

resolved to thank her, as soon as possible, for these few words of encouragement, given at the very moment when he most required them to rouse his spirit and energy.

He had not yet recovered his equanimity after this incident, when the Baron returned, and took him by the hand, to conduct him into the inner chamber; but before rejoining his companions, Albert approached his lips to his brother's ear, and said in a low but stern voice:

"The solemn moment is now come, Fabian!—Let us have no ridiculous blustering! Recollect my words—'high fortune, or life-long captivity'—and choose for yourself!"

Fabian bowed his head in silence, and they entered.

The eyes of all assembled in the chamber, were keenly bent on the new-comer, but the examination did not last long; the courtiers, accustomed to judge of men at first sight, required no lengthened investigation, and almost all testified their astonishment at finding Fabian so different from what they expected to see.

The young stranger was clad in a closely fitting doublet of green velvet, with hose of the same stuff, ornamented with that profusion of ribbands then considered necessary to complete the toilette of a man of fashion. His fine proportions, his calm and noble attitude, presented nothing of that clumsy and awkward gait they had anticipated in the young countryman. He held in his hand a broad hat, surmounted by a green plume, and the abundant locks of his fine hair fell gracefully over his shoulders. Neither did his features, which were regular and firm, without being harsh, express aught of that rustic simplicity which the previous descriptions of the Baron had announced; only a slight colour suffused them at the moment, whether caused by the universal and unaccustomed attention of which he was the object, or by a sentiment of shame at the character in which he was introduced to the assembly.

He made a dignified, though respectful salute, which was returned by very few, probably from contempt for a man whom they conceived destined to become an assassin. Neither did the Baron deem it necessary to present his brother formally; he pointed out to him a seat at the end of a vacant bench, and rejoined the group of courtiers.

"Truly, Croissi," said one of them in a low voice, "this is a cavalier of good bearing, of whom you have made choice, and I think the *gainer of battles* will scarcely hold his own in a hand-to-hand struggle with the youngster."

"Said I not so, Monsieur de Servien?" resu-

med Albert, with much satisfaction. "I can only say that the young gallant is as brave as he is robust; and I assure you that if we can only engage him to measure his strength against the 'gainer of battles,' as you call our enemy—"

Here an exclamation from the Marshal d'Hocquincourt attracted the attention of all, and interrupted the various private conversations that had been resumed. The marshal had at first regarded Fabian with indifference, but his examination became gradually more keen, and at length he started up, exclaiming:

"*Mort de ma vie!* do I deceive myself? Is not this the gentleman who yesterday, on the Pont-Neuf, rendered me a great service, by rescuing us from the midst of the *canaille*? Speak, young man, was it not you who so courageously charged the infuriated rabble, with a whip for your only weapon, and a worn-out hackney for your steed? I have done nothing all day but recite this act of prowess and have sought in vain for its hero. Was it not you?"

"It was indeed I," replied Fabian modestly, "but I had so powerful an interest in the inmates of that chariot—"

"I find you again, then," interrupted the marshal vehemently; "I am enchanted to see thee, my brave lad! There is my hand, and I swear to thee—"

D'Hocquincourt had stretched out his hand cordially to the young man, but a sudden reflection caused him quickly to draw it back.

"'Tis a pity," he said, in a tone of disappointment and half soliloquising, "that a good fellow like this should be engaged in such an affair. It is not, young man," he continued, again addressing Fabian; "it is not that the enterprise which has been communicated to you may not be necessary for the safety of the state, but I would they had consigned to some one else than thee the dirty portion of the job."

"Marshal! marshal!" muttered the Baron in his ear, "remember your own previous promises—"

"To the foul fiend with you and your promises!" replied the veteran, testily. "I am as much devoted to the Queen as any of you; but, to say sooth, I love not to see a youngster, who has every requisite for a brave and faithful soldier of the King, take such a task upon himself, led astray doubtless by evil counsel. This is one of your intrigues, De Croissi! 'Tis shameful to act towards a brother as you have done towards yours."

The Baron carried his hand to his sword, but the by-standers interposed between him and the marshal, who, in his generous indignation, forgot