

Chapter 19

Wherein D'Artagnan Perceives that It Was He Who Was Mistaken, and Manicamp Who Was Right.

The king, determined to be satisfied that no one was listening, went himself to the door, and then returned precipitately and placed himself opposite Manicamp.

"And now we are alone, Monsieur de Manicamp, explain yourself."

"With the greatest frankness, sire," replied the young man.

"And in the first place, pray understand," added the king, "that there is nothing to which I personally attach a greater importance than the honor of any lady."

"That is the very reason, sire, why I endeavored to study your delicacy of sentiment and feeling."

"Yes, I understand it all now. You say that it was one of the maids of honor of my sister-in-law who was the subject of dispute, and that the person in question, De Guiche's adversary, the man, in point of fact, whom you will not name - "

"But whom M. de Saint-Aignan will name, monsieur."

"Yes, you say, however, that this man insulted some one belonging to the household of Madame."

"Yes, sire. Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

"Ah!" said the king, as if he had expected the name, and yet as if its announcement had caused him a sudden pang; "ah! it was Mademoiselle de la Valliere who was insulted."

"I do not say precisely that she was insulted, sire."

"But at all events - "

"I merely say that she was spoken of in terms far enough from respectful."

"A man dares to speak in disrespectful terms of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and yet you refuse to tell me the name of the insulter?"

"Sire, I thought it was quite understood that your majesty had abandoned the idea of making me denounce him."

"Perfectly true, monsieur," returned the king, controlling his anger;

"besides, I shall know in good time the name of this man whom I shall feel it my duty to punish."

Manicamp perceived that they had returned to the question again. As for the king, he saw he had allowed himself to be hurried away a little too far, and therefore continued: - "And I will punish him - not because there is any question of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, although I esteem her very highly - but because a lady was the object of the quarrel. And I intend that ladies shall be respected at my court, and that quarrels shall be put a stop to altogether."

Manicamp bowed.

"And now, Monsieur de Manicamp," continued the king, "what was said about

Mademoiselle de la Valliere?"

"Cannot your majesty guess?"

"I?"

"Your majesty can imagine the character of the jest in which young men permit themselves to indulge."

"They very probably said that she was in love with some one?" the king ventured to remark.

"Probably so."

"But Mademoiselle de la Valliere has a perfect right to love any one she pleases," said the king.

"That is the very point De Guiche maintained."

"And on account of which he fought, do you mean?"

"Yes, sire, the sole and only cause."

The king colored. "And you do not know anything more, then?"

"In what respect, sire?"

"In the very interesting respect which you are now referring to."

"What does your majesty wish to know?"

"Why, the name of the man with whom La Valliere is in love, and whom De Guiche's adversary disputed her right to love."

"Sire, I know nothing - I have heard nothing - and have learnt nothing, even accidentally; but De Guiche is a noble-hearted fellow, and if, momentarily, he substituted himself in the place or stead of La Valliere's protector, it was because that protector was himself of too exalted a position to undertake her defense."

These words were more than transparent; they made the king blush, but this time with pleasure. He struck Manicamp gently on the shoulder.

"Well, well, Monsieur de Manicamp, you are not only a ready, witty fellow, but a brave gentleman besides, and your friend De Guiche is a paladin quite after my own heart; you will express that to him from me."

"Your majesty forgives me, then?"

"Completely."

"And I am free?"

The king smiled and held out his hand to Manicamp, which he took and kissed respectfully. "And then," added the king, "you relate stories so charmingly."

"I, sire!"

"You told me in the most admirable manner the particulars of the accident which happened to Guiche. I can see the wild boar rushing out of the wood - I can see the horse fall down fighting with his head, and the boar rush from the horse to the rider. You do not simply relate a story well: you positively paint its incidents."

"Sire, I think your majesty condescends to laugh at my expense," said Manicamp.

"On the contrary," said Louis, seriously, "I have so little intention of laughing, Monsieur de Manicamp, that I wish you to relate this adventure to every one."

"The adventure of the hunt?"

"Yes; in the same manner you told it to me, without changing a single word - _you understand?_"

"Perfectly, sire."

"And you will relate it, then?"

"Without losing a minute."

"Very well! and now summon M. d'Artagnan; I hope you are no longer afraid of him."

"Oh, sire, from the very moment I am sure of your majesty's kind disposition, I no longer fear anything!"

"Call him, then," said the king.

Manicamp opened the door, and said, "Gentlemen, the king wishes you to return."

D'Artagnan, Saint-Aignan, and Valot entered.

"Gentlemen," said the king, "I summoned you for the purposes of saying that Monsieur de Manicamp's explanation has entirely satisfied me."

D'Artagnan glanced at Valot and Saint-Aignan, as much as to say, "Well! did I not tell you so?"

The king led Manicamp to the door, and then in a low tone of voice said: "See that M. de Guiche takes good care of himself, and particularly that he recovers as soon as possible; I am very desirous of thanking him in the name of every lady, but let him take special care that he does not begin again."

"Were he to die a hundred times, sire, he would begin again if your majesty's honor were in any way called in question."

This remark was direct enough. But we have already said that the incense of flattery was very pleasing to the king, and, provided he received it, he was not very particular as to its quality.

"Very well, very well," he said, as he dismissed Manicamp, "I will see De Guiche myself, and make him listen to reason." And as Manicamp left the apartment, the king turned round towards the three spectators of this scene, and said, "Tell me, Monsieur d'Artagnan, how does it happen that

your sight is so imperfect? - you, whose eyes are generally so very good."

"My sight bad, sire?"

"Certainly."

"It must be the case since your majesty says so; but in what respect, may I ask?"

"Why, with regard to what occurred in the Bois-Rochin."

"Ah! ah!"

"Certainly. You pretended to have seen the tracks of two horses, to have detected the footprints of two men; and have described the particulars of an engagement, which you assert took place. Nothing of the sort occurred; pure illusion on your part."

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan.

"Exactly the same thing with the galloping to and fro of the horses, and the other indications of a struggle. It was the struggle of De Guiche against the wild boar, and absolutely nothing else; only the struggle was a long and a terrible one, it seems."

"Ah! ah!" continued D'Artagnan.

"And when I think that I almost believed it for a moment - but, then, you told it with such confidence."

"I admit, sire, that I must have been very short-sighted," said D'Artagnan, with a readiness of humor which delighted the king.

"You do admit it, then?"

"Admit it, sire, most assuredly I do."

"So now that you see the thing - "

"In quite a different light from that in which I saw it half an hour ago."

"And to what, then, do you attribute this difference in your opinion?"

"Oh! a very simple thing, sire; half an hour ago I returned from Bois-Rochin, where I had nothing to light me but a stupid stable lantern - "

"While now?"

"While now I have all the wax-lights of your cabinet, and more than that, your majesty's own eyes, which illuminate everything, like the blazing sun at noonday."

The king began to laugh; and Saint-Aignan broke out into convulsions of merriment.

"It is precisely like M. Valot," said D'Artagnan, resuming the conversation where the king had left off; "he has been imagining all along, that not only was M. de Guiche wounded by a bullet, but still more, that he extracted it, even, from his chest."

"Upon my word," said Valot, "I assure you - "

"Now, did you not believe that?" continued D'Artagnan.

"Yes," said Valot; "not only did I believe it, but, at this very moment, I would swear it."

"Well, my dear doctor, you have dreamt it."

"I have dreamt it!"

"M. de Guiche's wound - a mere dream; the bullet, a dream. So, take my advice, and prate no more about it."

"Well said," returned the king, "M. d'Artagnan's advice is sound. Do not speak of your dream to any one, Monsieur Valot, and, upon the word of a gentleman, you will have no occasion to repent it. Good evening, gentlemen; a very sad affair, indeed, is a wild boar-hunt!"

"A very serious thing, indeed," repeated D'Artagnan, in a loud voice, "is a wild boar-hunt!" and he repeated it in every room through which he passed; and left the chateau, taking Valot with him.

"And now we are alone," said the king to Saint-Aignan, "what is the name of De Guiche's adversary?"

Saint-Aignan looked at the king.

"Oh! do not hesitate," said the king; "you know that I am bound beforehand to forgive."

"De Wardes," said Saint-Aignan.

"Very good," said Louis XIV.; and then, retiring to his own room, added to himself, "To forgive is not to forget."