

future, which had, a moment before, appeared to him so dark and desolate, smiled now with the liveliest colours; in his excitement he would have fearlessly defied misfortune Diane at Paris!—Diane near him!—what now could trouble his felicity? He felt master of the universe! It seemed to him that Nature entire must rejoice with him and partake of his intoxication.

Of Marie, that woman so seductive, so extraordinary, whose image had a few hours before so profoundly agitated him, he thought no more. She had passed entirely from his mind.

The captain expected questions without number and embarrassing explanations, but he was agreeably disappointed in his expectations. Sforzi threw himself upon his neck, and embraced him warmly, at the same time crying:

"De Maurevert, conduct me to her!"

"My dear friend," replied the captain, not at all desirous to find himself third at the meeting of the two young people, "Mademoiselle d'Erlanges lives in the Rue du Paon, near the King David hostelry, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain—and I do not feel inclined to undertake such a walk this evening."

"Rue du Paon, Faubourg Saint-Germain," repeated the chevalier—"that is all I need to know;" and without further occupying himself with De Maurevert, he rushed from the hostelry like a man out of his senses.

"How youth throws away its strength!" remarked the captain, shrugging his shoulders. "The dear chevalier, on reaching Diane's house, bathed in perspiration, and with his dress covered with dust, exposes himself to appear at a disadvantage. Would he not have done a hundred times better to have mounted his horse, gone at a walking pace, and appeared before his mistress in all the glitter and freshness of an irreproachable condition of dress? Bah! who knows? Women delight in anything that has the appearance of passion. Raoul's disorder and impetuosity may perhaps greatly please Mademoiselle d'Erlanges! The reflection that worries me most, and to which I shall never accustom myself, is that the imprudences of youth mostly turn to its advantage; that is sovereignly unjust.

"What is to come of all this? Nothing good, I feel pretty sure. From Raoul's manner, on telling me that he had seen her highness, I suspect the interview had been a stormy one. I hope Sforzi contrived to keep his pride under control. The Princess is not a woman to forgive an affront, as she has but too often proved."

Fatigued by the exertions of the day, the adventurer seated himself on a stone bench outside the Stag's Head. It was a principle with him to remain as little as possible shut up in his own room; he affirmed that Fortune never comes to seek any one in his home, and that, therefore, if not sought, she ought at least to be waited for on the road—along which she is likely to pass.

He had been seated on the bench about a quarter of an hour, when his attention was attracted by the apparition of a strange personage.

It was a little man—whose height did not exceed four feet ten inches—with shrunken limbs, indefinable physiognomy, and timid and hesitating bearing. He was dressed in a pourpoint and hose, half glaring red, half gold yellow. Stopping before the Stag's Head, he appeared undecided whether or not to enter the hostelry.

"Companion," said De Maurevert to him, "if you are seeking a lodging, you may thank our good star for having conducted you here; wherever else will you find such excellent wine, or such a marvellous table. Would you like me to recommend you to the landlord?"

The little man turned towards De Maurevert and looked at him with extreme attention without returning any answer.

"*Tudieu*, companion!" cried the captain, knitting his brows and pretending to be angry, "it seems to me that I had the honour of addressing you a moment ago."

The little man this time did not even deign to look at his interlocutor.

"By the god Mars, my pretty little mignon!" cried De Maurevert, raising his voice, "do you know you have considerably raised my bile? For two plus I would demand satisfaction for your impertinence."

Wishing to push the joke further, the captain rose, drew himself up to his full height, and placed his hand on the hilt of his sword. The little man followed his example, and likewise pretended to draw his sword.

"Aha!" cried De Maurevert, pleased with the diversion thus sent him by chance, "it appears that you are fond of fighting, valiant companion. In that case—draw!"

Several idlers, attracted by this burlesque scene, formed a circle about the dwarf and the giant.

"Yes, yes—draw!" they repeated in chorus.

The little man, so strangely dressed, appeared—at least to judge from the bellicose and determined expression of his face—to take this invitation seriously.

"So be it," he cried; "a duel!—a second!"

"You are laconic, my impetuous friend," said De Maurevert; "your pantomime, however, so well supplies your lack of eloquence that one has no difficulty in comprehending you. You want a second, is not that it?"

"Yes," replied the dwarf.

"Do you know any friend of yours, one of your countrymen, a Patagonian for example, who will join his luck with yours and share your glory and your dangers?"

"Yes, I have such a friend."

"And where may he reside?"

"Here!" replied the dwarf, pointing to the Stag's Head.

"That is marvellously convenient. Do you desire me to go in and inquire for this friend?"

"I do."

"What is his name?"

"The Chevalier Sforzi."

De Maurevert was greatly surprised at hearing the chevalier named, and he examined more attentively than he had hitherto done the victim of his mystification, his pretended adversary.

"Sanguinary companion," he said, in a tone half jocular, half serious, "I deeply regret to be obliged to meet your wishes with a refusal. In the first place, Monsieur Sforzi is at this moment absent; in the next place, were he present, he could not accept your invitation. The chevalier counts me for his best friend."

"Absent!" repeated the dwarf, with an emotion so real as to double the captain's astonishment.

The little man advanced to De Maurevert, took one of his hands, and closely examined the natural lines upon the palm. More and more interested in the dwarf, the captain suffered him to do this without offering any opposition.

"Loyal and grasping," muttered the dwarf, releasing the adventurer's hand.

The air of jocularly, so far maintained by De Maurevert, changed into one of mystification.

"Death!" he cried, affecting to become furious. "We must come to an end of this. Since we have no seconds, let us fight on our own account."

"Let us fight!" repeated the dwarf, placing himself on guard with a precision and firmness which seemed to denote on his part a thorough knowledge of the art of fencing.

De Maurevert was beginning to be weary of this pleasantry, but he could not now put an end to it without throwing himself open to the sarcasms of the idle knot of bystanders. He therefore affected to take an extravagant posture of defence.

"Are you ready?" he demanded coldly of the dwarf.

"Yes, companion."

To the great pleasure of the on-lookers, the little man drew from its sheath a gilded lath, and began to fence with De Maurevert. After making two or three grotesque passes, he uttered a cry, threw up his arms, and, acting the part of a man who has been mortally wounded, fell to the ground.

"Help, captain!" he cried in a feeble voice.

De Maurevert not waiting for a second invitation, lifted up the little man, and carried him into the Stag's Head.

The idlers, prodigiously diverted by this amusing scene, dispersed, regretting that it had been so quickly terminated.

As soon as the dwarf and the adventurer were alone, De Maurevert said with a really serious air:

"Monsieur, I cannot imagine for what purpose you have enacted this pasquinade: but of this I am sure, that you have had some motive."

"Yes," replied the little man, whose face expressed profound sadness, "I wished to see Monsieur Sforzi."

"You know the chevalier, then?"

"I know him, and I love him."

"You love Monsieur Sforzi?"

"He has done me a great service."

"Ah!—And what do you want to say to him?"

The dwarf hesitated; then again taking the adventurer's hand in his own, he, for the second time, studied the lines of the palm. Apparently, this examination was favorable to De Maurevert, for the dwarf smiled affectionately, and, lowering his voice, said:

"My cousin D'Epéron detests my friend Sforzi!"

"That is true. How did you come to know this?"

"And when my cousin does that," continued the dwarf, "he pursues the person he detests to the death."

"Raoul is in danger?"

"Heaven send that he may return safely to-night?"

"What do you mean?"

"If he returns safely to-night," replied the dwarf, "do not let him go out again alone."

"Explain yourself more clearly. Why have you not confidence in me?" cried De Maurevert, seriously alarmed on Raoul's account.

"Many gentlemen wear coats of mail under their clothes," continued the singular little man, as if determined not to answer the questions of his interlocutor. "If I were Sforzi, I should follow the example of these gentlemen. Good-night," he added, nodding slightly to De Maurevert, and moving towards the door.

"I must absolutely know who you are?" cried the adventurer, seizing him by the arm.

"If you do me any harm, I will not come back again—and then it will be so much the worse for Sforzi," replied the dwarf.

"Tell me at least," said De Maurevert, releasing him, "what I am to answer the chevalier when he asks me your name."

"Tell him," said the dwarf, as he moved away, "that the Sane Madman often thinks of him; and that whenever the occasion arrives for being useful to him, he will not allow it to escape."

As if this response had horribly fatigued him, and that he dreaded having to submit to further questioning on the part of the captain, the dwarf went away running.

"By Castor and Pollux!" muttered De Maurevert, after the departure of the dwarf, "I should not be sorry at this moment to throw

myself into a good bed. But Raoul has need of me; there is no time for hesitation."

The giant adjusted the baldric of his sword, and, at a rapid pace, hurried towards the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

## CHAPTER XL.

## THE PRICE OF TWO QUESTIONS.

Night was beginning to fall when De Maurevert quitted the Stag's Head. Late passengers were already hurrying towards their dwelling-places, and the noise of the great city was gradually subsiding.

"*Morbleu!*" said the adventurer to himself, quickening his pace, "I am certainly growing old. It almost goes against my heart to traverse the streets when once the curfew has sounded. This is a bad symptom; it smells of marriage. What a pity it is that the Marquis de la Tremblais should have killed the Dame d'Erlanges!—that worthy old Huguenot, shaken up and rejuvenated by love, would have been a very well assorted match. I should have become Seigneur de Tauve, should have consecrated my leisure to the cultivation of my lands, and to the augmentation of dues paid by my vassals. What a charming existence it would have been!"

"By the way here is a man regulating his steps to mine in a singular manner; it seems very much as if he were following me. Let me see whether my suspicions are well founded."

De Maurevert crossed the street; the individual referred to did the same.

"No, I was not deceived," said De Maurevert to himself.

The captain turned sharply round, and saluted the stranger with extreme politeness:

"Monsieur," he said, "I am deeply pained to see the trouble I am giving you. I really cannot suffer you any longer to incommode yourself by acting as escort to me." While speaking, he laid his hand on the hilt of his sword.

The stranger appeared to take no notice of this threatening piece of pantomime.

"What, captain!" he replied—"have you not recognized me?"

"To my shame, I confess that I do not recognize you even now!" said De Maurevert.

The stranger loosened the folds of his cloak which hid his features; it was the confidential servant, by whom Marie had sent the mantle and purse to Sforzi in the morning, which, a few hours later, had become the property of the adventurer.

"Why did you not sooner make yourself known to me?" demanded De Maurevert.

"What need was there for me to do so? You were going towards the Marché-aux-Chevaux. I allowed you to proceed on your way."

"Her highness, then, wishes to speak with me?"

"Yes; she is waiting for you."

This answer appeared to annoy the captain considerably.

"By my faith," he replied, "I am, it is true, bound to her highness, body and soul; but it is impossible for me, at this moment, to obey her invitation. My companion in arms, my best—I might even say my only—friend, is exposed to danger. I am hurrying to his assistance. Duty before everything else."

"You refer to the Chevalier Sforzi?" asked the man.

"To Monsieur Sforzi."

"Well, then, I swear to you that your disobedience to the orders of the princess, my honored and powerful mistress, is likely greatly to exaggerate the position of the chevalier. Monsieur de Maurevert, I have no interest in deceiving you, and may speak to you with perfect frankness. Lend me your close attention."

"With pleasure, monsieur," replied De Maurevert; "but, as we can talk just as well walking as standing still, let us continue our way. I am now listening to you."

"Captain," responded Marie's servant, "I heard the princess, shortly after your departure, express herself in the most eulogistic terms concerning you. She congratulated herself on having attached you to her person, and promised herself frequently to turn to account your rare talents and precious qualities. If I were a mean and jealous spy, dear Monsieur de Maurevert, this favor on the part of my mistress would have made me desire to destroy your rising credit and future fortune; but, thank heaven, I see things from a higher point of view, I see, that instead of declaring myself your enemy, it will be my interest to become your most devoted servant. My office, as the confidential servant of her highness, pertains only to her highness' private business—to all such delicate missions as require address and discretion; you will have the superior direction—in a word, of all that pertains to the sword."

"Your duties, therefore, will not in the least interfere with mine; our two administrations will be perfectly distinct. Now, I feel convinced that, by relying upon one another our strength will be increased a hundredfold, and our credit will be for ever secured. You will hold the princess through her feelings of hatred; I by her tender affections. You see, then, dear Monsieur de Maurevert, that it is not my interest to deceive you, and that you may put the firmest trust in all I have now said to you."

De Maurevert had listened with the utmost attention, without for a moment slackening his pace.

"Two questions," he said. "What is your name?—and do you belong to the *noblesse*?"

"I am called Lambert," replied the man, "and I am the son of tradespeople."

"Then, Lambert, your sentiments are very

much above your origin. I have rarely met, even among the higher classes of society, a man gifted with such exquisite good sense as yourself. You have appreciated, with a clearness of sight which does you the greatest honor, the services it may be in my power at some time to render you. And now, estimable Lambert, let us pass to what is of more immediate consequence. Tell me, I beg, in what way my refusal—dictated by an imperious necessity—to go immediately to your mistress is of a nature to aggravate the position of my companion, the Chevalier Sforzi?"

"I left her highness," replied Marie's servant, "under the influence of an excitement beyond any I have ever before seen her display—and which she did not even attempt to conceal from me. She addressed to him at once the most cruel reproaches and the most tender expressions. She was both a tigress and a dove! It was in the midst of one of these transports that she sent me in search of you. Now, I feel certain that if you refuse to obey her orders, her highness will let the balance fall on the side of anger; and all the world knows that, when once she has resolved upon doing anything, whatever it may be, it is sure to be accomplished without delay. It would not surprise me to hear that this very evening the chevalier had received the chastisement due to his culpable indifference."

"The devil!" murmured De Maurevert, "the position is becoming complicated in a most lugubrious fashion! Poor Sforzi certainly does not bring happiness to his friends. As to himself personally, he is decidedly unlucky. Scarcely does he arrive in any country than everybody league themselves against him to exterminate him. After having revolutionized Aumontvergne, he is now going to raise Paris! The princess, D'Epéron, and De Joyeuse are eager to have him stabbed! All things considered, I think it will be best for me to attend her highness' summons. Dear Monsieur Lambert, having duly examined, weighed, and considered your communication, I will accompany you."

When the captain and Lambert reached the solitary house on the Marché-aux-Chevaux, they found Marie impatiently awaiting them at the foot of the stairs. She took De Maurevert by the arm, and drew him into a kind of small oratory on the ground floor.

"Captain," she cried, without giving him time to present his homage, "what is Raoul doing at this moment? Do not attempt to deceive me!—I have your promise. I will—do you hear?—I will know all!"

"Madame," replied De Maurevert, coolly, "your highness consented to allow me to remain silent whenever I consider it right to remain so; I therefore humbly beg of your highness' justice to be permitted to answer your questions, or to refrain from doing so as I see fit."

"Have you seen Monsieur Sforzi since you quitted my presence?" asked Marie, without thinking of discussing the pretension of her interlocutor.

"Yes, madame."

"When?"

"Scarcely an hour ago."

"And since then, where has Monsieur Sforzi been?"

De Maurevert remained silent. "Do you not hear me?" demanded Marie, impatiently. "I ask you where Monsieur Sforzi now is?"

"Madame," said De Maurevert, "if your highness attaches so little importance to an arrangement so fully discussed and voluntarily accepted that she thinks herself empowered to break it without being authorized to do so by the other contracting party, I shall be reduced to the painful necessity of refusing my services to your highness."

"Captain," cried Marie, "I will give you five thousand livres *tournois* if you will this evening answer all my questions!"

De Maurevert started, and his cheeks turned brick-red.

"I should prefer, madame," he said, after a short pause, "knowing your highness' generosity, that she would set a price on each of her questions."

"I don't understand you," replied Marie.

"My proposition is perfectly transparent nevertheless. Suppose that after satisfying your highness' curiosity ninety-nine times, I should be compelled to remain silent to the hundredth question, would it not be soverely unjust that my ninety-nine compliances should go for nothing? But the method of computation I have suggested, by setting such a price on each question as your highness may think fit to attach to it, it would result that I should be paid in proportion to the service I shall have rendered."

"Very well, captain—I will be less exacting than you; I will give you five thousand livres *tournois* for two questions only."

"That is to say, two thousand five hundred livres for each, madame; for I may answer your first, but not the second question."

"So be it—two thousand five hundred for each question."

"I am only too happy to be agreeable to your highness. Your first question?"

"Where is Monsieur Sforzi at this moment?"

"Is it really for an answer to this question that your highness is willing to pay two thousand five hundred livres?"

"Yes."

"Monsieur le Chevalier Sforzi left me, madame, to visit Mademoiselle Diane d'Erlanges."

"I suspected it!" murmured Marie. "A second question, captain," she went on, after a brief pause.

"Then, Lambert, your sentiments are very