pace. Suddenly, however, she stopped. “An idea occurs to me,” she said.

“A good idea, no doubt, Madame,” replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.

“Montalais must be as much embarrassed as La Vallière and yourself.”

“Less so, for she is less compromised, having said less.”

“That does not matter; she will help you, I dare say, by deviating a little from the exact truth.”

“Especially if she knows that your highness is kind enough to interest yourself about me.”

“Very well, I think I have discovered what it is best for you all to pretend.”

“How delightful.”

“You had better say that all three of you were perfectly well aware that the king was behind the tree, or behind the thicket, whichever it might have been; and that you knew M. de Saint-Aignan was there too.”

“Yes, Madame.”

“For you cannot disguise it from yourself, Athenais, Saint-Aignan takes advantage of some very flattering remarks you made about him.”

“Well, Madame, you see very clearly that one can be overheard,” cried Athenais, “since M. de Saint-Aignan overheard us.”

Madame bit her lips, for she had thoughtlessly committed herself. “Oh, you know Saint-Aignan’s character very well,” she said, “the favor the king shows him almost turns his brain, and he talks at random; not only so, he very often invents. That is not the question; the fact remains, did or did not the king overhear?”

“Oh, yes, Madame, he certainly did,” said Athenais, in despair.

“In that case, do what I said: maintain boldly that all three of you knew—mind, all three of you, for if there is a doubt about any one of you, there will be a doubt about all,—persist, I say, that you knew that the king and M. de Saint-Aignan were there, and that you wished to amuse yourself at the expense of those who were listening.”

“Oh, Madame, at the *king’s* expense; we shall never dare say that!”

“It is a simple jest; an innocent deception readily permitted in young girls whom men wish to take by surprise. In this manner everything explains itself. What Montalais said of Malicorne, a mere jest; what you said of M. de Saint-Aignan, a mere jest too; and what La Vallière might have said of—”

“And which she would have given anything to recall.”

“Are you sure of that?”

“Perfectly.”

“Very well, an additional reason. Say the whole affair was a mere joke. M. de Malicorne will have no occasion to get out of temper; M. de Saint-Aignan will be completely put out of countenance; *he* will be laughed at instead of you; and lastly, the king will be punished for a curiosity unworthy of his rank. Let people laugh a little at the king in this affair, and I do not think he will complain of it.”

“Oh, Madame, you are indeed an angel of goodness and sense!”

“It is to my own advantage.”

“In what way?”

“How can you ask me why it is to my advantage to spare my maids of honor the remarks, annoyances, perhaps even calumnies, that might follow? Alas! you well know that the court has no indulgence for this sort of peccadillo. But we have now been walking for some time, shall we be long before we reach it?”

“About fifty or sixty paces further; turn to the left, Madame, if you please.”

“And you are sure of Montalais?” said Madame.

“Oh, certainly.”

“Will she do what you ask her?”

“Everything. She will be delighted.”

“And La Vallière—” ventured the princess.

“Ah, there will be some difficulty with her, Madame; she would scorn to tell a falsehood.”

“Yet, when it is in her interest to do so—”

“I am afraid that that would not make the slightest difference in her ideas.”

“Yes, yes,” said Madame. “I have been already told that; she is one of those overnice and affectedly particular people who place heaven in the foreground in order to conceal themselves behind it. But if she refuses to tell a falsehood,—as she will expose herself to the jests of the whole court, as she will have annoyed the king by a confession as ridiculous as it was immodest,—Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière will think it but proper I should send her back again to her pigeons in the country, in order that, in Touraine yonder, or in Le Blaisois,—I know not where it may be,—she may at her ease study sentiment and pastoral life combined.”

These words were uttered with a vehemence and harshness that terrified Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; and the consequence was, that, as far as she was concerned, she promised to tell as many falsehoods as might be necessary. It was in this frame of mind that Madame and her companion reached the precincts of the royal oak.

“Here we are,” said Tonnay-Charente.

“We shall soon learn if one can overhear,” replied Madame.

“Hush!” whispered the young girl, holding Madame back with a hurried gesture, entirely forgetful of her companion’s rank. Madame stopped.

“You see that you can hear,” said Athenais.

“How?”

“Listen.”

Madame held her breath; and, in fact, the following words pronounced by a gentle and melancholy voice, floated towards them:

“I tell you, vicomte, I tell you I love her madly; I tell you I love her to distraction.”

Madame started at the voice; and, beneath her hood, a bright joyous smile illumined her features. It was she who now held back her companion, and with a light step leading her some twenty paces away,

that is to say, out of the reach of the voice, she said, “Remain here, my dear Athenais, and let no one surprise us. I think it must be you they are conversing about.”

“Me, Madame?”

“Yes, you—or rather your adventure. I will go and listen; if we were both there, we should be discovered. Or, stay!—go and fetch Montalais, and then return and wait for me with her at the entrance of the forest.” And then, as Athenais hesitated, she again said “Go!” in a voice which did not admit of reply. Athenais thereupon arranged her dress so as to prevent its rustling being heard; and, by a path beyond the group of trees, she regained the flower-garden. As for Madame, she concealed herself in the thicket, leaning her back against a gigantic chestnut-tree, one of the branches of which had been cut in such a manner as to form a seat, and waited there, full of anxiety and apprehension. “Now,” she said, “since one can hear from this place, let us listen to what M. de Bragelonne and that other madly-in-love fool, the Comte de Guiche, have to say about me.”

Chapter XLV. In Which Madame Acquires a Proof that Listeners Hear What Is Said.

There was a moment's silence, as if the mysterious sounds of night were hushed to listen, at the same time as Madame, to the youthful passionate disclosures of De Guiche.

Raoul was about to speak. He leaned indolently against the trunk of the large oak, and replied in his sweet and musical voice, "Alas, my dear De Guiche, it is a great misfortune."

"Yes," cried the latter, "great indeed."

"You do not understand me, De Guiche. I say that it is a great misfortune for you, not merely loving, but not knowing how to conceal your love."

"What do you mean?" said De Guiche.

"Yes, you do not perceive one thing; namely, that it is no longer to the only friend you have,—in other words,—to a man who would rather die than betray you; you do not perceive, I say, that it is no longer to your only friend that you confide your passion, but to the first person that approaches you."

"Are you mad, Bragelonne," exclaimed De Guiche, "to say such a thing to me?"

"The fact stands thus, however."

"Impossible! How, in what manner can I have ever been indiscreet to such an extent?"

"I mean, that your eyes, your looks, your sighs, proclaim, in spite of yourself, that exaggerated feeling which leads and hurries a man beyond his own control. In such a case he ceases to be master of himself; he is a prey to a mad passion, that makes him confide his grief to the trees, or to

the air, from the very moment he has no longer any living being in reach of his voice. Besides, remember this: it very rarely happens that there is not always some one present to hear, especially the very things which ought *not* to be heard." De Guiche uttered a deep sigh. "Nay," continued Bragelonne, "you distress me; since your return here, you have a thousand times, and in a thousand different ways, confessed your love for her; and yet, had you not said one word, your return alone would have been a terrible indiscretion. I persist, then, in drawing this conclusion; that if you do not place a better watch over yourself than you have hitherto done, one day or other something will happen that will cause an explosion. Who will save you then? Answer me. Who will save her? for, innocent as she will be of your affection, your affection will be an accusation against her in the hands of her enemies."

"Alas!" murmured De Guiche; and a deep sigh accompanied the exclamation.

"That is not answering me, De Guiche."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, what reply have you to make?"

"This, that when the day arrives I shall be no more a living being than I feel myself now."

"I do not understand you."

"So many vicissitudes have worn me out. At present, I am no more a thinking, acting being; at present, the most worthless of men is better than I am; my remaining strength is exhausted, my latest-formed resolutions have vanished, and I abandon myself to my fate. When a man is out campaigning, as we have been together, and he sets off alone and unaccompanied for a skirmish, it sometimes happens that he may meet with a party of five or six foragers, and although alone, he defends himself; afterwards, five or six others arrive unexpectedly, his anger is aroused and he persists; but if six, eight, or ten others should still be met with, he either sets spurs to his horse, if he should still happen to retain one, or lets himself be slain to save an ignominious flight. Such, indeed, is my own case: first, I had to struggle against myself; afterwards,

against Buckingham; now, since the king is in the field, I will not contend against the king, nor even, I wish you to understand, will the king retire; nor even against the nature of that woman. Still I do not deceive myself; having devoted myself to the service of such a love, I will lose my life in it."

"It is not the lady you ought to reproach," replied Raoul; "it is yourself."

"Why so?"

"You know the princess's character,—somewhat giddy, easily captivated by novelty, susceptible to flattery, whether it come from a blind person or a child, and yet you allow your passion for her to eat your very life away. Look at her,—love her, if you will,—for no one whose heart is not engaged elsewhere can see her without loving her. Yet, while you love her, respect, in the first place, her husband's rank, then herself, and lastly, your own safety."

"Thanks, Raoul."

"What for?"

"Because, seeing how much I suffer through this woman, you endeavor to console me, because you tell me all the good of her you think, and perhaps even that which you do not think."

"Oh," said Raoul, "there you are wrong, comte; what I think I do not always say, but in that case I say nothing; but when I speak, I know not how to feign or to deceive; and whoever listens to me may believe me."

During this conversation, Madame, her head stretched forward with eager ear and dilated glance, endeavoring to penetrate the obscurity, thirstily drank in the faintest sound of their voices.

"Oh, I know her better than you do, then!" exclaimed Guiche. "She is not merely giddy, but frivolous; she is not only attracted by novelty, she is utterly oblivious, and is without faith; she is not simply susceptible to flattery, she is a practiced and cruel coquette. A thorough coquette! yes, yes, I am sure of it. Believe me, Bragelonne, I am suffering all the

torments of hell; brave, passionately fond of danger, I meet a danger greater than my strength and my courage. But, believe me, Raoul, I reserve for myself a victory which shall cost her floods of tears."

"A victory," he asked, "and of what kind?"

"Of what kind, you ask?"

"Yes."

"One day I will accost her, and will address her thus: 'I was young—madly in love, I possessed, however, sufficient respect to throw myself at your feet, and to prostrate myself in the dust, if your looks had not raised me to your hand. I fancied I understood your looks, I rose, and then, without having done anything more towards you than love you yet more devotedly, if that were possible—you, a woman without heart, faith, or love, in very wantonness, dashed me down again from sheer caprice. You are unworthy, princess of the royal blood though you may be, of the love of a man of honor; I offer my life as a sacrifice for having loved you too tenderly, and I die despairing you.'"

"Oh!" cried Raoul, terrified at the accents of profound truth which De Guiche's words betrayed, "I was right in saying you were mad, Guiche."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed De Guiche, following out his own idea; "since there are no wars here now, I will flee yonder to the north, seek service in the Empire, where some Hungarian, or Croat, or Turk, will perhaps kindly put me out of my misery." De Guiche did not finish, or rather as he finished, a sound made him start, and at the same moment caused Raoul to leap to his feet. As for De Guiche, buried in his own thoughts, he remained seated, with his head tightly pressed between his hands. The branches of the tree were pushed aside, and a woman, pale and much agitated, appeared before the two young men. With one hand she held back the branches, which would have struck her face, and, with the other, she raised the hood of the mantle which covered her shoulders. By her clear and lustrous glance, by her lofty carriage, by her haughty attitude, and, more than all that, by the throbbing of his own heart, De Guiche recognized Madame, and, uttering a loud cry, he removed his

hands from his temple, and covered his eyes with them. Raoul, trembling and out of countenance, merely muttered a few words of respect.

"Monsieur de Bragelonne," said the princess, "have the goodness, I beg, to see if my attendants are not somewhere yonder, either in the walks or in the groves; and you, M. de Guiche, remain here: I am tired, and you will perhaps give me your arm."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at the feet of the unhappy young man, he would have been less terrified than by her cold and severe tone. However, as he himself had just said, he was brave; and as in the depths of his own heart he had just decisively made up his mind, De Guiche arose, and, observing Bragelonne's hesitation, he turned towards him a glance full of resignation and grateful acknowledgement. Instead of immediately answering Madame, he even advanced a step towards the vicomte, and holding out the arm which the princess had just desired him to give her, he pressed his friend's hand in his own, with a sigh, in which he seemed to give to friendship all the life that was left in the depths of his heart. Madame, who in her pride had never known what it was to wait, now waited until this mute colloquy was at an end. Her royal hand remained suspended in the air, and, when Raoul had left, it sank without anger, but not without emotion, in that of De Guiche. They were alone in the depths of the dark and silent forest, and nothing could be heard but Raoul's hastily retreating footsteps along the obscure paths. Over their heads was extended the thick and fragrant vault of branches, through the occasional openings of which the stars could be seen glittering in their beauty. Madame softly drew De Guiche about a hundred paces away from that indiscreet tree which had heard, and had allowed so many things to be heard, during the evening, and, leading him to a neighboring glade, so that they could see a certain distance around them, she said in a trembling voice, "I have brought you here, because yonder where you were, everything can be overheard."

"Everything can be overheard, did you say, Madame?" replied the young man, mechanically.

"Yes."

"Which means—" murmured De Guiche.

"Which means that I have heard every syllable you have said."

"Oh, Heaven! this only was wanting to destroy me," stammered De Guiche; and he bent down his head, like an exhausted swimmer beneath the wave which engulfs him.

"And so," she said, "you judge me as you have said?" De Guiche grew pale, turned his head aside, and was silent. He felt almost on the point of fainting.

"I do not complain," continued the princess, in a tone of voice full of gentleness; "I prefer a frankness that wounds me, to flattery, which would deceive me. And so, according to your opinion, M. de Guiche, I am a coquette, an a worthless creature."

"Worthless," cried the young man; "you worthless! Oh, no; most certainly I did not say, I could not have said, that that which was the most precious object in life for me could be worthless. No, no; I did not say that."

"A woman who sees a man perish, consumed by the fire she has kindled, and who does not allay that fire, is, in my opinion, a worthless woman."

"What can it matter to you what I said?" returned the comte. "What am I compared to you, and why should you even trouble yourself to know whether I exist or not?"

"Monsieur de Guiche, both you and I are human beings, and, knowing you as I do, I do not wish you to risk your life; with you I will change my conduct and character. I will be, not frank, for I am always so, but truthful. I implore you, therefore, to love me no more, and to forget utterly that I have ever addressed a word or a glance towards you."

De Guiche turned around, bending a look full of passionate devotion upon her. "You," he said; "*you* excuse yourself; *you* implore me?"

“Certainly; since I have done evil, I ought to repair the evil I have done. And so, comte, this is what we will agree to. You will forgive my frivolity and my coquetry. Nay, do not interrupt me. I will forgive you for having said I was frivolous and a coquette, or something worse, perhaps; and you will renounce your idea of dying, and will preserve for your family, for the king, and for our sex, a cavalier whom every one esteems, and whom many hold dear.” Madame pronounced this last word in such an accent of frankness, and even of tenderness, that poor De Guiche’s heart felt almost bursting.

“Oh! Madame, Madame!” he stammered out.

“Nay, listen further,” she continued. “When you shall have renounced all thought of me forever, from necessity in the first place, and, next, because you will yield to my entreaty, then you will judge me more favorably, and I am convinced you will replace this love—forgive the frivolity of the expression—by a sincere friendship, which you will be ready to offer me, and which, I promise you, shall be cordially accepted.”

De Guiche, his forehead bedewed with perspiration, a feeling of death in his heart, and a trembling agitation through his whole frame, bit his lip, stamped his foot on the ground, and, in a word, devoured the bitterness of his grief. “Madame,” he said, “what you offer is impossible, and I cannot accept such conditions.”

“What!” said Madame, “do you refuse my friendship, then?”

“No, no! I do not need your friendship, Madame. I prefer to die from love, than to live for friendship.”

“Comte!”

“Oh! Madame,” cried De Guiche, “the present is a moment for me, in which no other consideration and no other respect exist, than the consideration and respect of a man of honor towards the woman he worships. Drive me away, curse me, denounce me, you will be perfectly right. I have uttered complaints against you, but their bitterness has been owing to my passion for you; I have said I wish to die, and die I will. If I lived, you would forget me; but dead, you would never forget me, I am sure.”

Henrietta, who was standing buried in thought, and nearly as agitated as De Guiche himself, turned aside her head as but a minute before he had turned aside his. Then, after a moment's pause, she said, "And you love me, then, very much?"

"Madly; madly enough to die from it, whether you drive me from you, or whether you listen to me still."

"It is a hopeless case," she said, in a playful manner; "a case which must be treated with soothing application. Give me your hand. It is as cold as ice." De Guiche knelt down, and pressed to his lips, not one, but both of Madame's hands.

"Love me, then," said the princess, "since it cannot be otherwise." And almost imperceptibly she pressed his fingers, raising him thus, partly in the manner of a queen, and partly as a fond and affectionate woman would have done. De Guiche trembled from head to foot, and Madame, who felt how passion coursed through every fiber of his being, knew that he indeed loved truly. "Give me your arm, comte," she said, "and let us return."

"Ah! Madame," said the comte, trembling and bewildered; "you have discovered a third way of killing me."

"But, happily, it is the slowest way, is it not?" she replied, as she led him towards the grove of trees they had so lately quitted.

Chapter XLVI. Aramis's Correspondence.

When De Guiche's affairs, which had been suddenly set to right without his having been able to guess the cause of their improvement, assumed the unexpected aspect we have seen, Raoul, in obedience to the request of the princess, had withdrawn in order not to interrupt an explanation, the results of which he was far from guessing; and he soon after joined the ladies of honor who were walking about in the flower-gardens. During this time, the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had returned to his own room, read De Wardes's latter with surprise, for it informed him by the hand of his valet, of the sword-thrust received at Calais, and of all the details of the adventure, and invited him to inform De Guiche and Monsieur, whatever there might be in the affair likely to be most disagreeable to both of them. De Wardes particularly endeavored to prove to the chevalier the violence of Madame's affection for Buckingham, and he finished his letter by declaring that he thought this feeling was returned. The chevalier shrugged his shoulders at the last paragraph, and, in fact, De Wardes was out of date, as we have seen. De Wardes was still only at Buckingham's affair. The chevalier threw the letter over his shoulder upon an adjoining table, and said in a disdainful tone, "It is really incredible; and yet poor De Wardes is not deficient in ability; but the truth is, it is not very apparent, so easy is it to grow rusty in the country. The deuce take the simpleton, who ought to have written to me about matters of importance, and yet he writes such silly stuff as that. If it had not been for that miserable letter, which has no meaning at all in it, I should have detected in the grove yonder a charming little intrigue, which would have compromised a woman, would have perhaps have been as good as a sword-thrust for a man, and have diverted Monsieur for many days to come."

He looked at his watch. “It is now too late,” he said. “One o’clock in the morning; every one must have returned to the king’s apartments, where the night is to be finished; well, the scent is lost, and unless some extraordinary chance—” And thus saying, as if to appeal to his good star, the chevalier, greatly out of temper, approached the window, which looked out upon a somewhat solitary part of the garden. Immediately, and as if some evil genius was at his orders, he perceived returning towards the chateau, accompanied by a man, a silk mantle of a dark color, and recognized the figure which had struck his attention half an hour previously.

“Admirable!” he thought, striking his hands together, “this is my providential mysterious affair.” And he started out precipitately, along the staircase, hoping to reach the courtyard in time to recognize the woman in the mantle, and her companion. But as he arrived at the door of the little court, he nearly knocked against Madame, whose radiant face seemed full of charming revelations beneath the mantle which protected without concealing her. Unfortunately, Madame was alone. The chevalier knew that since he had seen her, not five minutes before, with a gentleman, the gentleman in question could not be far off. Consequently, he hardly took time to salute the princess as he drew up to allow her to pass; then when she had advanced a few steps, with the rapidity of a woman who fears recognition, and when the chevalier perceived that she was too much occupied with her own thoughts to trouble herself about him, he darted into the garden, looked hastily round on every side, and embraced within his glance as much of the horizon as he possibly could. He was just in time; the gentleman who had accompanied Madame was still in sight; only he was hurrying towards one of the wings of the chateau, behind which he was on the point of disappearing. There was not an instant to lose; the chevalier darted in pursuit of him, prepared to slacken his pace as he approached the unknown; but in spite of the diligence he used, the unknown had disappeared behind the flight of steps before he approached.

It was evident, however, that as the man pursued was walking quietly, in a pensive manner, with his head bent down, either beneath the weight of grief or happiness, when once the angle was passed, unless, indeed, he were to enter by some door or another, the chevalier could not fail to overtake him. And this, certainly, would have happened, if, at the very moment he turned the angle, the chevalier had not run against two persons, who were themselves wheeling in the opposite direction. The chevalier was ready to seek a quarrel with these two troublesome intruders, when, looking up, he recognized the superintendent. Fouquet was accompanied by a person whom the chevalier now saw for the first time. This stranger was the bishop of Vannes. Checked by the important character of the individual, and obliged out of politeness to make his own excuses when he expected to receive them, the chevalier stepped back a few paces; and as Monsieur Fouquet possessed, if not the friendship, at least the respect of every one; as the king himself, although he was rather his enemy than his friend, treated M. Fouquet as a man of great consideration, the chevalier did what the king himself would have done, namely, he bowed to M. Fouquet, who returned his salutation with kindly politeness, perceiving that the gentleman had run against him by mistake and without any intention of being rude. Then, almost immediately afterwards, having recognized the Chevalier de Lorraine, he made a few civil remarks, to which the chevalier was obliged to reply. Brief as the conversation was, De Lorraine saw, with the most unfeigned displeasure, the figure of his unknown becoming dimmer in the distance, and fast disappearing in the darkness. The chevalier resigned himself, and, once resigned, gave his entire attention to Fouquet:—"You arrive late, monsieur," he said. "Your absence has occasioned great surprise, and I heard Monsieur express himself as much astonished that, having been invited by the king, you had not come."

"It was impossible for me to do so; but I came as soon as I was free."

"Is Paris quiet?"

"Perfectly so. Paris has received the last tax very well."

"Ah! I understand you wished to assure yourself of this good feeling before you came to participate in our *fetes*."

"I have arrived, however, somewhat late to enjoy them. I will ask you, therefore, to inform me if the king is in the chateau or not, if I am likely to be able to see him this evening, or if I shall have to wait until to-morrow."

"We have lost sight of his majesty during the last half-hour nearly," said the chevalier.

"Perhaps he is in Madame's apartments?" inquired Fouquet.

"Not in Madame's apartments, I should think, for I just now met Madame as she was entering by the small staircase; and unless the gentleman whom you a moment ago encountered was the king himself —" and the chevalier paused, hoping that, in this manner, he might learn who it was he had been hurrying after. But Fouquet, whether he had or had not recognized De Guiche, simply replied, "No, monsieur, it was not the king."

The chevalier, disappointed in his expectation, saluted them; but as he did so, casting a parting glance around him, and perceiving M. Colbert in the center of a group, he said to the superintendent: "Stay, monsieur; there is some one under the trees yonder, who will be able to inform you better than myself."

"Who?" asked Fouquet, whose near-sightedness prevented him from seeing through the darkness.

"M. Colbert," returned the chevalier.

"Indeed! That person, then, who is speaking yonder to those men with torches in their hands, is M. Colbert?"

"M. Colbert himself. He is giving orders personally to the workmen who are arranging the lamps for the illuminations."

"Thank you," said Fouquet, with an inclination of the head, which indicated that he had obtained all the information he wished. The chevalier, on his side, having, on the contrary, learned nothing at all, withdrew with a profound salutation.

He had scarcely left when Fouquet, knitting his brows, fell into a deep reverie. Aramis looked at him for a moment with a mingled feeling of compassion and silence.

"What!" he said to him, "the fellow's name alone seemed to affect you. Is it possible that, full of triumph and delight as you were just now, the sight merely of that man is capable of dispiriting you? Tell me, have you faith in your good star?"

"No," replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

"Why not?"

"Because I am too full of happiness at this present moment," he replied, in a trembling voice. "You, my dear D'Herblay, who are so learned, will remember the history of a certain tyrant of Samos. What can I throw into the sea to avert approaching evil? Yes! I repeat it once more, I am too full of happiness! so happy that I wish for nothing beyond what I have... I have risen so high... You know my motto: '*Quo non ascendam?*' I have risen so high that nothing is left me but to descend from my elevation. I cannot believe in the progress of a success already more than human."

Aramis smiled as he fixed his kind and penetrating glance upon him. "If I were aware of the cause of your happiness," he said, "I should probably fear for your grace; but you regard me in the light of a true friend; I mean, you turn to me in misfortune, nothing more. Even that is an immense and precious boon, I know; but the truth is, I have a just right to beg you to confide in me, from time to time, any fortunate circumstances that befall you, in which I should rejoice, you know, more than if they had befallen myself."

"My dear prelate," said Fouquet, laughing, "my secrets are of too profane a character to confide them to a bishop, however great a worldling he may be."

"Bah! in confession."

“Oh! I should blush too much if you were my confessor.” And Fouquet began to sigh. Aramis again looked at him without further betrayal of his thoughts than a placid smile.

“Well,” he said, “discretion is a great virtue.”

“Silence,” said Fouquet; “yonder venomous reptile has recognized us, and is crawling this way.”

“Colbert?”

“Yes; leave me, D’Herblay; I do not wish that fellow to see you with me, or he will take an aversion to *you*.”

Aramis pressed his hand, saying, “What need have I of his friendship, while you are here?”

“Yes, but I may not always be here,” replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

“On that day, then, if that day should ever dawn,” said Aramis, tranquilly, “we will think over a means of dispensing with the friendship, or of braving the dislike of M. Colbert. But tell me, my dear Fouquet, instead of conversing with this reptile, as you did him the honor of styling him, a conversation the need for which I do not perceive, why do you not pay a visit, if not to the king, at least to Madame?”

“To Madame,” said the superintendent, his mind occupied by his *souvenirs*. “Yes, certainly, to Madame.”

“You remember,” continued Aramis, “that we have been told that Madame stands high in favor during the last two or three days. It enters into your policy, and forms part of our plans, that you should assiduously devote yourself to his majesty’s friends. It is a means of counteracting the growing influence of M. Colbert. Present yourself, therefore, as soon as possible to Madame, and, for our sakes, treat this ally with consideration.”

“But,” said Fouquet, “are you quite sure that it is upon her that the king has his eyes fixed at the present moment?”

“If the needle has turned, it must be since the morning. You know I have my police.”

“Very well! I will go there at once, and, at all events, I shall have a means of introduction in the shape of a magnificent pair of antique cameos set with diamonds.”

“I have seen them, and nothing could be more costly and regal.”

At this moment they were interrupted by a servant followed by a courier. “For you, monseigneur,” said the courier aloud, presenting a letter to Fouquet.

“For your grace,” said the lackey in a low tone, handing Aramis a letter. And as the lackey carried a torch in his hand, he placed himself between the superintendent and the bishop of Vannes, so that both of them could read at the same time. As Fouquet looked at the fine and delicate writing on the envelope, he started with delight. Those who love, or who are beloved, will understand his anxiety in the first place, and his happiness in the next. He hastily tore open the letter, which, however, contained only these words: “It is but an hour since I quitted you, it is an age since I told you how much I love you.” And that was all. Madame de Belliere had, in fact, left Fouquet about an hour previously, after having passed two days with him; and apprehensive lest his remembrance of her might be effaced for too long a period from the heart she regretted, she dispatched a courier to him as the bearer of this important communication. Fouquet kissed the letter, and rewarded the bearer with a handful of gold. As for Aramis, he, on his side, was engaged in reading, but with more coolness and reflection, the following letter:

“The king has this evening been struck with a strange fancy; a woman loves him. He learned it accidentally, as he was listening to the conversation of this young girl with her companions; and his majesty has entirely abandoned himself to his new caprice. The girl’s name is Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and she is sufficiently pretty to warrant this caprice becoming a strong attachment. Beware of Mademoiselle de la Vallière.”

There was not a word about Madame. Aramis slowly folded the letter and put it in his pocket. Fouquet was still delightedly inhaling the perfume of his epistle.

“Monseigneur,” said Aramis, touching Fouquet’s arm.

“Yes, what is it?” he asked.

“An idea has just occurred to me. Are you acquainted with a young girl of the name of La Vallière?

“Not at all.”

“Reflect a little.”

“Ah! yes, I believe so; one of Madame’s maids of honor.”

“That must be the one.”

“Well, what then?”

“Well, monseigneur, it is to that young girl that you must pay your visit this evening.”

“Bah! why so?”

“Nay, more than that, it is to her you must present your cameos.”

“Nonsense.”

“You know, monseigneur, that my advice is not to be regarded lightly.”

“But this is unforeseen—”

“That is my affair. Pay your court in due form, and without loss of time, to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. I will be your guarantee with Madame de Belliere that your devotion is altogether politic.”

“What do you mean, my dear D’Herblay, and whose name have you just pronounced?”

“A name which ought to convince you that, as I am so well informed about yourself, I may possibly be just as well informed about others. Pay your court, therefore, to La Vallière.”

“I will pay my court to whomsoever you like,” replied Fouquet, his heart filled with happiness.

“Come, come, descend again to the earth, traveler in the seventh heaven,” said Aramis; “M. Colbert is approaching. He has been recruiting while we were reading; see, how he is surrounded, praised, congratulated; he is decidedly becoming powerful.” In fact, Colbert was

advancing, escorted by all the courtiers who remained in the gardens, every one of whom complimented him upon the arrangements of the *fete*: all of which so puffed him up that he could hardly contain himself.

"If La Fontaine were here," said Fouquet, smiling, "what an admirable opportunity for him to recite his fable of 'The Frog that wanted to make itself as big as the Ox.'"

Colbert arrived in the center of the circle blazing with light; Fouquet awaited his approach, unmoved and with a slightly mocking smile. Colbert smiled too; he had been observing his enemy during the last quarter of an hour, and had been approaching him gradually. Colbert's smile was a presage of hostility.

"Oh, oh!" said Aramis, in a low tone of voice to the superintendent; "the scoundrel is going to ask you again for more millions to pay for his fireworks and his colored lamps." Colbert was the first to salute them, and with an air which he endeavored to render respectful. Fouquet hardly moved his head.

"Well, monseigneur, what do your eyes say? Have we shown our good taste?"

"Perfect taste," replied Fouquet, without permitting the slightest tone of raillery to be remarked in his words.

"Oh!" said Colbert, maliciously, "you are treating us with indulgence. We are poor, we servants of the king, and Fontainebleau is no way to be compared as a residence with Vaux."

"Quite true," replied Fouquet coolly.

"But what can we do, monseigneur?" continued Colbert, "we have done our best on slender resources."

Fouquet made a gesture of assent.

"But," pursued Colbert, "it would be only a proper display of your magnificence, monseigneur, if you were to offer to his majesty a *fete* in your wonderful gardens—in those gardens which have cost you sixty millions of francs."

"Seventy-two," said Fouquet.

“An additional reason,” returned Colbert; “it would, indeed, be truly magnificent.”

“But do you suppose, monsieur, that his majesty would deign to accept my invitation?”

“I have no doubt whatever of it,” cried Colbert, hastily; “I will guarantee that he does.”

“You are exceedingly kind,” said Fouquet. “I may depend on it, then?”

“Yes, monseigneur; yes, certainly.”

“Then I will consider the matter,” yawned Fouquet.

“Accept, accept,” whispered Aramis, eagerly.

“You will consider?” repeated Colbert.

“Yes,” replied Fouquet; “in order to know what day I shall submit my invitation to the king.”

“This very evening, monseigneur, this very evening.”

“Agreed,” said the superintendent. “Gentlemen, I should wish to issue my invitations; but you know that wherever the king goes, the king is in his own palace; it is by his majesty, therefore, that you must be invited.” A murmur of delight immediately arose. Fouquet bowed and left.

“Proud and dauntless man,” thought Colbert, “you accept, and yet you know it will cost you ten millions.”

“You have ruined me,” whispered Fouquet, in a low tone, to Aramis.

“I have saved you,” replied the latter, whilst Fouquet ascended the flight of steps and inquired whether the king was still visible.

Chapter XLVII. The Orderly Clerk.

The king, anxious to be again quite alone, in order to reflect well upon what was passing in his heart, had withdrawn to his own apartments, where M. de Saint-Aignan had, after his conversation with Madame, gone to meet him. This conversation has already been related. The favorite, vain of his twofold importance, and feeling that he had become, during the last two hours, the confidant of the king, began to treat the affairs of the court in a somewhat indifferent manner: and, from the position in which he had placed himself, or rather, where chance had placed him, he saw nothing but love and garlands of flowers around him. The king's love for Madame, that of Madame for the king, that of Guiche for Madame, that of La Vallière for the king, that of Malicorne for Montalais, that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente for himself, was not all this, truly, more than enough to turn the head of any courtier? Besides, Saint-Aignan was the model of courtiers, past, present, and to come; and, moreover, showed himself such an excellent narrator, and so discerningly appreciative that the king listened to him with an appearance of great interest, particularly when he described the excited manner with which Madame had sought for him to converse about the affair of Mademoiselle de la Vallière. While the king no longer experienced for Madame any remains of the passion he had once felt for her, there was, in this same eagerness of Madame to procure information about him, great gratification for his vanity, from which he could not free himself. He experienced this pleasure then, but nothing more, and his heart was not, for a single moment, alarmed at what Madame might, or might not, think of his adventure. When, however,

Saint-Aignan had finished, the king, while preparing to retire to rest, asked, “Now, Saint-Aignan, you know what Mademoiselle de la Vallière is, do you not?”

“Not only what she is, but what she will be.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that she is everything that woman can wish to be—that is to say, beloved by your majesty; I mean, that she will be everything your majesty may wish her to be.”

“That is not what I am asking. I do not wish to know what she is to-day, or what she will be to-morrow; as you have remarked, that is my affair. But tell me what others say of her.”

“They say she is well conducted.”

“Oh!” said the king, smiling, “that is mere report.”

“But rare enough, at court, sire, to believe when it is spread.”

“Perhaps you are right. Is she well born?”

“Excellently; the daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, and step-daughter of that good M. de Saint-Remy.”

“Ah, yes! my aunt’s major-domo; I remember; and I remember now that I saw her as I passed through Blois. She was presented to the queens. I have even to reproach myself that I did not on that occasion pay her the attention she deserved.”

“Oh, sire! I trust that your majesty will now repair time lost.”

“And the report—you tell me—is, that Mademoiselle de la Vallière never had a lover.”

“In any case, I do not think your majesty would be much alarmed at the rivalry.”

“Yet, stay,” said the king, in a very serious tone of voice.

“Your majesty?”

“I remember.”

“Ah!”

“If she has no lover, she has, at least, a betrothed.”

“A betrothed!”

“What! Count, do you not know that?”

“No.”

“You, the man who knows all the news?”

“Your majesty will excuse me. You know this betrothed, then?”

“Assuredly! his father came to ask me to sign the marriage contract: it is—” The king was about to pronounce the Vicomte de Bragelonne’s name, when he stopped, and knitted his brows.

“It is—” repeated Saint-Aignan, inquiringly.

“I don’t remember now,” replied Louis XIV., endeavoring to conceal an annoyance he had some trouble to disguise.

“Can I put your majesty in the way?” inquired the Comte de Saint-Aignan.

“No; for I no longer remember to whom I intended to refer; indeed, I only remember very indistinctly, that one of the maids of honor was to marry—the name, however, has escaped me.”

“Was it Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente he was going to marry?” inquired Saint-Aignan.

“Very likely,” said the king.

“In that case, the intended was M. de Montespan; but Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did not speak of it, it seemed to me, in such a manner as would frighten suitors away.”

“At all events,” said the king, “I know nothing, or almost nothing, about Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Saint-Aignan, I rely upon you to procure me every information about her.”

“Yes, sire, and when shall I have the honor of seeing your majesty again, to give you the latest news?”

“Whenever you have procured it.”

“I shall obtain it speedily, then, if the information can be as quickly obtained as my wish to see your majesty again.”

“Well said, count! By the by, has Madame displayed any ill-feeling against this poor girl?”

“None, sire.”

“Madame did not get angry, then?”

“I do not know; I only know that she laughed continually.”

“That’s well; but I think I hear voices in the ante-rooms—no doubt a courier has just arrived. Inquire, Saint-Aignan.” The count ran to the door and exchanged a few words with the usher; he returned to the king, saying, “Sire, it is M. Fouquet who has this moment arrived, by your majesty’s orders, he says. He presented himself, but, because of the lateness of the hour, he does not press for an audience this evening, and is satisfied to have his presence here formally announced.”

“M. Fouquet! I wrote to him at three o’clock, inviting him to be at Fontainebleau the following day, and he arrives at Fontainebleau at two o’clock in the morning! This is, indeed, zeal!” exclaimed the king, delighted to see himself so promptly obeyed. “On the contrary, M. Fouquet shall have his audience. I summoned him, and will receive him. Let him be introduced. As for you, count, pursue your inquiries, and be here to-morrow.”

The king placed his finger on his lips; and Saint-Aignan, his heart brimful of happiness, hastily withdrew, telling the usher to introduce M. Fouquet, who, thereupon, entered the king’s apartment. Louis rose to receive him.

“Good evening, M. Fouquet,” he said, smiling graciously; “I congratulate you on your punctuality; and yet my message must have reached you late?”

“At nine in the evening, sire.”

“You have been working very hard lately, M. Fouquet, for I have been informed that you have not left your rooms at Saint-Mande during the last three or four days.”

“It is perfectly true, your majesty, that I have kept myself shut up for the past three days,” replied Fouquet.

“Do you know, M. Fouquet, that I had a great many things to say to you?” continued the king, with a most gracious air.

“Your majesty overwhelms me, and since you are so graciously disposed towards me, will you permit me to remind you of the promise made to grant an audience?”

“Ah, yes! some church dignitary, who thinks he has to thank me for something, is it not?”

“Precisely so, sire. The hour is, perhaps, badly chosen; but the time of the companion whom I have brought with me is valuable, and as Fontainebleau is on the way to his diocese—”

“Who is it, then?”

“The bishop of Vannes, whose appointment your majesty, at my recommendation, deigned, three months since, to sign.”

“That is very possible,” said the king, who had signed without reading; “and he is here?”

“Yes, sire; Vannes is an important diocese; the flock belonging to this pastor needed his religious consolation; they are savages, whom it is necessary to polish, at the same time that he instructs them, and M. d’Herblay is unequalled in such kind of missions.”

“M. d’Herblay!” said the king, musingly, as if his name, heard long since, was not, however, unknown to him.

“Oh!” said Fouquet, promptly, “your majesty is not acquainted with the obscure name of one of your most faithful and valuable servants?”

“No, I confess I am not. And so he wishes to set off again?”

“He has this very day received letters which will, perhaps, compel him to leave, so that, before setting off for that unknown region called Bretagne, he is desirous of paying his respects to your majesty.”

“Is he waiting?”

“He is here, sire.”

“Let him enter.”

Fouquet made a sign to the usher in attendance, who was waiting behind the tapestry. The door opened, and Aramis entered. The king allowed him to finish the compliments which he addressed to him, and fixed a long look upon a countenance which no one could forget, after having once beheld it.

"Vannes!" he said: "you are bishop of Vannes, I believe?"

"Yes, sire."

"Vannes is in Bretagne, I think?" Aramis bowed.

"Near the coast?" Aramis again bowed.

"A few leagues from Bell-Isle, is it not?"

"Yes, sire," replied Aramis; "six leagues, I believe."

"Six leagues; a mere step, then," said Louis XIV.

"Not for us poor Bretons, sire," replied Aramis: "six leagues, on the contrary, is a great distance, if it be six leagues on land; and an immense distance, if it be leagues on the sea. Besides, I have the honor to mention to your majesty that there are six leagues of sea from the river to Belle-Isle."

"It is said that M. Fouquet has a very beautiful house there?" inquired the king.

"Yes, it is said so," replied Aramis, looking quietly at Fouquet.

"What do you mean by 'it is said so?'" exclaimed the king.

"He has, sire."

"Really, M. Fouquet, I must confess that one circumstance surprises me."

"What may that be, sire?"

"That you should have at the head of the diocese a man like M. d'Herblay, and yet should not have shown him Belle-Isle."

"Oh, sire," replied the bishop, without giving Fouquet time to answer, "we poor Breton prelates seldom leave our residences."

"M. de Vannes," said the king, "I will punish M. Fouquet for his indifference."

“In what way, sire?”

“I will change your bishopric.”

Fouquet bit his lips, but Aramis only smiled.

“What income does Vannes bring you in?” continued the king.

“Sixty thousand livres, sire,” said Aramis.

“So trifling an amount as that; but you possess other property, Monsieur de Vannes?”

“I have nothing else, sire; only M. Fouquet pays me one thousand two hundred livres a year for his pew in the church.”

“Well, M. d’Herblay, I promise you something better than that.”

“Sire—”

“I will not forget you.”

Aramis bowed, and the king also bowed to him in a respectful manner, as he was accustomed to do towards women and members of the Church. Aramis gathered that his audience was at an end; he took his leave of the king in the simple, unpretending language of a country pastor, and disappeared.

“He is, indeed, a remarkable face,” said the king, following him with his eyes as long as he could see him, and even to a certain degree when he was no longer to be seen.

“Sire,” replied Fouquet, “if that bishop had been educated early in life, no prelate in the kingdom would deserve the highest distinctions better than he.”

“His learning is not extensive, then?”

“He changed the sword for the crucifix, and that rather late in life. But it matters little, if your majesty will permit me to speak of M. de Vannes again on another occasion—”

“I beg you to do so. But before speaking of him, let us speak of yourself, M. Fouquet.”

“Of me, sire?”

“Yes, I have to pay you a thousand compliments.”

“I cannot express to your majesty the delight with which you overwhelm me.”

“I understand you, M. Fouquet. I confess, however, to have had certain prejudices against you.”

“In that case, I was indeed unhappy, sire.”

“But they exist no longer. Did you not perceive—”

“I did, indeed, sire; but I awaited with resignation the day when the truth would prevail; and it seems that that day has now arrived.”

“Ah! you knew, then, you were in disgrace with me?”

“Alas! sire, I perceived it.”

“And do you know the reason?”

“Perfectly well; your majesty thought that I had been wastefully lavish in expenditure.”

“Not so; far from that.”

“Or, rather an indifferent administrator. In a word, you thought that, as the people had no money, there would be none for your majesty either.”

“Yes, I thought so; but I was deceived.”

Fouquet bowed.

“And no disturbances, no complaints?”

“And money enough,” said Fouquet.

“The fact is that you have been profuse with it during the last month.”

“I have more, not only for all your majesty’s requirements, but for all your caprices.”

“I thank you, Monsieur Fouquet,” replied the king, seriously. “I will not put you to the proof. For the next two months I do not intend to ask you for anything.”

“I will avail myself of the interval to amass five or six millions, which will be serviceable as money in hand in case of war.”

“Five or six millions!”

“For the expenses of your majesty’s household only, be it understood.”

“You think war probable, M. Fouquet?”

“I think that if Heaven has bestowed on the eagle a beak and claws, it is to enable him to show his royal character.”

The king blushed with pleasure.

“We have spent a great deal of money these few days past, Monsieur Fouquet; will you not scold me for it?”

“Sire, your majesty has still twenty years of youth to enjoy, and a thousand million francs to lavish in those twenty years.”

“That is a great deal of money, M. Fouquet,” said the king.

“I will economize, sire. Besides, your majesty as two valuable servants in M. Colbert and myself. The one will encourage you to be prodigal with your treasures—and this shall be myself, if my services should continue to be agreeable to your majesty; and the other will economize money for you, and this will be M. Colbert’s province.”

“M. Colbert?” returned the king, astonished.

“Certainly, sire; M. Colbert is an excellent accountant.”

At this commendation, bestowed by the traduced on the traducer, the king felt himself penetrated with confidence and admiration. There was not, moreover, either in Fouquet’s voice or look, anything which injuriously affected a single syllable of the remark he had made; he did not pass one eulogium, as it were, in order to acquire the right of making two reproaches. The king comprehended him, and yielding to so much generosity and address, he said, “You praise M. Colbert, then?”

“Yes, sire, I praise him; for, besides being a man of merit, I believe him to be devoted to your majesty’s interests.”

“Is that because he has often interfered with your own views?” said the king, smiling.

“Exactly, sire.”

“Explain yourself.”

“It is simple enough. I am the man who is needed to make the money come in; he is the man who is needed to prevent it leaving.”

“Nay, nay, monsieur le surintendant, you will presently say something which will correct this good opinion.”

“Do you mean as far as administrative abilities are concerned, sire?”

“Yes.”

“Not in the slightest.”

“Really?”

“Upon my honor, sire, I do not know throughout France a better clerk than M. Colbert.”

This word “clerk” did not possess, in 1661, the somewhat subservient signification attached to it in the present day; but, as spoken by Fouquet, whom the king had addressed as the superintendent, it seemed to acquire an insignificant and petty character, that at this juncture served admirably to restore Fouquet to his place, and Colbert to his own.

“And yet,” said Louis XIV., “it was Colbert, however, that, notwithstanding his economy, had the arrangement of my *fetes* here at Fontainebleau; and I assure you, Monsieur Fouquet, that in no way has he checked the expenditure of money.” Fouquet bowed, but did not reply.

“Is it not your opinion too?” said the king.

“I think, sire,” he replied, “that M. Colbert has done what he had to do in an exceedingly orderly manner, and that he deserves, in this respect, all the praise your majesty may bestow upon him.”

The word “orderly” was a proper accompaniment for the word “clerk.” The king possessed that extreme sensitiveness of organization, that delicacy of perception, which pierced through and detected the regular order of feelings and sensations, before the actual sensations themselves, and he therefore comprehended that the clerk had, in Fouquet’s opinion, been too full of method and order in his arrangements; in other words, that the magnificent *fetes* of Fontainebleau might have been rendered more magnificent still. The

king consequently felt that there was something in the amusements he had provided with which some person or another might be able to find fault; he experienced a little of the annoyance felt by a person coming from the provinces to Paris, dressed out in the very best clothes which his wardrobe can furnish, only to find that the fashionably dressed man there looks at him either too much or not enough. This part of the conversation, which Fouquet had carried on with so much moderation, yet with extreme tact, inspired the king with the highest esteem for the character of the man and the capacity of the minister. Fouquet took his leave at a quarter to three in the morning, and the king went to bed a little uneasy and confused at the indirect lesson he had received; and a good hour was employed by him in going over again in memory the embroideries, the tapestries, the bills of fare of the various banquets, the architecture of the triumphal arches, the arrangements for the illuminations and fireworks, all the offspring of the "Clerk Colbert's" invention. The result was, the king passed in review before him everything that had taken place during the last eight days, and decided that faults could be found in his *fetes*. But Fouquet, by his politeness, his thoughtful consideration, and his generosity, had injured Colbert more deeply than the latter, by his artifice, his ill-will, and his persevering hatred, had ever yet succeeded in hurting Fouquet.

Chapter XLVIII. Fontainebleau at Two o'Clock in the Morning.

As we have seen, Saint-Aignan had quitted the king's apartment at the very moment the superintendent entered it. Saint-Aignan was charged with a mission that required dispatch, and he was going to do his utmost to turn his time to the best advantage. He whom we have introduced as the king's friend was indeed an uncommon personage; he was one of those valuable courtiers whose vigilance and acuteness of perception threw all other favorites into the shade, and counterbalanced, by his close attention, the servility of Dangeau, who was not the favorite, but the toady of the king. M. de Saint-Aignan began to think what was to be done in the present position of affairs. He reflected that his first information ought to come from De Guiche. He therefore set out in search of him, but De Guiche, whom we saw disappear behind one of the wings, and who seemed to have returned to his own apartments, had not entered the chateau. Saint-Aignan therefore went in quest of him, and after having turned, and twisted, and searched in every direction, he perceived something like a human form leaning against a tree. This figure was as motionless as a statue, and seemed deeply engaged in looking at a window, although its curtains were closely drawn. As this window happened to be Madame's, Saint-Aignan concluded that the form in question must be that of De Guiche. He advanced cautiously, and found he was not mistaken. De Guiche had, after his conversation with Madame, carried away such a weight of happiness, that all of his strength of mind was hardly sufficient to enable him to support it. On his side, Saint-Aignan knew that De Guiche had had something to do with La Vallière's introduction to Madame's household, for a courtier knows everything and forgets nothing; but he had never learned under what

title or conditions De Guiche had conferred his protection upon La Vallière. But, as in asking a great many questions it is singular if a man does not learn something, Saint-Aignan reckoned upon learning much or little, as the case might be, if he questioned De Guiche with that extreme tact, and, at the same time, with that persistence in attaining an object, of which he was capable. Saint-Aignan's plan was as follows: If the information obtained was satisfactory, he would inform the king, with alacrity, that he had lighted upon a pearl, and claim the privilege of setting the pearl in question in the royal crown. If the information were unsatisfactory,—which, after all, might be possible,—he would examine how far the king cared about La Vallière, and make use of his information in such a manner as to get rid of the girl altogether, and thereby obtain all the merit of her banishment with all the ladies of the court who might have the least pretensions to the king's heart, beginning with Madame and finishing with the queen. In case the king should show himself obstinate in his fancy, then he would not produce the damaging information he had obtained, but would let La Vallière know that this damaging information was carefully preserved in a secret drawer of her confidant's memory. In this manner, he would be able to air his generosity before the poor girl's eyes, and so keep her in constant suspense between gratitude and apprehension, to such an extent as to make her a friend at court, interested, as an accomplice, in trying to make his fortune, while she was making her own. As far as concerned the day when the bombshell of the past should burst, if ever there were any occasion, Saint-Aignan promised himself that he would by that time have taken all possible precautions, and would pretend an entire ignorance of the matter to the king; while, with regard to La Vallière, he would still have an opportunity of being considered the personification of generosity. It was with such ideas as these, which the fire of covetousness had caused to dawn in half an hour, that Saint-Aignan, the son of earth, as La Fontaine would have said, determined to get De Guiche into conversation: in other words, to trouble him in his happiness—a happiness of which Saint-Aignan was quite ignorant. It was long past one o'clock in the morning when Saint-Aignan perceived

De Guiche, standing, motionless, leaning against the trunk of a tree, with his eyes fastened upon the lighted window,—the sleepiest hour of night-time, which painters crown with myrtles and budding poppies, the hour when eyes are heavy, hearts throb, and heads feel dull and languid—an hour which casts upon the day which has passed away a look of regret, while addressing a loving greeting to the dawning light. For De Guiche it was the dawn of unutterable happiness; he would have bestowed a treasure upon a beggar, had one stood before him, to secure him uninterrupted indulgence in his dreams. It was precisely at this hour that Saint-Aignan, badly advised,—selfishness always counsels badly,—came and struck him on the shoulder, at the very moment he was murmuring a word, or rather a name.

"Ah!" he cried loudly, "I was looking for you."

"For me?" said De Guiche, starting.

"Yes; and I find you seemingly moon-struck. Is it likely, my dear comte, you have been attacked by a poetical malady, and are making verses?"

The young man forced a smile upon his lips, while a thousand conflicting sensations were muttering defiance of Saint-Aignan in the deep recesses of his heart. "Perhaps," he said. "But by what happy chance—"

"Ah! your remark shows that you did not hear what I said."

"How so?"

"Why, I began by telling you I was looking for you."

"You were looking for me?"

"Yes: and I find you now in the very act."

"Of doing what, I should like to know?"

"Of singing the praises of Phyllis."

"Well, I do not deny it," said De Guiche, laughing. "Yes, my dear comte, I was celebrating Phyllis's praises."

"And you have acquired the right to do so."

"I?"

"You; no doubt of it. You; the intrepid protector of every beautiful and clever woman."

"In the name of goodness, what story have you got hold of now?"

"Acknowledged truths, I am well aware. But stay a moment; I am in love."

"You?"

"Yes."

"So much the better, my dear comte; tell me all about it." And De Guiche, afraid that Saint-Aignan might perhaps presently observe the window, where the light was still burning, took the comte's arm and endeavored to lead him away.

"Oh!" said the latter, resisting, "do not take me towards those dark woods, it is too damp there. Let us stay in the moonlight." And while he yielded to the pressure of De Guiche's arm, he remained in the flower-garden adjoining the chateau.

"Well," said De Guiche, resigning himself, "lead me where you like, and ask me what you please."

"It is impossible to be more agreeable than you are." And then, after a moment's silence, Saint-Aignan continued, "I wish you to tell me something about a certain person in who you have interested yourself."

"And with whom you are in love?"

"I will neither admit nor deny it. You understand that a man does not very readily place his heart where there is no hope of return, and that it is most essential he should take measures of security in advance."

"You are right," said De Guiche with a sigh; "a man's heart is a very precious gift."

"Mine particularly is very tender, and in that light I present it to you."

"Oh! you are well known, comte. Well?"

"It is simply a question of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

“Why, my dear Saint-Aignan, you are losing your senses, I should think.”

“Why so?”

“I have never shown or taken any interest in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.”

“Bah!”

“Never.”

“Did you not obtain admission for Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente into Madame’s household?”

“Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente—and you ought to know it better than any one else, my dear comte—is of a sufficiently good family to make her presence here desirable, and her admittance very easy.”

“You are jesting.”

“No; and upon my honor I do not know what you mean.”

“And you had nothing, then, to do with her admission?”

“No.”

“You do not know her?”

“I saw her for the first time the day she was presented to Madame. Therefore, as I have never taken any interest in her, as I do not know her, I am not able to give you the information you require.” And De Guiche made a movement as though he were about to leave his questioner.

“Nay, nay, one moment, my dear comte,” said Saint-Aignan; “you shall not escape me in this manner.”

“Why, really, it seems to me that it is now time to return to our apartments.”

“And yet you were not going in when I—did not meet, but found you.”

“Therefore, my dear comte,” said De Guiche, “as long as you have anything to say to me, I place myself entirely at your service.”

“And you are quite right in doing so. What matters half an hour more or less? Will you swear that you have no injurious communications to make to me about her, and that any injurious communications you might possibly have to make are not the cause of your silence?”

“Oh! I believe the poor child to be as pure as crystal.”

“You overwhelm me with joy. And yet I do not wish to have towards you the appearance of a man so badly informed as I seem. It is quite certain that you supplied the princess’s household with the ladies of honor. Nay, a song has even been written about it.”

“Oh! songs are written about everything.”

“Do you know it?”

“No: sing it to me and I shall make its acquaintance.”

“I cannot tell you how it begins; I only remember how it ends.”

“Very well, at all events, that is something.”

“When Maids of Honor happen to run short, Lo!—Guiche will furnish the entire Court.”

“The idea is weak, and the rhyme poor,” said De Guiche.

“What can you expect, my dear fellow? it is not Racine’s or Moliere’s, but La Feuillade’s; and a great lord cannot rhyme like a beggarly poet.”

“It is very unfortunate, though, that you only remember the termination.”

“Stay, stay, I have just recollected the beginning of the second couplet.”

“Why, there’s the birdcage, with a pretty pair, The charming Montalais, and…”

“And La Vallière,” exclaimed Guiche, impatiently, and completely ignorant besides of Saint-Aignan’s object.

“Yes, yes, you have it. You have hit upon the word, ‘La Vallière.’”

“A grand discovery indeed.”

“Montalais and La Vallière, these, then, are the two young girls in whom you interest yourself,” said Saint-Aignan, laughing.

“And so Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente’s name is not to be met with in the song?”

“No, indeed.”

“And are you satisfied, then?”

“Perfectly; but I find Montalais there,” said Saint-Aignan, still laughing.

“Oh! you will find her everywhere. She is a singularly active young lady.”

“You know her?”

“Indirectly. She was the *protegee* of a man named Malicorne, who is a *protegee* of Manicamp’s; Manicamp asked me to get the situation of maid of honor for Montalais in Madame’s household, and a situation for Malicorne as an officer in Monsieur’s household. Well, I asked for the appointments, for you know very well that I have a weakness for that droll fellow Manicamp.”

“And you obtained what you sought?”

“For Montalais, yes; for Malicorne, yes and no; for as yet he is only on trial. Do you wish to know anything else?”

“The last word of the couplet still remains, La Vallière,” said Saint-Aignan, resuming the smile that so tormented Guiche.

“Well,” said the latter, “it is true that I obtained admission for her in Madame’s household.”

“Ah!” said Saint-Aignan.

“But,” continued Guiche, assuming a great coldness of manner, “you will oblige me, comte, not to jest about that name. Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière is a young lady perfectly well-conducted.”

“Perfectly well-conducted do you say?”

“Yes.”

“Then you have not heard the last rumor?” exclaimed Saint-Aignan.

“No, and you will do me a service, my dear comte, in keeping this report to yourself and to those who circulate it.”

“Ah! bah! you take the matter up very seriously.”

“Yes; Mademoiselle de Vallière is beloved by one of my best friends.”

Saint-Aignan started. “Aha!” he said.

“Yes, comte,” continued Guiche; “and consequently, you, the most distinguished man in France for polished courtesy of manner, will understand that I cannot allow my friend to be placed in a ridiculous position.”

Saint-Aignan began to bite his nails, partially from vexation, and partially from disappointed curiosity. Guiche made him a very profound bow.

“You send me away,” said Saint-Aignan, who was dying to know the name of the friend.

“I do not send you away, my dear fellow. I am going to finish my lines to Phyllis.”

“And those lines—”

“Are a *quatrain*. You understand, I trust, that a *quatrain* is a serious affair?”

“Of course.”

“And as, of these four lines, of which it is composed, I have yet three and a half to make, I need my undivided attention.”

“I quite understand. Adieu! comte. By the by—”

“What?”

“Are you quick at making verses?”

“Wonderfully so.”

“Will you have quite finished the three lines and a half to-morrow morning?”

“I *hope* so.”

“Adieu, then, until to-morrow.”

“Adieu, adieu!”

Saint-Aignan was obliged to accept the notice to quit; he accordingly did so, and disappeared behind the hedge. Their conversation had led Guiche and Saint-Aignan a good distance from the chateau.

Every mathematician, every poet, and every dreamer has his own subjects of interest. Saint-Aignan, on leaving Guiche, found himself at the extremity of the grove,—at the very spot where the outbuildings of the servants begin, and where, behind the thickets of acacias and chestnut-trees interlacing their branches, which were hidden by masses of clematis and young vines, the wall which separated the woods from the courtyard was erected. Saint-Aignan, alone, took the path which led towards these buildings; De Guiche going off in the opposite direction. The one proceeded to the flower-garden, while the other bent his steps towards the walls. Saint-Aignan walked on between rows of mountain-ash, lilac, and hawthorn, which formed an almost impenetrable roof above his head; his feet were buried in the soft gravel and thick moss. He was deliberating a means of taking his revenge, which seemed difficult for him to carry out, and was vexed with himself for not having learned more about La Vallière, notwithstanding the ingenious measures he had resorted to in order to acquire more information about her, when suddenly the murmur of a human voice attracted his attention. He heard whispers, the complaining tones of a woman's voice mingled with entreaties, smothered laughter, sighs, and half-stilted exclamations of surprise; but above them all, the woman's voice prevailed. Saint-Aignan stopped to look about him; he perceived from the greatest surprise that the voices proceeded, not from the ground, but from the branches of the trees. As he glided along under the covered walk, he raised his head, and observed at the top of the wall a woman perched upon a ladder, in eager conversation with a man seated on a branch of a chestnut-tree, whose head alone could be seen, the rest of his body being concealed in the thick covert of the chestnut. 5

Chapter XLIX. The Labyrinth.

Saint-Aignan, who had only been seeking for information, had met with an adventure. This was indeed a piece of good luck. Curious to learn why, and particularly what about, this man and woman were conversing at such an hour, and in such a singular position, Saint-Aignan made himself as small as he possibly could, and approached almost under the rounds of the ladder. And taking measures to make himself as comfortable as possible, he leaned his back against a tree and listened, and heard the following conversation. The woman was the first to speak.

"Really, Monsieur Manicamp," she said, in a voice which, notwithstanding the reproaches she addressed to him, preserved a marked tone of coquetry, "really your indiscretion is of a very dangerous character. We cannot talk long in this manner without being observed."

"That is very probable," said the man, in the calmest and coolest of tones.

"In that case, then, what would people say? Oh! if any one were to see me, I declare I should die of very shame."

"Oh! that would be very silly; I do not believe you would."

"It might have been different if there had been anything between us; but to injure myself gratuitously is really very foolish of me; so, adieu, Monsieur Manicamp."

"So far so good; I know the man, and now let me see who the woman is," said Saint-Aignan, watching the rounds of the ladder, on which were standing two pretty little feet covered with blue satin shoes.

"Nay, nay, for pity's sake, my dear Montalais," cried Manicamp, "deuce take it, do not go away; I have a great many things to say to you, of the greatest importance, still."

“Montalais,” said Saint-Aignan to himself, “one of the three. Each of the three gossips had her adventure, only I imagined the hero of this one’s adventure was Malicorne and not Manicamp.”

At her companion’s appeal, Montalais stopped in the middle of her descent, and Saint-Aignan could observe the unfortunate Manicamp climb from one branch of the chestnut-tree to another, either to improve his situation or to overcome the fatigue consequent upon his inconvenient position.

“Now, listen to me,” said he; “you quite understand, I hope, that my intentions are perfectly innocent?”

“Of course. But why did you write me a letter stimulating my gratitude towards you? Why did you ask me for an interview at such an hour and in such a place as this?”

“I stimulated your gratitude in reminding you that it was I who had been the means of your becoming attached to Madame’s household; because most anxiously desirous of obtaining the interview you have been kind enough to grant me, I employed the means which appeared to me most certain to insure it. And my reason for soliciting it, at such an hour and in such a locality, was, that the hour seemed to me to be the most prudent, and the locality the least open to observation. Moreover, I had occasion to speak to you upon certain subjects which require both prudence and solitude.”

“Monsieur Manicamp!”

“But everything I wish to say is perfectly honorable, I assure you.”

“I think, Monsieur Manicamp, it will be more becoming in me to take my leave.”

“No, no!—listen to me, or I will jump from my perch here to yours; and be careful how you set me at defiance, for a branch of this chestnut-tree causes me a good deal of annoyance, and may provoke me to extreme measures. Do not follow the example of this branch, then, but listen to me.”

“I am listening, and I agree to do so; but be as brief as possible, for if you have a branch of the chestnut-tree which annoys you, I wish you to understand that one of the rounds of the ladder is hurting the soles of my feet, and my shoes are being cut through.”

“Do me the kindness to give me your hand.”

“Why?”

“Will you have the goodness to do so?”

“There is my hand, then; but what are you going to do?”

“To draw you towards me.”

“What for? You surely do not wish me to join you in the tree?”

“No; but I wish you to sit down upon the wall; there, that will do; there is quite room enough, and I would give a great deal to be allowed to sit down beside you.”

“No, no; you are very well where you are; we should be seen.”

“Do you really think so?” said Manicamp, in an insinuating voice.

“I am sure of it.”

“Very well, I remain in my tree, then, although I cannot be worse placed.”

“Monsieur Manicamp, we are wandering away from the subject.”

“You are right, we are so.”

“You wrote me a letter?”

“I did.”

“Why did you write?”

“Fancy, at two o’clock to-day, De Guiche left.”

“What then?”

“Seeing him set off, I followed him, as I usually do.”

“Of course, I see that, since you are here now.”

“Don’t be in a hurry. You are aware, I suppose, that De Guiche is up to his very neck in disgrace?”

“Alas! yes.”

“It was the very height of imprudence on his part, then, to come to Fontainebleau to seek those who had at Paris sent him away into exile, and particularly those from whom he had been separated.”

“Monsieur Manicamp, you reason like Pythagoras.”

“Moreover, De Guiche is as obstinate as a man in love can be, and he refused to listen to any of my remonstrances. I begged, I implored him, but he would not listen to anything. Oh, the deuce!”

“What’s the matter?”

“I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle Montalais, but this confounded branch, about which I have already had the honor of speaking to you, has just torn a certain portion of my dress.”

“It is quite dark,” replied Montalais, laughing; “so, pray continue, M. Manicamp.”

“De Guiche set off on horseback as hard as he could, I following him, at a slower pace. You quite understand that to throw one’s self into the water, for instance, with a friend, at the same headlong rate as he himself would do it, would be the act either of a fool or a madman. I therefore allowed De Guiche to get in advance, and I proceeded on my way with a commendable slowness of pace, feeling quite sure that my unfortunate friend would not be received, or, if he had been, that he would ride off again at the very first cross, disagreeable answer; and that I should see him returning much faster than he went, without having, myself, gone much farther than Ris or Melun—and that even was a good distance you will admit, for it is eleven leagues to get there and as many to return.”

Montalais shrugged her shoulders.

“Laugh as much as you like; but if, instead of being comfortably seated on the top of the wall as you are, you were sitting on this branch as if you were on horseback, you would, like Augustus, aspire to descend.”

“Be patient, my dear M. Manicamp; a few minutes will soon pass away; you were saying, I think, that you had gone beyond Ris and Melun.”

“Yes, I went through Ris and Melun, and I continued to go on, more and more surprised that I did not see him returning; and here I am at Fontainebleau; I look for and inquire after De Guiche everywhere, but no one has seen him, no one in the town has spoken to him; he arrived riding at full gallop, he entered the chateau; and there he has disappeared. I have been here at Fontainebleau since eight o’clock this evening inquiring for De Guiche in every direction, but no De Guiche can be found. I am dying with uneasiness. You understand that I have not been running my head into the lion’s den, in entering the chateau, as my imprudent friend has done; I came at once to the servants’ offices, and I succeeded in getting a letter conveyed to you; and now, for Heaven’s sake, my dear young lady, relieve me from my anxiety.”

“There will be no difficulty in that, my dear M. Manicamp; your friend De Guiche has been admirably received.”

“Bah!”

“The king made quite a fuss over him.”

“The king, who exiled him!”

“Madame smiled upon him, and Monsieur appears to like him better than ever.”

“Ah! ah!” said Manicamp, “that explains to me, then, why and how he has remained. And did he not say anything about me?”

“Not a word.”

“That is very unkind. What is he doing now?”

“In all probability he is asleep, or, if not asleep, dreaming.”

“And what have they been doing all the evening?”

“Dancing.”

“The famous ballet? How did De Guiche look?”

“Superb!”

“Dear fellow! And now, pray forgive me, Mademoiselle Montalais; but all I now have to do is pass from where I now am to your apartment.”

“What do you mean?”

“I cannot suppose that the door of the chateau will be opened for me at this hour; and as for spending the night upon this branch, I possibly might not object to do so, but I declare it is impossible for any other animal than a boa-constrictor to do it.”

“But, M. Manicamp, I cannot introduce a man over the wall in that manner.”

“Two, if you please,” said a second voice, but in so timid a tone that it seemed as if its owner felt the utter impropriety of such a request.

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Montalais, “who is that speaking to me?”

“Malicorne, Mademoiselle Montalais.”

And as Malicorne spoke, he raised himself from the ground to the lowest branches, and thence to the height of the wall.

“Monsieur Malicorne! why, you are both mad!”

“How do you do, Mademoiselle Montalais?” inquired Malicorne.

“I needed but this!” said Montalais, in despair.

“Oh! Mademoiselle Montalais,” murmured Malicorne; “do not be so severe, I beseech you.”

“In fact,” said Manicamp, “we are your friends, and you cannot possibly wish your friends to lose their lives; and to leave us to pass the night on these branches is in fact condemning us to death.”

“Oh!” said Montalais, “Monsieur Malicorne is so robust that a night passed in the open air with the beautiful stars above him will not do him any harm, and it will be a just punishment for the trick he has played me.”

“Be it so, then; let Malicorne arrange matters with you in the best way he can; I pass over,” said Manicamp. And bending down the famous branch against which he had directed such bitter complaints, he succeeded, by the assistance of his hands and feet, in seating himself side by side with Montalais, who tried to push him back, while he endeavored to maintain his position, and, moreover, he succeeded. Having taken possession of the ladder, he stepped on it, and then gallantly offered his hand to his fair antagonist. While this was going on,

Malicorne had installed himself in the chestnut-tree, in the very place Manicamp had just left, determining within himself to succeed him in the one he now occupied. Manicamp and Montalais descended a few rounds of the ladder, Manicamp insisting, and Montalais laughing and objecting.

Suddenly Malicorne's voice was heard in tones of entreaty:

"I entreat you, Mademoiselle Montalais, not to leave me here. My position is very insecure, and some accident will be certain to befall me, if I attempt unaided to reach the other side of the wall; it does not matter if Manicamp tears his clothes, for he can make use of M. de Guiche's wardrobe; but I shall not be able to use even those belonging to M. Manicamp, for they will be torn."

"My opinion," said Manicamp, without taking any notice of Malicorne's lamentations, "is that the best thing to be done is to go and look for De Guiche without delay, for, by and by, perhaps, I may not be able to get to his apartments."

"That is my own opinion, too," replied Montalais; "so, go at once, Monsieur Manicamp."

"A thousand thanks. Adieu Mademoiselle Montalais," said Manicamp, jumping to the ground; "your condescension cannot be repaid."

"Farewell, M. Manicamp; I am now going to get rid of M. Malicorne."

Malicorne sighed. Manicamp went away a few paces, but returning to the foot of the ladder, he said, "By the by, how do I get to M. de Guiche's apartments?"

"Nothing easier. You go along by the hedge until you reach a place where the paths cross."

"Yes."

"You will see four paths."

"Exactly."

"One of which you will take."

"Which of them?"

“That to the right.”

“That to the right?”

“No, to the left.”

“The deuce!”

“No, no, wait a minute—”

“You do not seem to be quite sure. Think again, I beg.”

“You take the middle path.”

“But there are *four*.”

“So there are. All I know is, that one of the four paths leads straight to Madame’s apartments; and that one I am well acquainted with.”

“But M. de Guiche is not in Madame’s apartments, I suppose?”

“No, indeed.”

“Well, then the path which leads to Madame’s apartments is of no use to me, and I would willingly exchange it for the one that leads to where M. de Guiche is lodging.”

“Of course, and I know that as well; but as for indicating it from where we are, it is quite impossible.”

“Well, let us suppose that I have succeeded in finding that fortunate path.”

“In that case, you are almost there, for you have nothing else to do but cross the labyrinth.”

“*Nothing* more than that? The deuce! so there is a labyrinth as well.”

“Yes, and complicated enough too; even in daylight one may sometimes be deceived,—there are turnings and windings without end: in the first place, you must turn three times to the right, then twice to the left, then turn once—stay, is it once or twice, though? at all events, when you get clear of the labyrinth, you will see an avenue of sycamores, and this avenue leads straight to the pavilion in which M. de Guiche is lodging.”

“Nothing could be more clearly indicated,” said Manicamp; “and I have not the slightest doubt in the world that if I were to follow your directions, I should lose my way immediately. I have, therefore, a slight service to ask of you.”

“What may that be?”

“That you will offer me your arm and guide me yourself, like another—like another—I used to know mythology, but other important matters have made me forget it; pray come with me, then?”

“And am I to be abandoned, then?” cried Malicorne.

“It is quite impossible, monsieur,” said Montalais to Manicamp; “if I were to be seen with you at such an hour, what would be said of me?”

“Your own conscience would acquit you,” said Manicamp, sententiously.

“Impossible, monsieur, impossible.”

“In that case, let me assist Malicorne to get down; he is a very intelligent fellow, and possesses a very keen scent; he will guide me, and if we lose ourselves, both of us will be lost, and the one will save the other. If we are together, and should be met by any one, we shall look as if we had some matter of business in hand; whilst alone I should have the appearance either of a lover or a robber. Come, Malicorne, here is the ladder.”

Malicorne had already stretched out one of his legs towards the top of the wall, when Manicamp said, in a whisper, “Hush!”

“What’s the matter?” inquired Montalais.

“I hear footsteps.”

“Good heavens!”

In fact the fancied footsteps soon became a reality; the foliage was pushed aside, and Saint-Aignan appeared, with a smile on his lips, and his hand stretched out towards them, taking every one by surprise; that is to say, Malicorne upon the tree with his head stretched out, Montalais upon the round of the ladder and clinging to it tightly, and Manicamp on the ground with his foot advanced ready to set off. “Good-evening,

Manicamp," said the comte, "I am glad to see you, my dear fellow; we missed you this evening, and a good many inquiries have been made about you. Mademoiselle de Montalais, your most obedient servant."

Montalais blushed. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed, hiding her face in both her hands.

"Pray reassure yourself; I know how perfectly innocent you are, and I shall give a good account of you. Manicamp, do you follow me: the hedge, the cross-paths, and labyrinth, I am well acquainted with them all; I will be your Ariadne. There now, your mythological name is found at last."

"Perfectly true, comte."

"And take M. Malicorne away with you at the same time," said Montalais.

"No, indeed," said Malicorne; "M. Manicamp has conversed with you as long as he liked, and now it is my turn, if you please; I have a multitude of things to tell you about our future prospects."

"You hear," said the comte, laughing; "stay with him, Mademoiselle Montalais. This is, indeed, a night for secrets." And, taking Manicamp's arm, the comte led him rapidly away in the direction of the road Montalais knew so well, and indicated so badly. Montalais followed them with her eyes as long as she could perceive them.

Chapter L: How Malicorne Had Been Turned Out of the Hotel of the Beau Paon.

While Montalais was engaged in looking after the comte and Manicamp, Malicorne had taken advantage of the young girl's attention being drawn away to render his position somewhat more tolerable, and when she turned round, she immediately noticed the change which had taken place; for he had seated himself, like a monkey, upon the wall, the foliage of the wild vine and honeysuckle curled around his head like a faun, while the twisted ivy branches represented tolerably enough his cloven feet. Montalais required nothing to make her resemblance to a dryad as complete as possible. "Well," she said, ascending another round of the ladder, "are you resolved to render me unhappy? have you not persecuted me enough, tyrant that you are?"

"I a tyrant?" said Malicorne.

"Yes, you are always compromising me, Monsieur Malicorne; you are a perfect monster of wickedness."

"I?"

"What have you to do with Fontainebleau? Is not Orleans your place of residence?"

"Do you ask me what I have to do here? I wanted to see you."

"Ah, great need of that."

"Not as far as concerns yourself, perhaps, but as far as I am concerned, Mademoiselle Montalais, you know very well that I have left my home, and that, for the future, I have no other place of residence than that which you may happen to have. As you, therefore, are staying at Fontainebleau at the present moment, I have come to Fontainebleau."

Montalais shrugged her shoulders. “You wished to see me, did you not?” she said.

“Of course.”

“Very well, you have seen me,—you are satisfied; so now go away.”

“Oh, no,” said Malicorne; “I came to talk with you as well as to see you.”

“Very well, we will talk by and by, and in another place than this.”

“By and by! Heaven only knows if I shall meet you by and by in another place. We shall never find a more favorable one than this.”

“But I cannot this evening, nor at the present moment.”

“Why not?”

“Because a thousand things have happened to-night.”

“Well, then, my affair will make a thousand and one.”

“No, no; Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is waiting for me in our room to communicate something of the very greatest importance.”

“How long has she been waiting?”

“For an hour at least.”

“In that case,” said Malicorne, tranquilly, “she can wait a few minutes longer.”

“Monsieur Malicorne,” said Montalais, “you are forgetting yourself.”

“You should rather say that it is you who are forgetting me, and that I am getting impatient at the part you make me play here indeed! For the last week I have been prowling about among the company, and you have not once deigned to notice my presence.”

“Have you been prowling about here for a week, M. Malicorne?”

“Like a wolf; sometimes I have been burnt by the fireworks, which have singed two of my wigs; at others, I have been completely drenched in the osiers by the evening damps, or the spray from the fountains,—half-famished, fatigued to death, with the view of a wall always before me, and the prospect of having to scale it perhaps. Upon my word, this is not the sort of life for any one to lead who is neither a squirrel, a

salamander, nor an otter; and since you drive your inhumanity so far as to wish to make me renounce my condition as a man, I declare it openly. A man I am, indeed, and a man I will remain, unless by superior orders."

"Well, then, tell me, what do you wish,—what do you require,—what do you insist upon?" said Montalais, in a submissive tone.

"Do you mean to tell me that you did not know I was at Fontainebleau?"

"I?"

"Nay, be frank."

"I suspected so."

"Well, then, could you not have contrived during the last week to have seen me once a day, at least?"

"I have always been prevented, M. Malicorne."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"Ask my companion, if you do not believe me."

"I shall ask no one to explain matters, I know better than any one."

"Compose yourself, M. Malicorne: things will change."

"They must indeed."

"You know that, whether I see you or not, I am thinking of you," said Montalais, in a coaxing tone of voice.

"Oh, you are thinking of me, are you? well, and is there anything new?"

"What about?"

"About my post in Monsieur's household."

"Ah, my dear Malicorne, no one has ventured lately to approach his royal highness."

"Well, but now?"

"Now it is quite a different thing; since yesterday he has left off being jealous."

"Bah! how has his jealousy subsided?"

“It has been diverted into another channel.”

“Tell me all about it.”

“A report was spread that the king had fallen in love with some one else, and Monsieur was tranquillized immediately.”

“And who spread the report?”

Montalais lowered her voice. “Between ourselves,” she said, “I think that Madame and the king have come to a secret understanding about it.”

“Ah!” said Malicorne; “that was the only way to manage it. But what about poor M. de Guiche?”

“Oh, as for him, he is completely turned off.”

“Have they been writing to each other?”

“No, certainly not; I have not seen a pen in either of their hands for the last week.”

“On what terms are you with Madame?”

“The very best.”

“And with the king?”

“The king always smiles at me whenever I pass him.”

“Good. Now tell me whom have the two lovers selected to serve as their screen?”

“La Vallière.”

“Oh, oh, poor girl! We must prevent that!”

“Why?”

“Because, if M. Raoul Bragelonne were to suspect it, he would either kill her or kill himself.”

“Raoul, poor fellow! do you think so?”

“Women pretend to have a knowledge of the state of people’s affections,” said Malicorne, “and they do not even know how to read the thoughts of their own minds and hearts. Well, I can tell you that M. de Bragelonne loves La Vallière to such a degree that, if she deceived him, he would, I repeat, either kill himself or kill her.”

“But the king is there to defend her,” said Montalais.

“The king!” exclaimed Malicorne; “Raoul would kill the king as he would a common thief.”

“Good heavens!” said Montalais; “you are mad, M. Malicorne.”

“Not in the least. Everything I have told you is, on the contrary, perfectly serious; and, for my own part, I know one thing.”

“What is that?”

“That I shall quietly tell Raoul of the trick.”

“Hush!” said Montalais, mounting another round of the ladder, so as to approach Malicorne more closely, “do not open your lips to poor Raoul.”

“Why not?”

“Because, as yet you know nothing at all.”

“What is the matter, then?”

“Why, this evening—but no one is listening, I hope?”

“No.”

“This evening, then, beneath the royal oak, La Vallière said aloud, and innocently enough, ‘I cannot conceive that when one has once seen the king, one can ever love another man.’”

Malicorne almost jumped off the wall. “Unhappy girl! did she really say that?”

“Word for word.”

“And she thinks so?”

“La Vallière always thinks what she says.”

“That positively cries aloud for vengeance. Why, women are the veriest serpents,” said Malicorne.

“Compose yourself, my dear Malicorne, compose yourself.”

“No, no; let us take the evil in time, on the contrary. There is time enough yet to tell Raoul of it.”

“Blunderer, on the contrary, it is too late,” replied Montalais.

"How so?"

"La Vallière's remark, which was intended for the king, reached its destination."

"The king knows it, then? The king was told of it, I suppose?"

"The king heard it."

"*Ahime!* as the cardinal used to say."

"The king was hidden in the thicket close to the royal oak."

"It follows, then," said Malicorne, "that for the future, the plan which the king and Madame have arranged, will go as easily as if it were on wheels, and will pass over poor Bragelonne's body."

"Precisely so."

"Well," said Malicorne, after a moment's reflection, "do not let us interpose our poor selves between a large oak-tree and a great king, for we should certainly be ground to pieces."

"The very thing I was going to say to you."

"Let us think of ourselves, then."

"My own idea."

"Open your beautiful eyes, then."

"And you your large ears."

"Approach your little mouth for a kiss."

"Here," said Montalais, who paid the debt immediately in ringing coin.

"Now let us consider. First, we have M. de Guiche, who is in love with Madame; then La Vallière, who is in love with the king; next, the king, who is in love both with Madame and La Vallière; lastly Monsieur, who loves no one but himself. Among all these loves, a noodle would make his fortune: a greater reason, therefore, for sensible people like ourselves to do so."

"There you are with your dreams again."

"Nay, rather with realities. Let me still lead you, darling. I do not think you have been very badly off hitherto?"

"No."

“Well, the future is guaranteed by the past. Only, since all here think of themselves before anything else, let us do so too.”

“Perfectly right.”

“But of ourselves only.”

“Be it so.”

“An offensive and defensive alliance.”

“I am ready to swear it.”

“Put out your hand, then, and say, ‘All for Malicorne.’”

“All for Malicorne.”

“And I, ‘All for Montalais,’” replied Malicorne, stretching out his hand in his turn.

“And now, what is to be done?”

“Keep your eyes and ears constantly open; collect every means of attack which may be serviceable against others; never let anything lie about which can be used against ourselves.”

“Agreed.”

“Decided.”

“Sworn to. And now the agreement entered into, good-bye.”

“What do you mean by ‘good-bye?’”

“Of course you can now return to your inn.”

“To my inn?”

“Yes; are you not lodging at the sign of the Beau Paon?”

“Montalais, Montalais, you now betray that you were aware of my being at Fontainebleau.”

“Well; and what does that prove, except that I occupy myself about you more than you deserve?”

“Hum!”

“Go back, then, to the Beau Paon.”

“That is now quite out of the question.”

“Have you not a room there?”

“I had, but have it no longer.”

“Who has taken it from you, then?”

“I will tell you. Some little time ago I was returning there, after I had been running about after you; and having reached my hotel quite out of breath, I perceived a litter, upon which four peasants were carrying a sick monk.”

“A monk?”

“Yes, an old gray-bearded Franciscan. As I was looking at the monk, they entered the hotel; and as they were carrying him up the staircase, I followed, and as I reached the top of the staircase I observed that they took him into my room.”

“Into your room?”

“Yes, into my own apartment. Supposing it to be a mistake, I summoned the landlord, who said that the room which had been let to me for the past eight days was let to the Franciscan for the ninth.”

“Oh, oh!”

“That was exactly what I said; nay, I did even more, for I was inclined to get out of temper. I went up-stairs again. I spoke to the Franciscan himself, and wished to prove to him the impropriety of the step; when this monk, dying though he seemed to be, raised himself upon his arm, fixed a pair of blazing eyes upon me, and, in a voice which was admirably suited for commanding a charge of cavalry, said, ‘Turn this fellow out of doors;’ which was done, immediately by the landlord and the four porters, who made me descend the staircase somewhat faster than was agreeable. This is how it happens, dearest, that I have no lodging.”

“Who can this Franciscan be?” said Montalais. “Is he a general?”

“That is exactly the very title that one of the bearers of the litter gave him as he spoke to him in a low tone.”

“So that—” said Montalais.

“So that I have no room, no hotel, no lodging; and I am as determined as my friend Manicamp was just now, not to pass the night in the open air.”

“What is to be done, then?” said Montalais.

“Nothing easier,” said a third voice; whereupon Montalais and Malicorne uttered a simultaneous cry, and Saint-Aignan appeared. “Dear Monsieur Malicorne,” said Saint-Aignan, “a very lucky accident has brought me back to extricate you from your embarrassment. Come, I can offer you a room in my own apartments, which, I can assure you, no Franciscan will deprive you of. As for you, my dear lady, rest easy. I already knew Mademoiselle de la Vallière’s secret, and that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; your own you have just been kind enough to confide to me; for which I thank you. I can keep three quite as well as one.” Malicorne and Montalais looked at each other, like children detected in a theft; but as Malicorne saw a great advantage in the proposition which had been made to him, he gave Montalais a sign of assent, which she returned. Malicorne then descended the ladder, round by round, reflecting at every step on the means of obtaining piecemeal from M. de Saint-Aignan all he might possibly know about the famous secret. Montalais had already darted away like a deer, and neither cross-road nor labyrinth was able to lead her wrong. As for Saint-Aignan, he carried off Malicorne with him to his apartments, showing him a thousand attentions, enchanted to have so close at hand the very two men who, even supposing De Guiche were to remain silent, could give him the best information about the maids of honor.

Chapter LI. What Actually Occurred at the Inn Called the Beau Paon.

In the first place, let us supply our readers with a few details about the inn called Beau Paon. It owed its name to its sign, which represented a peacock spreading its tail. But, in imitation of certain painters who bestowed the face of a handsome young man on the serpent which tempted Eve, the limner of the sign had conferred upon the peacock the features of a woman. This famous inn, an architectural epigram against that half of the human race which renders existence delightful, was situated at Fontainebleau, in the first turning on the left-hand side, which divides the road from Paris, the large artery that constitutes in itself alone the entire town of Fontainebleau. The side street in question was then known as the Rue de Lyon, doubtless because, geographically, it led in the direction of the second capital of the kingdom. The street itself was composed of two houses occupied by persons of the class of tradespeople, the houses being separated by two large gardens bordered with hedges running round them. Apparently, however, there were three houses in the street. Let us explain, notwithstanding appearances, how there were in fact only two. The inn of the Beau Paon had its principal front towards the main street; but upon the Rue de Lyon there were two ranges of buildings divided by courtyards, which comprised sets of apartments for the reception of all classes of travelers, whether on foot or on horseback, or even with their own carriages; and in which could be supplied, not only board and lodging, but also accommodation for exercise, or opportunities of solitude for even the wealthiest courtiers, whenever, after having received some check at the court, they wished to shut themselves up to their own society, either to devour an affront, or to brood on revenge. From the windows of this part of the building

travelers could perceive, in the first place, the street with the grass growing between the stones, which were being gradually loosened by it; next the beautiful hedges of elder and thorn, which embraced, as though within two green and flowery arms, the house of which we have spoken; and then, in the spaces between those houses, forming the groundwork of the picture, and appearing an almost impassable barrier, a line of thick trees, the advanced sentinels of the vast forest which extends in front of Fontainebleau. It was therefore easy, provided one secured an apartment at the angle of the building, to obtain, by the main street from Paris, a view of, as well as to hear, the passers-by and the *fetes*; and, by the Rue de Lyon, to look upon and to enjoy the calm of the country. And this without reckoning that, in cases of urgent necessity, at the very moment people might be knocking at the principal door in the Rue de Paris, one could make one's escape by the little door in the Rue de Lyon, and, creeping along the gardens of the private houses, attain the outskirts of the forest. Malicorne, who, it will be remembered, was the first to speak about this inn, by way of deploring his being turned out of it, being then absorbed in his own affairs, had not told Montalais all that could be said about this curious inn; and we will try to repair the omission. With the exception of the few words he had said about the Franciscan friar, Malicorne had not given any particulars about the travelers who were staying in the inn. The manner in which they had arrived, the manner in which they had lived, the difficulty which existed for every one but certain privileged travelers, of entering the hotel without a password, or living there without certain preparatory precautions, must have struck Malicorne; and, we will venture to say, really did so. But Malicorne, as we have already said, had personal matters of his own to occupy his attention which prevented him from paying much attention to others. In fact, all the apartments of the hotel were engaged and retained by certain strangers, who never stirred out, who were incommunicative in their address, with countenances full of thoughtful preoccupation, and not one of whom was known to Malicorne. Every one of these travelers had reached the hotel after his own arrival there; each man had entered after having given a kind of

password, which had at first attracted Malicorne's attention; but having inquired, in an indiscreet manner, about it, he had been informed that the host had given as a reason for this extreme vigilance, that, as the town was so full of wealthy noblemen, it must also be as full of clever and zealous pickpockets. The reputation of an honest inn like that of the Beau Paon was concerned in not allowing its visitors to be robbed. It occasionally happened that Malicorne asked himself, as he thought matters carefully over in his mind, and reflected upon his own position in the inn, how it was that they had allowed him to become an inmate of the hotel, when he had observed, since his residence there, admission refused to so many. He asked himself, too, how it was that Manicamp, who, in his opinion, must be a man to be looked upon with veneration by everybody, having wished to bait his horse at the Beau Paon, on arriving there, both horse and rider had been incontinently turned away with a *nescio vos* of the most positive character. All this for Malicorne, whose mind being fully occupied by his own love affair and personal ambition, was a problem he had not applied himself to solve. Had he wished to do so, we should hardly venture, notwithstanding the intelligence we have accorded as his due, to say he would have succeeded. A few words will prove to the reader that no one but Oedipus in person could have solved the enigma in question. During the week, seven travelers had taken up their abode in the inn, all of them having arrived there the day after the fortunate day on which Malicorne had fixed his choice on the Beau Paon. These seven persons, accompanied by a suitable retinue, were the following:—

First of all, a brigadier in the German army, his secretary, physician, three servants, and seven horses. The brigadier's name was the Comte de Wostpur.—A Spanish cardinal, with two nephews, two secretaries, an officer of his household, and twelve horses. The cardinal's name was Monseigneur Herrebia.—A rich merchant of Bremen, with his man-servant and two horses. This merchant's name was Meinheer Bonstett.—A Venetian senator with his wife and daughter, both extremely beautiful. The senator's name was Signor Marini.—A Scottish laird, with seven highlanders of his clan, all on foot. The laird's name was MacCumnor.—

An Austrian from Vienna without title or coat of arms, who had arrived in a carriage; a good deal of the priest, and something of the soldier. He was called the Councilor.—And, finally, a Flemish lady, with a man-servant, a lady's maid, and a female companion, a large retinue of servants, great display, and immense horses. She was called the Flemish lady.

All these travelers had arrived on the same day, and yet their arrival had occasioned no confusion in the inn, no stoppage in the street; their apartments had been fixed upon beforehand, by their couriers or secretaries, who had arrived the previous evening or that very morning. Malicorne, who had arrived the previous day, riding an ill-conditioned horse, with a slender valise, had announced himself at the hotel of the Beau Paon as the friend of a nobleman desirous of witnessing the *fetes*, and who would himself arrive almost immediately. The landlord, on hearing these words, had smiled as if he were perfectly well acquainted either with Malicorne or his friend the nobleman, and had said to him, "Since you are the first arrival, monsieur, choose what apartment you please." And this was said with that obsequiousness of manners, so full of meaning with landlords, which means, "Make yourself perfectly easy, monsieur: we know with whom we have to do, and you will be treated accordingly." These words, and their accompanying gesture, Malicorne had thought very friendly, but rather obscure. However, as he did not wish to be very extravagant in his expenses, and as he thought that if he were to ask for a small apartment he would doubtless have been refused, on account of his want of consequence, he hastened to close at once with the innkeeper's remark, and deceive him with a cunning equal to his own. So, smiling as a man would do for whom whatever might be done was but simply his due, he said, "My dear host, I shall take the best and the gayest room in the house."

"With a stable?"

"Yes, with a stable."

"And when will you take it?"

"Immediately if it be possible."

“Quite so.”

“But,” said Malicorne, “I shall leave the large room unoccupied for the present.”

“Very good!” said the landlord, with an air of intelligence.

“Certain reasons, which you will understand by and by, oblige me to take, at my own cost, this small room only.”

“Yes, yes,” said the host.

“When my friend arrives, he will occupy the large apartment: and as a matter of course, as this larger apartment will be his own affair, he will settle for it himself.”

“Certainly,” said the landlord, “certainly; let it be understood in that manner.”

“It is agreed, then, that such shall be the terms?”

“Word for word.”

“It is extraordinary,” said Malicorne to himself. “You quite understand, then?”

“Yes.”

“There is nothing more to be said. Since you understand,—for you do clearly understand, do you not?”

“Perfectly.”

“Very well; and now show me to my room.”

The landlord, cap in hand, preceded Malicorne, who installed himself in his room, and became more and more surprised to observe that the landlord, at every ascent or descent, looked and winked at him in a manner which indicated the best possible intelligence between them.

“There is some mistake here,” said Malicorne to himself; “but until it is cleared up, I shall take advantage of it, which is the best thing I can possibly do.” And he darted out of his room, like a hunting-dog following a scent, in search of all the news and curiosities of the court, getting himself burnt in one place and drowned in another, as he had told Mademoiselle de Montalais. The day after he had been installed in his

room, he had noticed the seven travelers arrive successively, who speedily filled the whole hotel. When he saw this perfect multitude of people, of carriages, and retinue, Malicorne rubbed his hands delightedly, thinking that, one day later, he should not have found a bed to lie upon after his return from his exploring expeditions. When all the travelers were lodged, the landlord entered Malicorne's room, and with his accustomed courteousness, said to him, "You are aware, my dear monsieur, that the large room in the third detached building is still reserved for you?"

"Of course I am aware of it."

"I am really making you a present of it."

"Thank you."

"So that when your friend comes—"

"Well!"

"He will be satisfied with me, I hope: or, if he be not, he will be very difficult to please."

"Excuse me, but will you allow me to say a few words about my friend?"

"Of course, for you have a perfect right to do so."

"He intended to come, as you know."

"And he does so still."

"He may possibly have changed his opinion."

"No."

"You are quite sure, then?"

"Quite sure."

"But in case you should have some doubt."

"Well!"

"I can only say that I do not positively assure you that he will come."

"Yet he told you—"

"He certainly did tell me; but you know that man proposes and God disposes,—*verba volant, scripta manent*."

“Which is as much to say—”

“That what is spoken flies away, and what is written remains; and, as he did not write to me, but contented himself by saying to me, ‘I will authorize you, yet without specifically instructing you,’ you must feel that it places me in a very embarrassing position.”

“What do you authorize me to do, then?”

“Why, to let your rooms if you find a good tenant for them.”

“I?”

“Yes, you.”

“Never will I do such a thing, monsieur. If he has not written to you, he has written to me.”

“Ah! what does he say? Let us see if his letter agrees with his words.”

“These are almost his very words. ‘To the landlord of the Beau Paon Hotel,—You will have been informed of the meeting arranged to take place in your inn between some people of importance; I shall be one of those who will meet with the others at Fontainebleau. Keep for me, then, a small room for a friend who will arrive either before or after me—’ and you are the friend, I suppose,” said the landlord, interrupting his reading of the letter. Malicorne bowed modestly. The landlord continued:

“‘And a large apartment for myself. The large apartment is my own affair, but I wish the price of the smaller room to be moderate, as it is destined for a fellow who is deucedly poor.’ It is still you he is speaking of, is he not?” said the host.

“Oh, certainly,” said Malicorne.

“Then we are agreed; your friend will settle for his apartment, and you for your own.”

“May I be broken alive on the wheel,” said Malicorne to himself, “if I understand anything at all about it,” and then he said aloud, “Well, then, are you satisfied with the name?”

“With what name?”

“With the name at the end of the letter. Does it give you the guarantee you require?”

“I was going to ask you the name.”

“What! was the letter not signed?”

“No,” said the landlord, opening his eyes very wide, full of mystery and curiosity.

“In that case,” said Malicorne, imitating his gesture and his mysterious look, “if he has not given you his name, you understand, he must have his reasons for it.”

“Oh, of course.”

“And, therefore, I, his friend, his confidant, must not betray him.”

“You are perfectly right, monsieur,” said the landlord, “and I do not insist upon it.”

“I appreciate your delicacy. As for myself, as my friend told you, my room is a separate affair, so let us come to terms about it. Short accounts make long friends. How much is it?”

“There is no hurry.”

“Never mind, let us reckon it all up all the same. Room, my own board, a place in the stable for my horse, and his feed. How much per day?”

“Four livres, monsieur.”

“Which will make twelve livres for the three days I have been here?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Here are your twelve livres, then.”

“But why settle now?”

“Because,” said Malicorne, lowering his voice, and resorting to his former air of mystery, because he saw that the mysterious had succeeded, “because if I had to set off suddenly, to decamp at any moment, my account would be settled.”

“You are right, monsieur.”

“I may consider myself at home, then?”

“Perfectly.”

“So far so well. Adieu!” And the landlord withdrew. Malicorne, left alone, reasoned with himself in the following manner: “No one but De Guiche or Manicamp could have written to this fellow; De Guiche, because he wishes to secure a lodging for himself beyond the precincts of the court, in the event of his success or failure, as the case might be; Manicamp, because De Guiche must have intrusted him with his commission. And De Guiche or Manicamp will have argued in this manner. The large apartment would serve for the reception, in a befitting manner, of a lady thickly veiled, reserving to the lady in question a double means of exit, either in a street somewhat deserted, or closely adjoining the forest. The smaller room might either shelter Manicamp for a time, who is De Guiche’s confidant, and would be the vigilant keeper of the door, or De Guiche himself, acting, for greater safety, the part of a master and confidant at the same time. Yet,” he continued, “how about this meeting which is to take place, and which has actually taken place, in this hotel? No doubt they are persons who are going to be presented to the king. And the ‘poor devil,’ for whom the smaller room is destined, is a trick, in order to better conceal De Guiche or Manicamp. If this be the case, as very likely it is, there is only half the mischief done, for there is simply the length of a purse string between Manicamp and Malicorne.” After he had thus reasoned the matter out, Malicorne slept soundly, leaving the seven travelers to occupy, and in every sense of the word to walk up and down, their several lodgings in the hotel. Whenever there was nothing at court to put him out, when he had wearied himself with his excursions and investigations, tired of writing letters which he could never find an opportunity of delivering to the people they were intended for, he returned home to his comfortable little room, and leaning upon the balcony, which was filled with nasturtiums and white pinks, for whom Fontainebleau seemed to possess no attractions with all its illuminations, amusements, and *fetes*.

Things went on in this manner until the seventh day, a day of which we have given such full details, with its night also, in the preceding chapters. On that night Malicorne was enjoying the fresh air, seated at

his window, toward one o'clock in the morning, when Manicamp appeared on horseback, with a thoughtful and listless air.

"Good!" said Malicorne to himself, recognizing him at the first glance; "there's my friend, who is come to take possession of his apartment, that is to say, of my room." And he called to Manicamp, who looked up and immediately recognized Malicorne.

"Ah! by Jove!" said the former, his countenance clearing up, "glad to see you, Malicorne. I have been wandering about Fontainebleau, looking for three things I cannot find: De Guiche, a room, and a stable."

"Of M. de Guiche I cannot give you either good or bad news, for I have not seen him; but as far as concerns your room and a stable, that's another matter, for they have been retained here for you."

"Retained—and by whom?"

"By yourself, I presume."

"By *me?*"

"Do you mean to say you did not take lodgings here?"

"By no means," said Manicamp.

At this moment the landlord appeared on the threshold of the door.

"I want a room," said Manicamp.

"Did you engage one, monsieur?"

"No."

"Then I have no rooms to let."

"In that case, I have engaged a room," said Manicamp.

"A room simply, or lodgings?"

"Anything you please."

"By letter?" inquired the landlord.

Malicorne nodded affirmatively to Manicamp.

"Of course by letter," said Manicamp. "Did you not receive a letter from me?"

“What was the date of the letter?” inquired the host, in whom Manicamp’s hesitation had aroused some suspicion.

Manicamp rubbed his ear, and looked up at Malicorne’s window; but Malicorne had left his window and was coming down the stairs to his friend’s assistance. At the very same moment, a traveler, wrapped in a large Spanish cloak, appeared at the porch, near enough to hear the conversation.

“I ask you what was the date of the letter you wrote to me to retain apartments here?” repeated the landlord, pressing the question.

“Last Wednesday was the date,” said the mysterious stranger, in a soft and polished tone of voice, touching the landlord on the shoulder.

Manicamp drew back, and it was now Malicorne’s turn, who appeared on the threshold, to scratch his ear. The landlord saluted the new arrival as a man who recognizes his true guest.

“Monsieur,” he said to him, with civility, “your apartment is ready for you, and the stables too, only—” He looked round him and inquired, “Your horses?”

“My horses may or may not arrive. That, however, matters but little to you, provided you are paid for what has been engaged.” The landlord bowed lower still.

“You have,” continued the unknown traveler, “kept for me in addition, the small room I asked for?”

“Oh!” said Malicorne, endeavoring to hide himself.

“Your friend has occupied it during the last week,” said the landlord, pointing to Malicorne, who was trying to make himself as small as possible. The traveler, drawing his cloak round him so as to cover the lower part of his face, cast a rapid glance at Malicorne, and said, “This gentleman is no friend of mine.”

The landlord started violently.

“I am not acquainted with this gentleman,” continued the traveler.

“What!” exclaimed the host, turning to Malicorne, “are you not this gentleman’s friend, then?”

“What does it matter whether I am or not, provided you are paid?” said Malicorne, parodying the stranger’s remark in a very majestic manner.

“It matters so far as this,” said the landlord, who began to perceive that one person had been taken for another, “that I beg you, monsieur, to leave the rooms, which had been engaged beforehand, and by some one else instead of you.”

“Still,” said Malicorne, “this gentleman cannot require at the same time a room on the first floor and an apartment on the second. If this gentleman will take the room, I will take the apartment: if he prefers the apartment, I will be satisfied with the room.”

“I am exceedingly distressed, monsieur,” said the traveler in his soft voice, “but I need both the room and the apartment.”

“At least, tell me for whom?” inquired Malicorne.

“The apartment I require for myself.”

“Very well; but the room?”

“Look,” said the traveler, pointing towards a sort of procession which was approaching.

Malicorne looked in the direction indicated, and observed borne upon a litter, the arrival of the Franciscan, whose installation in his apartment he had, with a few details of his own, related to Montalais, and whom he had so uselessly endeavored to convert to humbler views. The result of the arrival of the stranger, and of the sick Franciscan, was Malicorne’s expulsion, without any consideration for his feelings, from the inn, by the landlord and the peasants who had carried the Franciscan. The details have already been given of what followed this expulsion; of Manicamp’s conversation with Montalais; how Manicamp, with greater cleverness than Malicorne had shown, had succeeded in obtaining news of De Guiche, of the subsequent conversation of Montalais with Malicorne, and, finally, of the billets with which the Comte de Saint-Aignan had furnished Manicamp and Malicorne. It remains for us to inform our readers who was the traveler in the cloak—the principal

tenant of the double apartment, of which Malicorne had only occupied a portion—and the Franciscan, quite as mysterious a personage, whose arrival, together with that of the stranger, unfortunately upset the two friends' plans.

Chapter LII. A Jesuit of the Eleventh Year.

In the first place, in order not to weary the reader's patience, we will hasten to answer the first question. The traveler with the cloak held over his face was Aramis, who, after he had left Fouquet, and taken from a portmanteau, which his servant had opened, a cavalier's complete costume, quitted the chateau, and went to the hotel of the Beau Paon, where, by letters, seven or eight days previously, he had, as the landlord had stated, directed a room and an apartment to be retained for him. Immediately after Malicorne and Manicamp had been turned out, Aramis approached the Franciscan, and asked him whether he would prefer the apartment or the room. The Franciscan inquired where they were both situated. He was told that the room was on the first, and the apartment on the second floor.

"The room, then," he said.

Aramis did not contradict him, but, with great submissiveness, said to the landlord: "The room." And bowing with respect he withdrew into the apartment, and the Franciscan was accordingly carried at once into the room. Now, is it not extraordinary that this respect should be shown by a prelate of the Church for a simple monk, for one, too, belonging to a mendicant order; to whom was given up, without a request for it even, a room which so many travelers were desirous of obtaining? How, too, can one explain the unexpected arrival of Aramis at the hotel—he who had entered the chateau with M. Fouquet, and could have remained at the chateau with M. Fouquet if he had liked? The Franciscan supported his removal up the staircase without uttering a complaint, although it was evident he suffered very much, and that every time the litter knocked against the wall or the railing of the staircase, he experienced a terrible shock throughout his frame. And finally, when he had arrived in the

room, he said to those who carried him: “Help me to place myself in that armchair.” The bearers of the litter placed it on the ground, and lifting the sick man up as gently as possible, carried him to the chair he had indicated, which was situated at the head of the bed. “Now,” he added, with a marked benignity of gesture and tone, “desire the landlord to come.”

They obeyed, and five minutes afterwards the landlord appeared at the door.

“Be kind enough,” said the Franciscan to him, “to send these excellent fellows away; they are vassals of the Vicomte de Melun. They found me when I had fainted on the road overcome by the heat, and without thinking of whether they would be paid for their trouble, they wished to carry me to their own home. But I know at what cost to themselves is the hospitality which the poor extend to a sick monk, and I preferred this hotel, where, moreover, I was expected.”

The landlord looked at the Franciscan in amazement, but the latter, with his thumb, made the sign of the cross in a peculiar manner upon his breast. The host replied by making a similar sign on his left shoulder. “Yes, indeed,” he said, “we did expect you, but we hoped that you would arrive in a better state of health.” And as the peasants were looking at the innkeeper, usually so supercilious, and saw how respectful he had become in the presence of a poor monk, the Franciscan drew from a deep pocket three or four pieces of gold which he held out.

“My friends,” said he, “here is something to repay you for the care you have taken of me. So make yourselves perfectly easy, and do not be afraid of leaving me here. The order to which I belong, and for which I am traveling, does not require me to beg; only, as the attention you have shown me deserves to be rewarded, take these two louis and depart in peace.”

The peasants did not dare to take them; the landlord took the two louis out of the monk’s hand and placed them in that of one of the peasants, all four of whom withdrew, opening their eyes wider than ever. The door was then closed; and, while the innkeeper stood respectfully

near it, the Franciscan collected himself for a moment. He then passed across his sallow face a hand which seemed dried up by fever, and rubbed his nervous and agitated fingers across his beard. His large eyes, hollowed by sickness and inquietude, seemed to peruse in the vague distance a mournful and fixed idea.

"What physicians have you at Fontainebleau?" he inquired, after a long pause.

"We have three, holy father."

"What are their names?"

"Luiniguet first."

"The next one?"

"A brother of the Carmelite order, named Brother Hubert."

"The next?"

"A secular member, named Grisart."

"Ah! Grisart?" murmured the monk, "send for M. Grisart immediately."

The landlord moved in prompt obedience to the direction.

"Tell me what priests are there here?"

"What priests?"

"Yes; belonging to what orders?"

"There are Jesuits, Augustines, and Cordeliers; but the Jesuits are the closest at hand. Shall I send for a confessor belonging to the order of Jesuits?"

"Yes, immediately."

It will be imagined that, at the sign of the cross which they had exchanged, the landlord and the invalid monk had recognized each other as two affiliated members of the well-known Society of Jesus. Left to himself, the Franciscan drew from his pocket a bundle of papers, some of which he read over with the most careful attention. The violence of his disorder, however, overcame his courage; his eyes rolled in their sockets, a cold sweat poured down his face, and he nearly fainted, and lay with

his head thrown backwards and his arms hanging down on both sides of his chair. For more than five minutes he remained without any movement, when the landlord returned, bringing with him the physician, whom he hardly allowed time to dress himself. The noise they made in entering the room, the current of air, which the opening of the door occasioned, restored the Franciscan to his senses. He hurriedly seized hold of the papers which were lying about, and with his long and bony hand concealed them under the cushions of the chair. The landlord went out of the room, leaving patient and physician together.

"Come here, Monsieur Grisart," said the Franciscan to the doctor; "approach closer, for there is no time to lose. Try, by touch and sound, and consider and pronounce your sentence."

"The landlord," replied the doctor, "told me I had the honor of attending an affiliated brother."

"Yes," replied the Franciscan, "it is so. Tell me the truth, then; I feel very ill, and I think I am about to die."

The physician took the monk's hand, and felt his pulse. "Oh, oh," he said, "a dangerous fever."

"What do you call a dangerous fever?" inquired the Franciscan, with an imperious look.

"To an affiliated member of the first or second year," replied the physician, looking inquiringly at the monk, "I should say—a fever that may be cured."

"But to me?" said the Franciscan. The physician hesitated.

"Look at my grey hair, and my forehead, full of anxious thought," he continued: "look at the lines in my face, by which I reckon up the trials I have undergone; I am a Jesuit of the eleventh year, Monsieur Grisart." The physician started, for, in fact, a Jesuit of the eleventh year was one of those men who had been initiated in all the secrets of the order, one of those for whom science has no more secrets, the society no further barriers to present—temporal obedience, no more trammels.

“In that case,” said Grisart, saluting him with respect, “I am in the presence of a master?”

“Yes; act, therefore, accordingly.”

“And you wish to know?”

“My real state.”

“Well,” said the physician, “it is a brain fever, which has reached its highest degree of intensity.”

“There is no hope, then?” inquired the Franciscan, in a quick tone of voice.

“I do not say that,” replied the doctor; “yet, considering the disordered state of the brain, the hurried respiration, the rapidity of the pulse, and the burning nature of the fever which is devouring you—”

“And which has thrice prostrated me since this morning,” said the monk.

“All things considered, I shall call it a terrible attack. But why did you not stop on your road?”

“I was expected here, and I was obliged to come.”

“Even at the risk of your life?”

“Yes, at the risk of dying on the way.”

“Very well. Considering all the symptoms of your case, I must tell you that your condition is almost desperate.”

The Franciscan smiled in a strange manner.

“What you have just told me is, perhaps, sufficient for what is due to an affiliated member, even of the eleventh year; but for what is due to me, Monsieur Grisart, it is too little, and I have a right to demand more. Come, then, let us be more candid still, and as frank as if you were making your own confession to Heaven. Besides, I have already sent for a confessor.”

“Oh! I have hopes, however,” murmured the doctor.

“Answer me,” said the sick man, displaying with a dignified gesture a golden ring, the stone of which had until that moment been turned inside, and which bore engraved thereon the distinguishing mark of the Society of Jesus.

Grisart uttered loud exclamation. “The general!” he cried.

“Silence,” said the Franciscan., “you can now understand that the whole truth is all important.”

“Monseigneur, monseigneur,” murmured Grisart, “send for the confessor, for in two hours, at the next seizure, you will be attacked by delirium, and will pass away in its course.”

“Very well,” said the patient, for a moment contracting his eyebrows, “I have still two hours to live then?”

“Yes; particularly if you take the potion I will send you presently.”

“And that will give me two hours of life?”

“Two hours.”

“I would take it, were it poison, for those two hours are necessary not only for myself, but for the glory of the order.”

“What a loss, what a catastrophe for us all!” murmured the physician.

“It is the loss of one man—nothing more,” replied the Franciscan, “for Heaven will enable the poor monk, who is about to leave you, to find a worthy successor. Adieu, Monsieur Grisart; already even, through the goodness of Heaven, I have met with you. A physician who had not been one of our holy order, would have left me in ignorance of my condition; and, confident that existence would be prolonged a few days further, I should not have taken the necessary precautions. You are a learned man, Monsieur Grisart, and that confers an honor upon us all; it would have been repugnant to my feelings to have found one of our order of little standing in his profession. Adieu, Monsieur Grisart; send me the cordial immediately.”

“Give me your blessing, at least, monseigneur.”

“In my mind, I do; go, go; in my mind, I do so, I tell you—*animo*, Maitre Grisart, *viribus impossibile*.” And he again fell back on the armchair, in an almost senseless state. M. Grisart hesitated, whether he should give him immediate assistance, or should run to prepare the cordial he had promised. He decided in favor of the cordial, for he darted out of the room and disappeared down the staircase. 6

Chapter LIII. The State Secret.

A few moments after the doctor's departure, the confessor arrived. He had hardly crossed the threshold of the door when the Franciscan fixed a penetrating look upon him, and, shaking his head, murmured—"A weak mind, I see; may Heaven forgive me if I die without the help of this living piece of human infirmity." The confessor, on his side, regarded the dying man with astonishment, almost with terror. He had never beheld eyes so burningly bright at the very moment they were about to close, nor looks so terrible at the moment they were about to be quenched in death. The Franciscan made a rapid and imperious movement of his hand. "Sit down, there, my father," he said, "and listen to me." The Jesuit confessor, a good priest, a recently initiated member of the order, who had merely seen the beginning of its mysteries, yielded to the superiority assumed by the penitent.

"There are several persons staying in this hotel," continued the Franciscan.

"But," inquired the Jesuit, "I thought I had been summoned to listen to a confession. Is your remark, then, a confession?"

"Why do you ask?"

"In order to know whether I am to keep your words secret."

"My remarks are part of my confession; I confide them to you in your character of a confessor."

"Very well," said the priest, seating himself on the chair which the Franciscan had, with great difficulty, just left, to lie down on the bed.

The Franciscan continued,—"I repeat, there are several persons staying in this inn."

"So I have heard."

"They ought to be eight in number."

The Jesuit made a sign that he understood him. "The first to whom I wish to speak," said the dying man, "is a German from Vienna, whose name is Baron de Wostpur. Be kind enough to go to him, and tell him the person he expected has arrived." The confessor, astounded, looked at his penitent; the confession seemed a singular one.

"Obey," said the Franciscan, in a tone of command impossible to resist. The good Jesuit, completely subdued, rose and left the room. As soon as he had gone, the Franciscan again took up the papers which a crisis of the fever had already, once before, obliged him to put aside.

"The Baron de Wostpur? Good!" he said; "ambitious, a fool, and straitened in means."

He folded up the papers, which he thrust under his pillow. Rapid footsteps were heard at the end of the corridor. The confessor returned, followed by the Baron de Wostpur, who walked along with his head raised, as if he were discussing with himself the possibility of touching the ceiling with the feather in his hat. Therefore, at the appearance of the Franciscan, at his melancholy look, and seeing the plainness of the room, he stopped, and inquired,—"Who has summoned me?"

"I," said the Franciscan, who turned towards the confessor, saying, "My good father, leave us for a moment together; when this gentleman leaves, you will return here." The Jesuit left the room, and, doubtless, availed himself of this momentary exile from the presence of the dying man to ask the host for some explanation about this strange penitent, who treated his confessor no better than he would a man servant. The baron approached the bed, and wished to speak, but the hand of the Franciscan imposed silence upon him.

"Every moment is precious," said the latter, hurriedly. "You have come here for the competition, have you not?"

"Yes, my father."

"You hope to be elected general of the order?"

"I hope so."

“You know on what conditions only you can possibly attain this high position, which makes one man the master of monarchs, the equal of popes?”

“Who are you,” inquired the baron, “to subject me to these interrogations?”

“I am he whom you expected.”

“The elector-general?”

“I am the elected.”

“You are—”

The Franciscan did not give him time to reply; he extended his shrunken hand, on which glittered the ring of the general of the order. The baron drew back in surprise; and then, immediately afterwards, bowing with the profoundest respect, he exclaimed,—“Is it possible that you are here, monseigneur; you, in this wretched room; you, upon this miserable bed; you, in search of and selecting the future general, that is, your own successor?”

“Do not distress yourself about that, monsieur, but fulfil immediately the principal condition, of furnishing the order with a secret of importance, of such importance that one of the greatest courts of Europe will, by your instrumentality, forever be subjected to the order. Well! do you possess the secret which you promised, in your request, addressed to the grand council?”

“Monseigneur—”

“Let us proceed, however, in due order,” said the monk. “You are the Baron de Wostpur?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“And this letter is from you?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

The general of the Jesuits drew a paper from his bundle, and presented it to the baron, who glanced at it, and made a sign in the affirmative, saying, “Yes, monseigneur, this letter is mine.”

“Can you show me the reply which the secretary of the grand council returned to you?”

“Here it is,” said the baron, holding towards the Franciscan a letter bearing simply the address, “To his excellency the Baron de Wostpur,” and containing only this phrase, “From the 15th to the 22nd May, Fontainebleau, the hotel of the Beau Paon.—A. M. D. G.” [7]

“Right,” said the Franciscan, “and now speak.”

“I have a body of troops, composed of 50,000 men; all the officers are gained over. I am encamped on the Danube. In four days I can overthrow the emperor, who is, as you are aware, opposed to the progress of our order, and can replace him by whichever of the princes of his family the order may determine upon.” The Franciscan listened, unmoved.

“Is that all?” he said.

“A revolution throughout Europe is included in my plan,” said the baron.

“Very well, Monsieur de Wostpur, you will receive a reply; return to your room, and leave Fontainebleau within a quarter of an hour.” The baron withdrew backwards, as obsequiously as if he were taking leave of the emperor he was ready to betray.

“There is no secret there,” murmured the Franciscan, “it is a plot. Besides,” he added, after a moment’s reflection, “the future of Europe is no longer in the hands of the House of Austria.”

And with a pencil he held in his hand, he struck the Baron de Wostpur’s name from the list.

“Now for the cardinal,” he said; “we ought to get something more serious from the side of Spain.”

Raising his head, he perceived the confessor, who was awaiting his orders as respectfully as a school-boy.

“Ah, ah!” he said, noticing his submissive air, “you have been talking with the landlord.”

“Yes, monseigneur; and to the physician.”

“To Grisart?”

“Yes.”

“He is here, then?”

“He is waiting with the potion he promised.”

“Very well; if I require him, I will call; you now understand the great importance of my confession, do you not?”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Then go and fetch me the Spanish Cardinal Herrebia. Make haste. Only, as you now understand the matter in hand, you will remain near me, for I begin to feel faint.”

“Shall I summon the physician?”

“Not yet, not yet… the Spanish cardinal, no one else. Fly.”

Five minutes afterwards, the cardinal, pale and disturbed, entered the little room.

“I am informed, monseigneur,—” stammered the cardinal.

“To the point,” said the Franciscan, in a faint voice, showing the cardinal a letter which he had written to the grand council. “Is that your handwriting?”

“Yes, but—”

“And your summons?”

The cardinal hesitated to answer. His purple revolted against the mean garb of the poor Franciscan, who stretched out his hand and displayed the ring, which produced its effect, greater in proportion to the greatness of the person over whom the Franciscan exercised his influence.

“Quick, the secret, the secret!” said the dying man, leaning upon his confessor.

“*Coram isto?*” inquired the Spanish cardinal. 8

“Speak in Spanish,” said the Franciscan, showing the liveliest attention.

“You are aware, monseigneur,” said the cardinal, continuing the conversation in Castilian, “that the condition of the marriage of the Infanta with the king of France was the absolute renunciation of the rights of the said Infanta, as well as of King Louis XIV., to all claim to the crown of Spain.” The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative.

“The consequence is,” continued the cardinal, “that the peace and alliance between the two kingdoms depend upon the observance of that clause of the contract.” A similar sign from the Franciscan. “Not only France and Spain,” continued the cardinal, “but the whole of Europe even, would be violently rent asunder by the faithlessness of either party.” Another movement of the dying man’s head.

“It further results,” continued the speaker, “that the man who might be able to foresee events, and to render certain that which is no more than a vague idea floating in the mind of man, that is to say, the idea of a future good or evil, would preserve the world from a great catastrophe; and the event, which has no fixed certainty even in the brain of him who originated it, could be turned to the advantage of our order.”

“*Pronto*, *pronto!*” murmured the Franciscan, in Spanish, who suddenly became paler, and leaned upon the priest. The cardinal approached the ear of the dying man, and said, “Well, monseigneur, I know that the king of France has determined that, at the very first pretext, a death for instance, either that of the king of Spain, or that of a brother of the Infanta, France will, arms in hand, claim the inheritance, and I have in my possession, already prepared, the plan of policy agreed upon by Louis XIV. for this occasion.”

“And this plan?” said the Franciscan.

“Here it is,” returned the cardinal.

“In whose handwriting is it?”

“My own.”

“Have you anything further to say to me?”

“I think I have said a good deal, my lord,” replied the cardinal.

“Yes, you have rendered the order a great service. But how did you procure the details, by the aid of which you have constructed your plan?”

“I have the under-servants of the king of France in my pay, and I obtain from them all the waste papers, which have been saved from being burnt.”

“Very ingenious,” murmured the Franciscan, endeavoring to smile; “you will leave this hotel, cardinal, in a quarter of an hour, and a reply shall be sent you.” The cardinal withdrew.

“Call Grisart, and desire the Venetian Marini to come,” said the sick man.

While the confessor obeyed, the Franciscan, instead of striking out the cardinal’s name, as he had done the baron’s, made a cross at the side of it. Then, exhausted by the effort, he fell back on his bed, murmuring the name of Dr. Grisart. When he returned to his senses, he had drunk about half of the potion, of which the remainder was left in the glass, and he found himself supported by the physician, while the Venetian and the confessor were standing close to the door. The Venetian submitted to the same formalities as his two predecessors, hesitated as they had done at the sight of the two strangers, but his confidence restored by the order of the general, he revealed that the pope, terrified at the power of the order, was weaving a plot for the general expulsion of the Jesuits, and was tampering with the different courts of Europe in order to obtain their assistance. He described the pontiff’s auxiliaries, his means of action, and indicated the particular locality in the Archipelago where, by a sudden surprise, two cardinals, adepts of the eleventh year, and, consequently, high in authority, were to be transported, together with thirty-two of the principal affiliated members of Rome. The Franciscan thanked the Signor Marini. It was by no means a slight service he had rendered the society by denouncing this pontifical project. The Venetian thereupon received directions to set off in a quarter of an hour, and left as radiant as if he already possessed the ring, the sign of the supreme authority of the society. As, however, he was departing, the Franciscan murmured to himself: “All these men are either spies, or a sort of police,

not one of them a general; they have all discovered a plot, but not one of them a secret. It is not by means of ruin, or war, or force, that the Society of Jesus is to be governed, but by that mysterious influence moral superiority alone confers. No, the man is not yet found, and to complete the misfortune, Heaven strikes me down, and I am dying. Oh! must the society indeed fall with me for want of a column to support it? Must death, which is waiting for me, swallow up with me the future of the order; that future which ten years more of my own life would have rendered eternal? for that future, with the reign of the new king, is opening radiant and full of splendor." These words, which had been half-reflected, half-pronounced aloud, were listened to by the Jesuit confessor with a terror similar to that with which one listens to the wanderings of a person attacked by fever, whilst Grisart, with a mind of higher order, devoured them as the revelations of an unknown world, in which his looks were plunged without ability to comprehend. Suddenly the Franciscan recovered himself.

"Let us finish this," he said; "death is approaching. Oh! just now I was dying resignedly, for I hoped... while now I sink in despair, unless those who remain... Grisart, Grisart, give me to live a single hour longer."

Grisart approached the dying monk, and made him swallow a few drops, not of the potion which was still left in the glass, but of the contents of a small bottle he had upon his person.

"Call the Scotchman!" exclaimed the Franciscan; "call the Bremen merchant. Call, call quickly. I am dying. I am suffocated."

The confessor darted forward to seek assistance, as if there had been any human strength which could hold back the hand of death, which was weighing down the sick man; but, at the threshold of the door, he found Aramis, who, with his finger on his lips, like the statue of Harpocrates, the god of silence, by a look motioned him back to the end of the apartment. The physician and the confessor, after having consulted each other by looks, made a movement as if to push Aramis aside, who, however, with two signs of the cross, each made in a different manner, transfixed them both in their places.

“A chief!” they both murmured.

Aramis slowly advanced into the room where the dying man was struggling against the first attack of the agony which had seized him. As for the Franciscan, whether owing to the effect of the elixir, or whether the appearance of Aramis had restored his strength, he made a movement, and his eyes glaring, his mouth half open, and his hair damp with sweat, sat up upon the bed. Aramis felt that the air of the room was stifling; the windows were closed; the fire was burning upon the hearth; a pair of candles of yellow wax were guttering down in the copper candlesticks, and still further increased, by their thick smoke, the temperature of the room. Aramis opened the window, and fixing upon the dying man a look full of intelligence and respect, said to him: “Monseigneur, pray forgive my coming in this manner, before you summoned me, but your state alarms me, and I thought you might possibly die before you had seen me, for I am but the sixth upon your list.”

The dying man started and looked at the list.

“You are, therefore, he who was formerly called Aramis, and since, the Chevalier d’Herblay? You are the bishop of Vannes?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“I know you, I have seen you.”

“At the last jubilee, we were with the Holy Father together.”

“Yes, yes, I remember; and you place yourself on the list of candidates?”

“Monseigneur, I have heard it said that the order required to become possessed of a great state secret, and knowing that from modesty you had in anticipation resigned your functions in favor of the person who should be the depositary of such a secret, I wrote to say that I was ready to compete, possessing alone a secret I believe to be important.”

“Speak,” said the Franciscan; “I am ready to listen to you, and to judge the importance of the secret.”

“A secret of the value of that which I have the honor to confide to you cannot be communicated by word of mouth. Any idea which, when once expressed, has thereby lost its safeguard, and has become vulgarized by any manifestation or communication of it whatever, no longer is the property of him who gave it birth. My words may be overheard by some listener, or perhaps by an enemy; one ought not, therefore, to speak at random, for, in such a case, the secret would cease to be one.”

“How do you propose, then, to convey your secret?” inquired the dying monk.

With one hand Aramis signed to the physician and the confessor to withdraw, and with the other he handed to the Franciscan a paper enclosed in a double envelope.

“Is not writing more dangerous still than language?”

“No, my lord,” said Aramis, “for you will find within this envelope characters which you and I alone can understand.” The Franciscan looked at Aramis with an astonishment which momentarily increased.

“It is a cipher,” continued the latter, “which you used in 1655, and which your secretary, Juan Jujan, who is dead, could alone decipher, if he were restored to life.”

“You knew this cipher, then?”

“It was I who taught it him,” said Aramis, bowing with a gracefulness full of respect, and advancing towards the door as if to leave the room: but a gesture of the Franciscan accompanied by a cry for him to remain, restrained him.

“*Ecce homo!*” he exclaimed; then reading the paper a second time, he called out, “Approach, approach quickly!”

Aramis returned to the side of the Franciscan, with the same calm countenance and the same respectful manner, unchanged. The Franciscan, extending his arm, burnt by the flame of the candle the paper which Aramis had handed him. Then, taking hold of Aramis’s hand, he drew him towards him, and inquired: “In what manner and by whose means could you possibly become acquainted with such a secret?”

“Through Madame de Chevreuse, the intimate friend and *confidante* of the queen.”

“And Madame de Chevreuse—”

“Is dead.”

“Did any others know it?”

“A man and a woman only, and they of the lower classes.”

“Who are they?”

“Persons who had brought him up.”

“What has become of them?”

“Dead also. This secret burns like vitriol.”

“But you survive?”

“No one is aware that I know it.”

“And for what length of time have you possessed this secret?”

“For the last fifteen years.”

“And you have kept it?”

“I wished to live.”

“And you give it to the order without ambition, without acknowledgement?”

“I give it to the order with ambition and with a hope of return,” said Aramis; “for if you live, my lord, you will make of me, now you know me, what I can and ought to be.”

“And as I am dying,” exclaimed the Franciscan, “I constitute you my successor... Thus.” And drawing off the ring, he passed it on Aramis’s finger. Then, turning towards the two spectators of this scene, he said: “Be ye witnesses of this, and testify, if need be, that, sick in body, but sound in mind, I have freely and voluntarily bestowed this ring, the token of supreme authority, upon Monseigneur d’Herblay, bishop of Vannes, whom I nominate my successor, and before whom I, an humble sinner, about to appear before Heaven, prostrate myself, as an example for all to follow.” And the Franciscan bowed lowly and submissively, whilst the physician and the Jesuit fell on their knees. Aramis, even

while he became paler than the dying man himself, bent his looks successively upon all the actors of this scene. Profoundly gratified ambition flowed with life-blood towards his heart.

“We must lose no time,” said the Franciscan; “what I had still to do on earth was urgent. I shall never succeed in carrying it out.”

“I will do it,” said Aramis.

“It is well,” said the Franciscan, and then turning towards the Jesuit and the doctor, he added, “Leave us alone,” a direction they instantly obeyed.

“With this sign,” he said, “you are the man needed to shake the world from one end to the other; with this sign you will overthrow; with this sign you will edify; *in hoc signo vinces!*” 9

“Close the door,” continued the Franciscan after a pause. Aramis shut and bolted the door, and returned to the side of the Franciscan.

“The pope is conspiring against the order,” said the monk; “the pope must die.”

“He shall die,” said Aramis, quietly.

“Seven hundred thousand livres are owing to a Bremen merchant of the name of Bonstett, who came here to get the guarantee of my signature.”

“He shall be paid,” said Aramis.

“Six knights of Malta, whose names are written here, have discovered, by the indiscretion of one of the affiliated of the eleventh year, the three mysteries; it must be ascertained what else these men have done with the secret, to get it back again and bury it.”

“It shall be done.”

“Three dangerous affiliated members must be sent away into Tibet, there to perish; they stand condemned. Here are their names.”

“I will see that the sentence be carried out.”

“Lastly, there is a lady at Anvers, grand-niece of Ravaillac; she holds certain papers in her hands that compromise the order. There has been payable to the family during the last fifty-one years a pension of fifty thousand livres. The pension is a heavy one, and the order is not wealthy. Redeem the papers, for a sum of money paid down, or, in case of refusal, stop the pension—but run no risk.”

“I will quickly decide what is best to be done,” said Aramis.

“A vessel chartered from Lima entered the port of Lisbon last week; ostensibly it is laden with chocolate, in reality with gold. Every ingot is concealed by a coating of chocolate. The vessel belongs to the order; it is worth seventeen millions of livres; you will see that it is claimed; here are the bills of landing.”

“To what port shall I direct it to be taken?”

“To Bayonne.”

“Before three weeks are over it shall be there, wind and weather permitting. Is that all?” The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative, for he could no longer speak; the blood rushed to his throat and his head, and gushed from his mouth, his nostrils, and his eyes. The dying man had barely time to press Aramis’s hand, when he fell in convulsions from his bed upon the floor. Aramis placed his hand upon the Franciscan’s heart, but it had ceased to beat. As he stooped down, Aramis observed that a fragment of the paper he had given the Franciscan had escaped being burnt. He picked it up, and burnt it to the last atom. Then, summoning the confessor and the physician, he said to the former: “Your penitent is in heaven; he needs nothing more than prayers and the burial bestowed upon the pious dead. Go and prepare what is necessary for a simple interment, such as a poor monk only would require. Go.”

The Jesuit left the room. Then, turning towards the physician, and observing his pale and anxious face, he said, in a low tone of voice: “Monsieur Grisart, empty and clean this glass; *there is too much left in it of what the grand council desired you to put in*.”

Grisart, amazed, overcome, completely astounded, almost fell backwards in his extreme terror. Aramis shrugged his shoulders in sign of pity, took the glass, and poured out the contents among the ashes of the hearth. He then left the room, carrying the papers of the dead man with him.

Chapter LIV. A Mission.

The next day, or rather the same day (for the events we have just described were concluded only at three o'clock in the morning), before breakfast was served, and as the king was preparing to go to mass with the two queens; as Monsieur, with the Chevalier de Lorraine, and a few other intimate companions, was mounting his horse to set off for the river, to take one of those celebrated baths with which the ladies of the court were so infatuated, as, in fact, no one remained in the chateau, with the exception of Madame who, under the pretext of indisposition, would not leave her room; Montalais was seen, or rather not was not seen, to glide stealthily out of the room appropriated to the maids of honor, leading La Vallière after her, who tried to conceal herself as much as possible, and both of them, hurrying secretly through the gardens, succeeded, looking round them at every step they took, in reaching the thicket. The weather was cloudy, a warm breeze bowed the flowers and the shrubs, the burning dust, swept along in clouds by the wind, was whirled in eddies towards the trees. Montalais, who, during their progress, had discharged the functions of a clever scout, advanced a few steps further, and turning round again, to be quite sure that no one was either listening or approaching, said to her companion, "Thank goodness, we are quite alone! Since yesterday every one spies on us here, and a circle seems to be drawn round us, as if we were plague-stricken." La Vallière bent down her head and sighed. "It is positively unheard of," continued Montalais; "from M. Malicorne to M. de Saint-Aignan, every one wishes to get hold of our secret. Come, Louise, let us take counsel, you and I, together, in order that I may know what to do."

La Vallière lifted towards her companion her beautiful eyes, pure and deep as the azure of a spring sky, “And I,” she said, “will ask you why we have been summoned to Madame’s own room? Why have we slept close to her apartment, instead of sleeping as usual in our own? Why did you return so late, and whence are these measures of strict supervision which have been adopted since this morning, with respect to us both?”

“My dear Louise, you answer my question by another, or rather, by ten others, which is not answering me at all. I will tell you all you want to know later, and as it is of secondary importance, you can wait. What I ask you—for everything will depend upon that—is, whether there is or is not any secret?”

“I do not know if there is any secret,” said La Vallière; “but I do know, for my part at least, that there has been great imprudence committed. Since the foolish remark I made, and my still more silly fainting yesterday, every one here is making remarks about us.”

“Speak for yourself,” said Montalais, laughing, “speak for yourself and for Tonnay-Charente; for both of you made your declarations of love to the skies, which unfortunately were intercepted.”

La Vallière hung down her head. “Really you overwhelm me,” she said.

“I?”

“Yes, you torture me with your jests.”

“Listen to me, Louise. These are no jests, for nothing is more serious; on the contrary, I did not drag you out of the chateau; I did not miss attending mass; I did not pretend to have a cold, as Madame did, which she has no more than I have; and, lastly, I did not display ten times more diplomacy than M. Colbert inherited from M. de Mazarin, and makes use of with respect to M. Fouquet, in order to find means of confiding my perplexities to you, for the sole end and purpose that, when at last we were alone, with no one to listen to us, you should deal hypocritically with me. No, no; believe me, that when I ask you a question, it is not from curiosity alone, but really because the position is a critical one. What you said yesterday is now known,—it is a text on which every one is discoursing. Every one embellishes it to the utmost, and according to

his own fancy; you had the honor last night, and you have it still to-day, of occupying the whole court, my dear Louise; and the number of tender and witty remarks which have been ascribed to you, would make Mademoiselle de Scudery and her brother burst from very spite, if they were faithfully reported."

"But, dearest Montalais," said the poor girl, "you know better than any one exactly what I said, since you were present when I said it."

"Yes, I know. But that is not the question. I have not forgotten a single syllable you uttered, but did you think what you were saying?"

Louise became confused. "What," she exclaimed, "more questions still! Oh, heavens! when I would give the world to forget what I did say, how does it happen that every one does all he possibly can to remind me of it? Oh, this is indeed terrible!"

"What is?"

"To have a friend who ought to spare me, who might advise me and help me to save myself, and yet who is undoing me—is killing me."

"There, there, that will do," said Montalais; "after having said too little, you now say too much. No one thinks of killing you, nor even of robbing you, even of your secret; I wish to have it voluntarily, and in no other way; for the question does not concern your own affairs only, but ours also; and Tonnay-Charente would tell you as I do, if she were here. For, the fact is, that last evening she wished to have some private conversation in our room, and I was going there after the Manicamp and Malicorne colloquies terminated, when I learned, on my return, rather late, it is true, that Madame had sequestered her maids of honor, and that we were to sleep in her apartments, instead of our own. Moreover, Madame has shut up her maids of honor in order that they should not have the time to concert any measures together, and this morning she was closeted with Tonnay-Charente with the same object. Tell me, then, to what extent Athenais and I can rely upon you, as we will tell you in what way you can rely upon us?"

"I do not clearly understand the question you have put," said Louise, much agitated.

“Hum! and yet, on the contrary, you seem to understand me very well. However, I will put my questions in a more precise manner, in order that you may not be able, in the slightest degree, to evade them. Listen to me: *Do you love M. de Bragelonne?* That is plain enough, is it not?”

At this question, which fell like the first bombshell of a besieging army into a doomed town, Louise started. “You ask me,” she exclaimed, “if I love Raoul, the friend of my childhood,—my brother almost?”

“No, no, no! Again you evade me, or rather, you wish to escape me. I do not ask if you love Raoul, your childhood’s friend,—your brother; but I ask if you love the Vicomte de Bragelonne, your affianced husband?”

“Good heavens! dear Montalais,” said Louise, “how severe your tone is!”

“You deserve no indulgence,—I am neither more nor less severe than usual. I put a question to you, so answer it.”

“You certainly do not,” said Louise, in a choking voice, “speak to me like a friend; but I will answer you as a true friend.”

“Well, do so.”

“Very well; my heart is full of scruples and silly feelings of pride, with respect to everything that a woman ought to keep secret, and in this respect no one has ever read into the bottom of my soul.”

“That I know very well. If I had read it, I should not interrogate you as I have done; I should simply say,—‘My good Louise, you have the happiness of an acquaintance with M. de Bragelonne, who is an excellent young man, and an advantageous match for a girl without fortune. M. de la Fere will leave something like fifteen thousand livres a year to his son. At a future day, then, you, as this son’s wife, will have fifteen thousand livres a year; which is not bad. Turn, then, neither to the right hand nor to the left, but go frankly to M. de Bragelonne; that is to say, to the altar to which he will lead you. Afterwards, why— afterwards, according to his disposition, you will be emancipated or enslaved; in other words, you

will have a right to commit any piece of folly people commit who have either too much liberty or too little.' That is, my dear Louise, what I should have told you at first, if I had been able to read your heart."

"And I should have thanked you," stammered out Louise, "although the advice does not appear to me to be altogether sound."

"Wait, wait. But immediately after having given you that advice, I should have added,—'Louise, it is very dangerous to pass whole days with your head drooping, your hands unoccupied, your eyes restless and full of thought; it is dangerous to prefer the least frequented paths, and no longer be amused with such diversions as gladden young girls' hearts; it is dangerous, Louise, to scrawl with the point of your foot, as you do, upon the gravel, certain letters it is useless for you to efface, but which appear again under your heel, particularly when those letters rather resemble the letter L than the letter B; and, lastly, it is dangerous to allow the mind to dwell on a thousand wild fancies, the fruits of solitude and heartache; these fancies, while they sink into a young girl's mind, make her cheeks sink in also, so that it is not unusual, on such occasions, to find the most delightful persons in the world become the most disagreeable, and the wittiest to become the dullest.'"

"I thank you, dearest Aure," replied La Vallière, gently; "it is like you to speak to me in this manner, and I thank you for it."

"It was only for the benefit of wild dreamers, such as I have just described, that I spoke; do not take any of my words, then, to yourself, except such as you think you deserve. Stay, I hardly know what story recurs to my memory of some silly or melancholy girl, who was gradually pining away because she fancied that the prince, or the king, or the emperor, whoever it was—and it does not matter much which—had fallen in love with her; while on the contrary, the prince, or the king, or the emperor, whichever you please, was plainly in love with some one else, and—a singular circumstance, one, indeed, which she could not perceive, although every one around and about her perceived it clearly enough— made use of her as a screen for his own love affair. You laugh as I do, at this poor silly girl, do you not, Louise?"

"I?—oh! of course," stammered Louise, pale as death.

"And you are right, too, for the thing is amusing enough. The story, whether true or false, amused me, and so I remembered it and told it to you. Just imagine then, my good Louise, the mischief that such a melancholy would create in anybody's brain,—a melancholy, I mean, of that kind. For my own part, I resolved to tell you the story; for if such a thing were to happen to either of *us*, it would be most essential to be assured of its truth; to-day it is a snare, to-morrow it would become a jest and mockery, the next day it would mean death itself." La Vallière started again, and became, if possible, still paler.

"Whenever a king takes notice of us," continued Montalais, "he lets us see it easily enough, and, if we happen to be the object he covets, he knows very well how to gain his object. You see, then, Louise, that, in such circumstances, between young girls exposed to such a danger as the one in question, the most perfect confidence should exist, in order that those hearts which are not disposed towards melancholy may watch over those likely to become so."

"Silence, silence!" said La Vallière; "some one approaches."

"Some one is approaching fast, in fact," said Montalais; "but who can it possibly be? Everybody is away, either at mass with the king, or bathing with Monsieur."

At the end of the walk the young girls perceived almost immediately, beneath the arching trees, the graceful carriage and noble stature of a young man, who, with his sword under his arm and a cloak thrown across his shoulders, booted and spurred besides, saluted them from the distance with a gentle smile. "Raoul!" exclaimed Montalais.

"M. de Bragelonne!" murmured Louise.

"A very proper judge to decide upon our difference of opinion," said Montalais.

"Oh! Montalais, Montalais, for pity's sake," exclaimed La Vallière, "after having been so cruel, show me a little mercy." These words, uttered with all the fervor of a prayer, effaced all trace of irony, if not

from Montalais's heart, at least from her face.

"Why, you are as handsome as Amadis, Monsieur de Bragelonne," she cried to Raoul, "and armed and booted like him."

"A thousand compliments, young ladies," replied Raoul, bowing.

"But why, I ask, are you booted in this manner?" repeated Montalais, whilst La Vallière, although she looked at Raoul with a surprise equal to that of her companion, nevertheless uttered not a word.

"Why?" inquired Raoul.

"Yes!" ventured Louise.

"Because I am about to set off," said Bragelonne, looking at Louise.

The young girl seemed as though smitten by some superstitious feeling of terror, and tottered. "You are going away, Raoul!" she cried; "and where are you going?"

"Dearest Louise," he replied, with that quiet, composed manner which was natural to him, "I am going to England."

"What are you going to do in England?"

"The king has sent me there."

"The king!" exclaimed Louise and Aure together, involuntarily exchanging glances, the conversation which had just been interrupted recurring to them both. Raoul intercepted the glance, but could not understand its meaning, and, naturally enough, attributed it to the interest both the young girls took in him.

"His majesty," he said, "has been good enough to remember that the Comte de la Fere is high in favor with King Charles II. This morning, as he was on his way to attend mass, the king, seeing me as he passed, signed to me to approach, which I accordingly did. 'Monsieur de Bragelonne,' he said to me, 'you will call upon M. Fouquet, who has received from me letters for the king of Great Britain; you will be the bearer of them.' I bowed. 'Ah!' his majesty added, 'before you leave, you will be good enough to take any commissions which Madame may have for the king her brother.'"

“Gracious heaven!” murmured Louise, much agitated, and yet full of thought at the same time.

“So quickly! You are desired to set off in such haste!” said Montalais, almost paralyzed by this unforeseen event.

“Properly to obey those whom we respect,” said Raoul, “it is necessary to obey quickly. Within ten minutes after I had received the order, I was ready. Madame, already informed, is writing the letter which she is good enough to do me the honor of intrusting to me. In the meantime, learning from Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente that it was likely you would be in this direction, I came here, and am happy to find you both.”

“And both of us very sad, as you see,” said Montalais, going to Louise’s assistance, whose countenance was visibly altered.

“Suffering?” responded Raoul, pressing Louise’s hand with a tender curiosity. “Your hand is like ice.”

“It is nothing.”

“This coldness does not reach your heart, Louise, does it?” inquired the young man, with a tender smile. Louise raised her head hastily, as if the question had been inspired by some suspicion, and had aroused a feeling of remorse.

“Oh! you know,” she said, with an effort, “that my heart will never be cold towards a friend like yourself, Monsieur de Bragelonne.”

“Thank you, Louise. I know both your heart and your mind; it is not by the touch of the hand that one can judge of an affection like yours. You know, Louise, how devotedly I love you, with what perfect and unreserved confidence I reserve my life for you; will you not forgive me, then, for speaking to you with something like the frankness of a child?”

“Speak, Monsieur Raoul,” said Louise, trembling painfully, “I am listening.”

“I cannot part from you, carrying away with me a thought that tortures me; absurd I know it to be, and yet one which rends my very heart.”

“Are you going away, then, for any length of time?” inquired La Vallière, with faltering utterance, while Montalais turned her head aside.

“No; probably I shall not be absent more than a fortnight.” La Vallière pressed her hand upon her heart, which felt as though it were breaking.

“It is strange,” pursued Raoul, looking at the young girl with a melancholy expression; “I have often left you when setting off on adventures fraught with danger. Then I started joyously enough—my heart free, my mind intoxicated by thoughts of happiness in store for me, hopes of which the future was full; and yet I was about to face the Spanish cannon, or the halberds of the Walloons. To-day, without the existence of any danger or uneasiness, and by the sunniest path in the world, I am going in search of a glorious recompense, which this mark of the king’s favor seems to indicate, for I am, perhaps, going to win *you*, Louise. What other favor, more precious than yourself, could the king confer upon me? Yet, Louise, in very truth I know not how or why, but this happiness and this future seem to vanish before my very eyes like mist—like an idle dream; and I feel here, here at the very bottom of my heart, a deep-seated grief, a dejection I cannot overcome— something heavy, passionless, death-like,—resembling a corpse. Oh! Louise, too well do I know why; it is because I have never loved you so truly as now. God help me!”

At this last exclamation, which issued as it were from a broken heart, Louise burst into tears, and threw herself into Montalais’s arms. The latter, although she was not easily moved, felt the tears rush to her eyes. Raoul noted only the tears Louise shed; his look, however, did not penetrate—nay, sought not to penetrate—beyond those tears. He bent his knee before her, and tenderly kissed her hand; and it was evident that in that kiss he poured out his whole heart.

“Rise, rise,” said Montalais to him, ready to cry, “for Athenais is coming.”

Raoul rose, brushed his knee with the back of his hand, smiled again upon Louise, whose eyes were fixed on the ground, and, having pressed Montalais’s hand gratefully, he turned round to salute Mademoiselle de

Tonnay-Charente, the sound of whose silken robe was already heard upon the gravel walk. “Has Madame finished her letter?” he inquired, when the young girl came within reach of his voice.

“Yes, the letter is finished, sealed, and her royal highness is ready to receive you.”

Raoul, at this remark, hardly gave himself time to salute Athenais, cast one look at Louise, bowed to Montalais, and withdrew in the direction of the chateau. As he withdrew he again turned round, but at last, at the end of the grand walk, it was useless to do so again, as he could no longer see them. The three young girls, on their side, had, with widely different feelings, watched him disappear.

“At last,” said Athenais, the first to interrupt the silence, “at last we are alone, free to talk of yesterday’s great affair, and to come to an understanding upon the conduct it is advisable for us to pursue. Besides, if you will listen to me,” she continued, looking round on all sides, “I will explain to you, as briefly as possible, in the first place, our own duty, such as I imagine it to be, and, if you do not understand a hint, what is Madame’s desire on the subject.” And Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente pronounced these words in such a tone as to leave no doubt, in her companion’s minds, upon the official character with which she was invested.

“Madame’s desire!” exclaimed Montalais and La Vallière together.

“Her *ultimatum*,” replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, diplomatically.

“But,” murmured La Vallière, “does Madame know, then—”

“Madame knows more about the matter than we said, even,” said Athenais, in a formal, precise manner. “Therefore let us come to a proper understanding.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Montalais, “and I am listening in breathless attention.”

“Gracious heavens!” murmured Louise, trembling, “shall I ever survive this cruel evening?”

“Oh! do not frighten yourself in that manner,” said Athenais; “we have found a remedy.” So, seating herself between her two companions, and taking each of them by the hand, which she held in her own, she began. The first words were hardly spoke, when they heard a horse galloping away over the stones of the public high-road, outside the gates of the chateau.

Chapter LV. Happy as a Prince.

At the very moment he was about entering the chateau, Bragelonne met De Guiche. But before having been met by Raoul, De Guiche had met Manicamp, who had met Malicorne. How was it that Malicorne had met Manicamp? Nothing more simple, for he had awaited his return from mass, where he had accompanied M. de Saint-Aignan. When they met, they congratulated each other upon their good fortune, and Manicamp availed himself of the circumstance to ask his friend if he had not a few crowns still remaining at the bottom of his pocket. The latter, without expressing any surprise at the question, which he perhaps expected, answered that every pocket which is always being drawn upon without anything ever being put in it, resembles those wells which supply water during the winter, but which gardeners render useless by exhausting during the summer; that his, Malicorne's, pocket certainly was deep, and that there would be a pleasure in drawing on it in times of plenty, but that, unhappily, abuse had produced barrenness. To this remark, Manicamp, deep in thought, had replied, "Quite true!"

"The question, then, is how to fill it?" Malicorne added.

"Of course; but in what way?"

"Nothing easier, my dear Monsieur Manicamp."

"So much the better. How?"

"A post in Monsieur's household, and the pocket is full again."

"You have the post?"

"That is, I have the promise of being nominated."

"Well!"

"Yes; but the promise of nomination, without the post itself, is like a purse with no money in it."

“Quite true,” Manicamp replied a second time.

“Let us try for the post, then,” the candidate had persisted.

“My dear fellow,” sighed Manicamp, “an appointment in his royal highness’s household is one of the gravest difficulties of our position.”

“Oh! oh!”

“There is no question that, at the present moment, we cannot ask Monsieur for anything.”

“Why so?” “Because we are not on good terms with him.”

“A great absurdity, too,” said Malicorne, promptly.

“Bah! and if we were to show Madame any attention,” said Manicamp, “frankly speaking, do you think we should please Monsieur?”

“Precisely; if we show Madame any attention, and do it adroitly, Monsieur ought to adore us.”

“Hum!”

“Either that or we are great fools. Make haste, therefore, M. Manicamp, you who are so able a politician, and make M. de Guiche and his royal highness friendly again.”

“Tell me, what did M. de Saint-Aignan tell you, Malicorne?”

“Tell me? nothing; he asked me several questions, and that was all.”

“Well, was he less discreet, then, with me.”

“What did he tell you?”

“That the king is passionately in love with Mademoiselle de la Vallière.”

“We knew that already,” replied Malicorne, ironically; “and everybody talks about it loud enough for all to know it; but in the meantime, do what I advise you; speak to M. de Guiche, and endeavor to get him to make advances to Monsieur. Deuce take it! he owes his royal highness that, at least.”

“But we must see De Guiche, then?”

“There does not seem to be any great difficulty in that; try to see him in the same way I tried to see you; wait for him; you know that he is naturally very fond of walking.”

“Yes; but whereabouts does he walk?”

“What a question to ask! Do you not know that he is in love with Madame?”

“So it is said.”

“Very well; you will find him walking about on the side of the chateau where her apartments are.”

“Stay, my dear Malicorne, you were not mistaken, for here he is coming.”

“Why should I be mistaken? Have you ever noticed that I am in the habit of making a mistake? Come, we only need to understand each other. Are you in want of money?”

“Ah!” exclaimed Manicamp, mournfully.

“Well, I want my appointment. Let Malicorne have the appointment, and Manicamp shall have the money. There is no greater difficulty in the way than that.”

“Very well; in that case make yourself easy. I will do my best.”

“Do.”

De Guiche approached, Malicorne stepped aside, and Manicamp caught hold of De Guiche, who was thoughtful and melancholy. “Tell me, my dear comte, what rhyme you were trying to find,” said Manicamp. “I have an excellent one to match yours, particularly if yours ends in *ame*.”

De Guiche shook his head, and recognizing a friend, he took him by the arm. “My dear Manicamp,” he said, “I am in search of something very different from a rhyme.”

“What is it you are looking for?”

“You will help me to find what I am in search of,” continued the comte: “you who are such an idle fellow, in other words, a man with a mind full of ingenious devices.”

“I am getting my ingenuity ready, then, my dear comte.”

“This is the state of the case, then: I wish to approach a particular house, where I have some business.”

“You must get near the house, then,” said Manicamp.

“Very good; but in this house dwells a husband who happens to be jealous.”

“Is he more jealous than the dog Cerberus?”

“Not more, but quite as much so.”

“Has he three mouths, as that obdurate guardian of the infernal regions had? Do not shrug your shoulders, my dear comte: I put the question to you with an excellent reason, since poets pretend that, in order to soften Monsieur Cerberus, the visitor must take something enticing with him—a cake, for instance. Therefore, I, who view the matter in a prosaic light, that is to say in the light of reality, I say: one cake is very little for three mouths. If your jealous husband has three mouths, comte, get three cakes.”

“Manicamp, I can get such advice as that from M. de Beautru.”

“In order to get better advice,” said Manicamp, with a comical seriousness of expression, “you will be obliged to adopt a more precise formula than you have used towards me.”

“If Raoul were here,” said De Guiche, “he would be sure to understand me.”

“So I think, particularly if you said to him: ‘I should very much like to see Madame a little nearer, but I fear Monsieur, because he is jealous.’”

“Manicamp!” cried the comte, angrily, and endeavoring to overwhelm his tormentor by a look, who did not, however, appear to be in the slightest degree disturbed by it.

“What is the matter now, my dear comte?” inquired Manicamp.

“What! is it thus you blaspheme the most sacred of names?”

“What names?”

“Monsieur! Madame! the highest names in the kingdom.”

“You are very strangely mistaken, my dear comte. I never mentioned the highest names in the kingdom. I merely answered you in reference to the subject of a jealous husband, whose name you did not tell me, and who, as a matter of course, has a wife. I therefore replied to you, in order to see Madame, you must get a little more intimate with Monsieur.”

“Double-dealer that you are,” said the comte, smiling; “was that what you said?”

“Nothing else.”

“Very good; what then?”

“Now,” added Manicamp, “let the question be regarding the Duchess—or the Duke—; very well, I shall say: Let us get into the house in some way or other, for that is a tactic which cannot in any case be unfavorable to your love affair.”

“Ah! Manicamp, if you could but find me a pretext, a good pretext.”

“A pretext; I can find you a hundred, nay, a thousand. If Malicorne were here, he would have already hit upon a thousand excellent pretexts.”

“Who is Malicorne?” replied De Guiche, half-shutting his eyes, like a person reflecting, “I seem to know the name.”

“Know him! I should think so: you owe his father thirty thousand crowns.”

“Ah, indeed! so it’s that worthy fellow from Orleans.”

“Whom you promised an appointment in Monsieur’s household; not the jealous husband, but the other.”

“Well, then, since your friend Malicorne is such an inventive genius, let him find me a means of being adored by Monsieur, and a pretext to make my peace with him.”

“Very good: I’ll talk to him about it.”

“But who is that coming?”

“The Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“Raoul! yes, it is he,” said De Guiche, as he hastened forward to meet him. “You here, Raoul?” said De Guiche.

“Yes: I was looking for you to say farewell,” replied Raoul, warmly, pressing the comte’s hand. “How do you do, Monsieur Manicamp?”

“How is this, vicomte, you are leaving us?”

“Yes, a mission from the king.”

“Where are you going?”

“To London. On leaving you, I am going to Madame; she has a letter to give me for his majesty, Charles II.”

“You will find her alone, for Monsieur has gone out; gone to bathe, in fact.”

“In that case, you, who are one of Monsieur’s gentlemen in waiting, will undertake to make my excuses to him. I would have waited in order to receive any directions he might have to give me, if the desire for my immediate departure had not been intimated to me by M. Fouquet on behalf of his majesty.”

Manicamp touched De Guiche’s elbow, saying, “There’s a pretext for you.”

“What?”

“M. de Bragelonne’s excuses.”

“A weak pretext,” said De Guiche.

“An excellent one, if Monsieur is not angry with you; but a paltry one if he bears you ill-will.”

“You are right, Manicamp; a pretext, however poor it may be, is all I require. And so, a pleasant journey to you, Raoul!” And the two friends took a warm leave of each other.

Five minutes afterwards Raoul entered Madame’s apartments, as Mademoiselle de Montalais had begged him to do. Madame was still seated at the table where she had written her letter. Before her was still burning the rose-colored taper she had used to seal it. Only in her deep reflection, for Madame seemed to be buried in thought, she had

forgotten to extinguish the light. Bragelonne was a very model of elegance in every way; it was impossible to see him once without always remembering him; and not only had Madame seen him once, but it will not be forgotten he was one of the very first who had gone to meet her, and had accompanied her from Le Havre to Paris. Madame preserved therefore an excellent recollection of him.

"Ah! M. de Bragelonne," she said to him, "you are going to see my brother, who will be delighted to pay to the son a portion of the debt of gratitude he contracted with the father."

"The Comte de la Fere, Madame, has been abundantly recompensed for the little service he had the happiness to render the king, by the kindness manifested towards him, and it is I who will have to convey to his majesty the assurance of the respect, devotion, and gratitude of both father and son."

"Do you know my brother?"

"No, your highness; I shall have the honor of seeing his majesty for the first time."

"You require no recommendation to him. At all events, however, if you have any doubt about your personal merit, take me unhesitatingly for your surety."

"Your royal highness overwhelms me with kindness."

"No! M. de Bragelonne, I well remember that we were fellow-travelers once, and that I remarked your extreme prudence in the midst of the extravagant absurdities committed, on both sides, by two of the greatest simpletons in the world,—M. de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham. Let us not speak of them, however; but of yourself. Are you going to England to remain there permanently? Forgive my inquiry: it is not curiosity, but a desire to be of service to you in anything I can."

"No, Madame; I am going to England to fulfil a mission which his majesty has been kind enough to confide to me—nothing more."

"And you propose to return to France?"

“As soon as I have accomplished my mission; unless, indeed, his majesty, King Charles II., should have other orders for me.”

“He well beg you, at the very least, I am sure, to remain near him as long as possible.”

“In that case, as I shall not know how to refuse, I will now beforehand entreat your royal highness to have the goodness to remind the king of France that one of his devoted servants is far away from him.”

“Take care that when you *are* recalled, you do not consider his command an abuse of power.”

“I do not understand you, Madame.”

“The court of France is not easily matched, I am aware, but yet we have some pretty women at the court of England also.”

Raoul smiled.

“Oh!” said Madame, “yours is a smile which portends no good to my countrywomen. It is as though you were telling them, Monsieur de Bragelonne: ‘I visit you, but I leave my heart on the other side of the Channel.’ Did not your smile indicate that?”

“Your highness is gifted with the power of reading the inmost depths of the soul, and you will understand, therefore, why, at present, any prolonged residence at the court of England would be a matter of the deepest regret.”

“And I need not inquire if so gallant a knight is recompensed in return?”

“I have been brought up, Madame, with her whom I love, and I believe our affection is mutual.”

“In that case, do not delay your departure, Monsieur de Bragelonne, and delay not your return, for on your return we shall see two persons happy; for I hope no obstacle exists to your felicity.”

“There is a great obstacle, Madame.”

“Indeed! what is it?”

“The king’s wishes on the subject.”

“The king opposes your marriage?”

“He postpones it, at least. I solicited his majesty’s consent through the Comte de la Fere, and, without absolutely refusing it, he positively said it must be deferred.”

“Is the young lady whom you love unworthy of you, then?”

“She is worthy of a king’s affection, Madame.”

“I mean, she is not, perhaps, of birth equal to your own.”

“Her family is excellent.”

“Is she young, beautiful?”

“She is seventeen, and, in my opinion, exceedingly beautiful.”

“Is she in the country, or at Paris?”

“She is here at Fontainebleau, Madame.”

“At the court?”

“Yes.”

“Do I know her?”

“She has the honor to form one of your highness’s household.”

“Her name?” inquired the princess, anxiously; “if indeed,” she added, hastily, “her name is not a secret.”

“No, Madame, my affection is too pure for me to make a secret of it to any one, and with still greater reason to your royal highness, whose kindness towards me has been so extreme. It is Mademoiselle Louise de la Vallière.”

Madame could not restrain an exclamation, in which a feeling stronger than surprise might have been detected. “Ah!” she said, “La Vallière—she who yesterday—” she paused, and then continued, “she who was taken ill, I believe.”

“Yes, Madame; it was only this morning that I heard of the accident that had befallen her.”

“Did you see her before you came to me?”

“I had the honor of taking leave of her.”

“And you say,” resumed Madame, making a powerful effort over herself, “that the king has—deferred your marriage with this young girl.”

“Yes, Madame, deferred it.”

“Did he assign any reason for this postponement?”

“None.”

“How long is it since the Comte de la Fere preferred his request to the king?”

“More than a month, Madame.”

“It is very singular,” said the princess, as something like a film clouded her eyes.

“A month?” she repeated.

“About a month.”

“You are right, vicomte,” said the princess, with a smile, in which De Bragelonne might have remarked a kind of restraint; “my brother must not keep you too long in England; set off at once, and in the first letter I write to England, I will claim you in the king’s name.” And Madame rose to place her letter in Bragelonne’s hands. Raoul understood that his audience was at an end; he took the letter, bowed lowly to the princess, and left the room.

“A month!” murmured the princess; “could I have been blind, then, to so great an extent, and could he have loved her for this last month?” And as Madame had nothing to do, she sat down to begin a letter to her brother, the postscript of which was a summons for Bragelonne to return.

The Comte de Guiche, as we have seen, had yielded to the pressing persuasions of Manicamp, and allowed himself to be led to the stables, where they desired their horses to be got ready for them; then, by one of the side paths, a description of which has already been given, they advanced to meet Monsieur, who, having just finished bathing, was returning towards the chateau, wearing a woman’s veil to protect his face from getting burnt by the sun, which was shining very brightly. Monsieur was in one of those fits of good humor to which the admiration

of his own good looks sometimes gave occasion. As he was bathing he had been able to compare the whiteness of his body with that of the courtiers, and, thanks to the care which his royal highness took of himself, no one, not even the Chevalier de Lorraine, was able to stand the comparison. Monsieur, moreover, had been tolerably successful in swimming, and his muscles having been exercised by the healthy immersion in the cool water, he was in a light and cheerful state of mind and body. So that, at the sight of Guiche, who advanced to meet him at a hand gallop, mounted upon a magnificent white horse, the prince could not restrain an exclamation of delight.

"I think matters look well," said Manicamp, who fancied he could read this friendly disposition upon his royal highness's countenance.

"Good day, De Guiche, good day," exclaimed the prince.

"Long life to your royal highness!" replied De Guiche, encouraged by the tone of Philip's voice; "health, joy, happiness, and prosperity to your highness."

"Welcome, De Guiche, come on my right side, but keep your horse in hand, for I wish to return at a walking pace under the cool shade of these trees."

"As you please, monseigneur," said De Guiche, taking his place on the prince's right as he had been invited to do.

"Now, my dear De Guiche," said the prince, "give me a little news of that De Guiche whom I used to know formerly, and who used to pay attentions to my wife."

Guiche blushed to the very whites of his eyes, while Monsieur burst out laughing, as though he had made the wittiest remark in the world. The few privileged courtiers who surrounded Monsieur thought it their duty to follow his example, although they had not heard the remark, and a noisy burst of laughter immediately followed, beginning with the first courtier, passing on through the whole company, and only terminating with the last. De Guiche, although blushing scarlet, put a good countenance on the matter; Manicamp looked at him.

“Ah! monseigneur,” replied De Guiche, “show a little charity towards such a miserable fellow as I am: do not hold me up to the ridicule of the Chevalier de Lorraine.”

“How do you mean?”

“If he hears you ridicule me, he will go beyond your highness, and will show no pity.”

“About your passion and the princess, do you mean?”

“For mercy’s sake, monseigneur.”

“Come, come, De Guiche, confess that you *did* get a little sweet upon Madame.”

“I will never confess such a thing, monseigneur.”

“Out of respect for me, I suppose; but I release you from your respect, De Guiche. Confess, as if it were simply a question about Mademoiselle de Chalais or Mademoiselle de la Vallière.”

Then breaking off, he said, beginning to laugh again, “Comte, that wasn’t at all bad!—a remark like a sword, which cuts two ways at once. I hit you and my brother at the same time, Chalais and La Vallière, your affianced bride and his future lady love.”

“Really, monseigneur,” said the comte, “you are in a most brilliant humor to-day.”

“The fact is, I feel well, and then I am pleased to see you again. But you were angry with me, were you not?”

“I, monseigneur? Why should I have been so?”

“Because I interfered with your sarabands and your other Spanish amusements. Nay, do not deny it. On that day you left the princess’s apartments with your eyes full of fury; that brought you ill-luck, for you danced in the ballet yesterday in a most wretched manner. Now don’t get sulky, De Guiche, for it does you no good, but makes you look like a tame bear. If the princess did not look at you attentively yesterday, I am quite sure of one thing.”

“What is that, monseigneur? Your highness alarms me.”

“She has quite forsworn you now,” said the prince, with a burst of loud laughter.

“Decidedly,” thought Manicamp, “rank has nothing to do with it, and all men are alike.”

The prince continued: “At all events, you have now returned, and it is to be hoped that the chevalier will become amiable again.”

“How so, monseigneur: and by what miracle can I exercise such an influence over M. de Lorraine?”

“The matter is very simple, he is jealous of you.”

“Bah! it is not possible.”

“It is the case, though.”

“He does me too much honor.”

“The fact is, that when you are here, he is full of kindness and attention, but when you are gone he makes me suffer a perfect martyrdom. I am like a see-saw. Besides, you do not know the idea that has struck me?”

“I do not even suspect it.”

“Well, then; when you were in exile—for you really were exiled, my poor De Guiche—”

“I should think so, indeed; but whose fault was it?” said De Guiche, pretending to speak in an angry tone.

“Not mine, certainly, my dear comte,” replied his royal highness, “upon my honor, I did not ask for the king to exile you—”

“No, not you, monseigneur, I am well aware; but—”

“But Madame; well, as far as that goes, I do not say it was not the case. Why, what the deuce did you do or say to Madame?”

“Really, monseigneur—”

“Women, I know, have their grudges, and my wife is not free from caprices of that nature. But if she were the cause of your being exiled I bear you no ill-will.”

“In that case, monseigneur,” said De Guiche. “I am not altogether unhappy.”

Manicamp, who was following closely behind De Guiche and who did not lose a word of what the prince was saying, bent down to his very shoulders over his horse’s neck, in order to conceal the laughter he could not repress.

“Besides, your exile started a project in my head.”

“Good.”

“When the chevalier—finding you were no longer here, and sure of reigning undisturbed—began to bully me, I, observing that my wife, in the most perfect contrast to him, was most kind and amiable towards me who had neglected her so much, the idea occurred to me of becoming a model husband—a rarity, a curiosity, at the court; and I had an idea of getting very fond of my wife.”

De Guiche looked at the prince with a stupefied expression of countenance, which was not assumed.

“Oh! monseigneur,” De Guiche stammered out; “surely, that never seriously occurred to you.”

“Indeed it did. I have some property that my brother gave me on my marriage; she has some money of her own, and not a little either, for she gets money from her brother and brother-in-law of England and France at the same time. Well! we should have left the court. I should have retired to my chateau at Villers-Cotterets, situated in the middle of a forest, in which we should have led a most sentimental life in the very same spot where my grandfather, Henry IV., sojourned with La Belle Gabrielle. What do you think of that idea, De Guiche?”

“Why, it is enough to make one shiver, monseigneur,” replied De Guiche, who shuddered in reality.

“Ah! I see you would never be able to endure being exiled a second time.”

“I, monseigneur?”

“I will not carry you off with us, as I had first intended.”

“What, with you, monseigneur?”

“Yes; if the idea should occur to me again of taking a dislike to the court.”

“Oh! do not let that make any difference, monseigneur; I would follow your highness to the end of the world.”

“Clumsy fellow that you are!” said Manicamp, grumblingly, pushing his horse towards De Guiche, so as almost to unseat him, and then, as he passed close to him, as if he had lost command over the horse, he whispered, “For goodness’ sake, think what you are saying.”

“Well, it is agreed, then,” said the prince; “since you are so devoted to me, I shall take you with me.”

“Anywhere, monseigneur,” replied De Guiche in a joyous tone, “whenever you like, and at once, too. Are you ready?”

And De Guiche, laughingly, gave his horse the rein, and galloped forward a few yards.

“One moment,” said the prince. “Let us go to the chateau first.”

“What for?”

“Why, to take my wife, of course.”

“What for?” asked De Guiche.

“Why, since I tell you that it is a project of conjugal affection, it is necessary I should take my wife with me.”

“In that case, monseigneur,” replied the comte, “I am greatly concerned, but no De Guiche for you.”

“Bah!”

“Yes.—Why do you take Madame with you?”

“Because I begin to fancy I love her,” said the prince.

De Guiche turned slightly pale, but endeavored to preserve his seeming cheerfulness.

“If you love Madame, monseigneur,” he said, “that ought to be quite enough for you, and you have no further need of your friends.”

“Not bad, not bad,” murmured Manicamp.

“There, your fear of Madame has begun again,” replied the prince.

“Why, monseigneur, I have experienced that to my cost; a woman who was the cause of my being exiled!”

“What a revengeful disposition you have, De Guiche, how virulently you bear malice.”

“I should like the case to be your own, monseigneur.”

“Decidedly, then, that was the reason why you danced so badly yesterday; you wished to revenge yourself, I suppose, by trying to make Madame make a mistake in her dancing; ah! that is very paltry, De Guiche, and I will tell Madame of it.”

“You may tell her whatever you please, monseigneur, for her highness cannot hate me more than she does.”

“Nonsense, you are exaggerating; and this because merely of the fortnight’s sojourn in the country she imposed on you.”

“Monseigneur, a fortnight is a fortnight; and when the time is passed in getting sick and tired of everything, a fortnight is an eternity.”

“So that you will not forgive her?”

“Never!”

“Come, come, De Guiche, be a better disposed fellow than that. I wish to make your peace with her; you will find, in conversing with her, that she has no malice or unkindness in her nature, and that she is very talented.”

“Monseigneur—”

“You will see that she can receive her friends like a princess, and laugh like a citizen’s wife; you will see that, when she pleases, she can make the pleasant hours pass like minutes. Come, De Guiche, you must really make up your differences with my wife.”

“Upon my word,” said Manicamp to himself, “the prince is a husband whose wife’s name will bring him ill-luck, and King Candaules, of old, was a tiger beside his royal highness.”

“At all events,” added the prince, “I am sure you will make it up with my wife: I guarantee you will do so. Only, I must show you the way now. There is nothing commonplace about her: it is not every one who takes her fancy.”

“Monseigneur—”

“No resistance, De Guiche, or I shall get out of temper,” replied the prince.

“Well, since he will have it so,” murmured Manicamp, in Guiche’s ear, “do as he wants you to do.”

“Well, monseigneur,” said the comte, “I obey.”

“And to begin,” resumed the prince, “there will be cards, this evening, in Madame’s apartment; you will dine with me, and I will take you there with me.”

“Oh! as for that, monseigneur,” objected De Guiche, “you will allow me to object.”

“What, again! this is positive rebellion.”

“Madame received me too indifferently, yesterday, before the whole court.”

“Really!” said the prince, laughing.

“Nay, so much so, indeed, that she did not even answer me when I addressed her; it may be a good thing to have no self-respect at all, but to have too little is not enough, as the saying is.”

“Comte! after dinner, you will go to your own apartments and dress yourself, and then you will come to fetch me. I shall wait for you.”

“Since your highness absolutely commands it.”

“Positively.”

“He will not lose his hold,” said Manicamp; “these are the things to which husbands cling most obstinately. Ah! what a pity M. Moliere could not have heard this man; he would have turned him into verse if he had.”

The prince and his court, chatting in this manner, returned to the coolest apartments of the chateau.

“By the by,” said De Guiche, as they were standing by the door, “I had a commission for your royal highness.”

“Execute it, then.”

“M. de Bragelonne has, by the king’s order, set off for London, and he charged me with his respects for you; monseigneur.”

“A pleasant journey to the vicomte, whom I like very much. Go and dress yourself, De Guiche, and come back for me. If you don’t come back —”

“What will happen, monseigneur?”

“I will have you sent to the Bastile.”

“Well,” said De Guiche, laughing, “his royal highness, monseigneur, is decidedly the counterpart of her royal highness, Madame. Madame gets me sent into exile, because she does not care for me sufficiently; and monseigneur gets me imprisoned, because he cares for me too much. I thank monseigneur, and I thank Madame.”

“Come, come,” said the prince, “you are a delightful companion, and you know I cannot do without you. Return as soon as you can.”

“Very well; but I am in the humor to prove myself difficult to be pleased, in *my* turn, monseigneur.”

“Bah!”

“So, I will not return to your royal highness, except upon one condition.”

“Name it.”

“I want to oblige the friend of one of my friends.”

“What’s his name?”

“Malicorne.”

“An ugly name.”

“But very well borne, monseigneur.”

“That may be. Well?”

“Well, I owe M. Malicorne a place in your household, monseigneur.”

“What kind of a place?”

“Any kind of a place; a supervision of some sort or another, for instance.”

“That happens very fortunately, for yesterday I dismissed my chief usher of the apartments.”

“That will do admirably. What are his duties?”

“Nothing, except to look about and make his report.”

“A sort of interior police?”

“Exactly.”

“Ah, how excellently that will suit Malicorne,” Manicamp ventured to say.

“You know the person we are speaking of, M. Manicamp?” inquired the prince.

“Intimately, monseigneur. He is a friend of mine.”

“And your opinion is?”

“That your highness could never get a better usher of the apartments than he will make.”

“How much does the appointment bring in?” inquired the comte of the prince.

“I don’t know at all, only I have always been told that he could make as much as he pleased when he was thoroughly in earnest.”

“What do you call being thoroughly in earnest, prince?”

“It means, of course, when the functionary in question is a man who has his wits about him.”

“In that case I think your highness will be content, for Malicorne is as sharp as the devil himself.”

“Good! the appointment will be an expensive one for me, in that case,” replied the prince, laughing. “You are making me a positive present, comte.”

“I believe so, monseigneur.”

“Well, go and announce to your M. Melicorne—”

“Malicorne, monseigneur.”

“I shall never get hold of that name.”

“You say Manicamp very well, monseigneur.”

“Oh, I ought to say Malicorne very well, too. The alliteration will help me.”

“Say what you like, monseigneur, I can promise you your inspector of apartments will not be annoyed; he has the very happiest disposition that can be met with.”

“Well, then, my dear De Guiche, inform him of his nomination. But, stay—”

“What is it, monseigneur?”

“I wish to see him beforehand; if he be as ugly as his name, I retract every word I have said.”

“Your highness knows him, for you have already seen him at the Palais Royal; nay, indeed, it was I who presented him to you.”

“Ah, I remember now—not a bad-looking fellow.”

“I know you must have noticed him, monseigneur.”

“Yes, yes, yes. You see, De Guiche, I do not wish that either my wife or myself should have ugly faces before our eyes. My wife will have all her maids of honor pretty; I, all the gentlemen about me good-looking. In this way, De Guiche, you see, that any children we may have will run a good chance of being pretty, if my wife and myself have handsome models before us.”

“Most magnificently argued, monseigneur,” said Manicamp, showing his approval by look and voice at the same time.

As for De Guiche, he very probably did not find the argument so convincing, for he merely signified his opinion by a gesture, which, moreover, exhibited in a marked manner some indecision of mind on the subject. Manicamp went off to inform Malicorne of the good news he had just learned. De Guiche seemed very unwilling to take his departure for the purpose of dressing himself. Monsieur, singing, laughing, and admiring himself, passed away the time until the dinner-hour, in a frame of mind that justified the proverb of “Happy as a prince.”

Chapter LVI. Story of a Dryad and a Naiad.

Every one had partaken of the banquet at the chateau, and afterwards assumed their full court dresses. The usual hour for the repast was five o'clock. If we say, then, that the repast occupied an hour, and the toilette two hours, everybody was ready about eight o'clock in the evening. Towards eight o'clock, then, the guests began to arrive at Madame's, for we have already intimated that it was Madame who "received" that evening. And at Madame's *soirees* no one failed to be present; for the evenings passed in her apartments always had that perfect charm about them which the queen, that pious and excellent princess, had not been able to confer upon her *reunions*. For, unfortunately, one of the advantages of goodness of disposition is that it is far less amusing than wit of an ill-natured character. And yet, let us hasten to add, that such a style of wit could not be assigned to Madame, for her disposition of mind, naturally of the very highest order, comprised too much true generosity, too many noble impulses and high-souled thoughts, to warrant her being termed ill-natured. But Madame was endowed with a spirit of resistance—a gift frequently fatal to its possessor, for it breaks where another disposition would have bent; the result was that blows did not become deadened upon her as upon what might be termed the cotton-wadded feelings of Maria Theresa. Her heart rebounded at each attack, and therefore, whenever she was attacked, even in a manner that almost stunned her, she returned blow for blow to any one imprudent enough to tilt against her.

Was this really maliciousness of disposition or simply waywardness of character? We regard those rich and powerful natures as like the tree of knowledge, producing good and evil at the same time; a double branch, always blooming and fruitful, of which those who wish to eat know how

to detect the good fruit, and from which the worthless and frivolous die who have eaten of it—a circumstance which is by no means to be regarded as a great misfortune. Madame, therefore, who had a well-disguised plan in her mind of constituting herself the second, if not even the principal, queen of the court, rendered her receptions delightful to all, from the conversation, the opportunities of meeting, and the perfect liberty she allowed every one of making any remark he pleased, on the condition, however, that the remark was amusing or sensible. And it will hardly be believed, that, by that means, there was less talking among the society Madame assembled together than elsewhere. Madame hated people who talked much, and took a remarkably cruel revenge upon them, for she allowed them to talk. She disliked pretension, too, and never overlooked that defect, even in the king himself. It was more than a weakness of Monsieur, and the princess had undertaken the amazing task of curing him of it. As for the rest, poets, wits, beautiful women, all were received by her with the air of a mistress superior to her slaves. Sufficiently meditative in her liveliest humors to make even poets meditate; sufficiently pretty to dazzle by her attractions, even among the prettiest; sufficiently witty for the most distinguished persons who were present, to be listened to with pleasure—it will easily be believed that the *reunions* held in Madame's apartments must naturally have proved very attractive. All who were young flocked there, and when the king himself happens to be young, everybody at court is so too. And so, the older ladies of the court, the strong-minded women of the regency, or of the last reign, pouted and sulked at their ease; but others only laughed at the fits of sulkiness in which these venerable individuals indulged, who had carried the love of authority so far as even to take command of bodies of soldiers in the wars of the Fronde, in order, as Madame asserted, not to lose their influence over men altogether. As eight o'clock struck her royal highness entered the great drawing-room accompanied by her ladies in attendance, and found several gentlemen belonging to the court already there, having been waiting for some minutes. Among those who had arrived before the hour fixed for the reception she looked round for one who, she thought, ought to have been first in attendance, but he was not

there. However, almost at the very moment she completed her investigation, Monsieur was announced. Monsieur looked splendid. All the precious stones and jewels of Cardinal Mazarin, which of course that minister could not do otherwise than leave; all the queen-mother's jewels as well as a few belonging to his wife—Monsieur wore them all, and he was as dazzling as the rising sun. Behind him followed De Guiche, with hesitating steps and an air of contrition admirably assumed; De Guiche wore a costume of French-gray velvet, embroidered with silver, and trimmed with blue ribbons: he wore also Mechlin lace as rare and beautiful in its own way as the jewels of Monsieur in theirs. The plume in his hat was red. Madame, too, wore several colors, and preferred red for embroidery, gray for dress, and blue for flowers. M. de Guiche, dressed as we have described, looked so handsome that he excited every one's observation. An interesting pallor of complexion, a languid expression of the eyes, his white hands seen through the masses of lace that covered them, the melancholy expression of his mouth—it was only necessary, indeed, to see M. de Guiche to admit that few men at the court of France could hope to equal him. The consequence was that Monsieur, who was pretentious enough to fancy he could eclipse a star even, if a star had adorned itself in a similar manner to himself, was, on the contrary, completely eclipsed in all imaginations, which are silent judges certainly, but very positive and firm in their convictions. Madame looked at De Guiche lightly, but light as her look had been, it brought a delightful color to his face. In fact, Madame found De Guiche so handsome and so admirably dressed, that she almost ceased regretting the royal conquest she felt she was on the point of escaping her. Her heart, therefore, sent the blood to her face. Monsieur approached her. He had not noticed the princess's blush, or if he had seen it, he was far from attributing it to its true cause.

"Madame," he said, kissing his wife's hand, "there is some one present here, who has fallen into disgrace, an unhappy exile whom I venture to recommend to your kindness. Do not forget, I beg, that he is one of my best friends, and that a gentle reception of him will please me greatly."

“What exile? what disgraced person are you speaking of?” inquired Madame, looking all round, and not permitting her glance to rest more on the count than on the others.

This was the moment to present De Guiche, and the prince drew aside and let De Guiche pass him, who, with a tolerably well-assumed awkwardness of manner, approached Madame and made his reverence to her.

“What!” exclaimed Madame, as if she were greatly surprised, “is M. de Guiche the disgraced individual you speak of, the exile in question?”

“Yes, certainly,” returned the duke.

“Indeed,” said Madame, “he seems almost the only person here!”

“You are unjust, Madame,” said the prince.

“I?”

“Certainly. Come, forgive the poor fellow.”

“Forgive him what? What have I to forgive M. de Guiche?”

“Come, explain yourself, De Guiche. What do you wish to be forgiven?” inquired the prince.

“Alas! her royal highness knows very well what it is,” replied the latter, in a hypocritical tone.

“Come, come, give him your hand, Madame,” said Philip.

“If it will give you any pleasure, Monsieur,” and, with a movement of her eyes and shoulders, which it would be impossible to describe, Madame extended towards the young man her beautiful and perfumed hand, upon which he pressed his lips. It was evident that he did so for some little time, and that Madame did not withdraw her hand too quickly, for the duke added:

“De Guiche is not wickedly disposed, Madame; so do not be afraid, he will not bite you.”

A pretext was given in the gallery by the duke’s remark, which was not, perhaps, very laughable, for every one to laugh excessively. The situation was odd enough, and some kindly disposed persons had observed it.

Monsieur was still enjoying the effect of his remark, when the king was announced. The appearance of the room at that moment was as follows: —in the center, before the fireplace, which was filled with flowers, Madame was standing up, with her maids of honor formed in two wings, on either side of her; around whom the butterflies of the court were fluttering. Several other groups were formed in the recesses of the windows, like soldiers stationed in their different towers who belong to the same garrison. From their respective places they could pick up the remarks which fell from the principal group. From one of these groups, the nearest to the fireplace, Malicorne, who had been at once raised to the dignity, through Manicamp and De Guiche, of the post of master of the apartments, and whose official costume had been ready for the last two months, was brilliant with gold lace, and shone upon Montalais, standing on Madame's extreme left, with all the fire of his eyes and splendor of his velvet. Madame was conversing with Mademoiselle de Chatillon and Mademoiselle de Crequy, who were next to her, and addressed a few words to Monsieur, who drew aside as soon as the king was announced. Mademoiselle de la Vallière, like Montalais, was on Madame's left hand, and the last but one on the line, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente being on her right. She was stationed as certain bodies of troops are, whose weakness is suspected, and who are placed between two experienced regiments. Guarded in this manner by the companions who had shared her adventure, La Vallière, whether from regret at Raoul's departure, or still suffering from the emotion caused by recent events, which had begun to render her name familiar on the lips of the courtiers, La Vallière, we repeat, hid her eyes, red with weeping, behind her fan, and seemed to give the greatest attention to the remarks which Montalais and Athenais, alternately, whispered to her from time to time. As soon as the king's name was announced a general movement took place in the apartment. Madame, in her character as hostess, rose to receive the royal visitor; but as she rose, notwithstanding her preoccupation of mind, she glanced hastily towards her right; her glance,

which the presumptuous De Guiche regarded as intended for himself, rested, as it swept over the whole circle, upon La Vallière, whose warm blush and restless emotion it instantly perceived.

The king advanced to the middle of the group, which had now become a general one, by a movement which took place from the circumference to the center. Every head bowed low before his majesty, the ladies bending like frail, magnificent lilies before King Aquilo. There was nothing very severe, we will even say, nothing very royal that evening about the king, except youth and good looks. He wore an air of animated joyousness and good-humor which set all imaginations at work, and, thereupon, all present promised themselves a delightful evening, for no other reason than from having remarked the desire his majesty had to amuse himself in Madame's apartments. If there was any one in particular whose high spirits and good-humor equalled the king's, it was M. de Saint-Aignan, who was dressed in a rose-colored costume, with face and ribbons of the same color, and, in addition, particularly rose-colored in his ideas, for that evening M. de Saint-Aignan was prolific in jests. The circumstance which had given a new expansion to the numerous ideas germinating in his fertile brain was, that he had just perceived that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was, like himself, dressed in rose-color. We would not wish to say, however, that the wily courtier had not know beforehand that the beautiful Athenais was to wear that particular color; for he very well knew the art of unlocking the lips of a dress-maker or a lady's maid as to her mistress's intentions. He cast as many killing glances at Mademoiselle Athenais as he had bows of ribbons on his stockings and doublet; in other words he discharged a prodigious number. The king having paid Madame the customary compliments, and Madame having requested him to be seated, the circle was immediately formed. Louis inquired of Monsieur the particulars of the day's bathing; and stated, looking at the ladies present while he spoke, that certain poets were engaged turning into verse the enchanting diversion of the baths of Vulaines, and that one of them particularly, M. Loret, seemed to have been intrusted with the confidence of some water-nymph, as he had in his verses recounted many circumstances that were

actually true—at which remark more than one lady present felt herself bound to blush. The king at this moment took the opportunity of looking round him at more leisure; Montalais was the only one who did not blush sufficiently to prevent her looking at the king, and she saw him fix his eyes devouringly on Mademoiselle de la Vallière. This undaunted maid of honor, Mademoiselle de Montalais, be it understood, forced the king to lower his gaze, and so saved Louise de la Vallière from a sympathetic warmth of feeling this gaze might possibly have conveyed. Louis was appropriated by Madame, who overwhelmed him with inquiries, and no one in the world knew how to ask questions better than she did. He tried, however, to render the conversation general, and, with the view of effecting this, he redoubled his attention and devotion to her. Madame coveted complimentary remarks, and, determined to procure them at any cost, she addressed herself to the king, saying:

"Sire, your majesty, who is aware of everything which occurs in your kingdom, ought to know beforehand the verses confided to M. Loret by this nymph; will your majesty kindly communicate them to us?"

"Madame," replied the king, with perfect grace of manner, "I dare not —you, personally, might be in no little degree confused at having to listen to certain details—but Saint-Aignan tells a story well, and has a perfect recollection of the verses. If he does not remember them, he will invent. I can certify he is almost a poet himself." Saint-Aignan, thus brought prominently forward, was compelled to introduce himself as advantageously as possible. Unfortunately, however, for Madame, he thought of his own personal affairs only; in other words, instead of paying Madame the compliments she so much desired and relished, his mind was fixed upon making as much display as possible of his own good fortune. Again glancing, therefore, for the hundredth time at the beautiful Athenais, who carried into practice her previous evening's theory of not even deigning to look at her adorer, he said:—

"Your majesty will perhaps pardon me for having too indifferently remembered the verses which the nymph dictated to Loret; but if the king has not retained any recollection of them, how could I possibly

remember?”

Madame did not receive this shortcoming of the courtier very favorably.

“Ah! madame,” added Saint-Aignan, “at present it is no longer a question what the water-nymphs have to say; and one would almost be tempted to believe that nothing of any interest now occurs in those liquid realms. It is upon earth, madame, important events happen. Ah! Madame, upon the earth, how many tales are there full of—”

“Well,” said Madame, “and what is taking place upon the earth?”

“That question must be asked of the Dryads,” replied the comte; “the Dryads inhabit the forest, as your royal highness is aware.”

“I am aware also, that they are naturally very talkative, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan.”

“Such is the case, Madame; but when they say such delightful things, it would be ungracious to accuse them of being too talkative.”

“Do they talk so delightfully, then?” inquired the princess, indifferently. “Really, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, you excite my curiosity; and, if I were the king, I would require you immediately to tell us what the delightful things are these Dryads have been saying, since you alone seem to understand their language.”

“I am at his majesty’s orders, Madame, in that respect,” replied the comte, quickly.

“What a fortunate fellow this Saint-Aignan is to understand the language of the Dryads,” said Monsieur.

“I understand it perfectly, monseigneur, as I do my own language.”

“Tell us all about them, then,” said Madame.

The king felt embarrassed, for his confidant was, in all probability, about to embark in a difficult matter. He felt that it would be so, from the general attention excited by Saint-Aignan’s preamble, and aroused too by Madame’s peculiar manner. The most reserved of those who were present seemed ready to devour every syllable the comte was about to pronounce. They coughed, drew closer together, looked curiously at

some of the maids of honor, who, in order to support with greater propriety, or with more steadiness, the fixity of the inquisitorial looks bent upon them, adjusted their fans accordingly, and assumed the bearing of a duelist about to be exposed to his adversary's fire. At this epoch, the fashion of ingeniously constructed conversations, and hazardously dangerous recitals, so prevailed, that, where, in modern times, a whole company assembled in a drawing-room would begin to suspect some scandal, or disclosure, or tragic event, and would hurry away in dismay, Madame's guests quietly settled themselves in their places, in order not to lose a word or gesture of the comedy composed by Monsieur de Saint-Aignan for their benefit, and the termination of which, whatever the style and the plot might be, must, as a matter of course, be marked by the most perfect propriety. The comte as known as a man of extreme refinement, and an admirable narrator. He courageously began, then, amidst a profound silence, which would have been formidable to any one but himself:—"Madame, by the king's permission, I address myself, in the first place, to your royal highness, since you admit yourself to be the person present possessing the greatest curiosity. I have the honor, therefore, to inform your royal highness that the Dryad more particularly inhabits the hollows of oaks; and, as Dryads are mythological creatures of great beauty, they inhabit the most beautiful trees, in other words, the largest to be found."

At this exordium, which recalled, under a transparent veil, the celebrated story of the royal oak, which had played so important a part in the last evening, so many hearts began to beat, both from joy and uneasiness, that, if Saint-Aignan had not had a good and sonorous voice, their throbbings might have been heard above the sound of his voice.

"There must surely be Dryads at Fontainebleau, then," said Madame, in a perfectly calm voice; "for I have never, in all my life, seen finer oaks than in the royal park." And as she spoke, she directed towards De Guiche a look of which he had no reason to complain, as he had of the

one that preceded it; which, as we have already mentioned, had reserved a certain amount of indefiniteness most painful for so loving a heart as his.

“Precisely, Madame, it is of Fontainebleau I was about to speak to your royal highness,” said Saint-Aignan; “for the Dryad whose story is engaging our attention, lives in the park belonging to the chateau of his majesty.”

The affair was fairly embarked on; the action was begun, and it was no longer possible for auditory or narrator to draw back.

“It will be worth listening to,” said Madame; “for the story not only appears to me to have all the interest of a national incident, but still more, seems to be a circumstance of very recent occurrence.”

“I ought to begin at the beginning,” said the comte. “In the first place, then, there lived at Fontainebleau, in a cottage of modest and unassuming appearance, two shepherds. The one was the shepherd Tyrcis, the owner of extensive domains transmitted to him from his parents, by right of inheritance. Tyrcis was young and handsome, and, from his many qualifications, he might be pronounced to be the first and foremost among the shepherds in the whole country; one might even boldly say he was the king of shepherds.” A subdued murmur of approbation encouraged the narrator, who continued:—“His strength equals his courage; no one displays greater address in hunting wild beasts, nor greater wisdom in matters where judgment is required. Whenever he mounts and exercises his horse in the beautiful plains of his inheritance, or whenever he joins with the shepherds who owe him allegiance, in different games of skill and strength, one might say that it is the god Mars hurling his lance on the plains of Thrace, or, even better, that it was Apollo himself, the god of day, radiant upon earth, bearing his flaming darts in his hand.” Every one understood that this allegorical portrait of the king was not the worst exordium the narrator could have chosen; and consequently it did not fail to produce its effect, either upon those who, from duty or inclination, applauded it to the very echo, or on the king himself, to whom flattery was very agreeable when delicately

conveyed, and whom, indeed, it did not always displease, even when it was a little too broad. Saint-Aignan then continued:—"It is not in games of glory only, ladies, that the shepherd Tyrcis had acquired that reputation by which he was regarded as the king of the shepherds."

"Of the shepherds of Fontainebleau," said the king, smilingly, to Madame.

"Oh!" exclaimed Madame, "Fontainebleau is selected arbitrarily by the poet; but I should say, of the shepherds of the whole world." The king forgot his part of a passive auditor, and bowed.

"It is," paused Saint-Aignan, amidst a flattering murmur of applause, "it is with ladies fair especially that the qualities of this king of the shepherds are most prominently displayed. He is a shepherd with a mind as refined as his heart is pure; he can pay a compliment with a charm of manner whose fascination it is impossible to resist; and in his attachments he is so discreet, that beautiful and happy conquests may regard their lot as more than enviable. Never a syllable of disclosure, never a moment's forgetfulness. Whoever has seen and heard Tyrcis must love him; whoever loves and is beloved by him, has indeed found happiness." Saint-Aignan here paused; he was enjoying the pleasure of all these compliments; and the portrait he had drawn, however grotesquely inflated it might be, had found favor in certain ears, in which the perfections of the shepherd did not seem to have been exaggerated. Madame begged the orator to continue. "Tyrcis," said the comte, "had a faithful companion, or rather a devoted servant, whose name was—Amyntas."

"Ah!" said Madame, archly, "now for the portrait of Amyntas; you are such an excellent painter, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan."

"Madame—"

"Oh! comte, do not, I entreat you, sacrifice poor Amyntas; I should never forgive you."

"Madame, Amyntas is of too humble a position, particularly beside Tyrcis, for his person to be honored by a parallel. There are certain friends who resemble those followers of ancient times, who caused

themselves to be buried alive at their masters' feet. Amyntas's place, too, is at the feet of Tyrcis; he cares for no other; and if, sometimes, the illustrious hero—"

"Illustrious shepherd, you mean?" said Madame, pretending to correct M. de Saint-Aignan.

"Your royal highness is right; I was mistaken," returned the courtier; "if, I say, the shepherd Tyrcis deigns occasionally to call Amyntas his friend, and to open his heart to him, it is an unparalleled favor, which the latter regards as the most unbounded felicity."

"All that you say," interrupted Madame, "establishes the extreme devotion of Amyntas to Tyrcis, but does not furnish us with the portrait of Amyntas. Comte, do not flatter him, if you like; but describe him to us. I will have Amyntas's portrait." Saint-Aignan obeyed, after having bowed profoundly to his majesty's sister-in-law.

"Amyntas," he said, "is somewhat older than Tyrcis; he is not an ill-favored shepherd; it is even said that the muses condescended to smile upon him at his birth, even as Hebe smiled upon youth. He is not ambitious of display, but he is ambitious of being loved; and he might not, perhaps, be found unworthy of it, if he were only sufficiently well-known."

This latter paragraph, strengthened by a killing glance, was directed straight to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who received them both unmoved. But the modesty and tact of the allusion had produced a good effect; Amyntas reaped the benefit of it in the applause bestowed upon him: Tyrcis's head even gave the signal for it by a consenting bow, full of good feeling.

"One evening," continued Saint-Aignan, "Tyrcis and Amyntas were walking together in the forest, talking of their love disappointments. Do not forget, ladies, that the story of the Dryad is now beginning, otherwise it would be easy to tell you what Tyrcis and Amyntas, the two most discreet shepherds of the whole earth, were talking about. They reached

the thickest part of the forest, for the purpose of being quite alone, and of confiding their troubles more freely to each other, when suddenly the sound of voices struck upon their ears."

"Ah, ah!" said those who surrounded the narrator. "Nothing can be more interesting."

At this point, Madame, like a vigilant general inspecting his army, glanced at Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who could not help wincing as they drew themselves up.

"These harmonious voices," resumed Saint-Aignan, "were those of certain shepherdesses, who had been likewise desirous of enjoying the coolness of the shade, and who, knowing the isolated and almost unapproachable situation of the place, had betaken themselves there to interchange their ideas upon—" A loud burst of laughter occasioned by this remark of Saint-Aignan, and an imperceptible smile of the king, as he looked at Tonnay-Charente, followed this sally.

"The Dryad affirms positively," continued Saint-Aignan, "that the shepherdesses were three in number, and that all three were young and beautiful."

"What were their names?" said Madame, quickly.

"Their names?" said Saint-Aignan, who hesitated from fear of committing an indiscretion.

"Of course; you call your shepherds Tyrcis and Amyntas; give your shepherdesses names in a similar manner."

"Oh! Madame, I am not an inventor; I relate simply what took place as the Dryad related it to me."

"What did your Dryad, then, call these shepherdesses? You have a very treacherous memory, I fear. This Dryad must have fallen out with the goddess Mnemosyne."

"These shepherdesses, Madame? Pray remember that it is a crime to betray a woman's name."

"From which a woman absolves you, comte, on the condition that you will reveal the names of the shepherdesses."

“Their names were Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea.”

“Exceedingly well!—they have not lost by the delay,” said Madame, “and now we have three charming names. But now for their portraits.”

Saint-Aignan again made a slight movement.

“Nay, comte, let us proceed in due order,” returned Madame. “Ought we not, sire, to have the portraits of the shepherdesses?”

The king, who expected this determined perseverance, and who began to feel some uneasiness, did not think it safe to provoke so dangerous an interrogator. He thought, too, that Saint-Aignan, in drawing the portraits, would find a means of insinuating some flattering allusions which would be agreeable to the ears of one his majesty was interested in pleasing. It was with this hope and with this fear that Louis authorized Saint-Aignan to sketch the portraits of the shepherdesses, Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea.

“Very well, then; be it so,” said Saint-Aignan, like a man who has made up his mind, and he began.

Chapter LVII. Conclusion of the Story of a Naiad and of a Dryad.

“Phyllis,” said Saint-Aignan, with a glance of defiance at Montalais, such as a fencing-master would give who invites an antagonist worthy of him to place himself on guard, “Phyllis is neither fair nor dark, neither tall nor short, neither too grave nor too gay; though but a shepherdess, she is as witty as a princess, and as coquettish as the most finished flirt that ever lived. Nothing can equal her excellent vision. Her heart yearns for everything her gaze embraces. She is like a bird, which, always warbling, at one moment skims the ground, at the next rises fluttering in pursuit of a butterfly, then rests itself upon the topmost branch of a tree, where it defies the bird-catchers either to come and seize it or to entrap it in their nets.” The portrait bore such a strong resemblance to Montalais, that all eyes were directed towards her; she, however, with her head raised, and with a steady, unmoved look, listened to Saint-Aignan, as if he were speaking of an utter stranger.

“Is that all, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan?” inquired the princess.

“Oh! your royal highness, the portrait is but a mere sketch, and many more additions could be made, but I fear to weary your patience, or offend the modesty of the shepherdess, and I shall therefore pass on to her companion, Amaryllis.”

“Very well,” said Madame, “pass on to Amaryllis, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, we are all attention.”

“Amaryllis is the eldest of the three, and yet,” Saint-Aignan hastened to add, “this advanced age does not reach twenty years.”

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who had slightly knitted her brows at the commencement of the description, unbent them with a smile.

"She is tall, with an astonishing abundance of beautiful hair, which she fastens in the manner of the Grecian statues; her walk is full of majesty, her attitude haughty; she has the air, therefore, rather of a goddess than a mere mortal, and among the goddesses, she most resembles Diana the huntress; with this sole difference, however, that the cruel shepherdess, having stolen the quiver of young love, while poor Cupid was sleeping in a thicket of roses, instead of directing her arrows against the inhabitants of the forest, discharges them pitilessly against all poor shepherds who pass within reach of her bow and of her eyes."

"Oh! what a wicked shepherdess!" said Madame. "She may some day wound herself with one of those arrows she discharges, as you say, so mercilessly on all sides."

"It is the hope of shepherds, one and all!" said Saint-Aignan.

"And that of the shepherd Amyntas in particular, I suppose?" said Madame.

"The shepherd Amyntas is so timid," said Saint-Aignan, with the most modest air he could assume, "that if he cherishes such a hope as that, no one has ever known anything about it, for he conceals it in the very depths of his heart." A flattering murmur of applause greeted this profession of faith on behalf of the shepherd.

"And Galatea?" inquired Madame. "I am impatient to see a hand so skillful as yours continue the portrait where Virgil left it, and finish it before our eyes."

"Madame," said Saint-Aignan, "I am indeed a poor dumb post beside the mighty Virgil. Still, encouraged by your desire, I will do my best."

Saint-Aignan extended his foot and hand, and thus began:—"White as milk, she casts upon the breeze the perfume of her fair hair tinged with golden hues, as are the ears of corn. One is tempted to inquire if she is not the beautiful Europa, who inspired Jupiter with a tender passion as

she played with her companions in the flower-spangled meadows. From her exquisite eyes, blue as azure heaven on the clearest summer day, emanates a tender light, which reverie nurtures, and love dispenses. When she frowns, or bends her looks towards the ground, the sun is veiled in token of mourning. When she smiles, on the contrary, nature resumes her jollity, and the birds, for a brief moment silenced, recommence their songs amid the leafy covert of the trees. Galatea," said Saint-Aignan, in conclusion, "is worthy of the admiration of the whole world; and if she should ever bestow her heart upon another, happy will that man be to whom she consecrates her first affections."

Madame, who had attentively listened to the portrait Saint-Aignan had drawn, as, indeed, had all the others, contented herself with accentuating her approbation of the most poetic passage by occasional inclinations of her head; but it was impossible to say if these marks of assent were accorded to the ability of the narrator of the resemblance of the portrait. The consequence, therefore, was, that as Madame did not openly exhibit any approbation, no one felt authorized to applaud, not even Monsieur, who secretly thought that Saint-Aignan dwelt too much upon the portraits of the shepherdesses, and had somewhat slightingly passed over the portraits of the shepherds. The whole assembly seemed suddenly chilled. Saint-Aignan, who had exhausted his rhetorical skill and his palette of artistic tints in sketching the portrait of Galatea, and who, after the favor with which his other descriptions had been received, already imagined he could hear the loudest applause allotted to this last one, was himself more disappointed than the king and the rest of the company. A moment's silence followed, which was at last broken by Madame.

"Well, sir," she inquired, "What is your majesty's opinion of these three portraits?"

The king, who wished to relieve Saint-Aignan's embarrassment without compromising himself, replied, "Why, Amaryllis, in my opinion, is beautiful."

“For my part,” said Monsieur, “I prefer Phyllis; she is a capital girl, or rather a good-sort-of-fellow of a nymph.”

A gentle laugh followed, and this time the looks were so direct, that Montalais felt herself blushing almost scarlet.

“Well,” resumed Madame, “what were those shepherdesses saying to each other?”

Saint-Aignan, however, whose vanity had been wounded, did not feel himself in a position to sustain an attack of new and refreshed troops, and merely said, “Madame, the shepherdesses were confiding to one another their little preferences.”

“Nay, nay! Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, you are a perfect stream of pastoral poesy,” said Madame, with an amiable smile, which somewhat comforted the narrator.

“They confessed that love is a mighty peril, but that the absence of love is the heart’s sentence of death.”

“What was the conclusion they came to?” inquired Madame.

“They came to the conclusion that love was necessary.”

“Very good! Did they lay down any conditions?”

“That of choice, simply,” said Saint-Aignan. “I ought even to add,—remember it is the Dryad who is speaking,—that one of the shepherdesses, Amaryllis, I believe, was completely opposed to the necessity of loving, and yet she did not positively deny that she had allowed the image of a certain shepherd to take refuge in her heart.”

“Was it Amyntas or Tyrcis?”

“Amyntas, Madame,” said Saint-Aignan, modestly. “But Galatea, the gentle and soft-eyed Galatea, immediately replied, that neither Amyntas, nor Alphesiboeus, nor Tityrus, nor indeed any of the handsomest shepherds of the country, were to be compared to Tyrcis; that Tyrcis was as superior to all other men, as the oak to all other trees, as the lily in its majesty to all other flowers. She drew even such a portrait of Tyrcis that Tyrcis himself, who was listening, must have felt truly flattered at it, notwithstanding his rank as a shepherd. Thus Tyrcis and Amyntas had

been distinguished by Phyllis and Galatea; and thus had the secrets of two hearts revealed beneath the shades of evening, and amid the recesses of the woods. Such, Madame, is what the Dryad related to me; she who knows all that takes place in the hollows of oaks and grassy dells; she who knows the loves of the birds, and all they wish to convey by their songs; she who understands, in fact, the language of the wind among the branches, the humming of the insect with its gold and emerald wings in the corolla of the wild-flowers; it was she who related the particulars to me, and I have repeated them."

"And now you have finished, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, have you not?" said Madame, with a smile that made the king tremble.

"Quite finished," replied Saint-Aignan, "and but too happy if I have been able to amuse your royal highness for a few moments."

"Moments which have been too brief," replied the princess; "for you have related most admirably all you know; but, my dear Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, you have been unfortunate enough to obtain your information from one Dryad only, I believe?"

"Yes, Madame, only from one, I confess."

"The fact was, that you passed by a little Naiad, who pretended to know nothing at all, and yet knew a great deal more than your Dryad, my dear comte."

"A Naiad!" repeated several voices, who began to suspect that the story had a continuation.

"Of course close beside the oak you are speaking of, which, if I am not mistaken, is called the royal oak—is it not so, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan?"

Saint-Aignan and the king exchanged glances.

"Yes, Madame," the former replied.

"Well, close beside the oak there is a pretty little spring, which runs murmuringly over the pebbles, between banks of forget-me-nots and daffodils."

“I believe you are correct,” said the king, with some uneasiness, and listening with some anxiety to his sister-in-law’s narrative.

“Oh! there is one, I can assure you,” said Madame; “and the proof of it is, that the Naiad who resides in that little stream stopped me as I was about to come.”

“Ah?” said Saint-Aignan.

“Yes, indeed,” continued the princess, “and she did so in order to communicate to me many particulars Monsieur de Saint-Aignan has omitted in his recital.”

“Pray relate them yourself, then,” said Monsieur, “you can relate stories in such a charming manner.” The princess bowed at the conjugal compliment paid her.

“I do not possess the poetical powers of the comte, nor his ability to bring to light the smallest details.”

“You will not be listened to with less interest on that account,” said the king, who already perceived that something hostile was intended in his sister-in-law’s story.

“I speak, too,” continued Madame, “in the name of that poor little Naiad, who is indeed the most charming creature I ever met. Moreover, she laughed so heartily while she was telling me her story, that, in pursuance of that medical axiom that laughter is the finest physic in the world, I ask permission to laugh a little myself when I recollect her words.”

The king and Saint-Aignan, who noticed spreading over many of the faces present a distant and prophetic ripple of the laughter Madame announced, finished by looking at each other, as if asking themselves whether there was not some little conspiracy concealed beneath these words. But Madame was determined to turn the knife in the wound over and over again; she therefore resumed with the air of the most perfect candor, in other words, with the most dangerous of all her airs: “Well,

then, I passed that way," she said, "and as I found beneath my steps many fresh flowers newly blown, no doubt Phyllis, Amaryllis, Galatea, and all your shepherdesses had passed the same way before me."

The king bit his lips, for the recital was becoming more and more threatening. "My little Naiad," continued Madame, "was cooing over her quaint song in the bed of the rivulet; as I perceived that she accosted me by touching the hem of my dress, I could not think of receiving her advances ungraciously, and more particularly so, since, after all, a divinity, even though she be of a second grade, is always of greater importance than a mortal, though a princess. I thereupon accosted the Naiad, and bursting into laughter, this is what she said to me:

"'Fancy, princess...' You understand, sire, it is the Naiad who is speaking?"

The king bowed assentingly; and Madame continued:—"'Fancy, princess, the banks of my little stream have just witnessed a most amusing scene. Two shepherds, full of curiosity, even indiscreetly so, have allowed themselves to be mystified in a most amusing manner by three nymphs, or three shepherdesses,'—I beg your pardon, but I do not now remember if it was nymphs or shepherdesses she said; but it does not much matter, so we will continue."

The king, at this opening, colored visibly, and Saint-Aignan, completely losing countenance, began to open his eyes in the greatest possible anxiety.

"'The two shepherds,' pursued my nymph, still laughing, 'followed in the wake of the three young ladies,'—no, I mean, of the three nymphs; forgive me, I ought to say, of the three shepherdesses. It is not always wise to do that, for it may be awkward for those who are followed. I appeal to all the ladies present, and not one of them, I am sure, will contradict me."

The king, who was much disturbed by what he suspected was about to follow, signified his assent by a gesture.

"'But,' continued the Naiad, 'the shepherdesses had noticed Tyrcis and Amyntas gliding into the wood, and, by the light of the moon, they had recognized them through the grove of the trees.' Ah, you laugh!" interrupted Madame; "wait, wait, you are not yet at the end."

The king turned pale; Saint-Aignan wiped his forehead, now dewed with perspiration. Among the groups of ladies present could be heard smothered laughter and stealthy whispers.

"'The shepherdesses, I was saying, noticing how indiscreet the two shepherds were, proceeded to sit down at the foot of the royal oak; and, when they perceived that their over-curious listeners were sufficiently near, so that not a syllable of what they might say could be lost, they addressed towards them very innocently, in the most artless manner in the world indeed, a passionate declaration, which from the vanity natural to all men, and even to the most sentimental of shepherds, seemed to the two listeners as sweet as honey.'"

The king, at these words, which the assembly was unable to hear without laughing, could not restrain a flash of anger darting from his eyes. As for Saint-Aignan, he let his head fall upon his breast, and concealed, under a silly laugh, the extreme annoyance he felt.

"Oh," said the king, drawing himself up to his full height, "upon my word, that is a most amusing jest, certainly; but, really and truly, are you sure you quite understood the language of the Naiads?"

"The comte, sire, pretends to have perfectly understood that of the Dryads," retorted Madame, icily.

"No doubt," said the king; "but you know the comte has the weakness to aspire to become a member of the Academy, so that, with this object in view, he has learnt all sorts of things of which very happily you are ignorant; and it might possibly happen that the language of the Nymph of the Waters might be among the number of things you have not studied."

"Of course, sire," replied Madame, "for facts of that nature one does not altogether rely upon one's self alone; a woman's ear is not infallible, so says Saint Augustine; and I, therefore, wished to satisfy myself by

other opinions beside my own, and as my Naiad, who, in her character of a goddess, is polyglot,—is not that the expression, M. de Saint-Aignan?"

"I believe so," said the latter, quite out of countenance.

"Well," continued the princess, "as my Naiad, who, in her character of a goddess, had, at first spoken to me in English, I feared, as you suggest, that I might have misunderstood her, and I requested Mesdemoiselles de Montalais, de Tonnay-Charente, and de la Vallière, to come to me, begging my Naiad to repeat to me in the French language, the recital she had already communicated to me in English."

"And did she do so?" inquired the king.

"Oh, she is the most polite divinity it is possible to imagine! Yes, sire, she did so; so that no doubt whatever remains on the subject. Is it not so, young ladies?" said the princess, turning towards the left of her army; "did not the Naiad say precisely what I have related, and have I, in any one particular, exceeded the truth, Phyllis? I beg your pardon, I mean Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais?"

"Precisely as you have stated, Madame," articulated Mademoiselle de Montalais, very distinctly.

"Is it true, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente?"

"The perfect truth," replied Athenais, in a voice quite as firm, but not yet so distinct.

"And you, La Vallière?" asked Madame.

The poor girl felt the king's ardent look fixed upon her,—she dared not deny—she dared not tell a falsehood; she merely bowed her head; and everybody took it for a token of assent. Her head, however, was not raised again, chilled as she was by a coldness more bitter than that of death. This triple testimony overwhelmed the king. As for Saint-Aignan, he did not even attempt to dissemble his despair, and, hardly knowing what he said, he stammered out, "An excellent jest! admirably played!"

"A just punishment for curiosity," said the king, in a hoarse voice. "Oh! who would think, after the chastisement that Tyrcis and Amyntas had suffered, of endeavoring to surprise what is passing in the heart of

shepherdesses? Assuredly I shall not, for one; and, you, gentlemen?"

"Nor I! nor I!" repeated, in a chorus, the group of courtiers.

Madame was filled with triumph at the king's annoyance; and was full of delight, thinking that her story had been, or was to be, the termination of the whole affair. As for Monsieur, who had laughed at the two stories without comprehending anything about them, he turned towards De Guiche, and said to him, "Well, comte, you say nothing; can you not find something to say? Do you pity M. Tyrcis and M. Amyntas, for instance?"

"I pity them with all my soul," replied De Guiche; "for, in very truth, love is so sweet a fancy, that to lose it, fancy though it may be, is to lose more than life itself. If, therefore, these two shepherds thought themselves beloved,—if they were happy in that idea, and if, instead of that happiness, they meet not only that empty void which resembles death, but jeers and jests at love itself, which is worse than a thousand deaths,—in that case, I say that Tyrcis and Amyntas are the two most unhappy men I know."

"And you are right, too, Monsieur de Guiche," said the king; "for, in fact, the injury in question is a very hard return for a little harmless curiosity."

"That is as much to say, then, that the story of my Naiad has displeased the king?" asked Madame, innocently.

"Nay, Madame, undeceive yourself," said Louis, taking the princess by the hand; "your Naiad, on the contrary, has pleased me, and the more so, because she was so truthful, and because her tale, I ought to add, is confirmed by the testimony of unimpeachable witnesses."

These words fell upon La Vallière, accompanied by a look that on one, from Socrates to Montaigne, could have exactly defined. The look and the king's remark succeeded in overpowering the unhappy girl, who, with her head upon Montalais's shoulder, seemed to have fainted away. The king rose, without remarking this circumstance, of which no one, moreover, took any notice, and, contrary to his usual custom, for generally he remained late in Madame's apartments, he took his leave, and retired to his own side of the palace. Saint-Aignan followed him,

leaving the rooms in as much despair as he had entered them with delight. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, less sensitive than La Vallière, was not much frightened, and did not faint. However, it may be that the last look of Saint-Aignan had hardly been so majestic as the king's.

Chapter LVIII. Royal Psychology.

The king returned to his apartments with hurried steps. The reason he walked as fast as he did was probably to avoid tottering in his gait. He seemed to leave behind him as he went along a trace of a mysterious sorrow. That gayety of manner, which every one had remarked in him on his arrival, and which they had been delighted to perceive, had not perhaps been understood in its true sense: but his stormy departure, his disordered countenance, all knew, or at least thought they could tell the reason of. Madame's levity of manner, her somewhat bitter jests,—bitter for persons of a sensitive disposition, and particularly for one of the king's character; the great resemblance which naturally existed between the king and an ordinary mortal, were among the reasons assigned for the precipitate and unexpected departure of his majesty. Madame, keen-sighted enough in other respects, did not, however, at first see anything extraordinary in it. It was quite sufficient for her to have inflicted some slight wound upon the vanity or self-esteem of one who, so soon forgetting the engagements he had contracted, seemed to have undertaken to disdain, without cause, the noblest and highest prize in France. It was not an unimportant matter for Madame, in the present position of affairs, to let the king perceive the difference which existed between the bestowal of his affections on one in a high station, and the running after each passing fancy, like a youth fresh from the provinces. With regard to those higher placed affections, recognizing their dignity and their illimitable influence, acknowledging in them a certain etiquette and display—a monarch not only did not act in a manner derogatory to his high position, but found even repose, security, mystery, and general respect therein. On the contrary, in the debasement of a common or humble attachment, he would encounter, even among his meanest

subjects, carping and sarcastic remarks; he would forfeit his character of infallibility and inviolability. Having descended to the region of petty human miseries, he would be subjected to paltry contentions. In one word, to convert the royal divinity into a mere mortal by striking at his heart, or rather even at his face, like the meanest of his subjects, was to inflict a terrible blow upon the pride of that generous nature. Louis was more easily captivated by vanity than affection. Madame had wisely calculated her vengeance, and it has been seen, also, in what manner she carried it out. Let it not be supposed, however, that Madame possessed such terrible passions as the heroines of the middle ages, or that she regarded things from a pessimistic point of view; on the contrary, Madame, young, amiable, of cultivated intellect, coquettish, loving in her nature, but rather from fancy, or imagination, or ambition, than from her heart—Madame, we say, on the contrary, inaugurated that epoch of light and fleeting amusements, which distinguished the hundred and twenty years that intervened between the middle of the seventeenth century, and the last quarter of the eighteenth. Madame saw, therefore, or rather fancied she saw, things under their true aspect; she knew that the king, her august brother-in-law, had been the first to ridicule the humble La Vallière, and that, in accordance with his usual custom, it was hardly probable he would ever love the person who had excited his laughter, even had it been only for a moment. Moreover, was not her vanity ever present, that evil influence which plays so important a part in that comedy of dramatic incidents called the life of a woman? Did not her vanity tell her, aloud, in a subdued voice, in a whisper, in every variety of tone, that she could not, in reality, she a princess, young, beautiful, and rich, be compared to the poor La Vallière, as youthful as herself it is true, but far less pretty, certainly, and utterly without money, protectors, or position? And surprise need not be excited with respect to Madame; for it is known that the greatest characters are those who flatter themselves the most in the comparisons they draw between themselves and others, between others and themselves. It may perhaps be asked what was Madame's motive for an attack so skillfully conceived and executed. Why was there such a display of forces, if it were not

seriously her intention to dislodge the king from a heart that had never been occupied before, in which he seemed disposed to take refuge? Was there any necessity, then, for Madame to attach so great an importance to La Vallière, if she did not fear her? Yet Madame did not fear La Vallière in that direction in which an historian, who knows everything, sees into the future, or rather, the past. Madame was neither a prophetess nor a sibyl; nor could she, any more than another, read what was written in that terrible and fatal book of the future, which records in its most secret pages the most serious events. No, Madame desired simply to punish the king for having availed himself of secret means altogether feminine in their nature; she wished to prove to him that if he made use of offensive weapons of that nature, she, a woman of ready wit and high descent, would assuredly discover in the arsenal of her imagination defensive weapons proof even against the thrusts of a monarch. Moreover, she wished him to learn that, in a war of that description, kings are held of no account, or, at all events, that kings who fight on their own behalf, like ordinary individuals, may witness the fall of their crown in the first encounter; and that, in fact, if he had expected to be adored by all the ladies of the court from the very first, from a confident reliance on his mere appearance, it was a pretension which was most preposterous and insulting even, for certain persons who filled a higher position than others, and that a lesson taught in season to this royal personage, who assumed too high and haughty a carriage, would be rendering him a great service. Such, indeed, were Madame's reflections with respect to the king. The sequel itself was not thought of. And in this manner, it will be seen that she had exercised all her influence over the minds of her maids of honor, and with all its accompanying details, had arranged the comedy which had just been acted. The king was completely bewildered by it; for the first time since he had escaped from the trammels of M. de Mazarin, he found himself treated as a man. Similar severity from any of his subjects would have been at once resisted by him. Strength comes with battle. But to match one's self with women, to be attacked by them, to have been imposed upon by mere girls from the country, who had come from Blois expressly

for that purpose; it was the depth of dishonor for a young sovereign full of the pride his personal advantages and royal power inspired him with. There was nothing he could do—neither reproaches, nor exile—nor could he even show the annoyance he felt. To manifest vexation would have been to admit that he had been touched, like Hamlet, by a sword from which the button had been removed—the sword of ridicule. To show animosity against women—humiliation! especially when the women in question have laughter on their side, as a means of vengeance. If, instead of leaving all the responsibility of the affair to these women, one of the courtiers had had anything to do with the intrigue, how delightedly would Louis have seized the opportunity of turning the Bastile to personal account. But there, again, the king's anger paused, checked by reason. To be the master of armies, of prisons, of an almost divine authority, and to exert such majesty and might in the service of a petty grudge, would be unworthy not only of a monarch, but even of a man. It was necessary, therefore, simply to swallow the affront in silence, and to wear his usual gentleness and graciousness of expression. It was essential to treat Madame as a friend. As a friend!—Well, and why not? Either Madame had been the instigator of the affair, or the affair itself had found her passive. If she had been the instigator of it, it certainly was a bold measure on her part, but, at all events, it was but natural in her. Who was it that had sought her in the earliest moments of her married life to whisper words of love in her ear? Who was it that had dared to calculate the possibility of committing a crime against the marriage vow—a crime, too, still more deplorable on account of the relationship between them? Who was it that, shielded behind his royal authority, had said to this young creature: be not afraid, love but the king of France, who is above all, and a movement of whose sceptered hand will protect you against all attacks, even from your own remorse? And she had listened to and obeyed the royal voice, had been influenced by his ensnaring tones; and when, morally speaking, she had sacrificed her honor in listening to him, she saw herself repaid for her sacrifice by an infidelity the more humiliating, since it was occasioned by a woman far beneath her in the world.

Had Madame, therefore, been the instigator of the revenge, she would have been right. If, on the contrary, she had remained passive in the whole affair, what grounds had the king to be angry with her on that account? Was it for her to restrain, or rather could she restrain, the chattering of a few country girls? and was it for her, by an excess of zeal that might have been misinterpreted, to check, at the risk of increasing it, the impertinence of their conduct? All these various reasonings were like so many actual stings to the king's pride; but when he had carefully, in his own mind, gone over all the various causes of complaint, Louis was surprised, upon due reflection—in other words, after the wound has been dressed—to find that there were other causes of suffering, secret, unendurable, and unrevealed. There was one circumstance he dared not confess, even to himself; namely, that the acute pain from which he was suffering had its seat in his heart. The fact is, he had permitted his heart to be gratified by La Vallière's innocent confusion. He had dreamed of a pure affection—of an affection for Louis the man, and not the sovereign —of an affection free from all self-interest; and his heart, simpler and more youthful than he had imagined it to be, had to meet that other heart that had revealed itself to him by its aspirations. The commonest thing in the complicated history of love, is the double inoculation of love to which any two hearts are subjected; the one loves nearly always before the other, in the same way that the latter finishes nearly always by loving after the other. In this way, the electric current is established, in proportion to the intensity of the passion which is first kindled. The more Mademoiselle de la Vallière showed her affection, the more the king's affection had increased. And it was precisely that which had annoyed his majesty. For it was now fairly demonstrated to him, that no sympathetic current had been the means of hurrying his heart away in its course, because there had been no confession of love in the case—because the confession was, in fact, an insult towards the man and towards the sovereign; and finally, because—and the word, too, burnt like a hot iron—because, in fact, it was nothing but a mystification after all. This girl, therefore, who, in strictness, could not lay claim to beauty, or birth, or great intelligence—who had been selected by Madame

herself, on account of her unpretending position, had not only aroused the king's regard, but had, moreover, treated him with disdain—he, the king, a man who, like an eastern potentate, had but to bestow a glance, to indicate with his finger, to throw his handkerchief. And, since the previous evening, his mind had been so absorbed with this girl that he could think and dream of nothing else. Since the previous evening his imagination had been occupied by clothing her image with charms to which she could not lay claim. In very truth, he whom such vast interests summoned, and whom so many women smiled upon invitingly, had, since the previous evening, consecrated every moment of his time, every throb of his heart, to this sole dream. It was, indeed, either too much, or not sufficient. The indignation of the king, making him forget everything, and, among others, that Saint-Aignan was present, was poured out in the most violent imprecations. True it is, that Saint-Aignan had taken refuge in a corner of the room; and from his corner, regarded the tempest passing over. His own personal disappointment seemed contemptible, in comparison with the anger of the king. He compared with his own petty vanity the prodigious pride of offended majesty; and, being well read in the hearts of kings in general, and in those of powerful kings in particular, he began to ask himself if this weight of anger, as yet held in suspense, would not soon terminate by falling upon his own head, for the very reason that others were guilty, and he innocent. In point of fact, the king, all at once, did arrest his hurried pace; and, fixing a look full of anger upon Saint-Aignan, suddenly cried out: "And you, Saint-Aignan?"

Saint-Aignan made a sign which was intended to signify, "Well, sire?"

"Yes; you have been as silly as myself, I think."

"Sire," stammered out Saint-Aignan.

"You permitted us to be deceived by this shameless trick."

"Sire," said Saint-Aignan, whose agitation was such as to make him tremble in every limb, "let me entreat your majesty not to exasperate yourself. Women, you know, are characters full of imperfections, created

for the misfortune of mankind: to expect anything good from them is to require them to perform impossibilities."

The king, who had the greatest consideration for himself, and who had begun to acquire over his emotions that command which he preserved over them all his life, perceived that he was doing an outrage to his own dignity in displaying so much animosity about so trifling an object. "No," he said, hastily; "you are mistaken, Saint-Aignan; I am not angry; I can only wonder that we should have been turned into ridicule so cleverly and with such audacity by these young girls. I am particularly surprised that, although we might have informed ourselves accurately on the subject, we were silly enough to leave the matter for our own hearts to decide."

"The heart, sire, is an organ which requires positively to be reduced to its material functions, but which, for the sake of humanity's peace of mind, should be deprived of all its metaphysical inclinations. For my own part, I confess, when I saw that your majesty's heart was so taken up by this little—"

"My heart taken up! I! My mind might, perhaps, have been so; but as for my heart, it was—" Louis again perceived that, in order to fill one gulf, he was about to dig another. "Besides," he added, "I have no fault to find with the girl. I was quite aware that she was in love with some one else."

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne. I informed your majesty of the circumstance."

"You did so: but you were not the first who told me. The Comte de la Fere had solicited from me Mademoiselle de la Vallière's hand for his son. And, on his return from England, the marriage shall be celebrated, since they love each other."

"I recognize your majesty's great generosity of disposition in that act."

"So, Saint-Aignan, we will cease to occupy ourselves with these matters any longer," said Louis.

“Yes, we will digest the affront, sire,” replied the courtier, with resignation.

“Besides, it will be an easy matter to do so,” said the king, checking a sigh.

“And, by way of a beginning, I will set about the composition of an epigram upon all three of them. I will call it ‘The Naiad and Dryad,’ which will please Madame.”

“Do so, Saint-Aignan, do so,” said the king, indifferently. “You shall read me your verses; they will amuse me. Ah! it does not signify, Saint-Aignan,” added the king, like a man breathing with difficulty, “the blow requires more than human strength to support in a dignified manner.” As the king thus spoke, assuming an air of the most angelic patience, one of the servants in attendance knocked gently at the door. Saint-Aignan drew aside, out of respect.

“Come in,” said the king. The servant partially opened the door. “What is it?” inquired Louis.

The servant held out a letter of a triangular shape. “For your majesty,” he said.

“From whom?”

“I do not know. One of the officers on duty gave it to me.”

The valet, in obedience to a gesture of the king, handed him the letter. The king advanced towards the candles, opened the note, read the signature, and uttered a loud cry. Saint-Aignan was sufficiently respectful not to look on; but, without looking on, he saw and heard all, and ran towards the king, who with a gesture dismissed the servant. “Oh, heavens!” said the king, as he read the note.

“Is your majesty unwell?” inquired Saint-Aignan, stretching forward his arms.

“No, no, Saint-Aignan—read!” and he handed him the note.

Saint-Aignan’s eyes fell upon the signature. “La Vallière!” he exclaimed. “Oh, sire!”

“Read, *read!*”

And Saint-Aignan read:

"Forgive my importunity, sire; and forgive, also, the absence of the formalities which may be wanting in this letter. A note seems to be more speedy and more urgent than a dispatch. I venture, therefore, to address this note to your majesty. I have retired to my own room, overcome with grief and fatigue, sire; and I implore your majesty to grant me the favor of an audience, which will enable me to confess the *truth* to my sovereign.

"LOUISE de la VALLIERE."

"Well?" asked the king, taking the letter from Saint-Aignan's hands, who was completely bewildered by what he had just read.

"Well!" repeated Saint-Aignan.

"What do you think of it?"

"I hardly know."

"Still, what is your opinion?"

"Sire, the young lady must have heard the muttering of the thunder, and has got frightened."

"Frightened at what?" asked Louis with dignity.

"Why, your majesty has a thousand reasons to be angry with the author or authors of so hazardous a joke; and, if your majesty's memory were to be awakened in a disagreeable sense, it would be a perpetual menace hanging over the head of this imprudent girl."

"Saint-Aignan, I do not think as you do."

"Your majesty doubtless sees more clearly than myself."

"Well! I see affliction and restraint in these lines; more particularly since I recall some of the details of the scene which took place this evening in Madame's apartments—" The king suddenly stopped, leaving his meaning unexpressed.

"In fact," resumed Saint-Aignan, "your majesty will grant an audience; nothing is clearer than that."

"I will do better, Saint-Aignan."

“What is that, sire?”

“Put on your cloak.”

“But, sire—”

“You know the suite of rooms where Madame’s maids of honor are lodged?”

“Certainly.”

“You know some means of obtaining an entrance there.”

“As far as that is concerned, I do not.”

“At all events, you must be acquainted with some one there.”

“Really, your majesty is the source of every good idea.”

“You do know some one, then. Who is it?”

“I know a certain gentleman, who is on very good terms with a certain young lady there.”

“One of the maids of honor?”

“Yes, sire.”

“With Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, I suppose?” said the king, laughing.

“Fortunately, no, sire; with Montalais.”

“What is his name?”

“Malicorne.”

“And you can depend on him?”

“I believe so, sire. He ought to have a key of some sort in his possession; and if he should happen to have one, as I have done him a service, why, he will let us have it.”

“Nothing could be better. Let us set off immediately.”

The king threw his cloak over Saint-Aignan’s shoulders, asked him for his, and both went out into the vestibule.

Chapter LIX. Something That neither Naiad nor Dryad Foresaw.

Saint-Aignan stopped at the foot of the staircase leading to the *entresol*, where the maids of honor were lodged, and to the first floor, where Madame's apartments were situated. Then, by means of one of the servants who was passing, he sent to apprise Malicorne, who was still with Monsieur. After having waited ten minutes, Malicorne arrived, full of self-importance. The king drew back towards the darkest part of the vestibule. Saint-Aignan, on the contrary, advanced to meet him, but at the first words, indicating his wish, Malicorne drew back abruptly.

"Oh, oh!" he said, "you want me to introduce you into the rooms of the maids of honor?"

"Yes."

"You know very well that I cannot do anything of the kind, without being made acquainted with your object."

"Unfortunately, my dear Monsieur Malicorne, it is quite impossible for me to give you any explanation; you must therefore confide in me as in a friend who got you out of a great difficulty yesterday, and who now begs you to draw him out of one to-day."

"Yet I told you, monsieur, what my object was; which was, not to sleep out in the open air, and any man might express the same wish, whilst you, however, admit nothing."

"Believe me, my dear Monsieur Malicorne," Saint-Aignan persisted, "that if I were permitted to explain myself, I would do so."

"In that case, my dear monsieur, it is impossible for me to allow you to enter Mademoiselle de Montalais's apartment."

"Why so?"

“You know why, better than any one else, since you caught me on the wall paying my addresses to Mademoiselle de Montalais; it would, therefore, be an excess of kindness on my part, you will admit, since I am paying my attentions to her, to open the door of her room to you.”

“But who told you it was on her account I asked you for the key?”

“For whom, then?”

“She does not lodge there alone, I suppose?”

“No, certainly; for Mademoiselle de la Vallière shares her rooms with her; but, really, you have nothing more to do with Mademoiselle de la Vallière than with Mademoiselle de Montalais, and there are only two men to whom I would give this key; to M. de Bragelonne, if he begged me to give it to him, and to the king, if he commanded me.”

“In that case, give me the key, monsieur: I order you to do so,” said the king, advancing from the obscurity, and partially opening his cloak. “Mademoiselle de Montalais will step down to talk with you, while we go up-stairs to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, for, in fact, it is she only whom we desire to see.”

“The king!” exclaimed Malicorne, bowing to the very ground.

“Yes, the king,” said Louis, smiling: “the king, who is as pleased with your resistance as with your capitulation. Rise, monsieur, and render us the service we request of you.”

“I obey, your majesty,” said Malicorne, leading the way up the staircase.

“Get Mademoiselle de Montalais to come down,” said the king, “and do not breathe a word to her of my visit.”

Malicorne bowed in token of obedience, and proceeded up the staircase. But the king, after a hasty reflection, followed him, and that, too, with such rapidity, that, although Malicorne was already more than half-way up the staircase, the king reached the room at the same moment. He then observed, by the door which remained half-opened behind Malicorne, La Vallière, sitting in an armchair with her head thrown back, and in the opposite corner Montalais, who, in her dressing-

gown, was standing before a looking-glass, engaged in arranging her hair, and parleying the while with Malicorne. The king hurriedly opened the door and entered the room. Montalais called out at the noise made by the opening of the door, and, recognizing the king, made her escape. La Vallière rose from her seat, like a dead person galvanized, and then fell back in her armchair. The king advanced slowly towards her.

"You wished for an audience, I believe," he said coldly. "I am ready to hear you. Speak."

Saint-Aignan, faithful to his character of being deaf, blind, and dumb, had stationed himself in a corner of the door, upon a stool which by chance he found there. Concealed by the tapestry which covered the doorway, and leaning his back against the wall, he could thus listen without being seen; resigning himself to the post of a good watch-dog, who patiently waits and watches without ever getting in his master's way.

La Vallière, terror-stricken at the king's irritated aspect, rose a second time, and assuming a posture full of humility and entreaty, murmured, "Forgive me, sire."

"What need is there for my forgiveness?" asked Louis.

"Sire, I have been guilty of a great fault; nay, more than a great fault, a great crime."

"You?"

"Sire, I have offended your majesty."

"Not in the slightest degree in the world," replied Louis XIV.

"I implore you, sire, not to maintain towards me that terrible seriousness of manner which reveals your majesty's just anger. I feel I have offended you, sire; but I wish to explain to you how it was that I have not offended you of my own accord."

"In the first place," said the king, "in what way can you possibly have offended me? I cannot perceive how. Surely not on account of a young girl's harmless and very innocent jest? You turned the credulity of a

young man into ridicule—it was very natural to do so: any other woman in your place would have done the same."

"Oh! your majesty overwhelms me by your remark."

"Why so?"

"Because, if I had been the author of the jest, it would not have been innocent."

"Well, is that all you had to say to me in soliciting an audience?" said the king, as though about to turn away.

Thereupon La Vallière, in an abrupt and a broken voice, her eyes dried up by the fire of her tears, made a step towards the king, and said, "Did your majesty hear everything?"

"Everything, what?"

"Everything I said beneath the royal oak."

"I did not lose a syllable."

"And now, after your majesty really heard all, are you able to think I abused your credibility?"

"Credulity; yes, indeed, you have selected the very word."

"And your majesty did not suppose that a poor girl like myself might possibly be compelled to submit to the will of others?"

"Forgive me," returned the king; "but I shall never be able to understand that she, who of her own free will could express herself so unreservedly beneath the royal oak, would allow herself to be influenced to such an extent by the direction of others."

"But the threat held out against me, sire."

"Threat! who threatened you—who dared to threaten you?"

"Those who have the right to do so, sire."

"I do not recognize any one as possessing the right to threaten the humblest of my subjects."

"Forgive me, sire, but near your majesty, even, there are persons sufficiently high in position to have, or to believe that they possess, the right of injuring a young girl, without fortune, and possessing only her

reputation."

"In what way injure her?"

"In depriving her of her reputation, by disgracefully expelling her from the court."

"Oh! Mademoiselle de la Vallière," said the king bitterly, "I prefer those persons who exculpate themselves without incriminating others."

"Sire!"

"Yes; and I confess that I greatly regret to perceive, that an easy justification, as your own would have been, is now complicated in my presence by a tissue of reproaches and imputations against others."

"And which you do not believe?" exclaimed La Vallière. The king remained silent.

"Nay, but tell me!" repeated La Vallière, vehemently.

"I regret to confess it," repeated the king, bowing coldly.

The young girl uttered a deep groan, striking her hands together in despair. "You do not believe me, then," she said to the king, who still remained silent, while poor La Vallière's features became visibly changed at his continued silence. "Therefore, you believe," she said, "that I pre-arranged this ridiculous, this infamous plot, of trifling, in so shameless a manner, with your majesty."

"Nay," said the king, "it was neither ridiculous nor infamous; it was not even a plot; merely a jest, more or less amusing, and nothing more."

"Oh!" murmured the young girl, "the king does not, and will not believe me, then?"

"No, indeed, I will not believe you," said the king. "Besides, in point of fact, what can be more natural? The king, you argue, follows me, listens to me, watches me; the king wishes perhaps to amuse himself at my expense, I will amuse myself at his, and as the king is very tender-hearted, I will take his heart by storm."

La Vallière hid her face in her hands, as she stifled her sobs. The king continued pitilessly; he was revenging himself upon the poor victim before him for all he had himself suffered.

“Let us invent, then, this story of my loving him and preferring him to others. The king is so simple and so conceited that he will believe me; and then we can go and tell others how credulous the king is, and can enjoy a laugh at his expense.”

“Oh!” exclaimed La Vallière, “you think that, you believe that!—it is frightful.”

“And,” pursued the king, “that is not all; if this self-conceited prince take our jest seriously, if he should be imprudent enough to exhibit before others anything like delight at it, well, in that case, the king will be humiliated before the whole court; and what a delightful story it will be, too, for him to whom I am really attached, in fact part of my dowry for my husband, to have the adventure to relate of the monarch who was so amusingly deceived by a young girl.”

“Sire!” exclaimed La Vallière, her mind bewildered, almost wandering, indeed, “not another word, I implore you; do you not see that you are killing me?”

“A jest, nothing but a jest,” murmured the king, who, however, began to be somewhat affected.

La Vallière fell upon her knees, and that so violently, that the sound could be heard upon the hard floor. “Sire,” she said, “I prefer shame to disloyalty.”

“What do you mean?” inquired the king, without moving a step to raise the young girl from her knees.

“Sire, when I shall have sacrificed my honor and my reason both to you, you will perhaps believe in my loyalty. The tale which was related to you in Madame’s apartments, and by Madame herself, is utterly false; and that which I said beneath the great oak—”

“Well!”

“That is the only truth.”

“What!” exclaimed the king.

“Sire,” exclaimed La Vallière, hurried away by the violence of her emotions, “were I to die of shame on the very spot where my knees are fixed, I would repeat it until my latest breath; I said that I loved you, and it is true; I do love you.”

“You!”

“I have loved you, sire, from the very first day I ever saw you; from the moment when at Blois, where I was pining away my existence, your royal looks, full of light and life, were first bent upon me. I love you still, sire; it is a crime of high treason, I know, that a poor girl like myself should love her sovereign, and should presume to tell him so. Punish me for my audacity, despise me for my shameless immodesty; but do not ever say, do not ever think, that I have jested with or deceived you. I belong to a family whose loyalty has been proved, sire, and I, too, love my king.”

Suddenly her strength, voice, and respiration ceased, and she fell forward, like the flower Virgil alludes to, which the scythe of the reaper severed in the midst of the grass. The king, at these words, at this vehement entreaty, no longer retained any ill-will or doubt in his mind: his whole heart seemed to expand at the glowing breath of an affection which proclaimed itself in such noble and courageous language. When, therefore, he heard the passionate confession, his strength seemed to fail him, and he hid his face in his hands. But when he felt La Vallière’s hands clinging to his own, when their warm pressure fired his blood, he bent forward, and passing his arm round La Vallière’s waist, he raised her from the ground and pressed her against his heart. But she, her drooping head fallen forward on her bosom, seemed to have ceased to live. The king, terrified, called out for Saint-Aignan. Saint-Aignan, who had carried his discretion so far as to remain without stirring in his corner, pretending to wipe away a tear, ran forward at the king’s summons. He then assisted Louis to seat the young girl upon a couch, slapped her hands, sprinkled some Hungary water over her face, calling out all the while, “Come, come, it is all over; the king believes you, and forgives you. There, there now! take care, or you will agitate his majesty

too much; his majesty is so sensitive, so tender-hearted. Now, really, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, you must pay attention, for the king is very pale."

The fact was, the king was visibly losing color. But La Vallière did not move.

"Do pray recover," continued Saint-Aignan. "I beg, I implore you; it is really time you should; think only of one thing, that if the king should become unwell, I should be obliged to summon his physician. What a state of things that would be! So do pray rouse yourself; make an effort, pray do, and do so at once, my dear."

It was difficult to display more persuasive eloquence than Saint-Aignan did, but something still more powerful, and of a more energetic nature than this eloquence, aroused La Vallière. The king, who was kneeling before her, covered the palms of her hands with those burning kisses which are to the hands what a kiss upon the lips is to the face. La Vallière's senses returned to her; she languidly opened her eyes and, with a dying look, murmured, "Oh! sire, has your majesty pardoned me, then?"

The king did not reply, for he was still too much overcome. Saint-Aignan thought it was his duty again to retire, for he observed the passionate devotion which was displayed in the king's gaze. La Vallière rose.

"And now, sire, that I have justified myself, at least I trust so, in your majesty's eyes, grant me leave to retire into a convent. I shall bless your majesty all my life, and I shall die thanking and loving Heaven for having granted me one hour of perfect happiness."

"No, no," replied the king, "you will live here blessing Heaven, on the contrary, but loving Louis, who will make your existence one of perfect felicity—Louis who loves you—Louis who swears it."

"Oh! sire, sire!"

And upon this doubt of La Vallière, the king's kisses became so warm that Saint-Aignan thought it was his duty to retire behind the tapestry. These kisses, however, which she had not the strength at first to resist, began to intimidate the young girl.

"Oh! sire," she exclaimed, "do not make me repeat my loyalty, for this would show me that your majesty despises me still."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière," said the king, suddenly, drawing back with an air full of respect, "there is nothing in the world that I love and honor more than yourself, and nothing in my court, I call Heaven to witness, shall be so highly regarded as you shall be henceforward. I entreat your forgiveness for my transport; it arose from an excess of affection, but I can prove to you that I love you more than ever by respecting you as much as you can possibly desire or deserve." Then, bending before her, and taking her by the hand, he said to her, "Will you honor me by accepting the kiss I press upon your hand?" And the king's lips were pressed respectfully and lightly upon the young girl's trembling hand. "Henceforth," added Louis, rising and bending his glance upon La Vallière, "henceforth you are under my safeguard. Do not speak to any one of the injury I have done you, forgive others that which they may have attempted. For the future, you shall be so far above all those, that, far from inspiring you with fear, they shall be even beneath your pity." And he bowed as reverently as though he were leaving a place of worship. Then calling to Saint-Aignan, who approached with great humility, he said, "I hope, comte, that Mademoiselle de la Vallière will kindly confer a little of her friendship upon you, in return for that which I have vowed to her eternally."

Saint-Aignan bent his knee before La Vallière, saying, "How happy, indeed, would such an honor make me!"

"I will send your companion back to you," said the king. "Farewell! or, rather, adieu till we meet again; do not forget me in your prayers, I entreat."

"Oh!" cried La Vallière, "be assured that you and Heaven are in my heart together."

These words of Louise elated the king, who, full of happiness, hurried Saint-Aignan down the stairs. Madame had not anticipated this *denouement*; and neither the Naiad nor the Dryad had breathed a word about it.

Chapter LX. The New General of the Jesuits.

While La Vallière and the king were mingling, in their first confession of love, all the bitterness of the past, the happiness of the present, and hopes of the future, Fouquet had retired to the apartments which had been assigned to him in the chateau, and was conversing with Aramis precisely upon the very subjects which the king at that moment was forgetting.

“Now tell me,” said Fouquet, after having installed his guest in an armchair and seated himself by his side, “tell me, Monsieur d’Herblay, what is our position with regard to the Belle-Isle affair, and whether you have received any news about it.”

“Everything is going on in that direction as we wish,” replied Aramis; “the expenses have been paid, and nothing has transpired of our designs.”

“But what about the soldiers the king wished to send there?”

“I have received news this morning they arrived there fifteen days ago.”

“And how have they been treated?”

“In the best manner possible.”

“What has become of the former garrison?”

“The soldiers were landed at Sarzeau, and then transferred immediately to Quimper.”

“And the new garrison?”

“Belongs to us from this very moment.”

“Are you sure of what you say, my dear Monsieur de Vannes?”

“Quite sure, and, moreover, you will see by and by how matters have turned out.”

“Still you are very well aware, that, of all the garrison towns, Belle-Isle is precisely the very worst.”

“I know it, and have acted accordingly; no space to move about, no gayety, no cheerful society, no gambling permitted: well, it is a great pity,” added Aramis, with one of those smiles so peculiar to him, “to see how much young people at the present day seek amusement, and how much, consequently, they incline to the man who procures and pays for their favorite pastimes.”

“But if they amuse themselves at Bell-Isle?”

“If they amuse themselves through the king’s means, they will attach themselves to the king; but if they get bored to death through the king’s means, and amuse themselves through M. Fouquet, they will attach themselves to M. Fouquet.”

“And you informed my intendant, of course?—so that immediately on their arrival—”

“By no means; they were left alone a whole week, to weary themselves at their ease; but, at the end of the week, they cried out, saying that former officers amused themselves much better. Whereupon they were told that the old officers had been able to make a friend of M. Fouquet, and that M. Fouquet, knowing them to be friends of his, had from that moment done all he possibly could to prevent their getting wearied or bored upon his estates. Upon this they began to reflect. Immediately afterwards, however, the intendant added, that without anticipating M. Fouquet’s orders, he knew his master sufficiently well to be aware that he took an interest in every gentleman in the king’s service, and that, although he did not know the new-comers, he would do as much for them as he had done for the others.”

“Excellent! and I trust that the promises were followed up; I desire, as you know, that no promise should ever be made in my name without being kept.”

“Without a moment’s loss of time, our two privateers, and your own horses, were placed at the disposal of the officers; the keys of the principal mansion were handed over to them, so that they made up hunting-parties, and walking excursions with such ladies as are to be found in Belle-Isle; and such other as they are enabled to enlist from the neighborhood, who have no fear of sea-sickness.”

“And there is a fair sprinkling to be met with at Sarzeau and Vannes, I believe, your eminence?”

“Yes; in fact all along the coast,” said Aramis, quietly.

“And now, how about the soldiers?”

“Everything precisely the same, in a relative degree, you understand; the soldiers have plenty of wine, excellent provisions, and good pay.”

“Very good; so that—”

“So that this garrison can be depended upon, and it is a better one than the last.”

“Good.”

“The result is, if Fortune favors us, so that the garrisons are changed in this manner, only every two months, that, at the end of every three years, the whole army will, in its turn, have been there; and, therefore, instead of having one regiment in our favor, we shall have fifty thousand men.”

“Yes, yes; I knew perfectly well,” said Fouquet, “that no friend could be more incomparable and invaluable than yourself, my dear Monsieur d’Herblay; but,” he added, laughing, “all this time we are forgetting our friend, Du Vallon; what has become of him? During the three days I spent at Saint-Mande, I confess I have forgotten him completely.”

“I do not forget him, however,” returned Aramis. “Porthos is at Saint-Mande; his joints are kept well greased, the greatest care is being taken care of him with regard to the food he eats, and the wines he drinks; I advise him to take daily airings in the small park, which you have kept for your own use, and he makes us of it accordingly. He begins to walk again, he exercises his muscular powers by bending down young elm-

trees, or making the old oaks fly into splinters, as Milo of Crotona used to do; and, as there are no lions in the park, it is not unlikely we shall find him alive. Porthos is a brave fellow."

"Yes, but in the mean time he will get bored to death."

"Oh, no; he never does that."

"He will be asking questions?"

"He sees no one."

"At all events, he is looking or hoping for something or another."

"I have inspired in him a hope which we will realize some fine morning, and on that he subsists."

"What is it?"

"That of being presented to the king."

"Oh! in what character?"

"As the engineer of Belle-Isle, of course."

"Is it possible?"

"Quite true."

"Shall we not be obliged, then, to send him back to Belle-Isle?"

"Most certainly; I am even thinking of sending him as soon as possible. Porthos is very fond of display; he is man whose weakness D'Artagnan, Athos, and myself are alone acquainted with; he never commits himself in any way; he is dignity himself; to the officers there, he would seem like a Paladin of the time of the Crusades. He would make the whole staff drunk, without getting tipsy in the least himself, and every one will regard him with admiration and sympathy; if, therefore, it should happen that we have any orders requiring to be carried out, Porthos is an incarnation of the order itself, and whatever he chose to do others would find themselves obliged to submit to."

"Send him back, then."

"That is what I intend to do; but only in a few days; for I must not omit to tell you one thing."

"What is it?"

“I begin to mistrust D’Artagnan. He is not at Fontainebleau, as you may have noticed, and D’Artagnan is never absent, or apparently idle, without some object in view. And now that my own affairs are settled, I am going to try and ascertain what the affairs are in which D’Artagnan is engaged.”

“Your own affairs are settled, you say?”

“Yes.”

“You are very fortunate in that case, then, and I should like to be able to say the same.”

“I hope you do not make yourself uneasy.”

“Hum!”

“Nothing could be better than the king’s reception of you.”

“True.”

“And Colbert leaves you in peace.”

“Nearly so.”

“In that case,” said Aramis, with that connection of ideas which marked him, “in that case, then, we can bestow a thought upon the young girl I was speaking to you about yesterday.”

“Whom do you mean?”

“What, have you forgotten already? I mean La Vallière.”

“Ah! of course, of course.”

“Do you object, then, to try and make a conquest of her?”

“In one respect only; my heart is engaged in another direction, and I positively do not care about the girl in the least.”

“Oh, oh!” said Aramis, “your heart is engaged, you say. The deuce! we must take care of that.”

“Why?”

“Because it is terrible to have the heart occupied, when others, besides yourself, have so much need of the head.”

“You are right. So you see, at your first summons, I left everything. But to return to this girl. What good do you see in my troubling myself about her?”

“This.—The king, it is said, has taken a fancy to her; at least, so it is supposed.”

“But you, who know everything, know very differently.”

“I know that the king is greatly and suddenly changed; that the day before yesterday he was crazy over Madame; that a few days ago, Monsieur complained of it, even to the queen-mother; and that some conjugal misunderstandings and maternal scoldings were the consequence.”

“How do you know all that?”

“I do know it; at all events, since these misunderstandings and scoldings, the king has not addressed a word, has not paid the slightest attention, to her royal highness.”

“Well, what next?”

“Since then, he has been taken up with Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Now, Mademoiselle de la Vallière is one of Madame’s maids of honor. You happen to know, I suppose, what is called a *chaperon* in matters of love. Well, then, Mademoiselle de la Vallière is Madame’s *chaperon*. It is for you to take advantage of this state of things. You have no occasion for me to tell you that. But, at all events, wounded vanity will render the conquest an easier one; the girl will get hold of the king, and Madame’s secret, and you can scarcely predict what a man of intelligence can do with a secret.”

“But how to get at her?”

“Nay, you, of all men, to ask me such a question!” said Aramis.

“Very true. I shall not have any time to take any notice of her.”

“She is poor and unassuming, you will create a position for her, and whether she tames the king as his lady confessor, or his sweetheart, you will have enlisted a new and valuable ally.”

“Very good,” said Fouquet. “What is to be done, then, with regard to this girl?”

“Whenever you have taken a fancy to any lady, Monsieur Fouquet, what course have you generally pursued?”

“I have written to her, protesting my devotion to her. I have added, how happy I should be to render her any service in my power, and have signed ‘Fouquet,’ at the end of the letter.”

“And has any one offered resistance?”

“One person only,” replied Fouquet. “But, four days ago, she yielded, as the others had done.”

“Will you take the trouble to write?” said Aramis, holding a pen towards him, which Fouquet took, saying:

“I will write at your dictation. My head is so taken up in another direction, that I should not be able to write a couple lines.”

“Very well,” said Aramis, “write.”

And he dictated, as follows: “Mademoiselle—I have seen you—and you will not be surprised to learn, I think you very beautiful. But, for want of the position you merit at court, your presence there is a waste of time. The devotion of a man of honor, should ambition of any kind inspire you, might possibly serve as a means of display for your talent and beauty. I place my devotion at your feet; but, as an affection, however reserved and unpresuming it may be, might possibly compromise the object of its worship, it would ill become a person of your merit running the risk of being compromised, without her future being assured. If you would deign to accept, and reply to my affection, my affection shall prove its gratitude to you in making you free and independent forever.”

Having finished writing, Fouquet looked at Aramis.

“Sign it,” said the latter.

“Is it absolutely necessary?”

“Your signature at the foot of that letter is worth a million; you forget that.” Fouquet signed.

“Now, by whom do you intend to send this letter?” asked Aramis.

“By an excellent servant of mine.”

“Can you rely on him?”

“He is a man who has been with me all my life.”

“Very well. Besides, in this case, we are not playing for very heavy stakes.”

“How so? For if what you say be true of the accommodating disposition of this girl for the king and Madame, the king will give her all the money she can ask for.”

“The king has money, then?” asked Aramis.

“I suppose so, for he has not asked me for any more.”

“Be easy, he will ask for some, soon.”

“Nay, more than that, I had thought he would have spoken to me about the *fete* at Vaux, but he never said a word about it.”

“He will be sure to do so, though.”

“You must think the king’s disposition a very cruel one, Monsieur d’Herblay.”

“It is not he who is so.”

“He is young, and therefore his disposition is a kind one.”

“He is young, and either he is weak, or his passions are strong; and Monsieur Colbert holds his weakness and his passions in his villainous grasp.”

“You admit that you fear him?”

“I do not deny it.”

“I that case I am lost.”

“Why so?”

“My only influence with the king has been through the money I commanded, and now I am a ruined man.”

“Not so.”

“What do you mean by ‘not so?’ Do you know my affairs better than myself?”

"That is not unlikely."

"If he were to request this *fete* to be given?"

"You would give it, of course."

"But where is the money to come from?"

"Have you ever been in want of any?"

"Oh! if you only knew at what a cost I procured the last supply."

"The next shall cost you nothing."

"But who will give it me?"

"I will."

"What, give me six millions?"

"Ten, if necessary."

"Upon my word, D'Herblay," said Fouquet, "your confidence alarms me more than the king's displeasure. Who can you possibly be, after all?"

"You know me well enough, I should think."

"Of course; but what is it you are aiming at?"

"I wish to see upon the throne of France a king devoted to Monsieur Fouquet, and I wish Monsieur Fouquet to be devoted to me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Fouquet, pressing his hand,—"as for being devoted to you, I am yours, entirely; but believe me, my dear D'Herblay, you are deceiving yourself."

"In what respect?"

"The king will never become devoted to me."

"I do not remember to have said that King Louis would ever become devoted to you."

"Why, on the contrary, you have this moment said so."

"I did not say *the* king; I said *a* king."

"Is it not all the same?"

"No, on the contrary, it is altogether different."

"I do not understand you."

“You will do so, shortly, then; suppose, for instance, the king in question were to be a very different person to Louis XIV.”

“Another person.”

“Yes, who is indebted for everything to you.”

“Impossible.”

“His very throne, even.”

“You are mad, D’Herblay. There is no man living besides Louis XIV. who can sit on the throne of France. I know of none, not one.”

“*But* I know one.”

“Unless it be Monsieur,” said Fouquet, looking at Aramis uneasily; “yet Monsieur—”

“It is *not* Monsieur.”

“But how can it be, that a prince not of the royal line, that a prince without any right—”

“My king, or rather your king, will be everything that is necessary, be assured of that.”

“Be careful, Monsieur d’Herblay, you make my blood run cold, and my head swim.”

Aramis smiled. “There is but little occasion for that,” he replied.

“Again, I repeat, you terrify me,” said Fouquet. Aramis smiled.

“You laugh,” said Fouquet.

“The day will come when you will laugh too; only at the present moment I must laugh alone.”

“But explain yourself.”

“When the proper time comes, I will explain all. Fear nothing. Have faith in me, and doubt nothing.”

“The fact is, I cannot but doubt, because I do not see clearly, or even at all.”

“That is because of your blindness; but a day will come when you will be enlightened.”

“Oh!” said Fouquet, “how willingly would I believe.”

“You, without belief! you, who, through my means, have ten times crossed the abyss yawning at your feet, and in which, had you been alone, you would have been irretrievably swallowed; you, without belief; you, who from procureur-general attained the rank of intendant, from the rank of intendant, that of the first minister of the crown, and who from the rank of first minister will pass to that of mayor of the palace. But no,” he said, with the same unaltered smile, “no, no, you cannot see, and consequently cannot believe—what I tell you.” And Aramis rose to withdraw.

“One word more,” said Fouquet; “you have never yet spoken to me in this manner, you have never yet shown yourself so confident, I should rather say so daring.”

“Because it is necessary, in order to speak confidently, to have the lips unfettered.”

“And that is now your case?”

“Yes.”

“Since a very short time, then?”

“Since yesterday, only.”

“Oh! Monsieur d’Herblay, take care, your confidence is becoming audacity.”

“One can well be audacious when one is powerful.”

“And you are powerful?”

“I have already offered you ten millions; I repeat the offer.”

Fouquet rose, profoundly agitated.

“Come,” he said, “come; you spoke of overthrowing kings and replacing them by others. If, indeed, I am not really out of my senses, is or is not that what you said just now?”

“You are by no means out of your senses, for it is perfectly true I did say all that just now.”

“And why did you say so?”

“Because it is easy to speak in this manner of thrones being cast down, and kings being raised up, when one is, one’s self, far above all kings and thrones, of this world at least.”

“Your power is infinite, then?” cried Fouquet.

“I have told you so already, and I repeat it,” replied Aramis, with glistening eyes and trembling lips.

Fouquet threw himself back in his chair, and buried his face in his hands. Aramis looked at him for a moment, as the angel of human destinies might have looked upon a simple mortal.

“Adieu,” he said to him, “sleep undisturbed, and send your letter to La Vallière. To-morrow we shall see each other again.”

“Yes, to-morrow,” said Fouquet, shaking his hands like a man returning to his senses. “But where shall we see each other?”

“At the king’s promenade, if you like.”

“Agreed.” And they separated.

Chapter LXI. The Storm.

The dawn of the following day was dark and gloomy, and as every one knew that the promenade was down in the royal programme, every one's gaze, as his eyes were opened, was directed towards the sky. Just above the tops of the trees a thick, suffocating vapor seemed to remain suspended, with barely sufficient power to rise thirty feet above the ground under the influence of the sun's rays, which was scarcely visible as a faint spot of lesser darkness through the veil of heavy mist. No dew had fallen in the morning; the turf was dried up for want of moisture, the flowers withered. The birds sang less inspiringly than usual upon the boughs, which remained motionless as the limbs of corpses. The strange confused and animated murmurs, which seemed born and to exist in virtue of the sun, that respiration of nature which is unceasingly heard amidst all other sounds, could not be heard now, and never had the silence been so profound.

The king had noticed the cheerless aspect of the heavens as he approached the window immediately upon rising. But as all the necessary directions had been given respecting the promenade, and every preparation had been made accordingly, and as, which was far more imperious than anything else, Louis relied upon this promenade to satisfy the cravings of his imagination, and we will even already say, the clamorous desires of his heart—the king unhesitatingly decided that the appearance of the heavens had nothing whatever to do with the matter; that the promenade was arranged, and that, whatever the state of the weather, the promenade should take place. Besides, there are certain terrestrial sovereigns who seem to have accorded them privileged existences, and there are certain times when it might almost be

supposed that the expressed wish of an earthly monarch has its influence over the Divine will. It was Virgil who observed of Augustus: *Nocte pluit tota redeunt spectacula mane.* 10

Louis attended mass as usual, but it was evident that his attention was somewhat distracted from the presence of the Creator by the remembrance of the creature. His mind was occupied during the service in reckoning more than once the number of minutes, then of seconds, which separated him from the blissful moment when the promenade would begin, that is to say, the moment when Madame would set out with her maids of honor. Besides, as a matter of course, everybody at the chateau was ignorant of the interview which had taken place between La Vallière and the king. Montalais, perhaps, with her usual chattering propensity, might have been disposed to talk about it; but Montalais on this occasion was held in check by Malicorne, who had securely fastened on her pretty lips the golden padlock of mutual interest. As for Louis XIV., his happiness was so extreme that he had forgiven Madame, or nearly so, her little piece of malice of the previous evening. In fact, he had occasion to congratulate himself rather than to complain of it. Had it not been for her ill-natured action, he would not have received the letter from La Vallière; had it not been for the letter, he would have had no interview; and had it not been for the interview he would have remained undecided. His heart was filled with too much happiness for any ill-feeling to remain in it, at that moment at least. Instead, therefore, of knitting his brows into a frown when he perceived his sister-in-law, Louis resolved to receive her in a more friendly and gracious manner than usual. But on one condition only, that she would be ready to set out early. Such was the nature of Louis's thoughts during mass; which made him, during the ceremony, forget matters which, in his character of Most Christian King and of the eldest son of the Church, ought to have occupied his attention. He returned to the chateau, and as the promenade was fixed for midday, and it was at present just ten o'clock, he set to work desperately with Colbert and Lyonne. But even while he worked Louis went from the table to the window, inasmuch as the window looked out upon Madame's pavilion: he could see M. Fouquet in

the courtyard, to whom the courtiers, since the favor shown towards him on the previous evening, paid greater attention than ever. The king, instinctively, on noticing Fouquet, turned towards Colbert, who was smiling, and seemed full of benevolence and delight, a state of feeling which had arisen from the very moment one of his secretaries had entered and handed him a pocket-book, which he had put unopened into his pocket. But, as there was always something sinister at the bottom of any delight expressed by Colbert, Louis preferred, of the smiles of the two men, that of Fouquet. He beckoned to the superintendent to come up, and turning towards Lyonne and Colbert, he said:—"Finish this matter, place it on my desk, and I will read it at my leisure." And he left the room. At the sign the king had made to him, Fouquet had hastened up the staircase, while Aramis, who was with the superintendent, quietly retired among the group of courtiers and disappeared without having been even observed by the king. The king and Fouquet met at the top of the staircase.

"Sire," said Fouquet, remarking the gracious manner in which Louis was about to receive him, "your majesty has overwhelmed me with kindness during the last few days. It is not a youthful monarch, but a being of higher order, who reigns over France, one whom pleasure, happiness, and love acknowledge as their master." The king colored. The compliment, although flattering, was not the less somewhat pointed. Louis conducted Fouquet to a small room that divided his study from his sleeping-apartment.

"Do you know why I summoned you?" said the king as he seated himself upon the edge of the window, so as not to lose anything that might be passing in the gardens which fronted the opposite entrance to Madame's pavilion.

"No, sire," replied Fouquet, "but I am sure for something agreeable, if I am to judge from your majesty's gracious smile."

"You are mistaken, then."

"I, sire?"

"For I summoned you, on the contrary, to pick a quarrel with you."

"With me, sire?"

"Yes: and that a serious one."

"Your majesty alarms me—and yet I was most confident in your justice and goodness."

"Do you know I am told, Monsieur Fouquet, that you are preparing a grand *fete* at Vaux."

Fouquet smiled, as a sick man would do at the first shiver of a fever which has left him but returns again.

"And that you have not invited me!" continued the king.

"Sire," replied Fouquet, "I have not even thought of the *fete* you speak of, and it was only yesterday evening that one of my *friends*," Fouquet laid a stress upon the word, "was kind enough to make me think of it."

"Yet I saw you yesterday evening, Monsieur Fouquet, and you said nothing to me about it."

"How dared I hope that your majesty would so greatly descend from your own exalted station as to honor my dwelling with your royal presence?"

"Excuse me, Monsieur Fouquet, you did not speak to me about your *fete*."

"I did not allude to the *fete* to your majesty, I repeat, in the first place, because nothing had been decided with regard to it, and, secondly, because I feared a refusal."

"And something made you fear a refusal, Monsieur Fouquet? You see I am determined to push you hard."

"The profound wish I had that your majesty should accept my invitation—"

"Well, Monsieur Fouquet, nothing is easier, I perceive, than our coming to an understanding. Your wish is to invite me to your *fete*, my own is to be present at it; invite me and I will go."

"Is it possible that your majesty will deign to accept?" murmured the superintendent.

“Why, really, monsieur,” said the king, laughing, “I think I do more than accept; I rather fancy I am inviting myself.”

“Your majesty overwhelms me with honor and delight,” exclaimed Fouquet, “but I shall be obliged to repeat what M. Vieuville said to your ancestor, Henry IV., *Domine non sum dignus*.” [11]

“To which I reply, Monsieur Fouquet, that if you give a *fete*, I will go, whether I am invited or not.”

“I thank your majesty deeply,” said Fouquet, as he raised his head beneath this favor, which he was convinced would be his ruin.

“But how could your majesty have been informed of it?”

“By a public rumor, Monsieur Fouquet, which says such wonderful things of yourself and the marvels of your house. Would you become proud, Monsieur Fouquet, if the king were to be jealous of you?”

“I should be the happiest man in the world, sire, since the very day on which your majesty were to be jealous of Vaux, I should possess something worthy of being offered to you.”

“Very well, Monsieur Fouquet, prepare your *fete*, and open the door of your house as wide as possible.”

“It is for your majesty to fix the day.”

“This day month, then.”

“Has your majesty any further commands?”

“Nothing, Monsieur Fouquet, except from the present moment until then to have you near me as much as possible.”

“I have the honor to form one of your majesty’s party for the promenade.”

“Very good; indeed, I am now setting out; for there are the ladies, I see, who are going to start.”

With this remark, the king, with all the eagerness, not only of a young man, but of a young man in love, withdrew from the window, in order to take his gloves and cane, which his valet held ready for him. The neighing of the horses and the crunching of the wheels on the gravel of

the courtyard could be distinctly heard. The king descended the stairs, and at the moment he appeared upon the flight of steps, every one stopped. The king walked straight up to the young queen. The queen-mother, who was still suffering more than ever from the illness with which she was afflicted, did not wish to go out. Maria Theresa accompanied Madame in her carriage, and asked the king in what direction he wished the promenade to drive. The king, who had just seen La Vallière, still pale from the event of the previous evening, get into a carriage with three of her companions, told the queen that he had no preference, and wherever she would like to go, there would he be with her. The queen then desired that the outriders should proceed in the direction of Apremont. The outriders set off accordingly before the others. The king rode on horseback, and for a few minutes accompanied the carriage of the queen and Madame. The weather had cleared up a little, but a kind of veil of dust, like a thick gauze, was still spread over the surface of the heavens, and the sun made every atom glisten within the circuit of its rays. The heat was stifling; but, as the king did not seem to pay any attention to the appearance of the heavens, no one made himself uneasy about it, and the promenade, in obedience to the orders given by the queen, took its course in the direction of Apremont. The courtiers who followed were in the very highest spirits; it was evident that every one tried to forget, and to make others forget, the bitter discussions of the previous evening. Madame, particularly, was delightful. In fact, seeing the king at the door of her carriage, as she did not suppose he would be there for the queen's sake, she hoped that her prince had returned to her. Hardly, however, had they proceeded a quarter of a mile on the road, when the king, with a gracious smile, saluted them and drew up his horse, leaving the queen's carriage to pass on, then that of the principal ladies of honor, and then all the others in succession, who, seeing the king stop, wished in their turn to stop too; but the king made a sign to them to continue their progress. When La Vallière's carriage passed, the king approached it, saluted the ladies who were inside, and was preparing to accompany the carriage containing the maids of honor, in the same way he had followed that in which Madame

was, when suddenly the whole file of carriages stopped. It was probable that Madame, uneasy at the king having left her, had just given directions for the performance of this maneuver, the direction in which the promenade was to take place having been left to her. The king, having sent to inquire what her object was in stopping the cavalcade, was informed in reply, that she wished to walk. She most likely hoped that the king, who was following the carriages of the maids of honor on horseback, would not venture to follow the maids of honor themselves on foot. They had arrived in the middle of the forest.

The promenade, in fact, was not ill-timed, especially for those who were dreamers or lovers. From the little open space where the halt had taken place, three beautiful long walks, shady and undulating, stretched out before them. These walks were covered with moss or with leaves that formed a carpet from the loom of nature; and each walk had its horizon in the distance, consisting of about a hand-breadth of sky, apparent through the interlacing of the branches of the trees. At the end of almost every walk, evidently in great tribulation and uneasiness, the startled deer were seen hurrying to and fro, first stopping for a moment in the middle of the path, and then raising their heads they fled with the speed of an arrow or bounded into the depths of the forest, where they disappeared from view; now and then a rabbit, of philosophical mien, might be noticed quietly sitting upright, rubbing his muzzle with his fore paws, and looking about inquiringly, as though wondering whether all these people, who were approaching in his direction, and who had just disturbed him in his meditations and his meal, were not followed by their dogs, or had not their guns under their arms. All alighted from their carriages as soon as they observed that the queen was doing so. Maria Theresa took the arm of one of her ladies of honor, and, with a side glance towards the king, who did not perceive that he was in the slightest degree the object of the queen's attention, entered the forest by the first path before her. Two of the outriders preceded her majesty with long poles, which they used for the purpose of putting the branches of the trees aside, or removing the bushes that might impede her progress. As soon as Madame alighted, she found the Comte de Guiche at her side,

who bowed and placed himself at her disposal. Monsieur, delighted with his bath of the two previous days, had announced his preference for the river, and, having given De Guiche leave of absence, remained at the chateau with the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp. He was not in the slightest degree jealous. He had been looked for to no purpose among those present; but as Monsieur was a man who thought a great deal of himself, and usually added very little to the general pleasure, his absence was rather a subject of satisfaction than regret. Every one had followed the example which the queen and Madame had set, doing just as they pleased, according as chance or fancy influenced them. The king, we have already observed, remained near La Vallière, and, throwing himself off his horse at the moment the door of her carriage was opened, he offered her his hand to alight. Montalais and Tonnay-Charente immediately drew back and kept at a distance; the former from calculated, the latter from natural motives. There was this difference, however, between the two, that the one had withdrawn from a wish to please the king, the other for a very opposite reason. During the last half-hour the weather also had undergone a change; the veil which had been spread over the sky, as if driven by a blast of heated air, had become massed together in the western part of the heavens; and afterwards, as if driven by a current of air from the opposite direction, was now advancing slowly and heavily towards them. The approach of the storm could be felt, but as the king did not perceive it, no one thought it proper to do so. The promenade was therefore continued; some of the company, with minds ill at ease on the subject, raised their eyes from time to time towards the sky; others, even more timid still, walked about without wandering too far from the carriages, where they relied upon taking shelter in case the storm burst. The greater number of these, however, observing that the king fearlessly entered the wood with La Vallière, followed his majesty. The king, noticing this, took La Vallière's hand, and led her to a lateral forest-alley; where no one this time ventured to follow him.

Chapter LXII. The Shower of Rain.

At this moment, and in the same direction, too, that the king and La Vallière had taken, except that they were in the wood itself instead of following the path, two men were walking together, utterly indifferent to the appearance of the heavens. Their heads were bent down in the manner of people occupied with matters of great moment. They had not observed either De Guiche or Madame, the king or La Vallière. Suddenly something fell through the air like a colossal sheet of flame, followed by a loud but distant rumbling noise.

"Ah!" said one of them, raising his head, "here comes the storm. Let us reach our carriages, my dear D'Herblay."

Aramis looked inquiringly at the heavens. "There is no occasion to hurry yet," he said; and then resuming the conversation where it had doubtless been interrupted, he said, "You were observing that the letter we wrote last evening must by this time have reached its destination?"

"I was saying that she certainly has it."

"Whom did you send it by?"

"By my own servant, as I have already told you."

"Did he bring back an answer?"

"I have not seen him since; the young girl was probably in attendance on Madame, or was in her own room dressing, and he may have had to wait. Our time for leaving arrived, and we set off, of course; I cannot, therefore, know what is going on yonder."

"Did you see the king before leaving?"

"Yes."

"How did he seem?"

“Nothing could have passed off better, or worse; according as he be sincere or hypocritical.”

“And the *fete?*”

“Will take place in a month.”

“He invited himself, you say?”

“With a pertinacity in which I detected Colbert’s influence. But has not last night removed your illusions?”

“What illusions?”

“With respect to the assistance you may be able to give me under these circumstances.”

“No; I have passed the night writing, and all my orders are given.”

“Do not conceal it from yourself, D’Herblay, but the *fete* will cost some millions.”

“I will supply six; do you on your side get two or three.”

“You are a wonderful man, my dear D’Herblay.”

Aramis smiled.

“But,” inquired Fouquet, with some remaining uneasiness, “how is it that while you are now squandering millions in this manner, a few days ago you did not pay the fifty thousand francs to Baisemeaux out of your own pocket?”

“Because a few days ago I was as poor as Job.”

“And to-day?”

“To-day I am wealthier than the king himself.”

“Very well,” said Fouquet; “I understand men pretty well; I know you are incapable of forfeiting your word; I do not wish to wrest your secret from you, and so let us talk no more about it.”

At this moment a dull, heavy rumbling was heard, which suddenly developed into a violent clap of thunder.

“Oh, oh!” said Fouquet, “I was quite right in what I said.”

“Come,” said Aramis, “let us rejoin the carriages.”

“We shall not have time,” said Fouquet, “for here comes the rain.”

In fact, as he spoke, and as if the heavens were opened, a shower of large drops of rain was suddenly heard pattering on the leaves about them.

“We shall have time,” said Aramis, “to reach the carriages before the foliage becomes saturated.”

“It will be better,” said Fouquet, “to take shelter somewhere—in a grotto, for instance.”

“Yes, but where are we to find a grotto?” inquired Aramis.

“I know one,” said Fouquet, smiling, “not ten paces from here.” Then looking round him, he added: “Yes, we are quite right.”

“You are very fortunate to have so good a memory,” said Aramis, smiling in his turn, “but are you not afraid that your coachman, finding we do not return, will suppose we have taken another road back, and that he will not follow the carriages belonging to the court?”

“Oh, there is no fear of that,” said Fouquet; “whenever I place my coachman and my carriage in any particular spot, nothing but an express order from the king could stir them; and more than that, too, it seems that we are not the only ones who have come so far, for I hear footsteps and the sound of voices.”

As he spoke, Fouquet turned round, and opened with his cane a mass of foliage which hid the path from his view. Aramis’s glance as well as his own plunged at the same moment through the aperture he had made.

“A woman,” said Aramis.

“And a man,” said Fouquet.

“It is La Vallière and the king,” they both exclaimed together.

“Oh, oh!” said Aramis, “is his majesty aware of your cavern as well? I should not be astonished if he were, for he seems to be on very good terms with the dryads of Fontainebleau.”

“Never mind,” said Fouquet; “let us get there. If he is not aware of it, we shall see what he will do if he should know it, as it has two entrances, so that whilst he enters by one, we can leave by the other.”

“Is it far?” asked Aramis, “for the rain is beginning to penetrate.”

“We are there now,” said Fouquet, as he pushed aside a few branches, and an excavation in the solid rock could be observed, hitherto concealed by heaths, ivy, and a thick covert of small shrubs.

Fouquet led the way, followed by Aramis; but as the latter entered the grotto, he turned round, saying: “Yes, they are entering the wood; and, see, they are bending their steps this way.”

“Very well; let us make room for them,” said Fouquet, smiling and pulling Aramis by his cloak; “but I do not think the king knows of my grotto.”

“Yes,” said Aramis, “they are looking about them, but it is only for a thicker tree.”

Aramis was not mistaken, the king’s looks were directed upward, and not around him. He held La Vallière’s arm within his own, and held her hand in his. La Vallière’s feet began to sleep on the damp grass. Louis again looked round him with greater attention than before, and perceiving an enormous oak with wide-spreading branches, he hurriedly drew La Vallière beneath its protecting shelter. The poor girl looked round her on all sides, and seemed half afraid, half desirous of being followed. The king made her lean back against the trunk of the tree, whose vast circumference, protected by the thickness of the foliage, was as dry as if at that moment the rain had not been falling in torrents. He himself remained standing before her with his head uncovered. After a few minutes, however, some drops of rain penetrated through the branches of the tree and fell on the king’s forehead, who did not pay any attention to them.

“Oh, sire!” murmured La Vallière, pushing the king’s hat towards him. But the king simply bowed, and determinedly refused to cover his head.

“Now or never is the time to offer your place,” said Fouquet in Aramis’s ear.

“Now or never is the time to listen, and not lose a syllable of what they may have to say to each other,” replied Aramis in Fouquet’s ear.

In fact they both remained perfectly silent, and the king's voice reached them where they were.

"Believe me," said the king, "I perceive, or rather I can imagine your uneasiness; believe me, I sincerely regret having isolated you from the rest of the company, and brought you, also, to a spot where you will be inconvenienced by the rain. You are wet already, and perhaps cold too?"

"No, sire."

"And yet you tremble?"

"I am afraid, sire, that my absence may be misinterpreted; at a moment, too, when all the others are reunited."

"I would not hesitate to propose returning to the carriages, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, but pray look and listen, and tell me if it be possible to attempt to make the slightest progress at present?"

In fact the thunder was still rolling, and the rain continued to fall in torrents.

"Besides," continued the king, "no possible interpretation can be made which would be to your discredit. Are you not with the king of France; in other words, with the first gentleman of the kingdom?"

"Certainly, sire," replied La Vallière, "and it is a very distinguished honor for me; it is not, therefore, for myself that I fear any interpretations that may be made."

"For whom, then?"

"For you, sire."

"For *me?*" said the king, smiling, "I do not understand you."

"Has your majesty already forgotten what took place yesterday evening in her royal highness's apartments?"

"Oh! forget that, I beg, or allow me to remember it for no other purpose than to thank you once more for your letter, and—"

"Sire," interrupted La Vallière, "the rain is falling, and your majesty's head is uncovered."

"I entreat you not to think of anything but yourself."

“Oh! I,” said La Vallière, smiling, “I am a country girl, accustomed to roaming through the meadows of the Loire and the gardens of Blois, whatever the weather may be. And, as for my clothes,” she added, looking at her simple muslin dress, “your majesty sees there is but little room for injury.”

“Indeed, I have already noticed, more than once, that you owed nearly everything to yourself and nothing to your toilette. Your freedom from coquetry is one of your greatest charms in my eyes.”

“Sire, do not make me out better than I am, and say merely, ‘You cannot possibly be a coquette.’”

“Why so?”

“Because,” said La Vallière, smiling, “I am not rich.”

“You admit, then,” said the king, quickly, “that you have a love for beautiful things?”

“Sire, I only regard those things as beautiful which are within my reach. Everything which is too highly placed for me—”

“You are indifferent to?”

“Is foreign to me, as being prohibited.”

“And I,” said the king, “do not find that you are at my court on the footing you should be. The services of your family have not been sufficiently brought under my notice. The advancement of your family was cruelly neglected by my uncle.”

“On the contrary, sire. His royal highness, the Duke of Orleans, was always exceedingly kind towards M. de Saint-Remy, my step-father. The services rendered were humble, and, properly speaking, our services have been adequately recognized. It is not every one who is happy enough to find opportunities of serving his sovereign with distinction. I have no doubt at all, that, if ever opportunities had been met with, my family’s actions would have been as lofty as their loyalty was firm: but that happiness was never ours.”

“In that case, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, it belongs to kings to repair the want of opportunity, and most delightedly do I undertake to repair, in your instance, and with the least possible delay, the wrongs of fortune towards you.”

“Nay, sire,” cried La Vallière, eagerly; “leave things, I beg, as they are now.”

“Is it possible! you refuse what I ought, and what I wish to do for you?”

“All I desired has been granted me, when the honor was conferred upon me of forming one of Madame’s household.”

“But if you refuse for yourself, at least accept for your family.”

“Your generous intentions, sire, bewilder me and make me apprehensive, for, in doing for my family what your kindness urges you to do, your majesty will raise up enemies for us, and enemies for yourself, too. Leave me in the ranks of middle life, sire; of all the feelings and sentiments I experience, leave me to enjoy the pleasing instinct of disinterestedness.”

“The sentiments you express,” said the king, “are indeed admirable.”

“Quite true,” murmured Aramis in Fouquet’s ear, “and he cannot be accustomed to them.”

“But,” replied Fouquet, “suppose she were to make a similar reply to my letter.”

“True!” said Aramis, “let us not anticipate, but wait the conclusion.”

“And then, dear Monsieur d’Herblay,” added the superintendent, hardly able to appreciate the sentiments which La Vallière had just expressed, “it is very often sound calculation to seem disinterested with monarchs.”

“Exactly what I was thinking this very minute,” said Aramis. “Let us listen.”

The king approached nearer to La Vallière, and as the rain dripped more and more through the foliage of the oak, he held his hat over the head of the young girl, who raised her beautiful blue eyes towards the

royal hat which sheltered her, and shook her head, sighing deeply as she did so.

"What melancholy thought," said the king, "can possibly reach your heart when I place mine as a rampart before it?"

"I will tell you, sire. I had already once before broached this question, which is so difficult for a young girl of my age to discuss, but your majesty imposed silence on me. Your majesty belongs not to yourself alone: you are married; and every sentiment which would separate your majesty from the queen, in leading you to take notice of me, will be a source of profoundest sorrow for the queen." The king endeavored to interrupt the young girl, but she continued with a suppliant gesture. "The Queen Maria, with an attachment which can be well understood, follows with her eyes every step of your majesty which separates you from her. Happy enough in having had her fate united to your own, she weepingly implores Heaven to preserve you to her, and is jealous of the faintest throb of your heart bestowed elsewhere." The king again seemed anxious to speak, but again did La Vallière venture to prevent him. —"Would it not, therefore, be a most blamable action," she continued, "if your majesty, a witness of this anxious and disinterested affection, gave the queen any cause for jealousy? Forgive me, sire, for the expressions I have used. I well know it is impossible, or rather that it would be impossible, that the greatest queen of the whole world could be jealous of a poor girl like myself. But though a queen, she is still a woman, and her heart, like that of the rest of her sex, cannot close itself against the suspicions which such as are evilly disposed, insinuate. For Heaven's sake, sire, think no more of me; I am unworthy of your regard."

"Do you not know that in speaking as you have done, you change my esteem for you into the profoundest admiration?"

"Sire, you assume my words to be contrary to the truth; you suppose me to be better than I really am, and attach a greater merit to me than God ever intended should be the case. Spare me, sire; for, did I not know that your majesty was the most generous man in your kingdom, I should believe you were jesting."

“You do not, I know, fear such a thing; I am quite sure of that,” exclaimed Louis.

“I shall be obliged to believe it, if your majesty continues to hold such language towards me.”

“I am most unhappy, then,” said the king, in a tone of regret which was not assumed; “I am the unhappiest prince in the Christian world, since I am powerless to induce belief in my words, in one whom I love the best in the wide world, and who almost breaks my heart by refusing to credit my regard for her.”

“Oh, sire!” said La Vallière, gently putting the king aside, who had approached nearer to her, “I think the storm has passed away now, and the rain has ceased.” At the very moment, however, as the poor girl, fleeing as it were from her own heart, which doubtless throbbed but too well in unison with the king’s, uttered these words, the storm undertook to contradict her. A dead-white flash of lightning illumined the forest with a weird glare, and a peal of thunder, like a discharge of artillery, burst over their heads, as if the height of the oak that sheltered them had attracted the storm. The young girl could not repress a cry of terror. The king with one hand drew her towards his heart, and stretched the other above her head, as though to shield her from the lightning. A moment’s silence ensued, as the group, delightful as everything young and loving is delightful, remained motionless, while Fouquet and Aramis contemplated it in attitudes as motionless as La Vallière and the king. “Oh, sire!” murmured La Vallière, “do you hear?” and her head fell upon his shoulder.

“Yes,” said the king. “You see, the storm has not passed away.”

“*It is a warning, sire*.” The king smiled. “Sire, it is the voice of Heaven in anger.”

“Be it so,” said the king. “I agree to accept that peal of thunder as a warning, and even as a menace, if, in five minutes from the present moment, it is renewed with equal violence; but if not, permit me to think that the storm is a storm simply, and nothing more.” And the king, at the same moment, raised his head, as if to interrogate the heavens. But, as if

the remark had been heard and accepted, during the five minutes which elapsed after the burst of thunder which had alarmed them, no renewed peal was heard; and, when the thunder was again heard, it was passing as plainly as if, during those same five minutes, the storm, put to flight, had traversed the heavens with the wings of the wind. “Well, Louise,” said the king, in a low tone of voice, “do you still threaten me with the anger of Heaven? and, since you wished to regard the storm as a warning, do you still believe it bodes misfortune?”

The young girl looked up, and saw that while they had been talking, the rain had penetrated the foliage above them, and was trickling down the king’s face. “Oh, sire, sire!” she exclaimed, in accents of eager apprehensions, which greatly agitated the king. “Is it for me,” she murmured, “that the king remains thus uncovered, and exposed to the rain? What am I, then?”

“You are, you perceive,” said the king, “the divinity who dissipates the storm, and brings back fine weather.” In fact, even as the king spoke, a ray of sunlight streamed through the forest, and caused the rain-drops which rested upon the leaves, or fell vertically among the openings in the branches of the trees, to glisten like diamonds.

“Sire,” said La Vallière, almost overcome, but making a powerful effort over herself, “think of the anxieties your majesty will have to submit to on my account. At this very moment, they are seeking you in every direction. The queen must be full of uneasiness; and Madame—oh, Madame!” the young girl exclaimed, with an expression almost resembling terror.

This name had a certain effect upon the king. He started, and disengaged himself from La Vallière, whom he had, till that moment, held pressed against his heart. He then advanced towards the path, in order to look round, and returned, somewhat thoughtfully, to La Vallière. “Madame, did you say?” he remarked.

“Yes, Madame; she, too, is jealous,” said La Vallière, with a marked tone of voice; and her eyes, so timorous in their expression, and so modestly fugitive in their glance, for a moment, ventured to look

inquiringly into the king's.

"Still," returned Louis, making an effort over himself, "it seems to me that Madame has no reason, no right to be jealous of me."

"Alas!" murmured La Vallière.

"Are you, too," said the king, almost in a tone of reproach, "are you among those who think the sister has a right to be jealous of the brother?"

"It is not for me, sire, to seek to penetrate your majesty's secrets."

"You *do* believe it, then?" exclaimed the king.

"I believe Madame is jealous, sire," La Vallière replied, firmly.

"Is it possible," said the king with some anxiety, "that you have perceived it, then, from her conduct towards you? Have her manners in any way been such towards you that you can attribute them to the jealousy you speak of?"

"Not at all, sire; I am of so little importance."

"Oh! if it were really the case—" exclaimed Louis, violently.

"Sire," interrupted the young girl, "it has ceased raining; some one is coming, I think." And, forgetful of all etiquette, she had seized the king by the arm.

"Well," replied the king, "let them come. Who is there who would venture to think I had done wrong in remaining alone with Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"For pity's sake, sire! they will think it strange to see you wet through, in this manner, and that you should have run such risk for me."

"I have simply done my duty as a gentleman," said Louis; "and woe to him who may fail in his, in criticising his sovereign's conduct." In fact, at this moment a few eager and curious faces were seen in the walk, as if engaged in a search. Catching glimpses at last of the king and La Vallière, they seemed to have found what they were seeking. They were some of the courtiers who had been sent by the queen and Madame, and uncovered themselves, in token of having perceived his majesty. But Louis, notwithstanding La Vallière's confusion, did not quit his

respectful and tender attitude. Then, when all the courtiers were assembled in the walk—when every one had been able to perceive the extraordinary mark of deference with which he had treated the young girl, by remaining standing and bare-headed during the storm—he offered her his arm, led her towards the group who were waiting, recognized by an inclination of the head the respectful salutations which were paid him on all sides; and, still holding his hat in his hand, he conducted her to her carriage. And, as a few sparse drops of rain continued to fall—a last adieu of the vanishing storm—the other ladies, whom respect had prevented from getting into their carriages before the king, remained altogether unprotected by hood or cloak, exposed to the rain from which the king was protecting, as well as he was able, the humblest among them. The queen and Madame must, like the others, have witnessed this exaggerated courtesy of the king. Madame was so disconcerted at it, that she touched the queen with her elbow, saying at the same time, “Look there, look there.”

The queen closed her eyes as if she had been suddenly seized with a fainting-spell. She lifted her hands to her face and entered her carriage, Madame following her. The king again mounted his horse, and without showing a preference for any particular carriage door, he returned to Fontainebleau, the reins hanging over his horse’s neck, absorbed in thought. As soon as the crowd had disappeared, and the sound of the horses and carriages grew fainter in the distance, and when they were certain, in fact, that no one could see them, Aramis and Fouquet came out of their grotto, and both of them in silence passed slowly on towards the walk. Aramis looked most narrowly not only at the whole extent of the open space stretching out before and behind him, but even into the very depth of the wood.

“Monsieur Fouquet,” he said, when he had quite satisfied himself that they were alone, “we must get back, at any cost, that letter you wrote to La Vallière.”

“That will be easy enough,” said Fouquet, “if my servant has not given it to her.”

“In any case it must be had, do you understand?”

“Yes. The king is in love with the girl, you mean?”

“Deeply, and what is worse is, that on her side, the girl is passionately attached to him.”

“As much as to say that we must change our tactics, I suppose?”

“Not a doubt of it; you have no time to lose. You must see La Vallière, and, without thinking any more of becoming her lover, which is out of the question, must declare yourself her most devoted friend and her most humble servant.”

“I will do so,” replied Fouquet, “and without the slightest feeling of disinclination, for she seems a good-hearted girl.”

“Or a very clever one,” said Aramis; “but in that case, all the greater reason.” Then he added, after a moment’s pause, “If I am not mistaken, that girl will become the strongest passion of the king’s life. Let us return to our carriage, and, as fast as possible, to the chateau.”

Chapter LXIII. Toby.

Two hours after the superintendent's carriage had set off by Aramis's directions, conveying them both towards Fontainebleau with the fleetness of the clouds the last breath of the tempest was hurrying across the face of heaven, La Vallière was closeted in her own apartment, with a simple muslin wrapper round her, having just finished a slight repast, which was placed upon a marble table. Suddenly the door was opened, and a servant entered to announce M. Fouquet, who had called to request permission to pay his respects to her. She made him repeat the message twice over, for the poor girl only knew M. Fouquet by name, and could not conceive what business she could possibly have with a superintendent of finances. However, as he might represent the king—and, after the conversation we have recorded, it was very likely—she glanced at her mirror, drew out still more the ringlets of her hair, and desired him to be admitted. La Vallière could not, however, refrain from a certain feeling of uneasiness. A visit from the superintendent was not an ordinary event in the life of any woman attached to the court. Fouquet, so notorious for his generosity, his gallantry, and his sensitive delicacy of feeling with regard to women generally, had received more invitations than he had requested audiences. In many houses, the presence of the superintendent had been significant of fortune; in many hearts, of love. Fouquet entered the apartment with a manner full of respect, presenting himself with that ease and gracefulness of manner which was the distinctive characteristic of the men of eminence of that period, and which at the present day seems no longer to be understood, even through the interpretation of the portraits of the period, in which the painter has endeavored to recall them to being. La Vallière acknowledged the ceremonious salutation which Fouquet addressed to

her by a gentle inclination of the head, and motioned him to a seat. But Fouquet, with a bow, said, “I will not sit down until you have pardoned me.”

“I?” asked La Vallière, “pardon what?”

Fouquet fixed a most piercing look upon the young girl, and fancied he could perceive in her face nothing but the most unaffected surprise. “I observe,” he said, “that you have as much generosity as intelligence, and I read in your eyes the forgiveness I solicit. A pardon pronounced by your lips is insufficient for me, and I need the forgiveness of your heart and mind.”

“Upon my honor, monsieur,” said La Vallière, “I assure you most positively I do not understand your meaning.”

“Again, that is a delicacy on your part which charms me,” replied Fouquet, “and I see you do not wish me to blush before you.”

“Blush! blush before *me!* Why should you blush?”

“Can I have deceived myself,” said Fouquet; “and can I have been happy enough not to have offended you by my conduct towards you?”

“Really, monsieur,” said La Vallière, shrugging her shoulders, “you speak in enigmas, and I suppose I am too ignorant to understand you.”

“Be it so,” said Fouquet; “I will not insist. Tell me, only, I entreat you, that I may rely upon your full and complete forgiveness.”

“I have but one reply to make to you, monsieur,” said La Vallière, somewhat impatiently, “and I hope that will satisfy you. If I knew the wrong you have done me, I would forgive you, and I now do so with still greater reason since I am ignorant of the wrong you allude to.”

Fouquet bit his lips, as Aramis would have done. “In that case,” he said, “I may hope, that, notwithstanding what has happened, our good understanding will remain undisturbed, and that you will kindly confer the favor upon me of believing in my respectful friendship.”

La Vallière fancied that she now began to understand, and said to herself, “I should not have believed M. Fouquet so eager to seek the source of a favor so very recent,” and then added aloud, “Your

friendship, monsieur! you offer me your friendship. The honor, on the contrary, is mine, and I feel overpowered by it."

"I am aware," replied Fouquet, "that the friendship of the master may appear more brilliant and desirable than that of the servant; but I assure you the latter will be quite as devoted, quite as faithful, and altogether disinterested."

La Vallière bowed, for, in fact, the voice of the superintendent seemed to convey both conviction and real devotion in its tone, and she held out her hand to him, saying, "I believe you."

Fouquet eagerly took hold of the young girl's hand. "You see no difficulty, therefore," he added, "in restoring me that unhappy letter."

"What letter?" inquired La Vallière.

Fouquet interrogated her with his most searching gaze, as he had already done before, but the same ingenious expressions, the same transparently candid look met his. "I am obliged to confess," he said, after this denial, "that your heart is the most delicate in the world, and I should not feel I was a man of honor and uprightness if I were to suspect anything from a woman so generous as yourself."

"Really, Monsieur Fouquet," replied La Vallière, "it is with profound regret I am obliged to repeat that I absolutely understand nothing of what you refer to."

"In fact, then, upon your honor, mademoiselle, you have not received any letter from me?"

"Upon my honor, none," replied La Vallière, firmly.

"Very well, that is quite sufficient; permit me, then, to renew the assurance of my utmost esteem and respect," said Fouquet. Then, bowing, he left the room to seek Aramis, who was waiting for him in his own apartment, and leaving La Vallière to ask herself whether the superintendent had not lost his senses.

"Well!" inquired Aramis, who was impatiently waiting Fouquet's return, "are you satisfied with the favorite?"

“Enchanted,” replied Fouquet; “she is a woman full of intelligence and fine feeling.”

“She did not get angry, then?”

“Far from that—she did not even seem to understand.”

“To understand what?”

“To understand that I had written to her.”

“She must, however, have understood you sufficiently to give the letter back to you, for I presume she returned it.”

“Not at all.”

“At least, you satisfied yourself that she had burnt it.”

“My dear Monsieur d’Herblay, I have been playing at cross-purposes for more than an hour, and, however amusing it may be, I begin to have had enough of this game. So understand me thoroughly: the girl pretended not to understand what I was saying to her; she denied having received any letter; therefore, having positively denied its receipt, she was unable either to return or burn it.”

“Oh, oh!” said Aramis, with uneasiness, “what is this you tell me?”

“I say that she swore most positively she had not received any letter.”

“That is too much. And did you not insist?”

“On the contrary, I did insist, almost impertinently even.”

“And she persisted in her denial?”

“Unhesitatingly.”

“And did she not contradict herself?”

“Not once.”

“But, in that case, then, you have left our letter in her hands?”

“How could I do otherwise?”

“Oh! it was a great mistake.”

“What the deuce would you have done in my place?”

“One could not force her, certainly, but it is very embarrassing; such a letter ought not to remain in existence against us.”

“Oh! the young girl’s disposition is generosity itself; I looked at her eyes, and I can read eyes well.”

“You think she can be relied upon?”

“From my heart I do.”

“Well, I think we are mistaken.”

“In what way?”

“I think that, in point of fact, as she herself told you, she did not receive the letter.”

“What! do you suppose—”

“I suppose that, from some motive, of which we know nothing, your man did not deliver the letter to her.”

Fouquet rang the bell. A servant appeared. “Send Toby here,” he said. A moment afterwards a man made his appearance, with an anxious, restless look, shrewd expression of the mouth, with short arms, and his back somewhat bent. Aramis fixed a penetrating look upon him.

“Will you allow me to interrogate him myself?” inquired Aramis.

“Do so,” said Fouquet.

Aramis was about to say something to the lackey, when he paused. “No,” he said; “he would see that we attach too much importance to his answer; therefore question him yourself; I will pretend to be writing.” Aramis accordingly placed himself at a table, his back turned towards the old attendant, whose every gesture and look he watched in a looking-glass opposite to him.

“Come here, Toby,” said Fouquet to the valet, who approached with a tolerably firm step. “How did you execute my commission?” inquired Fouquet.

“In the usual way, monseigneur,” replied the man.

“But how, tell me?”

“I succeeded in penetrating as far as Mademoiselle de la Vallière’s apartment; but she was at mass, and so I placed the note on her toilette-table. Is not that what you told me to do?”

“Precisely; and is that all?”

“Absolutely all, monseigneur.”

“No one was there?”

“No one.”

“Did you conceal yourself as I told you?”

“Yes.”

“And she returned?”

“Ten minutes afterwards.”

“And no one could have taken the letter?”

“No one; for no one had entered the room.”

“From the outside, but from the interior?”

“From the place where I was secreted, I could see to the very end of the room.”

“Now listen to me,” said Fouquet, looking fixedly at the lackey; “if this letter did not reach its proper destination, confess it; for, if a mistake has been made, your head shall be the forfeit.”

Toby started, but immediately recovered himself. “Monseigneur,” he said, “I placed the letter on the very place I told you: and I ask only half an hour to prove to you that the letter is in Mademoiselle de la Vallière’s hand, or to bring you back the letter itself.”

Aramis looked at the valet scrutinizingly. Fouquet was ready in placing confidence in people, and for twenty years this man had served him faithfully. “Go,” he said; “but bring me the proof you speak of.” The lackey quitted the room.

“Well, what do you think of it?” inquired Fouquet of Aramis.

“I think that you must, by some means or another, assure yourself of the truth, either that the letter has, or has not, reached La Vallière; that, in the first case, La Vallière must return it to you, or satisfy you by burning it in your presence; that, in the second, you must have the letter back again, even were it to cost you a million. Come, is not that your opinion?”

“Yes; but still, my dear bishop, I believe you are exaggerating the importance of the affair.”

“Blind, how blind you are!” murmured Aramis.

“La Vallière,” returned Fouquet, “whom we assume to be a schemer of the first ability, is simply nothing more than a coquette, who hopes that I shall pay my court to her, because I have already done so, and who, now that she has received a confirmation of the king’s regard, hopes to keep me in leading strings with the letter. It is natural enough.”

Aramis shook his head.

“Is not that your opinion?” said Fouquet.

“She is not a coquette,” he replied.

“Allow me to tell you—”

“Oh! I am well enough acquainted with women who are coquettes,” said Aramis.

“My dear friend!”

“It is a long time ago since I finished my education, you mean. But women are the same, throughout the centuries.”

“True; but men change, and you at the present day are far more suspicious than you formerly were.” And then, beginning to laugh, he added, “Come, if La Vallière is willing to love me only to the extent of a third, and the king two-thirds, do you think the condition acceptable?”

Aramis rose impatiently. “La Vallière,” he said, “has never loved, and never will love, any one but the king.”

“At all events,” said Fouquet, “what would you do?”

“Ask me rather what I would have done?”

“Well! what would you have done?”

“In the first place, I should not have allowed that man to depart.”

“Toby?”

“Yes; Toby is a traitor. Nay, I am sure of it, and I would not have let him go until he had told me the truth.”

“There is still time. I will recall him, and do you question him in your turn.”

“Agreed.”

“But I assure you it is useless. He has been with me for twenty years, and has never made the slightest mistake, and yet,” added Fouquet, laughing, “it would have been easy enough for him to have done so.”

“Still, call him back. This morning I fancy I saw that face, in earnest conversation with one of M. Colbert’s men.”

“Where was that?”

“Opposite the stables.”

“Bah! all my people are at daggers drawn with that fellow.”

“I saw him, I tell you, and his face, which should have been unknown to me when he entered just now, struck me as disagreeably familiar.”

“Why did you not say something, then, while he was here?”

“Because it is only at this very minute that my memory is clear upon the subject.”

“Really,” said Fouquet, “you alarm me.” And he again rang the bell.

“Provided that it is not already too late,” said Aramis.

Fouquet once more rang impatiently. The valet usually in attendance appeared. “Toby!” said Fouquet, “send Toby.” The valet again shut the door.

“You leave me at perfect liberty, I suppose?”

“Entirely so.”

“I may employ all means, then, to ascertain the truth.”

“All.”

“Intimidation, even?”

“I constitute you public prosecutor in my place.”

They waited ten minutes longer, but uselessly, and Fouquet, thoroughly out of patience, again rang loudly.

“Toby!” he exclaimed.

“Monseigneur,” said the valet, “they are looking for him.”

“He cannot be far distant, I have not given him any commission to execute.”

“I will go and see, monseigneur,” replied the valet, as he closed the door. Aramis, during the interview, walked impatiently, but without a syllable, up and down the cabinet. They waited a further ten minutes. Fouquet rang in a manner to alarm the very dead. The valet again presented himself, trembling in a way to induce a belief that he was the bearer of bad news.

“Monseigneur is mistaken,” he said, before even Fouquet could interrogate him, “you must have given Toby some commission, for he has been to the stables and taken your lordship’s swiftest horse, and saddled it himself.”

“Well?”

“And he has gone off.”

“Gone!” exclaimed Fouquet. “Let him be pursued, let him be captured.”

“Nay, nay,” whispered Aramis, taking him by the hand, “be calm, the evil is done.”

The valet quietly went out.

“The evil is done, you say?”

“No doubt; I was sure of it. And now, let us give no cause for suspicion; we must calculate the result of the blow, and ward it off, if possible.”

“After all,” said Fouquet, “the evil is not great.”

“You think so?” said Aramis.

“Of course. Surely a man is allowed to write a love-letter to a woman.”

“A man, certainly; a subject, no; especially, too, when the woman in question is one with whom the king is in love.”

“But the king was not in love with La Vallière a week ago! he was not in love with her yesterday, and the letter is dated yesterday; I could not guess the king was in love, when the king’s affection was not even yet in existence.”

“As you please,” replied Aramis; “but unfortunately the letter is not dated, and it is that circumstance particularly which annoys me. If it had only been dated yesterday, I should not have the slightest shadow of uneasiness on your account.”

Fouquet shrugged his shoulders.

“Am I not my own master,” he said, “and is the king, then, king of my brain and of my flesh?”

“You are right,” replied Aramis, “do not let us attach greater importance to matters than is necessary; and besides... Well! if we are menaced, we have means of defense.”

“Oh! menaced!” said Fouquet, “you do not place this gnat bite, as it were, among the number of menaces which may compromise my fortune and my life, do you?”

“Do not forget, Monsieur Fouquet, that the bit of an insect can kill a giant, if the insect be venomous.”

“But has this sovereign power you were speaking of, already vanished?”

“I am all-powerful, it is true, but I am not immortal.”

“Come, then, the most pressing matter is to find Toby again, I suppose. Is not that your opinion?”

“Oh! as for that, you will not find him again,” said Aramis, “and if he were of any great value to you, you must give him up for lost.”

“At all events he is somewhere or another in the world,” said Fouquet.

“You’re right, let me act,” replied Aramis.

Chapter LXIV. Madame's Four Chances.

Anne of Austria had begged the young queen to pay her a visit. For some time past suffering most acutely, and losing both her youth and beauty with that rapidity which signalizes the decline of women for whom life has been one long contest, Anne of Austria had, in addition to her physical sufferings, to experience the bitterness of being no longer held in any esteem, except as a surviving remembrance of the past, amidst the youthful beauties, wits, and influential forces of her court. Her physician's opinions, her mirror also, grieved her far less than the inexorable warnings which the society of the courtiers afforded, who, like rats in a ship, abandon the hold into which on the very next voyage the water will infallibly penetrate, owing to the ravages of decay. Anne of Austria did not feel satisfied with the time her eldest son devoted to her. The king, a good son, more from affectation than from affection, had at first been in the habit of passing an hour in the morning and one in the evening with his mother; but, since he had himself undertaken the conduct of state affairs, the duration of the morning and evening's visit had been reduced by one half; and then, by degrees, the morning visit had been suppressed altogether. They met at mass; the evening visit was replaced by a meeting, either at the king's assembly or at Madame's, which the queen attended obligingly enough, out of regard to her two sons.

The result of this was, that Madame gradually acquired an immense influence over the court, which made her apartments the true royal place of meeting. This, Anne of Austria perceived; knowing herself to be very ill, and condemned by her sufferings to frequent retirement, she was distressed at the idea that the greater part of her future days and evenings would pass away solitary, useless, and in despondency. She

recalled with terror the isolation in which Cardinal Richelieu had formerly left her, those dreaded and insupportable evenings, during which, however, she had both youth and beauty, which are ever accompanied by hope, to console her. She next formed the project of transporting the court to her own apartments, and of attracting Madame, with her brilliant escort, to her gloomy and already sorrowful abode, where the widow of a king of France, and the mother of a king of France, was reduced to console, in her artificial widowhood, the weeping wife of a king of France.

Anne began to reflect. She had intrigued a good deal in her life. In the good times past, when her youthful mind nursed projects that were, ultimately, invariably successful, she had by her side, to stimulate her ambition and her love, a friend of her own sex, more eager, more ambitious than herself,—a friend who had loved her, a rare circumstance at courts, and whom some petty considerations had removed from her forever. But for many years past—except Madame de Motteville, and La Molena, her Spanish nurse, a confidante in her character of countrywoman and woman too—who could boast of having given good advice to the queen? Who, too, among all the youthful heads there, could recall the past for her,—that past in which alone she lived? Anne of Austria remembered Madame de Chevreuse, in the first place exiled rather by her wish than the king's, and then dying in exile, the wife of a gentleman of obscure birth and position. She asked herself what Madame de Chevreuse would have advised her to do in similar circumstances, in their mutual difficulties arising from their intrigues; and after serious reflection, it seemed as if the clever, subtle mind of her friend, full of experience and sound judgment, answered her in the well-remembered ironical tones: "All the insignificant young people are poor and greedy of gain. They require gold and incomes to supply means of amusement; it is by interest you must gain them over." And Anne of Austria adopted this plan. Her purse was well filled, and she had at her disposal a considerable sum of money, which had been amassed by Mazarin for her, and lodged in a place of safety. She possessed the most magnificent jewels in France, and especially pearls of a size so large that

they made the king sigh every time he saw them, because the pearls of his crown were like millet seed compared to them. Anne of Austria had neither beauty nor charms any longer at her disposal. She gave out, therefore, that her wealth was great, and as an inducement for others to visit her apartments she let it be known that there were good gold crowns to be won at play, or that handsome presents were likely to be made on days when all went well with her; or windfalls, in the shape of annuities which she had wrung from the king by entreaty, and thus she determined to maintain her credit. In the first place, she tried these means upon Madame; because to gain her consent was of more importance than anything else. Madame, notwithstanding the bold confidence which her wit and beauty inspired her, blindly ran head foremost into the net thus stretched out to catch her. Enriched by degrees by these presents and transfers of property, she took a fancy to inheritances by anticipation. Anne of Austria adopted the same means towards Monsieur, and even towards the king himself. She instituted lotteries in her apartments. The day on which the present chapter opens, invitations had been issued for a late supper in the queen-mother's apartments, as she intended that two beautiful diamond bracelets of exquisite workmanship should be put into a lottery. The medallions were antique cameos of the greatest value; the diamonds, in point of intrinsic value, did not represent a very considerable amount, but the originality and rarity of the workmanship were such, that every one at court not only wished to possess the bracelets, but even to see the queen herself wear them; for, on the days she wore them, it was considered as a favor to be admitted to admire them in kissing her hands. The courtiers had, even with regard to this subject, adopted various expressions of gallantry to establish the aphorism, that the bracelets would have been priceless in value if they had not been unfortunate enough to be placed in contact with arms as beautiful as the queen's. This compliment had been honored by a translation into all the languages of Europe, and numerous verses in Latin and French had been circulated on the subject. The day that Anne of Austria had selected for the lottery was a decisive moment; the king had not been near his mother for a couple of days; Madame,

after the great scene of the Dryads and Naiads, was sulking by herself. It is true, the king's fit of resentment was over, but his mind was absorbingly occupied by a circumstance that raised him above the stormy disputes and giddy pleasures of the court.

Anne of Austria effected a diversion by the announcement of the famous lottery to take place in her apartments on the following evening. With this object in view, she saw the young queen, whom, as we have already seen, she had invited to pay her a visit in the morning. "I have good news to tell you," she said to her; "the king has been saying the most tender things about you. He is young, you know, and easily drawn away; but so long as you keep near me, he will not venture to keep away from you, to whom, besides, he is most warmly and affectionately attached. I intend to have a lottery this evening and shall expect to see you."

"I have heard," said the young queen, with a sort of timid reproach, "that your majesty intends to put in the lottery those lovely bracelets whose rarity is so great that we ought not to allow them to pass out of the custody of the crown, even were there no other reason than that they had once belonged to you."

"My daughter," said Anne of Austria, who read the young queen's thoughts, and wished to console her for not having received the bracelets as a present, "it is positively necessary that I should induce Madame to pass her time in my apartments."

"Madame!" said the young queen, blushing.

"Of course: would you not prefer to have a rival near you, whom you could watch and influence, to knowing the king is with her, always as ready to flirt as to be flirted with by her? The lottery I have proposed is my means of attraction for that purpose; do you blame me?"

"Oh, no!" returned Maria Theresa, clapping her hands with a childlike expression of delight.

"And you no longer regret, then, that I did not give you these bracelets, as I at first intended to do?"

“Oh, no, no!”

“Very well; make yourself look as beautiful as possible that our supper may be very brilliant; the gayer you seem, the more charming you appear, and you will eclipse all the ladies present as much by your brilliancy as by your rank.”

Maria Theresa left full of delight. An hour afterwards, Anne of Austria received a visit from Madame, whom she covered with caresses, saying, “Excellent news! the king is charmed with my lottery.”

“But I,” replied Madame, “am not so greatly charmed: to see such beautiful bracelets on any one’s arms but yours or mine, is what I cannot reconcile myself to.”

“Well, well,” said Anne of Austria, concealing by a smile a violent pang she had just experienced, “do not look at things in the worst light immediately.”

“Ah, Madame, Fortune is blind, and I am told there are two hundred tickets.”

“Quite as many as that; but you cannot surely forget that there can only be one winner.”

“No doubt. But who will that be? Can you tell?” said Madame, in despair.

“You remind me that I had a dream last night; my dreams are always good,—I sleep so little.”

“What was your dream?—but are you suffering?”

“No,” said the queen, stifling with wonderful command the torture of a renewed attack of shooting pains in her bosom; “I dreamed that the king won the bracelets.”

“The king!”

“You are going to ask me, I think, what the king could possibly do with the bracelets?”

“Yes.”

“And you would not add, perhaps, that it would be very fortunate if the king were really to win, for he would be obliged to give the bracelets to some one else.”

“To restore them to you, for instance.”

“In which case I should immediately give them away; for you do not think, I suppose,” said the queen, laughing, “that I have put these bracelets up to a lottery from necessity. My object was to give them without arousing any one’s jealousy; but if Fortune will not get me out of my difficulty—well, I will teach Fortune a lesson—and I know very well to whom I intend to offer the bracelets.” These words were accompanied by so expressive a smile, that Madame could not resist paying her by a grateful kiss.

“But,” added Anne of Austria, “do you not know, as well as I do, that if the king were to win the bracelets, he would not restore them to me?”

“You mean he would give them to the queen?”

“No; and for the very same reason that he would not give them back again to me; since, if I had wished to make the queen a present of them, I had no need of him for that purpose.”

Madame cast a side glance upon the bracelets, which, in their casket, were dazzlingly exposed to view upon a table close beside her.

“How beautiful they are,” she said, sighing. “But stay,” Madame continued, “we are quite forgetting that your majesty’s dream was nothing but a dream.”

“I should be very much surprised,” returned Anne of Austria, “if my dream were to deceive me; that has happened to me very seldom.”

“We may look upon you as a prophetess, then.”

“I have already said, that I dream but very rarely; but the coincidence of my dream about this matter, with my own ideas, is extraordinary! it agrees so wonderfully with my own views and arrangements.”

“What arrangements do you allude to?”

“That you will get the bracelets, for instance.”

“In that case, it will not be the king.”

“Oh!” said Anne of Austria, “there is not such a very great distance between his majesty’s heart and your own; for, are you not his sister, for whom he has a great regard? There is not, I repeat, so very wide a distance, that my dream can be pronounced false on that account. Come, let us reckon up the chances in its favor.”

“I will count them.”

“In the first place, we will begin with the dream. If the king wins, he is sure to give you the bracelets.”

“I admit that is one.”

“If you win them, they are yours.”

“Naturally; that may be admitted also.”

“Lastly;—if Monsieur were to win them!”

“Oh!” said Madame, laughing heartily, “he would give them to the Chevalier de Lorraine.”

Anne of Austria laughed as heartily as her daughter-in-law; so much so, indeed, that her sufferings again returned, and made her turn suddenly pale in the very midst of her enjoyment.

“What is the matter?” inquired Madame, terrified.

“Nothing, nothing; a pain in my side. I have been laughing too much. We were at the fourth chance, I think.”

“I cannot see a fourth.”

“I beg your pardon; I am not excluded from the chance of winning, and if I be the winner, you are sure of me.”

“Oh! thank you, thank you!” exclaimed Madame.

“I hope that you look upon yourself as one whose chances are good, and that my dream now begins to assure the solid outlines of reality.”

“Yes, indeed: you give me both hope and confidence,” said Madame, “and the bracelets, won in this manner, will be a hundred times more precious to me.”

“Well! then, good-bye, until this evening.” And the two princesses separated. Anne of Austria, after her daughter-in-law had left her, said to herself, as she examined the bracelets, “They are, indeed, precious; since, by their means, this evening, I shall have won over a heart to my side, at the same time, fathomed an important secret.”

Then turning towards the deserted recess in her room, she said, addressing vacancy,—“Is it not thus that you would have acted, my poor Chevreuse? Yes, yes; I know it is.”

And, like a perfume of other, fairer days, her youth, her imagination, and her happiness seemed to be wafted towards the echo of this invocation.

Chapter LXV. The Lottery.

By eight o'clock in the evening, every one had assembled in the queen-mother's apartments. Anne of Austria, in full dress, beautiful still, from former loveliness, and from all the resources coquetry can command at the hands of clever assistants, concealed, or rather pretended to conceal, from the crowd of courtiers who surrounded her, and who still admired her, thanks to the combination of circumstances which we have indicated in the preceding chapter, the ravages, which were already visible, of the acute suffering to which she finally yielded a few years later. Madame, almost as great a coquette as Anne of Austria, and the queen, simple and natural as usual, were seated beside her, each contending for her good graces. The ladies of honor, united in a body, in order to resist with greater effect, and consequently with more success, the witty and lively conversations which the young men held about them, were enabled, like a battalion formed in a square, to offer each other the means of attack and defense which were thus at their command. Montalais, learned in that species of warfare which consists of sustained skirmishing, protected the whole line by a sort of rolling fire she directed against the enemy. Saint-Aignan, in utter despair at the rigor, which became almost insulting from the very fact of her persisting in it, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente displayed, tried to turn his back upon her; but, overcome by the irresistible brilliancy of her eyes, he, every moment, returned to consecrate his defeat by new submissions, to which Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did not fail to reply by fresh acts of impertinence. Saint-Aignan did not know which way to turn. La Vallière had about her, not exactly a court, but sprinklings of courtiers. Saint-Aignan, hoping by this maneuver to attract Athenais's attention towards him, approached the young girl, and saluted her with a respect

that induced some to believe that he wished to balance Athenais by Louise. But these were persons who had neither been witnesses of the scene during the shower, nor had heard it spoken of. As the majority was already informed, and well informed, too, on the matter, the acknowledged favor with which she was regarded had attracted to her side some of the most astute, as well as the least sensible, members of the court. The former, because they said with Montaigne, “How do I know?” and the latter, who said with Rabelais, “Perhaps.” The greatest number had followed in the wake of the latter, just as in hunting five or six of the best hounds alone follow the scent of the animal hunted, whilst the remainder of the pack follow only the scent of the hounds. The two queens and Madame examined with particular attention the toilettes of their ladies and maids of honor; and they condescended to forget they were queens in recollecting that they were women. In other words, they pitilessly picked to pieces every person present who wore a petticoat. The looks of both princesses simultaneously fell upon La Vallière, who, as we have just said, was completely surrounded at that moment. Madame knew not what pity was, and said to the queen-mother, as she turned towards her, “If Fortune were just, she would favor that poor La Vallière.”

“That is not possible,” said the queen-mother, smiling.

“Why not?”

“There are only two hundred tickets, so that it was not possible to inscribe every one’s name on the list.”

“And hers is not there, then?”

“No!”

“What a pity! she might have won them, and then sold them.”

“Sold them!” exclaimed the queen.

“Yes; it would have been a dowry for her, and she would not have been obliged to marry without her *trousseau*, as will probably be the case.”

“Really,” answered the queen-mother, “poor little thing: has she no dresses, then?”

And she pronounced these words like a woman who has never been able to understand the inconveniences of a slenderly filled purse.

“Stay, look at her. Heaven forgive me, if she is not wearing the very same petticoat this evening that she had on this morning during the promenade, and which she managed to keep clean, thanks to the care the king took of her, in sheltering her from the rain.”

At the very moment Madame uttered these words the king entered the room. The two queens would not perhaps have observed his arrival, so completely were they occupied in their ill-natured remarks, had not Madame noticed that, all at once, La Vallière, who was standing up facing the gallery, exhibited certain signs of confusion, and then said a few words to the courtiers who surrounded her, who immediately dispersed. This movement induced Madame to look towards the door, and at that moment, the captain of the guards announced the king. At this moment La Vallière, who had hitherto kept her eyes fixed upon the gallery, suddenly cast them down as the king entered. His majesty was dressed magnificently and in the most perfect taste; he was conversing with Monsieur and the Duc de Roquelaure, Monsieur on his right, and the Duc de Roquelaure on his left. The king advanced, in the first place, towards the queens, to whom he bowed with an air full of graceful respect. He took his mother’s hand and kissed it, addressed a few compliments to Madame upon the beauty of her toilette, and then began to make the round of the assembly. La Vallière was saluted in the same manner as the others, but with neither more nor less attention. His majesty then returned to his mother and his wife. When the courtiers noticed that the king had only addressed some ordinary remark to the young girl who had been so particularly noticed in the morning, they immediately drew their own conclusion to account for this coldness of manner; this conclusion being, that although the king may have taken a sudden fancy to her, that fancy had already disappeared. One thing, however, must be remarked, that close beside La Vallière, among the

number of the courtiers, M. Fouquet was to be seen; and his respectfully attentive manner served to sustain the young girl in the midst of the varied emotions that visibly agitated her.

M. Fouquet was just on the point, moreover, of speaking in a more friendly manner with Mademoiselle de la Vallière, when M. Colbert approached, and after having bowed to Fouquet with all the formality of respectful politeness, he seemed to take up a post beside La Vallière, for the purpose of entering into conversation with her. Fouquet immediately quitted his place. These proceedings were eagerly devoured by the eyes of Montalais and Malicorne, who mutually exchanged their observations on the subject. De Guiche, standing within the embrasure of one of the windows, saw no one but Madame. But as Madame, on her side, frequently glanced at La Vallière, De Guiche's eyes, following Madame's, were from time to time cast upon the young girl. La Vallière instinctively felt herself sinking beneath the weight of all these different looks, inspired, some by interest, others by envy. She had nothing to compensate her for her sufferings, not a kind word from her companions, nor a look of affection from the king. No one could possibly express the misery the poor girl was suffering. The queen-mother next directed the small table to be brought forward, on which the lottery-tickets were placed, two hundred in number, and begged Madame de Motteville to read the list of the names. It was a matter of course that this list had been drawn out in strict accordance with the laws of etiquette. The king's name was first on the list, next the queen-mother, then the queen, Monsieur, Madame, and so on. All hearts throbbed anxiously as the list was read out; more than three hundred persons had been invited, and each of them was anxious to learn whether his or her name was to be found in the number of privileged names. The king listened with as much attention as the others, and when the last name had been pronounced, he noticed that La Vallière had been omitted from the list. Every one, of course, remarked this omission. The king flushed as if much annoyed; but La Vallière, gentle and resigned, as usual, exhibited nothing of the sort. While the list was being read, the king had not taken his eyes off the young girl, who seemed to expand, as it were,

beneath the happy influence she felt was shed around her, and who was delighted and too pure in spirit for any other thought than that of love to find an entrance either to her mind or her heart. Acknowledging this touching self-denial by the fixity of his attention, the king showed La Vallière how much he appreciated its delicacy. When the list was finished, the different faces of those who had been omitted or forgotten fully expressed their disappointment. Malicorne was also left out from amongst the men; and the grimace he made plainly said to Montalais, who was also forgotten, “Cannot we contrive to arrange matters with Fortune in such a manner that she shall not forget us?” to which a smile full of intelligence from Mademoiselle Aure, replied: “Certainly we can.”

The tickets were distributed to each according to the number listed. The king received his first, next the queen-mother, then Monsieur, then the queen and Madame, and so on. After this, Anne of Austria opened a small Spanish leather bag, containing two hundred numbers engraved upon small balls of mother-of-pearl, and presented the open sack to the youngest of her maids of honor, for the purpose of taking one of the balls out of it. The eager expectation of the throng, amidst all the tediously slow preparations, was rather that of cupidity than curiosity. Saint-Aignan bent towards Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente to whisper to her, “Since we have each a number, let us unite our two chances. The bracelet shall be yours if I win, and if you are successful, deign to give me but one look of your beautiful eyes.”

“No,” said Athenais, “if you win the bracelet, keep it, every one for himself.”

“You are without any pity,” said Saint-Aignan, “and I will punish you by a quatrain:—

“Beautiful Iris, to my vows You are too opposed—”

“Silence,” said Athenais, “you will prevent me hearing the winning number.”

“Number one,” said the young girl who had drawn the mother-of-pearl from the Spanish leather bag.

“The king!” exclaimed the queen-mother.

“The king has won,” repeated the queen, delightedly.

“Oh! the king! your dream!” said Madame, joyously, in the ear of Anne of Austria.

The king was the only one who did not exhibit any satisfaction. He merely thanked Fortune for what she had done for him, in addressing a slight salutation to the young girl who had been chosen as her proxy. Then receiving from the hands of Anne of Austria, amid the eager desire of the whole assembly, the casket inclosing the bracelets, he said, “Are these bracelets really beautiful, then?”

“Look at them,” said Anne of Austria, “and judge for yourself.”

The king looked at them, and said, “Yes, indeed, an admirable medallion. What perfect finish!”

Queen Maria Theresa easily saw, and that, too at the very first glance, that the king would not offer the bracelets to her; but, as he did not seem the least degree in the world disposed to offer them to Madame, she felt almost satisfied, or nearly so. The king sat down. The most intimate among the courtiers approached, one by one, for the purpose of admiring more closely the beautiful piece of workmanship, which soon, with the king’s permission, was handed about from person to person. Immediately, every one, connoisseurs or not, uttered various exclamations of surprise, and overwhelmed the king with congratulations. There was, in fact, something for everybody to admire—the brilliance for some, and the cutting for others. The ladies present visibly displayed their impatience to see such a treasure monopolized by the gentlemen.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” said the king, whom nothing escaped, “one would almost think that you wore bracelets as the Sabines used to do; hand them round for a while for the inspection of the ladies, who seem to have, and with far greater right, an excuse for understanding such matters!”

These words appeared to Madame the commencement of a decision she expected. She gathered, besides, this happy belief from the glances of the queen-mother. The courtier who held them at the moment the king

made this remark, amidst the general agitation, hastened to place the bracelets in the hands of the queen, Maria Theresa, who, knowing too well, poor woman, that they were not designed for her, hardly looked at them, and almost immediately passed them on to Madame. The latter, and even more minutely, Monsieur, gave the bracelets a long look of anxious and almost covetous desire. She then handed the jewels to those ladies who were near her, pronouncing this single word, but with an accent which was worth a long phrase, “Magnificent!”

The ladies who had received the bracelets from Madame’s hands looked at them as long as they chose to examine them, and then made them circulate by passing them on towards the right. During this time the king was tranquilly conversing with De Guiche and Fouquet, rather passively letting them talk than himself listening. Accustomed to the set form of ordinary phrases, his ear, like that of all men who exercise an incontestable superiority over others, merely selected from the conversations held in various directions the indispensable word which requires reply. His attention, however, was now elsewhere, for it wandered as his eyes did.

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was the last of the ladies inscribed for tickets; and, as if she had ranked according to her name upon the list, she had only Montalais and La Vallière near her. When the bracelets reached these two latter, no one appeared to take any further notice of them. The humble hands which for a moment touched these jewels, deprived them, for the time, of their importance—a circumstance which did not, however, prevent Montalais from starting with joy, envy, and covetous desire, at the sight of the beautiful stones still more than at their magnificent workmanship. It is evident that if she were compelled to decide between the pecuniary value and the artistic beauty, Montalais would unhesitatingly have preferred diamonds to cameos, and her disinclination, therefore, to pass them on to her companion, La Vallière, was very great. La Vallière fixed a look almost of indifference upon the jewels.

“Oh, how beautiful, how magnificent these bracelets are!” exclaimed Montalais; “and yet you do not go into ecstasies about them, Louise! You are no true woman, I am sure.”

“Yes, I am, indeed,” replied the young girl, with an accent of the most charming melancholy; “but why desire that which can never, by any possibility, be ours?”

The king, his head bent forward, was listening to what Louise was saying. Hardly had the vibration of her voice reached his ear than he rose, radiant with delight, and passing across the whole assembly, from the place where he stood, to La Vallière, “You are mistaken, mademoiselle,” he said, “you are a woman, and every woman has a right to wear jewels, which are a woman’s appurtenance.”

“Oh, sire!” said La Vallière, “your majesty will not absolutely believe in my modesty?”

“I believe you possess every virtue, mademoiselle; frankness as well as every other; I entreat you, therefore, to say frankly what you think of these bracelets?”

“That they are beautiful, sire, and cannot be offered to any other than a queen.”

“I am delighted that such is your opinion, mademoiselle; the bracelets are yours, and the king begs your acceptance of them.”

And as, with a movement almost resembling terror, La Vallière eagerly held out the casket to the king, the king gently pushed back her trembling hand.

A silence of astonishment, more profound than that of death, reigned in the assembly.

And yet, from the side where the queens were, no one had heard what he had said, nor understood what he had done. A charitable friend, however, took upon herself to spread the news; it was Tonnay-Charente, to whom Madame had made a sign to approach.

“Good heavens!” explained Tonnay-Charente, “how happy that La Vallière is! the king has just given her the bracelets.”

Madame bit her lips to such a degree that the blood appeared upon the surface of the skin. The young queen looked first at La Vallière and then at Madame, and began to laugh. Anne of Austria rested her chin upon her beautiful white hand, and remained for a long time absorbed by a presentiment that disturbed her mind, and by a terrible pang which stung her heart. De Guiche, observing Madame turn pale, and guessing the cause of her change of color, abruptly quitted the assembly and disappeared. Malicorne was then able to approach Montalais very quietly, and under cover of the general din of conversation, said to her:

"Aure, your fortune and our future are standing at your elbow."

"Yes," was her reply, as she tenderly embraced La Vallière, whom, inwardly, she was tempted to strangle.

End of Ten Years Later. The next text in the series is Louise de la Vallière.

Footnotes:

1 (return)
[In the three-volume edition, Volume 1, entitled The Vicomte de Bragelonne, ends here.]

2 (return)
[In most other editions, the previous chapter and the next are usually combined into one chapter, entitled “D’Artagnan calls De Wardes to account.”]

3 (return)
[Dumas is mistaken. The events in the following chapters occurred in 1661.]

4 (return)
[In the five-volume edition, Volume 2 ends here.]

5 (return)
[The verses in this chapter have been re-written to give the flavor of them rather than the meaning. A more literal translation would look like this: “Guiche is the furnisher Of the maids of honor.” and—

“He has stocked the birdcage;
Montalais and—”

It would be more accurate, though, to say “baited” rather than “stocked” in the second couplet.]

6 (return)
[The Latin translates to “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”]

7 (return)
[“Ad majorem Dei gloriam” was the motto of the Jesuits. It translates to “For the greater glory of God.”]

8 (return)
[“In the presence of these men?”]

9 (return)
[“By this sign you shall conquer.”]

10 (return)
[“It rained all night long; the games will be held tomorrow.”]

11 (return)
[“Lord, I am not worthy.”]

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