

Chapter 42

HOW DOM GORENFLOT BLESSED THE KING AS HE PASSED BEFORE THE PRIORY OF THE JACOBINS.

Ernanton went away with a full heart but a quiet conscience; he had had the singular good fortune to declare his love to a princess, and to get over the awkwardness which might have resulted from it by the important conversation which followed. He had neither betrayed the king, M. de Mayenne, nor himself. Therefore he was content, but he still wished for many things, and, among others, a quick return to Vincennes, where the king expected him; then to go to bed and dream. He set off at full gallop as soon as he left Bel-Esbat, but he had scarcely gone a hundred yards when he came on a body of cavaliers who stretched right across the road. He was surrounded in a minute, and half a dozen swords and pistols presented at him.

"Oh!" said Ernanton, "robbers on the road, a league from Paris--"

"Silence, if you please," said a voice that Ernanton thought he recognized. "Your sword, your arms; quick."

And one man seized the bridle of the horse, while another stripped him of his arms.

"Peste! what clever thieves!" said Ernanton. "At least, gentlemen, do me the favor to tell me--"

"Why it is M. de Carmainges!" said the man who had seized his sword.

"M. de Pincornay!" cried Ernanton. "Oh, fie; what a bad trade you have taken up."

"I said silence," cried the voice of the chief; "and take this man to the depot."

"But, M. de St. Maline, it is our companion, Ernanton de Carmainges."

"Ernanton here!" cried St. Maline, angrily; "what is he doing here?"

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said Carmainges; "I did not, I confess, expect to find so much good company."

"Diable!" growled St. Maline; "this is unforeseen."

"By me also, I assure you," said Ernanton, laughing.

"It is embarrassing; what were you doing here?"

"If I asked you that question, would you answer?"

"No."

"Then let me act as you would."

"Then you will not tell me?"

"No."

"Nor where you were going?"

Ernanton did not answer.

"Then, monsieur, since you do not explain, I must treat you like any other man."

"Do what you please, monsieur; only I warn you, you will have to answer for it."

"To M. de Loignac?"

"Higher than that."

"M. d'Epernon?"

"Higher still."

"Well, I have my orders, and I shall send you to Vincennes."

"That is capital; it is just where I was going."

"It is lucky that this little journey pleases you so much."

Ernanton was then conducted by his companions to the courtyard of Vincennes. Here he found fifty disarmed cavaliers, who, looking pale and dispirited, and surrounded by fifty light horse, were deploring their bad fortune, and anticipating a disastrous ending to an enterprise so well planned. The Forty-five had taken all these men, either by force or cunning, as they had, for precaution, come to the rendezvous either singly, or two or three together at most. Now all this would have rejoiced Ernanton had he understood it, but he saw without understanding.

"Monsieur," said he to St. Maline, "I see that you were told of the importance of my mission, and that, fearing some accident for me, you were good enough to take the trouble to escort me here: now I will tell you that you were right; the king expects me, and I have important things to say to him. I will tell the king what you have done for his service."

St. Maline grew red and then pale; but he understood, being clever when not blinded by passion, that Ernanton spoke the truth, and that he was expected. There was no joking with MM. de Loignac and d'Epernon; therefore he said, "You are free, M. Ernanton; I am delighted to have been agreeable to you."

Ernanton waited for no more, but began to mount the staircase which led to the king's room. St. Maline followed him with his eyes, and saw De Loignac meet him on the stairs, and sign to him to come on. De Loignac then descended to see the captives with his own eyes, and pronounced the road perfectly safe and free for the king's return. He knew nothing of the Jacobin convent, and the artillery and musketry of the fathers. But D'Epernon did, being perfectly informed by Nicholas Poulain. Therefore, when De Loignac came and said to his chief, "Monsieur, the roads are free," D'Epernon replied:

"Very well, the king orders that the Forty-five guards form themselves into three compact bodies, one to go before and one on each side of the carriage, so that if there be any firing it may not reach the carriage."

"Very good!" said De Loignac, "only I do not see where firing is to come from."

"At the priory of the Jacobins, monsieur, they must draw close."

This dialogue was interrupted by the king, who descended the staircase, followed by several gentlemen, among whom St. Maline, with rage in his heart, recognized Ernanton.

"Gentlemen," said the king, "are my brave Forty-five all here?"

"Yes, sire," said D'Epernon, showing them.

"Have the orders been given?"

"Yes, sire, and will be followed."

"Let us go, then!"

The light horse were left in charge of the prisoners, and forbidden to address a word to them. The king got into his carriage with his naked sword by his side, and, as nine o'clock struck, they set off.

M. de Mayneville was still at his window, only he was infinitely less tranquil and hopeful, for none of his soldiers had appeared, and the only sound heard along the silent black road was now and then horses' feet on the road to Vincennes. When this occurred, Mayneville and the duchess vainly tried to see what was going on. At last Mayneville became so anxious that he sent off a man on horseback, telling him to inquire of the first body of cavaliers he met. The messenger did not return, so the duchess sent another, but neither reappeared.

"Our officer," said the duchess, always hopeful, "must have been afraid of not having sufficient force, and must have kept our men to help him; it is prudent, but it makes one anxious."

"Yes, very anxious," said Mayneville, whose eyes never quitted the horizon.

"Mayneville, what can have happened?"

"I will go myself, madame, and find out."

"Oh, no! I forbid that. Who would stay with me, who would know our friends, when the time comes? No, no, stay, Mayneville; one is naturally apprehensive when a secret of this importance is concerned, but, really, the plan was too well combined, and, above all, too secret, not to succeed."

"Nine o'clock!" replied Mayneville, rather to himself than to the duchess. "Well! here are the Jacobins coming-out of their convent, and ranging themselves along the walls."

"Listen!" cried the duchess. They began to hear from afar a noise like thunder.

"It is cavalry!" cried the duchess; "they are bringing him, we have him at last;" and she clapped her hands in the wildest joy.

"Yes," said Mayneville, "I hear a carriage and the gallop of horses."

And he cried out loudly, "Outside the walls, my brothers, outside!"

Immediately the gates of the priory opened, and a hundred armed monks marched out, with Borromée at their head, and they heard Gorenflot's voice crying, "Wait for me, wait for me; I must be at the head to receive his majesty."

"Go to the balcony, prior," cried Borromée, "and overlook us all."

"Ah! true; I forgot that I had chosen that place, but luckily you are here to remind me."

Borromée dispatched four monks to stand behind the prior, on the pretense of doing him honor.

Soon the road was illumined by a number of torches, thanks to which the duchess and Mayneville could see cuirasses and swords shining. Incapable of moderation, she cried--"Go down, Mayneville, and bring him to me."

"Yes, madame, but one thing disquiets me."

"What is it?"

"I do not hear the signal agreed on."

"What use is the signal, since they have him?"

"But they were to arrest him only here, before the priory."

"They must have found a good opportunity earlier."

"I do not see our officer."

"I do."

"Where?"

"See that red plume."

"Ventrebleu! that red plume--"

"Well?"

"It is M. d'Epernon, sword in hand."

"They have left him his sword."

"Mordieu! he commands."

"Our people! There has been treason."

"Oh! madame; they are not our people."

"You are mad, Mayneville!"

But at that moment De Loignac, at the head of the first body of guards, cried, brandishing his large sword, "Vive le Roi!"

"Vive le Roi!" replied enthusiastically all the Forty-five, with their Gascon accent. The duchess grew pale and sank down almost fainting.

Mayneville, somber, but resolute, drew his sword, not knowing but what the house was to be attacked. The cortege advanced, and had reached Bel-Esbat. Borromée came a little forward, and as De Loignac rode straight up to him, he immediately saw that all was lost, and determined on his part.

"Room for the king!" cried De Loignac. Gorenflot, delighted with the scene, extended his powerful arm and blessed the king from his balcony. Henri saw him, and bowed smilingly, and at this mark of favor Gorenflot gave out a "Vive le Roi!" with his stentorian voice. The rest, however, remained mute: they expected a different result from their two months' training. But Borromée, feeling certain from the absence of the duchess's troops of the fate of the enterprise, knew that to hesitate a moment was to be ruined, and he answered with a "Vive le Roi!" almost as sonorous as Gorenflot's. Then all the rest took it up.

"Thanks, reverend father, thanks," cried Henri; and then he passed the convent, where his course was to have terminated, like a whirlwind of fire, noise, and glory, leaving behind him Bel-Esbat in obscurity.

From her balcony, hidden by the golden scutcheon, behind which she was kneeling, the duchess saw and examined each face on which the light of the torches fell.

"Oh!" cried she, "look, Mayneville! That young man, my brother's messenger, is in the king's service! We are lost!"

"We must fly immediately, madame, now the Valois is conqueror."

"We have been betrayed; it must have been by that young man, he must have known all."

The king had already, with all his escort, entered the Porte St. Antoine, which had opened before him and shut behind him.