

Chapter 15

After Supper.

The king took Saint-Aignan by the arm, and passed into the adjoining apartment. "What has detained you, comte?" said the king.

"I was bringing the answer, sire," replied the comte.

"She has taken a long time to reply to what I wrote her."

"Sire, your majesty deigned to write in verse, and Mademoiselle de la Valliere wished to repay your majesty in the same coin; that is to say, in gold."

"Verses! Saint-Aignan," exclaimed the king in ecstasy. "Give them to me at once." And Louis broke the seal of a little letter, inclosing the verses which history has preserved entire for us, and which are more meritorious in invention than in execution. Such as they were, however, the king was enchanted with them, and exhibited his satisfaction by unequivocal transports of delight; but the universal silence which reigned in the rooms warned Louis, so sensitively particular with regard to good breeding, that his delight must give rise to various interpretations. He turned aside and put the note in his pocket, and then advancing a few steps, which brought him again to the threshold of the door close to his guests, he said, "M. du Vallon, I have seen you to-day with the greatest pleasure, and my pleasure will be equally great to

see you again." Porthos bowed as the Colossus of Rhodes would have done, and retired from the room with his face towards the king. "M. d'Artagnan," continued the king, "you will await my orders in the gallery; I am obliged to you for having made me acquainted with M. du Vallon. Gentlemen," addressing himself to the other guests, "I return to Paris to-morrow on account of the departure of the Spanish and Dutch ambassadors. Until to-morrow then."

The apartment was immediately cleared of the guests. The king took Saint-Aignan by the arm, made him read La Valliere's verses over again, and said, "What do you think of them?"

"Charming, sire."

"They charm me, in fact, and if they were known - "

"Oh! the professional poets would be jealous of them; but it is not likely they will know anything about them."

"Did you give her mine?"

"Oh! sire, she positively devoured them."

"They were very weak, I am afraid."

"That is not what Mademoiselle de la Valliere said of them."

"Do you think she was pleased with them?"

"I am sure of it, sire."

"I must answer, then."

"Oh! sire, immediately after supper? Your majesty will fatigue yourself."

"You are quite right; study after eating is notoriously injurious."

"The labor of a poet especially so; and besides, there is great excitement prevailing at Mademoiselle de la Valliere's."

"What do you mean?"

"With her as with all the ladies of the court."

"Why?"

"On account of poor De Guiche's accident."

"Has anything serious happened to De Guiche, then?"

"Yes, sire, he has one hand nearly destroyed, a hole in his breast; in fact, he is dying."

"Good heavens! who told you that?"

"Manicamp brought him back just now to the house of a doctor here in Fontainebleau, and the rumor soon reached us all."

"Brought back! Poor De Guiche; and how did it happen?"

"Ah! that is the very question, - how did it happen?"

"You say that in a very singular manner, Saint-Aignan. Give me the details. What does he say himself?"

"He says nothing, sire; but others do."

"What others?"

"Those who brought him back, sire."

"Who are they?"

"I do not know, sire; but M. de Manicamp knows. M. de Manicamp is one of his friends."

"As everybody is, indeed," said the king.

"Oh! no!" returned Saint-Aignan, "you are mistaken sire; every one is not precisely a friend of M. de Guiche."

"How do you know that?"

"Does your majesty require me to explain myself?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, sire, I believe I have heard something said about a quarrel between two gentlemen."

"When?"

"This very evening, before your majesty's supper was served."

"That can hardly be. I have issued such stringent and severe ordinances with respect to duelling, that no one, I presume, would dare to disobey them."

"In that case, Heaven preserve me from excusing any one!" exclaimed Saint-Aignan. "Your majesty commanded me to speak, and I spoke accordingly."

"Tell me, then, in what way the Comte de Guiche has been wounded?"

"Sire, it is said to have been at a boar-hunt."

"This evening?"

"Yes, sire."

"One of his hands shattered, and a hole in his breast. Who was at the hunt with M. de Guiche?"

"I do not know, sire; but M. de Manicamp knows, or ought to know."

"You are concealing something from me, Saint-Aignan."

"Nothing, sire, I assure you."

"Then, explain to me how the accident happened; was it a musket that burst?"

"Very likely, sire. But yet, on reflection, it could hardly have been that, for De Guiche's pistol was found close by him still loaded."

"His pistol? But a man does not go to a boar-hunt with a pistol, I should think."

"Sire, it is also said that De Guiche's horse was killed and that the horse is still to be found in the wide open glade in the forest."

"His horse? - Guiche go on horseback to a boar-hunt? - Saint-Aignan, I do not understand a syllable of what you have been telling me. Where did this affair happen?"

"At the Rond-point, in that part of the forest called the Bois-Rochin."

"That will do. Call M. d'Artagnan." Saint-Aignan obeyed, and the musketeer entered.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, "you will leave this place by the little door of the private staircase."

"Yes, sire."

"You will mount your horse."

"Yes, sire."

"And you will proceed to the Rond-point du Bois-Rochin. Do you know the spot?"

"Yes, sire. I have fought there twice."

"What!" exclaimed the king, amazed at the reply.

"Under the edicts, sire, of Cardinal Richelieu," returned D'Artagnan,

with his usual impassability.

"That is very different, monsieur. You will, therefore, go there, and will examine the locality very carefully. A man has been wounded there, and you will find a horse lying dead. You will tell me what your opinion is upon the whole affair."

"Very good, sire."

"As a matter of course, it is your own opinion I require, and not that of any one else."

"You shall have it in an hour's time, sire."

"I prohibit your speaking with any one, whoever it may be."

"Except with the person who must give me a lantern," said D'Artagnan.

"Oh! that is a matter of course," said the king, laughing at the liberty, which he tolerated in no one but his captain of the musketeers.

D'Artagnan left by the little staircase.

"Now, let my physician be sent for," said Louis. Ten minutes afterwards the king's physician arrived, quite out of breath.

"You will go, monsieur," said the king to him, "and accompany M. de Saint-

Aignan wherever he may take you; you will render me an account of the state of the person you may see in the house you will be taken to." The physician obeyed without a remark, as at that time people began to obey Louis XIV., and left the room preceding Saint-Aignan.

"Do you, Saint-Aignan, send Manicamp to me, before the physician can possibly have spoken to him." And Saint-Aignan left in his turn.