

Chapter 39. How, sometimes, the Unhappy mistake Chance for Providence.

"Well, madame," said De Winter, when the queen had dismissed her attendants.

"Well, my lord, what I foresaw has come to pass."

"What? does the cardinal refuse to receive the king? France refuse hospitality to an unfortunate prince? Ay, but it is for the first time, madame!"

"I did not say France, my lord; I said the cardinal, and the cardinal is not even a Frenchman."

"But did you see the queen?"

"It is useless," replied Henrietta, "the queen will not say yes when the cardinal says no. Are you not aware that this Italian directs everything, both indoors and out? And moreover, I should not be surprised had we been forestalled by Cromwell. He was embarrassed whilst speaking to me and yet quite firm in his determination to refuse. Then did you not observe the agitation in the Palais Royal, the passing to and fro of busy people? Can they have received any news, my lord?"

"Not from England, madame. I made such haste that I am certain of not

having been forestalled. I set out three days ago, passing miraculously through the Puritan army, and I took post horses with my servant Tony; the horses upon which we were mounted were bought in Paris. Besides, the king, I am certain, awaits your majesty's reply before risking anything."

"You will tell him, my lord," resumed the queen, despairingly, "that I can do nothing; that I have suffered as much as himself--more than he has--obliged as I am to eat the bread of exile and to ask hospitality from false friends who smile at my tears; and as regards his royal person, he must sacrifice it generously and die like a king. I shall go and die by his side."

"Madame, madame," exclaimed De Winter, "your majesty abandons yourself to despair; and yet, perhaps, there still remains some hope."

"No friends left, my lord; no other friends left in the wide world but yourself! Oh, God!" exclaimed the poor queen, raising her eyes to Heaven, "have You indeed taken back all the generous hearts that once existed in the world?"

"I hope not, madame," replied De Winter, thoughtfully; "I once spoke to you of four men."

"What can be done with four?"

"Four devoted, resolute men can do much, assure yourself, madame; and those of whom I speak performed great things at one time."

"And where are these four men?"

"Ah, that is what I do not know. It is twenty years since I saw them, and yet whenever I have seen the king in danger I have thought of them."

"And these men were your friends?"

"One of them held my life in his hands and gave it to me. I know not whether he is still my friend, but since that time I have remained his."

"And these men are in France, my lord?"

"I believe so."

"Tell me their names; perhaps I may have heard them mentioned and might be able to aid you in finding them."

"One of them was called the Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"Ah, my lord, if I mistake not, the Chevalier d'Artagnan is lieutenant of royal guards; but take care, for I fear that this man is entirely devoted to the cardinal."

"That would be a misfortune," said De Winter, "and I shall begin to think that we are really doomed."

"But the others," said the queen, who clung to this last hope as a

shipwrecked man clings to the hull of his vessel. "The others, my lord!"

"The second--I heard his name by chance; for before fighting us, these four gentlemen told us their names; the second was called the Comte de la Fere. As for the two others, I had so much the habit of calling them by nicknames that I have forgotten their real ones."

"Oh, mon Dieu, it is a matter of the greatest urgency to find them out," said the queen, "since you think these worthy gentlemen might be so useful to the king."

"Oh, yes," said De Winter, "for they are the same men. Listen, madame, and recall your remembrances. Have you never heard that Queen Anne of Austria was once saved from the greatest danger ever incurred by a queen?"

"Yes, at the time of her relations with Monsieur de Buckingham; it had to do in some way with certain studs and diamonds."

"Well, it was that affair, madame; these men are the ones who saved her; and I smile with pity when I reflect that if the names of those gentlemen are unknown to you it is because the queen has forgotten them, who ought to have made them the first noblemen of the realm."

"Well, then, my lord, they must be found; but what can four men, or rather three men do--for I tell you, you must not count on Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"It will be one valiant sword the less, but there will remain still three, without reckoning my own; now four devoted men around the king to protect him from his enemies, to be at his side in battle, to aid him with counsel, to escort him in flight, are sufficient, not to make the king a conqueror, but to save him if conquered; and whatever Mazarin may say, once on the shores of France your royal husband may find as many retreats and asylums as the seabird finds in a storm."

"Seek, then, my lord, seek these gentlemen; and if they will consent to go with you to England, I will give to each a duchy the day that we reascend the throne, besides as much gold as would pave Whitehall. Seek them, my lord, and find them, I conjure you."

"I will search for them, madame," said De Winter "and doubtless I shall find them; but time fails me. Has your majesty forgotten that the king expects your reply and awaits it in agony?"

"Then indeed we are lost!" cried the queen, in the fullness of a broken heart.

At this moment the door opened and the young Henrietta appeared; then the queen, with that wonderful strength which is the privilege of parents, repressed her tears and motioned to De Winter to change the subject.

But that act of self-control, effective as it was, did not escape the eyes of the young princess. She stopped on the threshold, breathed a sigh, and addressing the queen:

"Why, then, do you always weep, mother, when I am away from you?" she said.

The queen smiled, but instead of answering:

"See, De Winter," she said, "I have at least gained one thing in being only half a queen; and that is that my children call me 'mother' instead of 'madame.'"

Then turning toward her daughter:

"What do you want, Henrietta?" she demanded.

"My mother," replied the young princess, "a cavalier has just entered the Louvre and wishes to present his respects to your majesty; he arrives from the army and has, he says, a letter to remit to you, on the part of the Marechal de Grammont, I think."

"Ah!" said the queen to De Winter, "he is one of my faithful adherents; but do you not observe, my dear lord, that we are so poorly served that it is left to my daughter to fill the office of doorkeeper?"

"Madame, have pity on me," exclaimed De Winter; "you wring my heart!"

"And who is this cavalier, Henrietta?" asked the queen.

"I saw him from the window, madame; he is a young man that appears

scarce sixteen years of age, and is called the Viscount de Bragelonne."

The queen, smiling, made a sign with her head; the young princess opened the door and Raoul appeared on the threshold.

Advancing a few steps toward the queen, he knelt down.

"Madame," said he, "I bear to your majesty a letter from my friend the Count de Guiche, who told me he had the honor of being your servant; this letter contains important news and the expression of his respect."

At the name of the Count de Guiche a blush spread over the cheeks of the young princess and the queen glanced at her with some degree of severity.

"You told me that the letter was from the Marechal de Grammont, Henrietta!" said the queen.

"I thought so, madame," stammered the young girl.

"It is my fault, madame," said Raoul. "I did announce myself, in truth, as coming on the part of the Marechal de Grammont; but being wounded in the right arm he was unable to write and therefore the Count de Guiche acted as his secretary."

"There has been fighting, then?" asked the queen, motioning to Raoul to rise.

"Yes, madame," said the young man.

At this announcement of a battle having taken place, the princess opened her mouth as though to ask a question of interest; but her lips closed again without articulating a word, while the color gradually faded from her cheeks.

The queen saw this, and doubtless her maternal heart translated the emotion, for addressing Raoul again:

"And no evil has happened to the young Count de Guiche?" she asked; "for not only is he our servant, as you say, sir, but more--he is one of our friends."

"No, madame," replied Raoul; "on the contrary, he gained great glory and had the honor of being embraced by his highness, the prince, on the field of battle."

The young princess clapped her hands; and then, ashamed of having been betrayed into such a demonstration of joy, she half turned away and bent over a vase of roses, as if to inhale their odor.

"Let us see," said the queen, "what the count says." And she opened the letter and read:

"Madame,--Being unable to have the honor of writing to you myself, by

reason of a wound I have received in my right hand, I have commanded my son, the Count de Guiche, who, with his father, is equally your humble servant, to write to tell you that we have just gained the battle of Lens, and that this victory cannot fail to give great power to Cardinal Mazarin and to the queen over the affairs of Europe. If her majesty will have faith in my counsels she ought to profit by this event to address at this moment, in favor of her august husband, the court of France. The Vicomte de Bragelonne, who will have the honor of remitting this letter to your majesty, is the friend of my son, who owes to him his life; he is a gentleman in whom your majesty may confide entirely, in case your majesty may have some verbal or written order to remit to me.

"I have the honor to be, with respect, etc.,

"Marechal de Grammont."

At the moment mention occurred of his having rendered a service to the count, Raoul could not help turning his glance toward the young princess, and then he saw in her eyes an expression of infinite gratitude to the young man; he no longer doubted that the daughter of King Charles I. loved his friend.

"The battle of Lens gained!" said the queen; "they are lucky here indeed; they can gain battles! Yes, the Marechal de Grammont is right; this will change the aspect of French affairs, but I much fear it will do nothing for English, even if it does not harm them. This is recent

news, sir," continued she, "and I thank you for having made such haste to bring it to me; without this letter I should not have heard till to-morrow, perhaps after to-morrow--the last of all Paris."

"Madame," said Raoul, "the Louvre is but the second palace this news has reached; it is as yet unknown to all, and I had sworn to the Count de Guiche to remit this letter to your majesty before even I should embrace my guardian."

"Your guardian! is he, too, a Bragelonne?" asked Lord de Winter. "I once knew a Bragelonne--is he still alive?"

"No, sir, he is dead; and I believe it is from him my guardian, whose near relation he was, inherited the estate from which I take my name."

"And your guardian, sir," asked the queen, who could not help feeling some interest in the handsome young man before her, "what is his name?"

"The Comte de la Fere, madame," replied the young man, bowing.

De Winter made a gesture of surprise and the queen turned to him with a start of joy.

"The Comte de la Fere!" she cried. "Have you not mentioned that name to me?"

As for De Winter he could scarcely believe that he had heard aright.

"The Comte de la Fere!" he cried in his turn. "Oh, sir, reply, I entreat

you--is not the Comte de la Fere a noble whom I remember, handsome and brave, a musketeer under Louis XIII., who must be now about forty-seven or forty-eight years of age?"

"Yes, sir, you are right in every particular!"

"And who served under an assumed name?"

"Under the name of Athos. Latterly I heard his friend, Monsieur d'Artagnan, give him that name."

"That is it, madame, that is the same. God be praised! And he is in Paris?" continued he, addressing Raoul; then turning to the queen: "We may still hope. Providence has declared for us, since I have found this brave man again in so miraculous a manner. And, sir, where does he reside, pray?"

"The Comte de la Fere lodges in the Rue Guenegaud, Hotel du Grand Roi Charlemagne."

"Thanks, sir. Inform this dear friend that he may remain within, that I shall go and see him immediately."

"Sir, I obey with pleasure, if her majesty will permit me to depart."

"Go, Monsieur de Bragelonne," said the queen, "and rest assured of our affection."

Raoul bent respectfully before the two princesses, and bowing to De Winter, departed.

The queen and De Winter continued to converse for some time in low voices, in order that the young princess should not overhear them; but the precaution was needless: she was in deep converse with her own thoughts.

Then, when De Winter rose to take leave:

"Listen, my lord," said the queen; "I have preserved this diamond cross which came from my mother, and this order of St. Michael which came from my husband. They are worth about fifty thousand pounds. I had sworn to die of hunger rather than part with these precious pledges; but now that this ornament may be useful to him or his defenders, everything must be sacrificed. Take them, and if you need money for your expedition, sell them fearlessly, my lord. But should you find the means of retaining them, remember, my lord, that I shall esteem you as having rendered the greatest service that a gentleman can render to a queen; and in the day of my prosperity he who brings me this order and this cross shall be blessed by me and my children."

"Madame," replied De Winter, "your majesty will be served by a man devoted to you. I hasten to deposit these two objects in a safe place, nor should I accept them if the resources of our ancient fortune were left to us, but our estates are confiscated, our ready money is exhausted, and we are reduced to turn to service everything we possess. In an hour hence I shall be with the Comte de la Fere, and to-morrow

your majesty shall have a definite reply."

The queen tendered her hand to Lord de Winter, who, kissing it respectfully, went out and traversed alone and unaccompanied those large, dark and deserted apartments, brushing away tears which, blase as he was by fifty years spent as a courtier, he could not withhold at the spectacle of royal distress so dignified, yet so intense.