

## Chapter 29

ST. MALINE.

Ernanton was not deceived; the man he saw was really Chicot. He on his side had seen the cavaliers coming, and suspecting that it was for him that they came, waited for them.

Ernanton and St. Maline looked at each other.

"Speak, monsieur, if you wish," said Ernanton to his adversary.

St. Maline was suffocated by this courtesy, he could not speak, he could only bend his head; then Ernanton, advancing said, to Chicot--

"Monsieur, would it be indiscreet to inquire your name?"

"I am called 'the Shade.'"

"Do you expect anything?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Will you be good enough to tell us what?"

"A letter."

"From where?"

"From the Louvre."

"Sealed with what seal?"

"The royal seal."

Ernanton put his hand into the breast of his doublet and drew out a letter.

"That is it," said Chicot, "and for greater certainty, I was to give you something in exchange, was I not?"

"A receipt."--"Yes."

"Monsieur," continued Ernanton, "I was told to carry it, but this gentleman was to deliver it." And he handed the letter to St. Maline, who gave it to Chicot.

"You see," said Ernanton, "that we have faithfully fulfilled our mission. There is no one here, and no one has seen us give you the letter."

"It is true, gentlemen; but to whom am I to give the receipt?"

"The king did not say," said St. Maline, with a meaning air.

"Write two, monsieur, and give one to each of us. It is far from this to the Louvre, and some misfortune may happen to one of us on the road," and as he spoke, Ernanton's eyes flashed in their turn.

"You are wise," said Chicot, drawing his tablets from his pocket, from which he tore out two pages and wrote on each, "Received from the hands of St. Maline the letter brought by M. Ernanton de Carmainges.--THE SHADE."

"Adieu, monsieur," said St. Maline, taking his.

"Adieu, monsieur, and a pleasant journey to you," added Ernanton. "Have you anything else to send to the Louvre?"

"Nothing, I thank you."

Then the young men set off toward Paris, and Chicot in the opposite direction. When he was out of sight--

"Now, monsieur," said Ernanton to St. Maline, "dismount, if you please."

"And why so?"

"Our task is accomplished; we have now to converse, and this place appears excellent for an explanation of this sort."

"As you please, monsieur;" and they got off their horses.

Then Ernanton said, "You know, monsieur, that without any cause on my part, you have during the whole journey insulted me grievously. You wished to make me fight at an inopportune time, and I refused; but now the time is good and I am your man."

But St. Maline was angry no longer, and did not wish to fight.

"Monsieur," replied he, "when I insulted you, you responded by rendering me a service. I can no longer hold the language I did just now."

"No; but you think the same."

"How do you know?"

"Because your words were dictated by hatred and envy, and they cannot already be extinct in your heart."

St. Maline colored, but did not reply.

Ernanton continued, "If the king preferred me to you, it was because I pleased him best. If I was not thrown into the Bievre like you, it was because I ride better; if I did not accept your challenge before, it was because I was wiser than you; if I was not bitten by the dog, it was because I had more sagacity; if I now summon you to draw your sword, it

is because I have more honor; and if you hesitate, I shall say more courage."

St. Maline looked like a demon, and drew his sword furiously.

"I have fought eleven times," said he, "and two of my adversaries are dead. Are you aware of that, monsieur?"

"And I, monsieur, have never fought, for I have never had occasion, and I did not seek it now. I wait your pleasure, monsieur."

"Oh!" said St. Maline, "we are compatriots, and we are both in the king's service; do not let us quarrel. You are a brave man, and I would give you my hand if I could. What would you have? I am envious--it is my nature. M. de Chalabre, or M. de Montcrabeau, would not have made me angry; it was your superior merit. Console yourself, therefore, for I can do nothing against you, and unluckily your merit remains. I should not like any one to know the cause of our quarrel."

"No one will know it, monsieur."

"No one?"

"No; for if we fight I should kill you, or you would kill me. I do not despise life; on the contrary, I cling to it, for I am only twenty-three years of age, have a good name and am not poor, and I shall defend myself like a lion."

"Well, I, on the contrary, am thirty, and am disgusted with life; but still I would rather not fight with you."

"Then you will apologize?"

"No, I have said enough. If you are not content, so much the better, for you are not superior to me."

"But, monsieur, one cannot end a quarrel thus, without the risk of being laughed at."--"I know it."

"Then you refuse to fight?"

"With you."

"After having provoked me?"

"I confess it."

"But if my patience fail, and I attack you?"

"I will throw my sword away; but I shall then have reason to hate you, and the first time I find you in the wrong, I will kill you."

Ernanton sheathed his sword. "You are a strange man," said he, "and I pity you."

"You pity me!"

"Yes, for you must suffer."

"Horribly."

"Do you never love?"

"Never."

"Have you no passions?"

"One alone, jealousy; but that includes all others to a frightful degree. I adore a woman, as soon as she loves another; I love gold, when another possesses it;--yes, you are right, I am unhappy."

"Have you never tried to become good?"

"Yes, and failed. What does the venomous plant? What do the bear and bird of prey? They destroy, but certain people use them for the chase. So shall I be in the hands of MM. d'Epernon and Loignac, till the day when they shall say, 'This plant is hurtful, let us tear it up; this beast is furious, let us kill him.'"

Ernanton was calmed; St. Maline was no longer an object of anger but of pity.

"Good fortune should cure you," said he; "when you succeed, you should hate less."

"However high I should rise, others would be higher."

They rode on silently for some time. At last Ernanton held out his hand to St. Maline, and said, "Shall I try to cure you?"

"No, do not try that; you would fail. Hate me, on the contrary, and I shall admire you."

An hour after they entered the Louvre; the king had gone out, and would not return until evening.