

### Chapter 33. Grimaud Speaks.

Grimaud was left alone with the executioner, who in a few moments opened his eyes.

"Help, help," he murmured; "oh, God! have I not a single friend in the world who will aid me either to live or to die?"

"Take courage," said Grimaud; "they are gone to find assistance."

"Who are you?" asked the wounded man, fixing his half opened eyes on Grimaud.

"An old acquaintance," replied Grimaud.

"You?" and the wounded man sought to recall the features of the person now before him.

"Under what circumstances did we meet?" he asked again.

"One night, twenty years ago, my master fetched you from Bethune and conducted you to Armentieres."

"I know you well now," said the executioner; "you were one of the four grooms."

"Just so."

"Where do you come from now?"

"I was passing by and drew up at this inn to rest my horse. They told me the executioner of Bethune was here and wounded, when you uttered two piercing cries. At the first we ran to the door and at the second forced it open."

"And the monk?" exclaimed the executioner, "did you see the monk?"

"What monk?"

"The monk that was shut in with me."

"No, he was no longer here; he appears to have fled by the window. Was he the man that stabbed you?"

"Yes," said the executioner.

Grimaud moved as if to leave the room.

"What are you going to do?" asked the wounded man.

"He must be apprehended."

"Do not attempt it; he has revenged himself and has done well. Now I may

hope that God will forgive me, since my crime is expiated."

"Explain yourself." said Grimaud.

"The woman whom you and your masters commanded me to kill----"

"Milady?"

"Yes, Milady; it is true you called her thus."

"What has the monk to do with this Milady?"

"She was his mother."

Grimaud trembled and stared at the dying man in a dull and leaden manner.

"His mother!" he repeated.

"Yes, his mother."

"But does he know this secret, then?"

"I mistook him for a monk and revealed it to him in confession."

"Unhappy man!" cried Grimaud, whose face was covered with sweat at the bare idea of the evil results such a revelation might cause; "unhappy man, you named no one, I hope?"

"I pronounced no name, for I knew none, except his mother's, as a young girl, and it was by this name that he recognized her, but he knows that his uncle was among her judges."

Thus speaking, he fell back exhausted. Grimaud, wishing to relieve him, advanced his hand toward the hilt of the dagger.

"Touch me not!" said the executioner; "if this dagger is withdrawn I shall die."

Grimaud remained with his hand extended; then, striking his forehead, he exclaimed:

"Oh! if this man should ever discover the names of the others, my master is lost."

"Haste! haste to him and warn him," cried the wounded man, "if he still lives; warn his friends, too. My death, believe me, will not be the end of this atrocious misadventure."

"Where was the monk going?" asked Grimaud.

"Toward Paris."

"Who stopped him?"

"Two young gentlemen, who were on their way to join the army and the

name of one of whom I heard his companion mention--the Viscount de Bragelonne."

"And it was this young man who brought the monk to you? Then it was the will of God that it should be so and this it is which makes it all so awful," continued Grimaud. "And yet that woman deserved her fate; do you not think so?"

"On one's death-bed the crimes of others appear very small in comparison with one's own," said the executioner; and falling back exhausted he closed his eyes.

Grimaud was reluctant to leave the man alone and yet he perceived the necessity of starting at once to bear these tidings to the Comte de la Fere. Whilst he thus hesitated the host re-entered the room, followed not only by a surgeon, but by many other persons, whom curiosity had attracted to the spot. The surgeon approached the dying man, who seemed to have fainted.

"We must first extract the steel from the side," said he, shaking his head in a significant manner.

The prophecy which the wounded man had just uttered recurred to Grimaud, who turned away his head. The weapon, as we have already stated, was plunged into the body to the hilt, and as the surgeon, taking it by the end, drew it forth, the wounded man opened his eyes and fixed them on him in a manner truly frightful. When at last the blade had been entirely withdrawn, a red froth issued from the mouth of the wounded man

and a stream of blood spouted afresh from the wound when he at length drew breath; then, fixing his eyes upon Grimaud with a singular expression, the dying man uttered the last death-rattle and expired.

Then Grimaud, lifting the dagger from the pool of blood which was gliding along the room, to the horror of all present, made a sign to the host to follow him, paid him with a generosity worthy of his master and again mounted his horse. Grimaud's first intention had been to return to Paris, but he remembered the anxiety which his prolonged absence might occasion Raoul, and reflecting that there were now only two miles between the vicomte and himself and a quarter of an hour's riding would unite them, and that the going, returning and explanation would not occupy an hour, he put spurs to his horse and a few minutes after had reached the only inn of Mazingarbe.

Raoul was seated at table with the Count de Guiche and his tutor, when all at once the door opened and Grimaud presented himself, travel-stained, dirty, and sprinkled with the blood of the unhappy executioner.

"Grimaud, my good Grimaud!" exclaimed Raoul "here you are at last! Excuse me, sirs, this is not a servant, but a friend. How did you leave the count?" continued he. "Does he regret me a little? Have you seen him since I left him? Answer, for I have many things to tell you, too; indeed, the last three days some odd adventures have happened--but what is the matter? how pale you are! and blood, too! What is this?"

"It is the blood of the unfortunate man whom you left at the inn and who

died in my arms."

"In your arms?--that man! but know you who he was?"

"He used to be the headsman of Bethune."

"You knew him? and he is dead?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir," said D'Arminges, "it is the common lot; even an executioner is not exempted. I had a bad opinion of him the moment I saw his wound, and since he asked for a monk you know that it was his opinion, too, that death would follow."

At the mention of the monk, Grimaud became pale.

"Come, come," continued D'Arminges, "to dinner;" for like most men of his age and generation he did not allow sentiment or sensibility to interfere with a repast.

"You are right, sir," said Raoul. "Come, Grimaud, order dinner for yourself and when you have rested a little we can talk."

"No, sir, no," said Grimaud. "I cannot stop a moment; I must start for Paris again immediately."

"What? You start for Paris? You are mistaken; it is Olivain who leaves

me; you are to remain."

"On the contrary, Olivain is to stay and I am to go. I have come for nothing else but to tell you so."

"But what is the meaning of this change?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Explain yourself."

"I cannot explain myself."

"Come, tell me, what is the joke?"

"Monsieur le vicomte knows that I never joke."

"Yes, but I know also that Monsieur le Comte de la Fere arranged that you were to remain with me and that Olivain should return to Paris. I shall follow the count's directions."

"Not under present circumstances, monsieur."

"Perhaps you mean to disobey me?"

"Yes, monsieur, I must."

"You persist, then?"

"Yes, I am going; may you be happy, monsieur," and Grimaud saluted and turned toward the door to go out.

Raoul, angry and at the same time uneasy, ran after him and seized him by the arm. "Grimaud!" he cried; "remain; I wish it."

"Then," replied Grimaud, "you wish me to allow monsieur le comte to be killed." He saluted and made a movement to depart.

"Grimaud, my friend," said the viscount, "will you leave me thus, in such anxiety? Speak, speak, in Heaven's name!" And Raoul fell back trembling upon his chair.

"I can tell you but one thing, sir, for the secret you wish to know is not my own. You met a monk, did you not?"

"Yes."

The young men looked at each other with an expression of fear.

"You conducted him to the wounded man and you had time to observe him, and perhaps you would know him again were you to meet him."

"Yes, yes!" cried both young men.

"Very well; if ever you meet him again, wherever it may be, whether on the high road or in the street or in a church, anywhere that he or you

may be, put your foot on his neck and crush him without pity, without mercy, as you would crush a viper or a scorpion! destroy him utterly and quit him not until he is dead; the lives of five men are not safe, in my opinion, as long as he is on the earth."

And without adding another word, Grimaud, profiting by the astonishment and terror into which he had thrown his auditors, rushed from the room. Two minutes later the thunder of a horse's hoofs was heard upon the road; it was Grimaud, on his way to Paris. When once in the saddle Grimaud reflected on two things; first, that at the pace he was going his horse would not carry him ten miles, and secondly, that he had no money. But Grimaud's ingenuity was more prolific than his speech, and therefore at the first halt he sold his steed and with the money obtained from the purchase took post horses.