

Chapter 59

ROLAND.

Thanks to the reinforcement which had arrived, M. le Duc d'Anjou could go where he pleased; he explored the ramparts of the surrounding country and castles. The Angevin gentlemen found liberty and amusement at the court of the duke, and the three friends were soon intimate with many of these nobles, especially those who had pretty wives. The general joy was at its height when twenty-two riding horses, thirty carriage horses, and forty mules, together with litters, carriages and wagons, arrived at Angers, all the property of the duke. We must allow that the saddles were not paid for, and that the coffers were empty, but still it made a magnificent effect. The duke's reputation for wealth was henceforward solidly established, and all the province remained convinced that he was rich enough to war against all Europe if need were, therefore they did not grudge the new tax which the prince imposed upon them. People never mind giving or lending to rich people, only to poor ones; therefore the worthy prince lived like a patriarch on all the fat of the land. Numerous cavaliers arrived to offer to him their adhesions, or their offers of service. One afternoon, however, about four o'clock, M. de Monsoreau arrived on horseback at the gates of Angers. He had ridden eighteen leagues that day; therefore his spurs were red, and his horse covered with foam, and half dead. They no longer made difficulties about letting strangers enter, therefore M. de Monsoreau went straight through the city to the palace, and asked for the duke.

"He is out reconnoitering," replied the sentinel.

"Where?"

"I do not know."

"Diable! What I have to say to him is very pressing."

"First put your horse in the stable, or he will fall."

"The advice is good; where are the stables?"

As he spoke a man approached and asked for his name. M. de Monsoreau gave it. The major-domo (for it was he) bowed respectfully, for the chief huntsman's name was well known in Anjou.

"Monsieur," said he, "please to enter and take some repose. Monseigneur has not been out more than ten minutes, and will not be back till eight o'clock."

"Eight o'clock! I cannot wait so long; I am the bearer of news which cannot be too soon known to his highness. Can I not have a horse and a guide?"

"There are plenty of horses, but a guide is a different thing, for his highness did not say where he was going."

"Well, I will take a fresh horse, and try to discover him."

"Probably you will hear where he has passed, monsieur."

"Do they ride fast?"

"Oh no."

"Well, get me a horse then."

"Will monsieur come into the stables and choose one? they all belong to the duke." Monsoreau entered. Ten or twelve fine horses, quite fresh, were feeding from the manger, which was filled with grain.

Monsoreau looked over them, and then said, "I will take this bay."

"Roland?"

"Is that his name?"

"Yes, and it is his highness's favorite horse. M. de Bussy gave him to the duke, and it is quite a chance that it is here to-day."

Ronald was soon saddled, and Monsoreau rode out of the stable.

"In which direction did they start?" asked he.

The man pointed it out.

"Ma foi!" said Monsoreau, "the horse seems to know the way."

Indeed, the animal set off without being urged, and went deliberately out of the city, took a short cut to the gate, and then began to accelerate his pace: Monsoreau let him go. He went along the boulevard, then turned into a shady lane, which cut across the country, passing gradually from a trot to a gallop.

"Oh!" thought Monsoreau, as they entered the woods, "one would say we were going to Méridor. Can his highness be there?" and his face grew black at the thought.

"Oh!" murmured he, "I who was going to see the prince, and putting off till to-morrow to see my wife; shall I see them both at the same time?"

The horse went on, turning always to the right.

"We cannot be far from the park," said he.

At that moment his horse neighed, and another answered him. In a minute Monsoreau saw a wall, and a horse tied to a neighboring tree.

"There is some one," thought he, turning pale.