

## Chapter 28

### TWO FRIENDS.

We will now follow the two young men sent by the king. Scarcely on horseback, Ernanton and St. Maline, determined that one should not get before the other, nearly crushed each other in the gateway. The face of St. Maline became purple, and that of Ernanton pale.

"You hurt me, monsieur," cried the former; "do you wish to crush me?"

"You also hurt me, only I did not complain."

"You wish to give me a lesson, I believe?"

"I wish to give you nothing."

"Ah!" cried St. Maline, "pray repeat that."

"You are seeking a quarrel, are you not?" replied Ernanton, quietly; "so much the worse for you."

"And why should I wish to quarrel? I do not know you," replied St. Maline, disdainfully.

"You know me perfectly, monsieur, because at home my house is but two

leagues from yours, and I am well known there, being of an old family; but you are furious at seeing me in Paris, when you thought that you alone were sent for; also, because the king gave me the letter to carry."

"Well," said St. Maline, "it may be true, but there is one result."

"What is it?"

"That I do not like to be near you."

"Go away, then; pardieu, I do not want to keep you. On the contrary, I understand perfectly; you would like to take the letter from me and carry it yourself; but unfortunately you must kill me first."

"And who tells you that I do not wish to do that?"

"To desire and to do are two different things."

"Descend with me to the banks of the water, and you will see that with me they are the same."

"My dear monsieur, when the king gives me a letter to carry, I carry it."

"I will tear it from you by force."

"You will not force me, I hope, to shoot you like a dog."

"You!"

"Yes; I have a pistol, and you have not."

"You shall pay for this."

"I trust so, after my commission is over; but, meanwhile, I beg you to observe that as we belong to the king, it is setting a bad example to quarrel."

St. Maline was furious, he bit his fingers with rage. As they crossed the Rue St. Antoine, Ernanton saw a litter with a lady in it. "My page!" cried he, and he rode toward it; but she did not seem to recognize him, and passed on.

The young men now rode on without speaking. St. Maline soon discovered, to his chagrin, that his horse was not as good as Ernanton's, and could hardly keep pace with him. This annoyed him so much that he began to quarrel with his horse, and to fret him so perpetually with the spur, that at last the animal started off and made for the river Bievre, where he got rid of his rider by throwing him in. One might have heard half a mile off the imprecations of St. Maline, although he was half stifled by the water. By the time he scrambled out his horse had got some little way off. He himself was wet and muddy, and his face bleeding with scratches, and he felt sure that it was useless to try and catch it; and

to complete his vexation, he saw Ernanton going down a cross-road which he judged to be a short cut.

He climbed up the banks of the river, but now could see neither Ernanton nor his own horse. But while he stood there, full of sinister thoughts toward Ernanton, he saw him reappear from the cross-road, leading the runaway horse, which he had made a detour to catch. At this sight St. Maline was full of joy and even of gratitude; but gradually his face clouded again as he thought of the superiority of Ernanton over himself, for he knew that in the same situation he should not even have thought of acting in a similar manner.

He stammered out thanks, to which Ernanton paid no attention, then furiously seized the reins of his horse and mounted again. They rode on silently till about half-past two, when they saw a man walking with a dog by his side. Ernanton passed him; but St. Maline, hoping to be more clever, rode up to him and said, "Traveler, do you expect something?"

The man looked at him. Certainly his aspect was not agreeable. His face still bore marks of anger, and the mud half dried on his clothes and the blood on his cheeks, and his hand extended more in menace than interrogation, all seemed very sinister to the traveler.

"If I expect something," said he, "it is not some one; and if I expect some one, it is not you."

"You are impolite," said St. Maline, giving way to the anger that he had

restrained so long; and as he spoke he raised his hand armed with a cane to strike the traveler, but he, with his stick, struck St. Maline on the shoulder, while the dog rushed at him, tearing his clothes, as well as his horse's legs.

The horse, irritated by the pain, rushed furiously on. St. Maline could not stop him for some time, but he kept his seat. They passed thus before Ernanton, who took no notice. At last St. Maline succeeded in quieting his horse, and they rode on again in silence till Ernanton said: "There is he whom we seek waiting for us."