

## Chapter XXIV. The False King.

In the meantime, usurped royalty was playing out its part bravely at Vaux. Philippe gave orders that for his petit lever the grandes entrees, already prepared to appear before the king, should be introduced. He determined to give this order notwithstanding the absence of M. d'Herblay, who did not return--our readers know the reason. But the prince, not believing that absence could be prolonged, wished, as all rash spirits do, to try his valor and his fortune far from all protection and instruction. Another reason urged him to this--Anne of Austria was about to appear; the guilty mother was about to stand in the presence of her sacrificed son. Philippe was not willing, if he had a weakness, to render the man a witness of it before whom he was bound thenceforth to display so much strength. Philippe opened his folding doors, and several persons entered silently. Philippe did not stir whilst his valets de chambre dressed him. He had watched, the evening before, all the habits of his brother, and played the king in such a manner as to awaken no suspicion. He was thus completely dressed in hunting costume when he received his visitors. His own memory and the notes of Aramis announced everybody to him, first of all Anne of Austria, to whom Monsieur gave his hand, and then Madame with M. de Saint-Aignan. He smiled at seeing these countenances, but trembled on recognizing his mother. That still so noble and imposing figure, ravaged by pain, pleaded in his heart the cause of the famous queen who had immolated a child to reasons of state. He found his mother still handsome. He knew that Louis XIV. loved her, and he promised himself to love her likewise, and not to prove a scourge to her old age. He contemplated his brother with a tenderness easily to be understood. The latter had usurped nothing, had cast no shades athwart his life. A separate tree, he allowed the stem to rise without heeding its elevation or majestic life. Philippe promised himself to be a kind brother to this prince, who required nothing but gold to minister to his pleasures. He bowed with a friendly air to Saint-Aignan, who was all reverences and smiles, and trembling held out his hand to Henrietta, his sister-in-law, whose beauty struck him; but he saw in the eyes of that princess an expression of coldness which would facilitate, as he thought, their future relations.

"How much more easy," thought he, "it will be to be the brother of that woman than her gallant, if she evinces towards me a coldness that my brother could not have for her, but which is imposed upon me as a duty." The only visit he dreaded at this moment was that of the queen; his heart--his mind--had just been shaken by so violent a trial, that, in spite of their firm temperament, they would not, perhaps, support another shock. Happily the queen did not come. Then commenced, on the part of Anne of Austria, a political dissertation upon the welcome M. Fouquet had given to the house of France. She mixed up hostilities with compliments addressed to the king, and questions as to his health, with little maternal flatteries and diplomatic artifices.

"Well, my son," said she, "are you convinced with regard to M. Fouquet?"

"Saint-Aignan," said Philippe, "have the goodness to go and inquire after the queen."

At these words, the first Philippe had pronounced aloud, the slight difference that there was between his voice and that of the king was sensible to maternal ears, and Anne of Austria looked earnestly at her son. Saint-Aignan left the room, and Philippe continued:

"Madame, I do not like to hear M. Fouquet ill-spoken of, you know I do not--and you have even spoken well of him yourself."

"That is true; therefore I only question you on the state of your sentiments with respect to him."

"Sire," said Henrietta, "I, on my part, have always liked M. Fouquet. He is a man of good taste,--a superior man."

"A superintendent who is never sordid or niggardly," added Monsieur; "and who pays in gold all the orders I have on him."

"Every one in this thinks too much of himself, and nobody for the state," said the old queen. "M. Fouquet, it is a fact, M. Fouquet is ruining the state."

"Well, mother!" replied Philippe, in rather a lower key, "do you likewise constitute yourself the buckler of M. Colbert?"

"How is that?" replied the old queen, rather surprised.

"Why, in truth," replied Philippe, "you speak that just as your old friend Madame de Chevreuse would speak."

"Why do you mention Madame de Chevreuse to me?" said she, "and what sort of humor are you in to-day towards me?"

Philippe continued: "Is not Madame de Chevreuse always in league against somebody? Has not Madame de Chevreuse been to pay you a visit, mother?"

"Monsieur, you speak to me now in such a manner that I can almost fancy I am listening to your father."

"My father did not like Madame de Chevreuse, and had good reason for not liking her," said the prince. "For my part, I like her no better than he did, and if she thinks proper to come here as she formerly did, to sow divisions and hatreds under the pretext of begging money--why--"

"Well! what?" said Anne of Austria, proudly, herself provoking the storm.

"Well!" replied the young man firmly, "I will drive Madame de Chevreuse out of my kingdom--and with her all who meddle with its secrets and mysteries."

He had not calculated the effect of this terrible speech, or perhaps he wished to judge the effect of it, like those who, suffering from a chronic pain, and seeking to break the monotony of that suffering, touch their wound to procure a sharper pang. Anne of Austria was nearly fainting; her eyes, open but meaningless, ceased to see for several seconds; she stretched out her arms towards her other son, who supported and embraced her without fear of irritating the king.

"Sire," murmured she, "you are treating your mother very cruelly."

"In what respect, madame?" replied he. "I am only speaking of Madame de Chevreuse; does my mother prefer Madame de Chevreuse to the security of the state and of my person? Well, then, madame, I tell you Madame de Chevreuse has returned to France to borrow money, and that she addressed herself to M. Fouquet to sell him a certain secret."

"A certain secret!" cried Anne of Austria.

"Concerning pretended robberies that monsieur le surintendant had committed, which is false," added Philippe. "M. Fouquet rejected her offers with indignation, preferring the esteem of the king to complicity with such intriguers. Then Madame de Chevreuse sold the secret to M. Colbert, and as she is insatiable, and was not satisfied with having extorted a hundred thousand crowns from a servant of the state, she has taken a still bolder flight, in search of surer sources of supply. Is that true, madame?"

"You know all, sire," said the queen, more uneasy than irritated.

"Now," continued Philippe, "I have good reason to dislike this fury, who comes to my court to plan the shame of some and the ruin of others. If Heaven has suffered certain crimes to be committed, and has concealed them in the shadow of its clemency, I will not permit Madame de Chevreuse to counteract the just designs of fate."

The latter part of this speech had so agitated the queen-mother, that her son had pity on her. He took her hand and kissed it tenderly; she did not feel that in that kiss, given in spite of repulsion and bitterness of the heart, there was a pardon for eight years of suffering. Philippe allowed the silence of a moment to swallow the emotions that had just developed themselves. Then, with a cheerful

smile:

"We will not go to-day," said he, "I have a plan." And, turning towards the door, he hoped to see Aramis, whose absence began to alarm him. The queen-mother wished to leave the room.

"Remain where you are, mother," said he, "I wish you to make your peace with M. Fouquet."

"I bear M. Fouquet no ill-will; I only dreaded his prodigalities."

"We will put that to rights, and will take nothing of the superintendent but his good qualities."

"What is your majesty looking for?" said Henrietta, seeing the king's eyes constantly turned towards the door, and wishing to let fly a little poisoned arrow at his heart, supposing he was so anxiously expecting either La Valliere or a letter from her.

"My sister," said the young man, who had divined her thought, thanks to that marvelous perspicuity of which fortune was from that time about to allow him the exercise, "my sister, I am expecting a most distinguished man, a most able counselor, whom I wish to present to you all, recommending him to your good graces. Ah! come in, then, D'Artagnan."

"What does your majesty wish?" said D'Artagnan, appearing.

"Where is monsieur the bishop of Vannes, your friend?"

"Why, sire--"

"I am waiting for him, and he does not come. Let him be sought for."

D'Artagnan remained for an instant stupefied; but soon, reflecting that Aramis had left Vaux privately on a mission from the king, he concluded that the king wished to preserve the secret. "Sire," replied he, "does your majesty absolutely require M. d'Herblay to be brought to you?"

"Absolutely is not the word," said Philippe; "I do not want him so particularly as that; but if he can be found--"

"I thought so," said D'Artagnan to himself.

"Is this M. d'Herblay the bishop of Vannes?"

"Yes, madame."

"A friend of M. Fouquet?"

"Yes, madame; an old musketeer."

Anne of Austria blushed.

"One of the four braves who formerly performed such prodigies."

The old queen repented of having wished to bite; she broke off the conversation, in order to preserve the rest of her teeth. "Whatever may be your choice, sire," said she, "I have no doubt it will be excellent."

All bowed in support of that sentiment.

"You will find in him," continued Philippe, "the depth and penetration of M. de Richelieu, without the avarice of M. de Mazarin!"

"A prime minister, sire?" said Monsieur, in a fright.

"I will tell you all about that, brother; but it is strange that M. d'Herblay is not here!"

He called out:

"Let M. Fouquet be informed that I wish to speak to him--oh! before you, before you; do not retire!"

M. de Saint-Aignan returned, bringing satisfactory news of the queen, who only kept her bed from precaution, and to have strength to carry out the king's wishes. Whilst everybody was seeking M. Fouquet and Aramis, the new king quietly continued his experiments, and everybody, family, officers, servants, had not the least suspicion of his identity, his air, his voice, and manners were so like the king's. On his side, Philippe, applying to all countenances the accurate descriptions and key-notes of character supplied by his accomplice Aramis, conducted himself so as not to give birth to a doubt in the minds of those who surrounded him. Nothing from that time could disturb the usurper. With what strange facility had Providence just reversed the loftiest fortune of the world to substitute the lowliest in its stead! Philippe admired the goodness of God with regard to himself, and seconded it with all the resources of his admirable nature. But he felt, at times, something like a specter gliding between him and the rays of his new glory. Aramis did not appear. The conversation had languished in the royal family; Philippe, preoccupied, forgot to dismiss his brother and Madame Henrietta. The latter were astonished, and began, by degrees, to lose all patience. Anne of Austria stooped towards her son's ear and addressed some words to him in Spanish. Philippe was completely ignorant of that language, and grew pale at this unexpected obstacle. But, as if the spirit of the imperturbable Aramis had covered him with his infallibility, instead of appearing disconcerted, Philippe rose. "Well! what?" said Anne of Austria.

"What is all that noise?" said Philippe, turning round towards the door of the second staircase.

And a voice was heard saying, "This way, this way! A few steps more, sire!"

"The voice of M. Fouquet," said D'Artagnan, who was standing close to the queen-mother.

"Then M. d'Herblay cannot be far off," added Philippe.

But he then saw what he little thought to have beheld so near to him. All eyes were turned towards the door at which M. Fouquet was expected to enter; but it was not M. Fouquet who entered. A terrible cry resounded from all corners of the chamber, a painful cry uttered by the king and all present. It is given to but few men, even those whose destiny contains the strangest elements, and accidents the most wonderful, to contemplate such a spectacle similar to that which presented itself in the royal chamber at that moment. The half-closed shutters only admitted the entrance of an uncertain light passing through thick violet velvet curtains lined with silk. In this soft shade, the eyes were by degrees dilated, and every one present saw others rather with imagination than with actual sight. There could not, however, escape, in these circumstances, one of the surrounding details; and the new object which presented itself appeared as luminous as though it shone out in full sunlight. So it happened with Louis XIV., when he showed himself, pale and frowning, in the doorway of the secret stairs. The face of Fouquet appeared behind him, stamped with sorrow and determination. The queen-mother, who perceived Louis XIV., and who held the hand of Philippe, uttered a cry of which we have spoken, as if she beheld a phantom. Monsieur was bewildered, and kept turning his head in astonishment from one to the other. Madame made a step forward, thinking she was looking at the form of her brother-in-law reflected in a mirror. And, in fact, the illusion was possible. The two princes, both pale as death--for we renounce the hope of being able to describe the fearful state of Philippe--trembling, clenching their hands convulsively, measured each other with looks, and darted their glances, sharp as poniards, at each other. Silent, panting, bending forward, they appeared as if about to spring upon an enemy. The unheard-of resemblance of countenance, gesture, shape, height, even to the resemblance of costume, produced by chance--for Louis XIV. had been to the Louvre and put on a violet-colored dress--the perfect analogy of the two princes, completed the consternation of Anne of Austria. And yet she did not at once guess the truth. There are misfortunes in life so truly dreadful that no one will at first accept them; people rather believe in the supernatural and the impossible. Louis had not reckoned on these obstacles. He expected that he had only to appear to be acknowledged. A living sun, he could not endure the suspicion of equality with any one. He did not admit that

every torch should not become darkness at the instant he shone out with his conquering ray. At the aspect of Philippe, then, he was perhaps more terrified than any one round him, and his silence, his immobility were, this time, a concentration and a calm which precede the violent explosions of concentrated passion.

But Fouquet! who shall paint his emotion and stupor in presence of this living portrait of his master! Fouquet thought Aramis was right, that this newly-arrived was a king as pure in his race as the other, and that, for having repudiated all participation in this coup d'etat, so skillfully got up by the General of the Jesuits, he must be a mad enthusiast, unworthy of ever dipping his hands in political grand strategy work. And then it was the blood of Louis XIII. which Fouquet was sacrificing to the blood of Louis XIII.; it was to a selfish ambition he was sacrificing a noble ambition; to the right of keeping he sacrificed the right of having. The whole extent of his fault was revealed to him at simple sight of the pretender. All that passed in the mind of Fouquet was lost upon the persons present. He had five minutes to focus meditation on this point of conscience; five minutes, that is to say five ages, during which the two kings and their family scarcely found energy to breathe after so terrible a shock. D'Artagnan, leaning against the wall, in front of Fouquet, with his hand to his brow, asked himself the cause of such a wonderful prodigy. He could not have said at once why he doubted, but he knew assuredly that he had reason to doubt, and that in this meeting of the two Louis XIV.s lay all the doubt and difficulty that during late days had rendered the conduct of Aramis so suspicious to the musketeer. These ideas were, however, enveloped in a haze, a veil of mystery. The actors in this assembly seemed to swim in the vapors of a confused waking. Suddenly Louis XIV., more impatient and more accustomed to command, ran to one of the shutters, which he opened, tearing the curtains in his eagerness. A flood of living light entered the chamber, and made Philippe draw back to the alcove. Louis seized upon this movement with eagerness, and addressing himself to the queen:

"My mother," said he, "do you not acknowledge your son, since every one here has forgotten his king!" Anne of Austria started, and raised her arms towards Heaven, without being able to articulate a single word.

"My mother," said Philippe, with a calm voice, "do you not acknowledge your son?" And this time, in his turn, Louis drew back.

As to Anne of Austria, struck suddenly in head and heart with fell remorse, she lost her equilibrium. No one aiding her, for all were petrified, she sank back in her fauteuil, breathing a weak, trembling sigh. Louis could not endure the spectacle and the affront. He bounded towards D'Artagnan, over whose brain a vertigo was stealing and who staggered as he caught at the door for support.

"A moi! mousquetaire!" said he. "Look us in the face and say which is

the paler, he or I!"

This cry roused D'Artagnan, and stirred in his heart the fibers of obedience. He shook his head, and, without more hesitation, he walked straight up to Philippe, on whose shoulder he laid his hand, saying, "Monsieur, you are my prisoner!"

Philippe did not raise his eyes towards Heaven, nor stir from the spot, where he seemed nailed to the floor, his eye intently fixed upon the king his brother. He reproached him with a sublime silence for all misfortunes past, all tortures to come. Against this language of the soul the king felt he had no power; he cast down his eyes, dragging away precipitately his brother and sister, forgetting his mother, sitting motionless within three paces of the son whom she left a second time to be condemned to death. Philippe approached Anne of Austria, and said to her, in a soft and nobly agitated voice:

"If I were not your son, I should curse you, my mother, for having rendered me so unhappy."

D'Artagnan felt a shudder pass through the marrow of his bones. He bowed respectfully to the young prince, and said as he bent, "Excuse me, monseigneur, I am but a soldier, and my oaths are his who has just left the chamber."

"Thank you, M. d'Artagnan.... What has become of M. d'Herblay?"

"M. d'Herblay is in safety, monseigneur," said a voice behind them; "and no one, while I live and am free, shall cause a hair to fall from his head."

"Monsieur Fouquet!" said the prince, smiling sadly.

"Pardon me, monseigneur," said Fouquet, kneeling, "but he who is just gone out from hence was my guest."

"Here are," murmured Philippe, with a sigh, "brave friends and good hearts. They make me regret the world. On, M. d'Artagnan, I follow you."

At the moment the captain of the musketeers was about to leave the room with his prisoner, Colbert appeared, and, after remitting an order from the king to D'Artagnan, retired. D'Artagnan read the paper, and then crushed it in his hand with rage.

"What is it?" asked the prince.

"Read, monseigneur," replied the musketeer.

Philippe read the following words, hastily traced by the hand of the



king:

"M. d'Artagnan will conduct the prisoner to the Ile Sainte-Marguerite. He will cover his face with an iron vizor, which the prisoner shall never raise except at peril of his life."

"That is just," said Philippe, with resignation; "I am ready."

"Aramis was right," said Fouquet, in a low voice, to the musketeer, "this one is every whit as much a king as the other."

"More so!" replied D'Artagnan. "He wanted only you and me."