

Chapter 18

The Physician.

M. Valot entered. The position of the different persons present was precisely the same: the king was seated, Saint-Aignan leaning over the back of his armchair, D'Artagnan with his back against the wall, and Manicamp still standing.

"Well, M. Valot," said the king, "did you obey my directions?"

"With the greatest alacrity, sire."

"You went to the doctor's house in Fontainebleau?"

"Yes, sire."

"And you found M. de Guiche there?"

"I did, sire."

"What state was he in? - speak unreservedly."

"In a very sad state indeed, sire."

"The wild boar did not quite devour him, however?"

"Devour whom?"

"De Guiche."

"What wild boar?"

"The boar that wounded him."

"M. de Guiche wounded by a boar?"

"So it is said, at least."

"By a poacher, rather, or by a jealous husband, or an ill-used lover, who, in order to be revenged, fired upon him."

"What is it that you say, Monsieur Valot? Were not M. de Guiche's wounds produced by defending himself against a wild boar?"

"M. de Guiche's wounds are the result of a pistol-bullet that broke his ring-finger and the little finger of the right hand, and afterwards buried itself in the intercostal muscles of the chest."

"A bullet! Are you sure Monsieur de Guiche was wounded by a _bullet?_" exclaimed the king, pretending to look much surprised.

"Indeed, I am, sire; so sure, in fact, that here it is." And he

presented to the king a half-flattened bullet, which the king looked at, but did not touch.

"Did he have that in his chest, poor fellow?" he asked.

"Not precisely. The ball did not penetrate, but was flattened, as you see, either upon the trigger of the pistol or upon the right side of the breast-bone."

"Good heavens!" said the king, seriously, "you said nothing to me about this, Monsieur de Manicamp."

"Sire - "

"What does all this mean, then, this invention about hunting a wild boar at nightfall? Come, speak, monsieur."

"Sire - "

"It seems, then, that you are right," said the king, turning round towards his captain of musketeers, "and that a duel actually took place."

The king possessed, to a greater extent than any one else, the faculty enjoyed by the great in power or position, of compromising and dividing those beneath him. Manicamp darted a look full of reproaches at the musketeer. D'Artagnan understood the look at once, and not wishing to

remain beneath the weight of such an accusation, advanced a step forward, and said: "Sire, your majesty commanded me to go and explore the place where the cross-roads meet in the Bois-Rochin, and to report to you, according to my own ideas, what had taken place there. I submitted my observations to you, but without denouncing any one. It was your majesty yourself who was the first to name the Comte de Guiche."

"Well, monsieur, well," said the king, haughtily; "you have done your duty, and I am satisfied with you. But you, Monsieur de Manicamp, have failed in yours, for you have told me a falsehood."

"A falsehood, sire. The expression is a hard one."

"Find a more accurate, then."

"Sire, I will not attempt to do so. I have already been unfortunate enough to displease your majesty, and it will, in every respect, be far better for me to accept most humbly any reproaches you may think proper to address to me."

"You are right, monsieur, whoever conceals the truth from me, risks my displeasure."

"Sometimes, sire, one is ignorant of the truth."

"No further falsehood, monsieur, or I double the punishment."

Manicamp bowed and turned pale. D'Artagnan again made another step forward, determined to interfere, if the still increasing anger of the king attained certain limits.

"You see, monsieur," continued the king, "that it is useless to deny the thing any longer. M. de Guiche has fought a duel."

"I do not deny it, sire, and it would have been truly generous on your majesty's part not to have forced me to tell a falsehood."

"Forced? Who forced you?"

"Sire, M. de Guiche is my friend. Your majesty has forbidden duels under pain of death. A falsehood might save my friend's life, and I told it."

"Good!" murmured D'Artagnan, "an excellent fellow, upon my word."

"Instead of telling a falsehood, monsieur, you should have prevented him from fighting," said the king.

"Oh! sire, your majesty, who is the most accomplished gentleman in France, knows quite as well as any of us other gentlemen that we have never considered M. de Bouteville dishonored for having suffered death on the Place de Greve. That which does in truth dishonor a man is to avoid meeting his enemy - not to avoid meeting his executioner!"

"Well, monsieur, that may be so," said Louis XIV.; "I am desirous of suggesting a means of your repairing all."

"If it be a means of which a gentleman may avail himself, I shall most eagerly seize the opportunity."

"The name of M. de Guiche's adversary?"

"Oh, oh!" murmured D'Artagnan, "are we going to take Louis XIII. as a model?"

"Sire!" said Manicamp, with an accent of reproach.

"You will not name him, then?" said the king.

"Sire, I do not know him."

"Bravo!" murmured D'Artagnan.

"Monsieur de Manicamp, hand your sword to the captain."

Manicamp bowed very gracefully, unbuckled his sword, smiling as he did so, and handed it for the musketeer to take. But Saint-Aignan advanced hurriedly between him and D'Artagnan. "Sire," he said, "will your majesty permit me to say a word?"

"Do so," said the king, delighted, perhaps, at the bottom of his heart, for some one to step between him and the wrath he felt he had carried him too far.

"Manicamp, you are a brave man, and the king will appreciate your conduct; but to wish to serve your friends too well, is to destroy them. Manicamp, you know the name the king asks you for?"

"It is perfectly true - I do know it."

"You will give it up then?"

"If I felt I ought to have mentioned it, I should have already done so."

"Then I will tell it, for I am not so extremely sensitive on such points of honor as you are."

"You are at liberty to do so, but it seems to me, however - "

"Oh! a truce to magnanimity; I will not permit you to go to the Bastile in that way. Do you speak; or I will."

Manicamp was keen-witted enough, and perfectly understood that he had done quite sufficient to produce a good opinion of his conduct; it was now only a question of persevering in such a manner as to regain the good

graces of the king. "Speak, monsieur," he said to Saint-Aignan; "I have on my own behalf done all that my conscience told me to do; and it must have been very importunate," he added, turning towards the king, "since its mandates led me to disobey your majesty's commands; but your majesty will forgive me, I hope, when you learn that I was anxious to preserve the honor of a lady."

"Of a lady?" said the king, with some uneasiness.

"Yes, sire."

"A lady was the cause of this duel?"

Manicamp bowed.

"If the position of the lady in question warrants it," he said, "I shall not complain of your having acted with so much circumspection; on the contrary, indeed."

"Sire, everything which concerns your majesty's household, or the household of your majesty's brother, is of importance in my eyes."

"In my brother's household," repeated Louis XIV., with a slight hesitation. "The cause of the duel was a lady belonging to my brother's household, do you say?"

"Or to Madame's."

"Ah! to Madame's?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well - and this lady?"

"Is one of the maids of honor of her royal highness Madame la Duchesse d'Orleans."

"For whom M. de Guiche fought - do you say?"

"Yes, sire, and, this time, I tell no falsehood."

Louis seemed restless and anxious. "Gentlemen," he said, turning towards the spectators of this scene, "will you have the goodness to retire for a moment. I wish to be alone with M. de Manicamp; I know he has some important communication to make for his own justification, and which he will not venture before witnesses.... Put up your sword, M. de Manicamp."

Manicamp returned his sword to his belt.

"The fellow decidedly has his wits about him," murmured the musketeer, taking Saint-Aignan by the arm, and withdrawing with him.

"He will get out of it," said the latter in D'Artagnan's ear.

"And with honor, too, comte."

Manicamp cast a glance of recognition at Saint-Aignan and the captain, which luckily passed unnoticed by the king.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan, as he left the room, "I had an indifferent opinion of the new generation. Well, I was mistaken after all. There is some good in them, I perceive."

Valot preceded the favorite and the captain, leaving the king and Manicamp alone in the cabinet.