

## Chapter 51

### HOW PEOPLE DO NOT ALWAYS LOSE THEIR TIME BY SEARCHING EMPTY DRAWERS.

The scene which the duke had just had with the king made him regard his position as desperate. The minions had not allowed him to be ignorant of what had passed, and he had heard the people cry, "Vive le roi!" He felt himself abandoned by the other chiefs, who had themselves to save. In his quarrels with his brother Charles he had always had for confidants, or rather dupes, those two devoted men, Coconnas and La Mole, and, for the first time in his life, feeling himself alone and isolated, he felt a kind of remorse at having sacrificed them. During that time his sister Marguerite loved and consoled him. How had he recompensed her?

He had recently had near him a brave and valiant heart and sword--Bussy, the brave Bussy. And he had offended him to please Monsoreau, who had his secret, with which he always threatened him, and which was now known to the king. He had therefore quarreled with Bussy gratuitously, and, above all, uselessly, which as a great politician once said, "was more than a crime, it was a mistake!" How he would have rejoiced in his present situation, to know that Bussy was watching over him; Bussy the loyal, Bussy the universal favorite. It would have been probable liberty and certain vengeance.

But as we have said, Bussy, wounded to the heart, kept away from the prince, so the prisoner remained fifty feet above the ground, with the four favorites in the corridor, without counting the court full of Swiss. Besides this, one or other of the young men entered from time to time, and, without seeming even to notice the prince, went round the room, examined the doors and windows, looked under the beds and tables, and glanced at the curtains and sheets.

"Ma foi!" said Maugiron, after one of these visits, "I have done; I am not going to look after him any more to-night."

"Yes," said D'Epernon, "as long as we guard him, there is no need of going to look at him."

"And he is not handsome to look at," said Quelus.

"Still," said Schomberg, "I think we had better not relax our vigilance, for the devil is cunning."

"Yes, but not cunning enough to pass over the bodies of four men like us."

"That is true," said Quelus.

"Oh!" said Schomberg, "do you think, if he wants to fly, he will choose our corridor to come through? He would make a hole in the wall."

"With what?"

"Then he has the windows."

"Ah! the windows, bravo, Schomberg; would you jump forty-five feet?"

"I confess that forty-five feet----"

"Yes, and he who is lame, and heavy, and timid as----"

"You," said Schomberg.

"You know I fear nothing but phantoms--that is an affair of the nerves."

"The last phantom was," said Quelus, "that all those whom he had killed in duels appeared to him one night."

"However," said Maugiron, "I have read of wonderful escapes; with sheets, for instance."

"Ah! that is more sensible. I saw myself, at Bordeaux, a prisoner who escaped by the aid of his sheets."

"You see, then?"

"Yes, but he had his leg broken, and his neck, too; his sheets were thirty feet too short, and he had to jump, so that while his body escaped from prison, his soul escaped from his body."

"Besides," said Quelus, "if he escapes, we will follow him, and in catching him some mischief might happen to him."

So they dismissed the subject. They were perfectly right that the duke was not likely to attempt a perilous escape. From time to time his pale face was at the window which overlooked the fosses of the Louvre, beyond which was an open space about fifteen feet broad, and then the Seine rolled calm as a mirror. On the other side rose, like a giant, the tower of Nesle.

He had watched the sunset and the gradual extinction of all the lights. He had contemplated the beautiful spectacle of old Paris, with its roofs gilded by the last rays of the sun, and silvered by the first beams of the moon; then little by little he was seized with a great terror at seeing immense clouds roll over the sky and announce a storm. Among his other weaknesses, the Duc d'Anjou was afraid of thunder, and he would have given anything to have

had his guardians with him again, even if they insulted him. He threw himself on his bed, but found it impossible to sleep. Then he began to swear, and break everything near him. It was a family failing, and they were accustomed to it at the Louvre. The young men had opened the door to see what the noise meant, and seeing that it was the duke amusing himself, they had shut it again, which redoubled his anger. He had just broken a chair, when a crashing of glass was heard at the window, and he felt a sharp blow on his thigh. His first idea was that he was wounded by some emissary of the king's.

"Ah! I am dead!" he cried, and fell on the carpet. But as he fell his hand came in contact with a larger and rougher substance than a ball.

"Oh! a stone," thought he, and feeling his leg, he found it uninjured. He picked up the stone and looked at it, and saw that it was wrapped in a piece of paper. Then the duke's ideas began to change. Might not this stone come from a friend as well as an enemy. He approached the light, cut the silk which tied the paper round the stone and read,--

"Are you tired of keeping your room? Do you love open air and liberty? Enter the little room where the Queen of Navarre hid your poor friend, M. de la Mole, open the cupboard, and, by displacing the lowest bracket, you will find a double bottom; in this there is a silk ladder; attach it yourself to the balcony, two vigorous arms will hold it at the bottom. A horse, swift as thought, will lead you to a safe place.

"A FRIEND."

"A friend!" cried the prince; "oh! I did not know I had a friend. Who is this friend who thinks of me?" And the duke ran to the window, but could see no one.

"Can it be a snare?" thought he; "but first let me see if there is a double bottom and a ladder."

The duke then, leaving the light where it was for precaution, groped his way to the cabinet, which he knew so well. He opened it, felt for the bottom shelf, and, to his great joy, found what he looked for. As a thief escapes with his booty, the duke rushed into the next room with his prey. Ten o'clock struck; the duke thought of his hourly visitors, and hid his ladder under a cushion, on which he sat down. Indeed, five minutes had not passed before Maugiron appeared in a dressing-gown, with a sword in one hand and a light in the other. As he came in one of his friends said to him, "The bear is furious, he was breaking everything just now; take care he does not devour you, Maugiron."

Maugiron made his usual examination; he saw a broken window, but thought the duke had done it in his rage.

"Maugiron!" cried Schomberg, from outside, "are you already eaten that you do not speak? In that case, sigh, at least, that we may know and avenge you."

The duke trembled with impatience.

"No, no," said Maugiron, "on the contrary, my bear is quite conquered."

And so saying he went out and locked the door. When the key had ceased to turn in the lock the duke murmured,--

"Take care, gentlemen, or the duke will be too much for you."