

## Chapter 30

### DE LOIGNAC'S INTERVIEW WITH THE FORTY-FIVE.

Each of the young men placed himself at a window to watch for the return of the king. Ernanton, however, soon forgot his present situation, and became abstracted in thinking who the woman could be who had entered Paris as his page, and whom he had since seen in such a splendid litter; and with a heart more disposed to love adventure than to make ambitious calculations, he forgot why he was sitting there, till, suddenly raising his head, he saw that St. Maline was no longer there. He understood at once that he had seen the king arrive, and had gone to him. He rose quickly, traversed the gallery, and arrived at the king's room just as St. Maline was coming out.

"Look!" cried he joyfully, "what the king has given me," and he showed a gold chain.

"I congratulate you, monsieur," said Ernanton, quietly, and he entered in his turn.

St. Maline waited impatiently until he came out again, which he did in about ten minutes, although it appeared an hour to St. Maline.

When Ernanton came out, he looked all over him, and seeing nothing, he cried joyfully, "And you, monsieur, what has he given to you?"

"His hand to kiss," replied Ernanton.

St. Maline crushed his chain impatiently in his hands, and they both returned in silence. As they entered the hall, the trumpet sounded, and at this signal all the Forty-five came out of their rooms, wondering what was the matter; while they profited by this reunion to examine each other. Most of them were richly dressed, though generally in bad taste. They all had a military tournour, and long swords, boots and gloves of buckskin or buffalo, all well gilded or well greased, were almost universal.

The most discreet might be known by their quiet colors, the most economical by the substantial character of their equipments, and the most gay by their white or rose-colored satins. Perducas de Pincornay had bought from some Jew a gold chain as thick as a cable; Pertinax de Montcrabeau was all bows and embroidery: he had bought his costume from a merchant who had purchased it of a gentleman who had been wounded by robbers. It was rather stained with blood and dirt, it was true, but he had managed to clean it tolerably. There remained two holes made by the daggers of the robbers, but Pertinax had had them embroidered in gold.

Eustache de Miradoux did not shine; he had had to clothe Lardille, Militor, and the two children. All the gentlemen were there admiring each other, when M. de Loignac entered frowning, and placed himself in front of them, with a countenance anything but agreeable.

"Gentlemen," said he, "are you all here?"

"All!" they replied.

"Gentlemen, you have been summoned to Paris as a special guard to the king; it is an honorable title, but it engages you to much. Some of you seem not to have understood your duties; I will, therefore, recall them to you. If you do not assist at the deliberations of the council, you will constantly be called upon to execute the resolutions passed there; therefore, the responsibility of those secrets rests upon you. Suppose now that one of the officers on whom the safety of the state and the tranquillity of the crown reposes, betray the secrets of the council, or a soldier charged with a commission does not execute it, his life is the forfeit; you know that?"

"Doubtless," replied many voices.

"Well, gentlemen, this very day a measure of his majesty's has been betrayed, and a step which he wished to take rendered, perhaps, impossible."

Terror began to replace pride in the minds of the Forty-five, and they looked at each other with suspicion and disquietude.

"Two of you, gentlemen," continued De Loignac, "have been heard in the open street chattering like a couple of old women, and that about grave things."

St. Maline advanced. "Monsieur," said he, "pray explain at once, that suspicion may not rest on us all."

"That is easy. The king heard to-day that one of his enemies--precisely one of those whom we have been enrolled to guard him against--had arrived in Paris to conspire against him. This name was pronounced quietly, but was overheard by a soldier on guard, that is to say, by a man who should be regarded as a wall--deaf, dumb, and immovable. However, that man repeated this name in the street with a noise and boasting which attracted the attention of the passers-by and raised quite an emotion; I know it, for I was there, and heard and saw all, and had I not placed my hand on his shoulder to stop him, he would have compromised such grave interests, that, had he not been quiet at my touch, I should have been compelled to poniard him on the spot."

Pertinax de Montcrabeau and Perducas de Pincornay turned deadly pale, and Montcrabeau tried to stammer out some excuses. All eyes were turned toward them.

"Nothing can excuse you," said De Loignac; "even if you were drunk you should be punished for that; and you shall be punished."

A terrible silence ensued. Then Pertinax said, "Pardon, monsieur! we are provincials, new to the court, and unaccustomed to politics."

"You should not have accepted your posts without weighing their duties."

"For the future we will be as mute as sepulchers, we swear to you."

"Good; but can you repair the evil you have done to-day?"

"We will try."

"It is impossible, I tell you."

"Then, for this time, pardon us."

"You live," continued De Loignac, "with a sort of license which I must repress. Those who find the terms too hard will return; I can easily replace them; but I warn you that justice will be done among us, secretly and expeditiously. Traitors will be punished with death on the spot."

Montcrabeau nearly fainted, and Pertinax grew paler than ever.

"I shall have," De Loignac continued, "for smaller offenses lighter punishments, as imprisonment, for instance. For this time, I spare the lives of M. de Montcrabeau and M. de Pincornay, because they probably acted in ignorance, and shall only enforce against them my third method of punishment--a fine. You have received one thousand livres apiece, gentlemen; you will each return one hundred."

"One hundred!" cried Pincornay; "Cap de Bious! I have not got them; I

have spent them on my equipment."

"Sell your chain, then. But I have something else to add; I have remarked many signs of irritation between different members of your body, and each time a difference arises I wish the matter referred to me, and I alone shall have the power of allowing a duel to take place. Dueling is much in fashion now, but I do not wish, that, to follow the fashion, my company be constantly left imperfect. The first duel, therefore, that takes place without my permission will be punished with a rigorous imprisonment and a heavy fine. Now fifteen of you will place yourselves this evening at the foot of the staircase when his majesty receives, fifteen will keep without, and fifteen remain at home. Also, as you should have some chief, and I cannot be everywhere, I will each day name a chief for the fifteen, so that all shall learn to obey and command. At present I do not know the capacities of any one, but I shall watch and learn. Now, go, gentlemen; and M. de Montcrabeau and M. de Pincornay, you will remember that I expect your fines to be paid to-morrow."

They all retired except Ernanton, who lingered behind.

"Do you wish anything?" asked De Loignac.

"Yes, monsieur," said Ernanton, bowing; "it seems to me that you have forgotten to point out to us our duties. To be in the king's service has a glorious sound, doubtless, but I should wish to know in what this service consists?"

"That, monsieur, is a question to which I cannot reply."

"May I ask why, monsieur?"

"Because I, myself, am often ignorant in the morning of what I shall have to do in the evening."

"Monsieur, you are placed in such a high position that you must know much of which we are ignorant."

"You love the king, I suppose?"

"I do; and I ought to do so, as a subject and a gentleman."

"Well! that is the cardinal point by which to regulate your conduct."

"Very well, monsieur; but there is one point which disquiets me."

"What is it?"

"Passive obedience."

"It is an essential condition."

"So I understand; but it is sometimes difficult for persons who are delicate on points of honor."

"That does not concern me, M. de Carmainges."

"But, monsieur, when an order displeases you--"

"I read the signature of M. d'Epernon, and that consoles me."

"And M. d'Epernon?"

"He reads the signature of his majesty, and consoles himself as I do."

"You are right, monsieur, and I am your humble servant;" and Ernanton was about to retire, when De Loignac stopped him.

"I will say to you," said he, "what I have not said to the others, for no one else has had the courage to speak to me thus."

Ernanton bowed.

"Perhaps," continued De Loignac, "a great personage will come to the Louvre this evening; if so, do not lose sight of him, and follow him when he leaves."

"Pardon me, monsieur; but that seems the work of a spy."

"Do you think so? It is possible; but look here"--and he drew out a paper which he presented to Ernanton, who read--



"Have M. de Mayenne followed this evening, if he presents himself at the Louvre.--D'EPERNON."

"Well, monsieur?"

"I will follow M. de Mayenne," said Ernanton, bowing.