

## Chapter 38

### THE STABLE-YARD.

Ernanton arrived at Paris on the third day. At three in the afternoon he entered the Louvre, among his comrades. The Gascons called out in surprise at seeing him, and M. de Loignac looked gloomy, and signed to him to enter a little room, where he always gave his private audiences.

"This is nice behavior, monsieur," said he; "five days and nights absent; and you whom I thought so well of."

"Monsieur, I did what I was told to do."

"What were you told to do?"

"To follow M. de Mayenne, and I have followed him."

"For five days and nights?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then he has left Paris?"

"He left that same evening, and that seemed to me suspicious."

"You are right, monsieur, go on."

Ernanton related clearly and energetically all that had taken place.

When Ernanton mentioned the letter:

"You have it, monsieur?" asked De Loignac.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Diable! that deserves attention; come with me, I beg of you."

Ernanton followed De Loignac to the courtyard of the Louvre. All was preparing for the king's going out, and M. d'Epernon was seeing two new horses tried, which had been sent from England, as a present from Elizabeth to Henri, and which were that day to be harnessed to the king's carriage for the first time.

De Loignac approached D'Epernon.

"Great news, M. le Duc," said he.

"What is it?" said D'Epernon, drawing to one side.

"M. de Carmainges has seen M. de Mayenne lying wounded in a village beyond Orleans."

"Wounded!"

"Yes, and more, he has written a letter to Madame de Montpensier, which M. de Carmainges has in his pocket."

"Oh! oh! send M. de Carmainges to me."

"Here he is," said De Loignac, signing to Ernanton to advance.

"Well, monsieur, it seems you have a letter from M. de Mayenne."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Addressed to Madame de Montpensier?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Give it to me," and the duke extended his hand.

"Pardon, monsieur, but did you ask me for the duke's letter?"

"Certainly."

"You do not know that this letter was confided to me."

"What matters that?"

"It matters much, monsieur; I passed my word to the duke to give it to

Madame la Duchesse herself."

"Do you belong to the king, or M. de Mayenne?"

"To the king."

"Well! the king wishes to see the letter."

"Monsieur, you are not the king."

"I think you forget to whom you speak, M. de Carmainges."

"I remember perfectly, monsieur, and that is why I refuse."

"You refuse?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"M. de Carmainges, you forget your oath of fidelity."

"Monsieur, I have sworn fidelity only to one person, and that is the king; if he asks me for the letter, he must have it, but he is not here."

"M. de Carmainges," said the duke, growing very angry, "you are like the rest of the Gascons; blind in prosperity, your good fortune dazzles you, and the possession of a state secret is a weight too heavy for you to

carry."

"The only thing I find heavy, monsieur, is the disgrace into which I seem likely to fall; not my fortune, which my refusal to obey you renders, I know, very precarious; but, no matter; I do what I ought to do, and no one, excepting the king, shall see this letter, but the person to whom it is addressed."

"De Loignac," cried D'Epernon, "place M. de Carmainges in arrest at once."

"It is certain that will prevent me from delivering the letter for a time, but once I come out--"

"If you never do come out?"

"I shall come out, monsieur; unless you have me assassinated. Yes, I shall come out, the walls are less strong than my will, and then--"

"Well?"

"I will speak to the king."

"To prison with him, and take away the letter," cried D'Epernon, beside himself with rage.

"No one shall touch it," cried Ernanton, starting back and drawing from

his breast the tablet of M. de Mayenne, "for I will break it to pieces, since I can save it in no other way; M. de Mayenne will approve my conduct, and the king will pardon me."

The young man was about to execute his threat, when a touch arrested his arm. He turned and saw the king, who, coming down the staircase behind them, had heard the end of the discussion.

"What is the matter, gentlemen?" said he.

"Sire," cried D'Epernon, furiously, "this man, one of your Forty-five Guardsmen, of which he shall soon cease to form part, being sent by me to watch M. de Mayenne, in Paris, followed him to Orleans, and received from him a letter for Madame de Montpensier."

"You have received this letter?" asked the king of Ernanton.

"Yes, sire, but M. d'Epernon does not tell you under what circumstances."

"Well, where is this letter?"

"That is just the cause of the quarrel, sire. M. de Carmainges resolutely refuses to give it to me, and determines to carry it to its address."

Carmainges bent one knee before the king. "Sire," said he, "I am a poor

gentleman, but a man of honor. I saved the life of your messenger, who was about to be assassinated by M. de Mayenne and six of his followers, for I arrived just in time to turn the fortune of the combat."

"And M. de Mayenne?"

"Was dangerously wounded."

"Well, after?"

"Your messenger, sire, who seemed to have a particular hatred of M. de Mayenne--"

The king smiled.

"Wished to kill his enemy; perhaps he had the right, but I thought that in my presence, whose sword belongs to your majesty, this vengeance became a political assassination, and--"

"Go on, monsieur."

"I saved the life of M. de Mayenne, as I had saved that of your messenger."

D'Epernon shrugged his shoulders with a scornful smile.

"Go on," said the king.

"M. de Mayenne, reduced to one companion, for the four others were killed, did not wish to separate from him, and, ignorant that I belonged to your majesty, confided to me a letter to his sister. I have this letter, sire, and here it is; I offer it to your majesty who has the right to dispose of it and of me. My honor is dear to me, sire, but I place it fearlessly in your hands."

Ernanton, so saying, held out the tablets to the king, who gently put them back.

"What did you say, D'Epernon?" said he; "M. de Carmainges is an honest man and a faithful servant?"

"What did I say, sire."

"Yes; I heard you pronounce the word 'prison.' Mordieu! on the contrary, when one meets a man like M. de Carmainges, it is reward we should speak of. A letter, duke, belongs only to the bearer and to the person to whom it is sent. You will deliver your letter, M. de Carmainges."

"But, sire," said D'Epernon, "think of what that letter may contain. Do not play at delicacy, when, perhaps, your majesty's life is concerned."

"You will deliver your letter, M. de Carmainges," said the king.

"Thanks, sire," said Carmainges, beginning to retire.



"Where do you take it?"

"To Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier, I believed I had had the honor of telling your majesty."

"I mean, to the Hotel Guise, St. Denis, or where?"

"I had no instructions on that subject, sire. I shall take the letter to the Hotel Guise, and there I shall learn where Madame de Montpensier is."

"And when you have found her?"

"I will deliver my letter."

"Just so. M. de Carmainges, have you promised anything else to M. de Mayenne than to deliver that letter to his sister?"

"No, sire."

"No secrecy as to the place where you find her?"--"No, sire."

"Then I will impose only one condition on you."

"I am your majesty's servant."

"Deliver your letter, and then come to me at Vincennes, where I shall be this evening."

"Yes, sire."

"And you will tell me where you found the duchesse?"

"I will, sire."

"I ask no other confidences; remember."

"Sire, I promise."

"What imprudence, sire!" cried D'Epernon.

"There are men you cannot understand, duke. This one is loyal to Mayenne, he will be loyal to me."

"Toward you, sire, I shall be more than loyal--I shall be devoted," cried Ernanton.

"Now, D'Epernon, no more quarrels," said the king; "and you must at once pardon in this brave fellow what you looked upon as a want of loyalty, but which I regard as a proof of honesty."

"Sire," said Ernanton, "M. le Duc is too superior a man not to have discovered, through my disobedience (for which I confess my regret), my

respect for him; only, before all things, I must do what I believe to be my duty."

"Parfandious!" said the duke, changing his expression like a mask, "this trial has done you honor, my dear Carmainges, and you are really a fine fellow--is he not, De Loignac? However, we gave him a good fright;" and the duke burst out laughing.

De Loignac did not answer; he could not lie like his illustrious chief.

"If it was a trial, so much the better," said the king, doubtfully; "but I counsel you not to try these experiments often; too many people would give way under them. Now, let us go, duke; you accompany me?"

"It was your majesty's order that I should ride by the door?"

"Yes; and who goes the other side?"

"A devoted servant of your majesty's, M. de St. Maline," said D'Epernon, glancing at Ernanton to see the effect of his words: but Ernanton remained unmoved.