

Chapter 23. One of the Forty Methods of Escape of the Duc de Beaufort.

Meanwhile time was passing on for the prisoner, as well as for those who were preparing his escape; only for him it passed more slowly. Unlike other men, who enter with ardor upon a perilous resolution and grow cold as the moment of execution approaches, the Duc de Beaufort, whose buoyant courage had become a proverb, seemed to push time before him and sought most eagerly to hasten the hour of action. In his escape alone, apart from his plans for the future, which, it must be admitted, were for the present sufficiently vague and uncertain, there was a beginning of vengeance which filled his heart. In the first place his escape would be a serious misfortune to Monsieur de Chavigny, whom he hated for the petty persecutions he owed to him. It would be a still worse affair for Mazarin, whom he execrated for the greater offences he had committed. It may be observed that there was a proper proportion in his sentiments toward the governor of the prison and the minister--toward the subordinate and the master.

Then Monsieur de Beaufort, who was so familiar with the interior of the Palais Royal, though he did not know the relations existing between the queen and the cardinal, pictured to himself, in his prison, all that dramatic excitement which would ensue when the rumor should run from the minister's cabinet to the chamber of Anne of Austria: "Monsieur de Beaufort has escaped!" Whilst saying that to himself, Monsieur de Beaufort smiled pleasantly and imagined himself already outside,

breathing the air of the plains and the forests, pressing a strong horse between his knees and crying out in a loud voice, "I am free!"

It is true that on coming to himself he found that he was still within four walls; he saw La Ramee twirling his thumbs ten feet from him, and his guards laughing and drinking in the ante-chamber. The only thing that was pleasant to him in that odious tableau--such is the instability of the human mind--was the sullen face of Grimaud, for whom he had at first conceived such a hatred and who now was all his hope.

Grimaud seemed to him an Antinous. It is needless to say that this transformation was visible only to the prisoner's feverish imagination.

Grimaud was still the same, and therefore he retained the entire confidence of his superior, La Ramee, who now relied upon him more than he did upon himself, for, as we have said, La Ramee felt at the bottom of his heart a certain weakness for Monsieur de Beaufort.

And so the good La Ramee made a festivity of the little supper with his prisoner. He had but one fault--he was a gourmand; he had found the pates good, the wine excellent. Now the successor of Pere Marteau had promised him a pate of pheasant instead of a pate of fowl, and Chambertin wine instead of Macon. All this, set off by the presence of that excellent prince, who was so good-natured, who invented so droll tricks against Monsieur de Chavigny and so fine jokes against Mazarin, made for La Ramee the approaching Pentecost one of the four great feasts of the year. He therefore looked forward to six o'clock with as much impatience as the duke himself.

Since daybreak La Ramee had been occupied with the preparations, and

trusting no one but himself, he had visited personally the successor of Pere Marteau. The latter had surpassed himself; he showed La Ramee a monstrous pate, ornamented with Monsieur de Beaufort's coat-of-arms. It was empty as yet, but a pheasant and two partridges were lying near it. La Ramee's mouth watered and he returned to the duke's chamber rubbing his hands. To crown his happiness, Monsieur de Chavigny had started on a journey that morning and in his absence La Ramee was deputy-governor of the chateau.

As for Grimaud, he seemed more sullen than ever.

In the course of the forenoon Monsieur de Beaufort had a game of tennis with La Ramee; a sign from Grimaud put him on the alert. Grimaud, going in advance, followed the course which they were to take in the evening. The game was played in an inclosure called the little court of the chateau, a place quite deserted except when Monsieur de Beaufort was playing; and even then the precaution seemed superfluous, the wall was so high.

There were three gates to open before reaching the inclosure, each by a different key. When they arrived Grimaud went carelessly and sat down by a loophole in the wall, letting his legs dangle outside. It was evident that there the rope ladder was to be attached.

This manoeuvre, transparent to the Duc de Beaufort, was quite unintelligible to La Ramee.

The game at tennis, which, upon a sign from Grimaud, Monsieur de

Beaufort had consented to play, began in the afternoon. The duke was in full strength and beat La Ramee completely.

Four of the guards, who were constantly near the prisoner, assisted in picking up the tennis balls. When the game was over, the duke, laughing at La Ramee for his bad play, offered these men two louis d'or to go and drink his health, with their four other comrades.

The guards asked permission of La Ramee, who gave it to them, but not till the evening, however; until then he had business and the prisoner was not to be left alone.

Six o'clock came and, although they were not to sit down to table until seven o'clock, dinner was ready and served up. Upon a sideboard appeared the colossal pie with the duke's arms on it, and seemingly cooked to a turn, as far as one could judge by the golden color which illuminated the crust.

The rest of the dinner was to come.

Every one was impatient, La Ramee to sit down to table, the guards to go and drink, the duke to escape.

Grimaud alone was calm as ever. One might have fancied that Athos had educated him with the express forethought of such a great event.

There were moments when, looking at Grimaud, the duke asked himself if he was not dreaming and if that marble figure was really at his service

and would grow animated when the moment came for action.

La Ramee sent away the guards, desiring them to drink to the duke's health, and as soon as they were gone shut all the doors, put the keys in his pocket and showed the table to the prince with an air that signified:

"Whenever my lord pleases."

The prince looked at Grimaud, Grimaud looked at the clock; it was hardly a quarter-past six. The escape was fixed to take place at seven o'clock; there was therefore three-quarters of an hour to wait.

The duke, in order to pass away another quarter of an hour, pretended to be reading something that interested him and muttered that he wished they would allow him to finish his chapter. La Ramee went up to him and looked over his shoulder to see what sort of a book it was that had so singular an influence over the prisoner as to make him put off taking his dinner.

It was "Caesar's Commentaries," which La Ramee had lent him, contrary to the orders of the governor; and La Ramee resolved never again to disobey these injunctions.

Meantime he uncorked the bottles and went to smell if the pie was good.

At half-past six the duke arose and said very gravely:

"Certainly, Caesar was the greatest man of ancient times."

"You think so, my lord?" answered La Ramee.

"Yes."

"Well, as for me, I prefer Hannibal."

"And why, pray, Master La Ramee?" asked the duke.

"Because he left no Commentaries," replied La Ramee, with his coarse laugh.

The duke vouchsafed no reply, but sitting down at the table made a sign that La Ramee should seat himself opposite. There is nothing so expressive as the face of an epicure who finds himself before a well spread table, so La Ramee, when receiving his plate of soup from Grimaud, presented a type of perfect bliss.

The duke smiled.

"Zounds!" he said; "I don't suppose there is a more contented man at this moment in all the kingdom than yourself!"

"You are right, my lord duke," answered the officer; "I don't know any pleasanter sight on earth than a well covered table; and when, added to that, he who does the honors is the grandson of Henry IV., you will, my lord duke, easily comprehend that the honor fairly doubles the pleasure

one enjoys."

The duke, in his turn, bowed, and an imperceptible smile appeared on the face of Grimaud, who kept behind La Ramee.

"My dear La Ramee," said the duke, "you are the only man to turn such faultless compliments."

"No, my lord duke," replied La Ramee, in the fullness of his heart; "I say what I think; there is no compliment in what I say to you----"

"Then you are attached to me?" asked the duke.

"To own the truth, I should be inconsolable if you were to leave Vincennes."

"A droll way of showing your affliction." The duke meant to say "affection."

"But, my lord," returned La Ramee, "what would you do if you got out? Every folly you committed would embroil you with the court and they would put you into the Bastile, instead of Vincennes. Now, Monsieur de Chavigny is not amiable, I allow, but Monsieur du Tremblay is considerably worse."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the duke, who from time to time looked at the clock, the fingers of which seemed to move with sickening slowness.

"But what can you expect from the brother of a capuchin monk, brought up in the school of Cardinal Richelieu? Ah, my lord, it is a great happiness that the queen, who always wished you well, had a fancy to send you here, where there's a promenade and a tennis court, good air, and a good table."

"In short," answered the duke, "if I comprehend you aright, La Ramee, I am ungrateful for having ever thought of leaving this place?"

"Oh! my lord duke, 'tis the height of ingratitude; but your highness has never seriously thought of it?"

"Yes," returned the duke, "I must confess I sometimes think of it."

"Still by one of your forty methods, your highness?"

"Yes, yes, indeed."

"My lord," said La Ramee, "now we are quite at our ease and enjoying ourselves, pray tell me one of those forty ways invented by your highness."

"Willingly," answered the duke, "give me the pie!"

"I am listening," said La Ramee, leaning back in his armchair and raising his glass of Madeira to his lips, and winking his eye that he might see the sun through the rich liquid that he was about to taste.



The duke glanced at the clock. In ten minutes it would strike seven.

Grimaud placed the pie before the duke, who took a knife with a silver blade to raise the upper crust; but La Ramee, who was afraid of any harm happening to this fine work of art, passed his knife, which had an iron blade, to the duke.

"Thank you, La Ramee," said the prisoner.

"Well, my lord! this famous invention of yours?"

"Must I tell you," replied the duke, "on what I most reckon and what I determine to try first?"

"Yes, that's the thing, my lord!" cried his custodian, gaily.

"Well, I should hope, in the first instance, to have for keeper an honest fellow like you."

"And you have me, my lord. Well?"

"Having, then, a keeper like La Ramee, I should try also to have introduced to him by some friend or other a man who would be devoted to me, who would assist me in my flight."

"Come, come," said La Ramee, "that's not a bad idea."

"Capital, isn't it? for instance, the former servingman of some brave

gentleman, an enemy himself to Mazarin, as every gentleman ought to be."

"Hush! don't let us talk politics, my lord."

"Then my keeper would begin to trust this man and to depend upon him, and I should have news from those without the prison walls."

"Ah, yes! but how can the news be brought to you?"

"Nothing easier; in a game of tennis, for example."

"In a game of tennis?" asked La Ramee, giving more serious attention to the duke's words.

"Yes; see, I send a ball into the moat; a man is there who picks it up; the ball contains a letter. Instead of returning the ball to me when I call for it from the top of the wall, he throws me another; that other ball contains a letter. Thus we have exchanged ideas and no one has seen us do it."

"The devil it does! The devil it does!" said La Ramee, scratching his head; "you are in the wrong to tell me that, my lord. I shall have to watch the men who pick up balls."

The duke smiled.

"But," resumed La Ramee, "that is only a way of corresponding."

"And that is a great deal, it seems to me."

"But not enough."

"Pardon me; for instance, I say to my friends, Be on a certain day, on a certain hour, at the other side of the moat with two horses."

"Well, what then?" La Ramee began to be uneasy; "unless the horses have wings to mount the ramparts and come and fetch you."

"That's not needed. I have," replied the duke, "a way of descending from the ramparts."

"What?"

"A rope ladder."

"Yes, but," answered La Ramee, trying to laugh, "a ladder of ropes can't be sent around a ball, like a letter."

"No, but it may be sent in something else."

"In something else--in something else? In what?"

"In a pate, for example."

"In a pate?" said La Ramee.

"Yes. Let us suppose one thing," replied the duke "let us suppose, for instance, that my maitre d'hotel, Noirmont, has purchased the shop of Pere Marteau----"

"Well?" said La Ramee, shuddering.

"Well, La Ramee, who is a gourmand, sees his pates, thinks them more attractive than those of Pere Marteau and proposes to me that I shall try them. I consent on condition that La Ramee tries them with me. That we may be more at our ease, La Ramee removes the guards, keeping only Grimaud to wait on us. Grimaud is the man whom a friend has sent to second me in everything. The moment for my escape is fixed--seven o'clock. Well, at a few minutes to seven----"

"At a few minutes to seven?" cried La Ramee, cold sweat upon his brow.

"At a few minutes to seven," returned the duke (suited the action to the words), "I raise the crust of the pie; I find in it two poniards, a ladder of rope, and a gag. I point one of the poniards at La Ramee's breast and I say to him, 'My friend, I am sorry for it, but if thou stirrest, if thou utterest one cry, thou art a dead man!'"

The duke, in pronouncing these words, suited, as we have said, the action to the words. He was standing near the officer and he directed the point of the poniard in such a manner, close to La Ramee's heart, that there could be no doubt in the mind of that individual as to his determination. Meanwhile, Grimaud, still mute as ever, drew from the pie the other poniard, the rope ladder and the gag.

La Ramee followed all these objects with his eyes, his alarm every moment increasing.

"Oh, my lord," he cried, with an expression of stupefaction in his face; "you haven't the heart to kill me!"

"No; not if thou dost not oppose my flight."

"But, my lord, if I allow you to escape I am a ruined man."

"I will compensate thee for the loss of thy place."

"You are determined to leave the chateau?"

"By Heaven and earth! This night I am determined to be free."

"And if I defend myself, or call, or cry out?"

"I will kill thee, on the honor of a gentleman."

At this moment the clock struck.

"Seven o'clock!" said Grimaud, who had not spoken a word.

La Ramee made one movement, in order to satisfy his conscience. The duke frowned, the officer felt the point of the poniard, which, having penetrated through his clothes, was close to his heart.

"Let us dispatch," said the duke.

"My lord, one last favor."

"What? speak, make haste."

"Bind my arms, my lord, fast."

"Why bind thee?"

"That I may not be considered as your accomplice."

"Your hands?" asked Grimaud.

"Not before me, behind me."

"But with what?" asked the duke.

"With your belt, my lord!" replied La Ramee.

The duke undid his belt and gave it to Grimaud, who tied La Ramee in such a way as to satisfy him.

"Your feet, too," said Grimaud.

La Ramee stretched out his legs, Grimaud took a table-cloth, tore it into strips and tied La Ramee's feet together.

"Now, my lord," said the poor man, "let me have the poire d'angoisse. I ask for it; without it I should be tried in a court of justice because I did not raise the alarm. Thrust it into my mouth, my lord, thrust it in."

Grimaud prepared to comply with this request, when the officer made a sign as if he had something to say.

"Speak," said the duke.

"Now, my lord, do not forget, if any harm happens to me on your account, that I have a wife and four children."

"Rest assured; put the gag in, Grimaud."

In a second La Ramee was gagged and laid prostrate. Two or three chairs were thrown down as if there had been a struggle. Grimaud then took from the pocket of the officer all the keys it contained and first opened the door of the room in which they were, then shut it and double-locked it, and both he and the duke proceeded rapidly down the gallery which led to the little inclosure. At last they reached the tennis court. It was completely deserted. No sentinels, no one at any of the windows. The duke ran to the rampart and perceived on the other side of the ditch, three cavaliers with two riding horses. The duke exchanged a signal with them. It was indeed for him that they were there.

Grimaud, meantime, undid the means of escape.

This was not, however, a rope ladder, but a ball of silk cord, with a narrow board which was to pass between the legs, the ball to unwind itself by the weight of the person who sat astride upon the board.

"Go!" said the duke.

"First, my lord?" inquired Grimaud.

"Certainly. If I am caught, I risk nothing but being taken back again to prison. If they catch thee, thou wilt be hung."

"True," replied Grimaud.

And instantly, Grimaud, sitting upon the board as if on horseback, commenced his perilous descent.

The duke followed him with his eyes, with involuntary terror. He had gone down about three-quarters of the length of the wall when the cord broke. Grimaud fell--precipitated into the moat.

The duke uttered a cry, but Grimaud did not give a single moan. He must have been dreadfully hurt, for he did not stir from the place where he fell.

Immediately one of the men who were waiting slipped down into the moat, tied under Grimaud's shoulders the end of a cord, and the remaining two, who held the other end, drew Grimaud to them.



"Descend, my lord," said the man in the moat. "There are only fifteen feet more from the top down here, and the grass is soft."

The duke had already begun to descend. His task was the more difficult, as there was no board to support him. He was obliged to let himself down by his hands and from a height of fifty feet. But as we have said he was active, strong, and full of presence of mind. In less than five minutes he arrived at the end of the cord. He was then only fifteen feet from the ground, as the gentlemen below had told him. He let go the rope and fell upon his feet, without receiving any injury.

He instantly began to climb up the slope of the moat, on the top of which he met De Rochefort. The other two gentlemen were unknown to him. Grimaud, in a swoon, was tied securely to a horse.

"Gentlemen," said the duke, "I will thank you later; now we have not a moment to lose. On, then! on! those who love me, follow me!"

And he jumped on his horse and set off at full gallop, snuffing the fresh air in his triumph and shouting out, with an expression of face which it would be impossible to describe:

"Free! free! free!"