

Chapter 11

M. BRYAN DE MONSOREAU.

It was more than joy, it was almost delirium, which agitated Bussy when he had acquired the certainty that the lady of his dream was a reality, and had, in fact, given him that generous hospitality of which he had preserved the vague remembrance in his heart. He would not let the young doctor go, but, dirty as he was, made him get into the litter with him; he feared that if he lost sight of him, he too would vanish like a dream. He would have liked to talk all night of the unknown lady, and explain to Rémy how superior she was even to her portrait; but Rémy, beginning his functions at once, insisted that he should go to bed: fatigue and pain gave the same counsel and these united powers carried the point.

The next day, on awaking, he found Rémy at his bedside. The young man could hardly believe in his good fortune, and wanted to see Bussy again to be sure of it.

"Well!" said he, "how are you, M. le Comte?"

"Quite well, my dear Esculapius; and you, are you satisfied?"

"So satisfied, my generous protector, that I would not change places with the king. But I now must see the wound."

"Look." And Bussy turned round for the young surgeon to take off the bandage. All looked well; the wound was nearly closed. Bussy, quite happy, had slept well, and sleep and happiness had aided the doctor.

"Well," said Bussy, "what do you say?"

"I dare not tell you that you are nearly well, for fear you should send me back to the Rue Beauheillis, five hundred paces from the famous house."

"Which we will find, will we not, Rémy?"

"I should think so."

"Well, my friend, look on yourself as one of the house, and to-day, while you move your things, let me go to the fête of the installation of the new chief huntsman."

"Ah! you want to commit follies already."

"No, I promise to be very reasonable."

"But you must ride."

"It is necessary."

"Have you a horse with an easy pace?"

"I have four to choose from."

"Well, take for to-day the one you would choose for the lady of the portrait you know."

"Know! Ah, Rémy, you have found the way to my heart forever; I feared you would prevent me from going to this chase, or rather this imitation of one, and all the ladies of the Court, and many from the City, will be admitted to it. Now, Rémy, this lady may be there. She certainly is not a simple bourgeoisie--those tapestries, that bed, so much luxury as well as good taste, show a woman of quality, or, at least, a rich one. If I were to meet her there!"

"All is possible," replied Rémy, philosophically.

"Except to find the house," sighed Bussy. "Or to penetrate when we have found it."

"Oh! I have a method."

"What is it?"

"Get another sword wound."

"Good; that gives me the hope that you will keep me."

"Be easy, I feel as if I had known you for twenty years, and could not do without you."

The handsome face of the young doctor grew radiant with joy.

"Well, then," said he, "it is decided; you go to the chase to look for the lady, and I go to look for the house."

"It will be curious if we each succeed."

There had been a great chase commanded in the Bois de Vincennes, for M. de Monsoreau to enter on his functions of chief huntsman. Most people had believed, from the scene of the day before, that the king would not attend, and much astonishment was expressed when it was announced that he had set off with his brother and all the court. The rendezvous was at the Point St. Louis. It was thus they named a cross-road where the martyr king used to sit under an oak-tree and administer justice. Everyone was therefore assembled here at nine o'clock, when the new officer, object of the general curiosity, unknown as he was to almost everyone, appeared on a magnificent black horse. All eyes turned towards him.

He was a man about thirty-five, tall, marked by the smallpox, and with a disagreeable expression. Dressed in a jacket of green cloth braided with silver, with a silver shoulder belt, on which the king's arms were embroidered in gold; on his head a cap with a long plume; in his left hand a spear, and in his right the *éstortuaire* [Footnote: The *éstortuaire* was a stick, which the chief huntsman presented to the king, to put aside the branches of the trees when he was going at full gallop.] destined for the king, M. de Monsoreau might look like a terrible warrior, but not certainly like a handsome cavalier.

"Fie! what an ugly figure you have brought us, monseigneur," said Bussy, to the Duc d'Anjou, "are these the sort of gentlemen that your favor seeks for out of the provinces? Certainly, one could hardly find such in Paris, which is nevertheless as well stocked with ugliness. They say that your highness made a great point of the king's appointing this man."

"M. de Monsoreau has served me well, and I recompense him," replied the duke.

"Well said, monseigneur, it is rare for princes to be grateful; but if that be all, I also have served you well, and should wear the embroidered jacket more gracefully, I trust, than M. de Monsoreau. He has a red beard, I see also, which is an additional beauty."

"I never knew that a man must be an Apollo, or Antinous, to fill an office at court."

"You never heard it; astonishing!"

"I consult the heart and not the face--the services rendered and promised."

"Your highness will say I am very envious; but I search, and uselessly, I confess, to discover what service this Monsoreau can have rendered you."

"You are too curious, Bussy," said the duke, angrily.

"Just like princes," cried Bussy, with his ordinary freedom, "they ask you everything; but if you ask a question in return, you are too curious."

"Well! go and ask M. de Monsoreau, himself."

"Ah! you are right. He is but a simple gentleman, and if he do not reply, I shall know what to say."

"What?"

"Tell him he is impertinent." And, turning from the prince, Bussy approached M. de Monsoreau, who was in the midst of the circle.

Bussy approached, gay and smiling, and his hat in his hand.

"Pardon, monsieur, but you seem all alone. Is it that the favor which you enjoy has already made you enemies?"

"I do not know, monsieur, but it is probable. But, may I ask, to what I owe the honor that you do me in invading my solitude?"

"Ma foi, to the great admiration that M. le Duc d'Anjou has inspired in me for you."

"How so?"

"By recounting to me the exploit for which you were made chief huntsman."

M. de Monsoreau grew so frightfully pale, that the marks in his face looked like black spots on his yellow skin; at the same time he looked at Bussy in a manner that portended a violent storm. Bussy saw that he had done wrong; but he was not a man to draw back; on the contrary, he was one of those who generally repair an indiscretion by an impertinence.

"You say, monsieur," said Monsoreau, "that the Duke recounted to you my last exploit?"

"Yes, monsieur, but I should much like to hear the story from your own lips."

M. de Monsoreau clasped his dagger tighter in his hand, as though he longed to attack Bussy.

"Ma foi, monsieur," said he, "I was quite disposed to grant your request, and recognize your courtesy, but unfortunately here is the king arriving, so we must leave it for another time."

Indeed, the king, mounted on his favorite Spanish horse, advanced rapidly towards them. He loved handsome faces, and was therefore little pleased with that of M. de Monsoreau. However, he accepted, with a good grace, the *éstortuaire* which he presented to him, kneeling, according to custom. As soon as the king was armed, the chase commenced.

Bussy watched narrowly everyone that passed, looking for the original of the portrait, but in vain; there were pretty, even beautiful and charming women, but not the charming creature whom he sought for. He was reduced to conversation, and the company of his ordinary friends. Antragues, always laughing and talking, was a great amusement.

"We have a frightful chief huntsman," said he to Bussy, "do you not think so?"

"I find him horrible; what a family it must be if his children are like him. Do you know his wife?"

"He is not married."

"How do you know?"

"From Madame de Vendron, who finds him very handsome, and would willingly make him her fourth husband. See how she keeps near him."

"What property has he?"

"Oh! a great deal in Anjou."

"Then he is rich?"

"They say so, but that is all; he is not of very good birth. But see, there is M. le Duc d'Anjou calling to you."

"Ah! ma foi, he must wait. I am curious about this man. I find him singular, I hardly know why. And such an odd name."

"Oh! it comes from Mons Soricis; Livarot knows all about that.--Here, Livarot; this Monsoreau----"

"Well."

"Tell us what you know about him----"

"Willingly. Firstly, I am afraid of him."

"Good, that is what you think; now tell us what you know."

"Listen. I was going home one night----"

"It begins in a terrible manner."

"Pray let me finish. It was about six months ago, I was returning from my uncle D'Entragues, through the wood of Méridor, when all at once I heard a frightful cry, and I saw pass, with an empty saddle, a white horse, rushing through the wood. I rode on, and at the end of a long avenue, darkened by the approaching shades of night, I saw a man on a black horse; he seemed to fly. Then I heard again the same cry, and I distinguished before him on

the saddle a woman, on whose mouth he had his hand. I had a gun in my hand--you know I aim well, and I should have killed him, but my gun missed fire."

"Well?"

"I asked a woodcutter who this gentleman on the black horse was, and he said, 'M. de Monsoreau.'"

"Well," said Antragues, "it is not so uncommon to carry away a woman, is it, Bussy?"

"No; but, at least, one might let them cry out."

"And who was the woman?"

"That I do not know; but he has a bad reputation,"

"Do you know anything else about him?"

"No; but he is much feared by his tenantry. However, he is a good hunter, and will fill his post better than St. Luc would have done, for whom it was first destined."

"Do you know where St. Luc is?"

"No; is he still the king's prisoner?"

"Not at all; he set off at one o'clock this morning to visit his country house with his wife."

"Banished?"

"It looks like it."

"Impossible!"

"True as the gospel; Marshal de Brissac told me so this morning."

"Well! it has served M. de Monsoreau----"

"Ah! I know now."

"Know what?"

"The service that he rendered to the duke."

"Who? St. Luc?"

"No; Monsoreau."

"Really."

"Yes, you shall see; come with me," and Bussy, followed by Livarot and Antraques, galloped after the Duc d'Anjou.

"Ah, monseigneur," said he, "what a precious man M. de Monsoreau is."

"Ah! really; then you spoke to him?"

"Certainly."

"And asked him what he had done for me?"

"Certainly; that was all I spoke to him for."

"And what did he say?"

"He courteously confessed that he was your purveyor."

"Of game?"

"No; of women."

"What do you mean, Bussy?" cried the duke angrily.

"I mean, monseigneur, that he carries away women for you on his great black horse, and that as they are ignorant of the honor reserved for them, he puts his hand on their mouths to prevent their crying out."

The duke frowned, and ground his teeth with anger, grew pale, and galloped on so fast, that Bussy and his, companions were left in the rear.

"Ah! ah! it seems that the joke is a good one," said Antragues.

"And so much the better, that everyone does not seem to find it a joke," said Bussy.

A moment after, they heard the duke's voice calling Bussy. He went, and found the duke laughing.

"Oh!" said he, "it appears that what I said was droll."

"I am not laughing at what you said."

"So much the worse; I should have liked to have made a prince laugh, who hardly ever does so."

"I laugh at your inventing a false story to find out the true one."

"No, I told you the truth."

"Well, then, as we are alone, tell me your little history. Where did it happen?"

"In the wood of Méridor."

The duke grew pale again, but did not speak.

"Decidedly," thought Bussy, "the duke is mixed up with that story. Pardieu! monseigneur," said he, "as M. de Monsoreau seems to have found the method of pleasing you so well, teach it to me."

"Pardieu! yes, Bussy, I will tell you how. Listen; I met, by chance, at church, a charming woman, and as some features of her face, which I only saw through a veil, recalled to me a lady whom I had much loved, I followed her, and found out where she lived. I have gained over her servant, and have a key of the house."

"Well, monseigneur, all seems to go well for you."

"But they say she is a great prude, although free, young, and beautiful."

"Ah! you are romancing."

"Well, you are brave, and love me?"

"I have my days."

"For being brave?"

"No, for loving you."

"Well, is this one of the days?"

"I will try and make it one, if I can serve your highness."

"Well, I want you to do for me what most people do for themselves."

"Make love to her, to find out if she be a prude?"

"No, find out if she has a lover. I want you to lay in wait and discover who the man is that visits her."

"There is a man then?"

"I fear so."

"Lover, or husband?"

"That is what I want to know."

"And you want me to find out?"

"If you will do me that great favor----"

"You will make me the next chief huntsman."

"I have never yet done anything for you."

"Oh! you have discovered that at last."

"Well, do you consent?"

"To watch the lady?"

"Yes."

"Monseigneur, I confess I do not like the commission."

"You offered to do me a service, and you draw back already!"

"Because you want me to be a spy."

"I ask you as a friend."

"Monseigneur, this is a sort of thing that every man must do for himself, even if he be a prince."

"Then you refuse?"

"Ma foi! yes."

The duke frowned. "Well, I will go myself," said he, "and if I am killed or wounded, I shall say that I begged my friend Bussy to undertake the task, and that for the first time he was prudent."

"Monseigneur, you said to me the other night, 'Bussy, I hate all those minions of the king's who are always laughing at and insulting us; go to this wedding of St. Luc's, pick a quarrel and try to get rid of them.' I went; they were five and I was alone. I defied them all; they laid wait for me, attacked me all together, and killed my horse, yet I wounded three of them. To-day

you ask me to wrong a woman. Pardon, monseigneur, but that is past the service which a prince should exact from a gallant man, and I refuse."

"So be it; I will do my work myself, or with Aurilly, as I have done already."

"Oh!" said Bussy, with a sudden thought.

"What?"

"Were you engaged on it the night when you saw the ambush laid for me?"

"Just so."

"Then your beautiful unknown lives near the Bastile."

"Opposite the Rue St. Catherine. It is a dangerous place, as you know."

"Has your highness been there since?"

"Yesterday."

"And you saw?"

"A man spying all about and who at last stopped at her door."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes, at first. Afterwards he was joined by another, with a lantern in his hand."

"Ah!"

"Then they began to talk together, and at last, tired of waiting, I went away. And before I venture into the house where I might be killed----"

"You would like one of your friends to try it."

"They would not have my enemies, nor run the same risk; and then they might report to me----"

"In your place I would give up this woman."

"No, she is too beautiful."

"You said you hardly saw her."

"I saw her enough to distinguish splendid blonde hair, magnificent eyes, and such a complexion!"

"Ah! ah!"

"You understand! one does not easily renounce such a woman."

"No, I feel for you."

"You jest."

"No, on my word, and the proof is, that if you will give me my instructions, I will watch this evening."

"You retract your decision?"

"There is no one but the pope infallible; now tell me what I am to do."

"You will have to hide a little way off, and if a man enter, follow him to find out who he is?"

"But if, in entering, he close the door behind him?"

"I told you I had a key."

"Ah! true; then there is only one more thing to fear, that I should follow a wrong man to a wrong door."

"You cannot mistake; this door is the door of an alley, and at the end of the alley there is a staircase; mount twelve steps, and you will be in a corridor."

"How do you know all this, if you have never been in?"

"Did I not tell you I had gained over the servant? She told me all."

"Mon Dieu! how convenient it is to be a prince. I should have had to find out all for myself, which would have taken me an enormous time, and I might have failed after all."

"Then you consent?"

"Can I refuse your highness? But will you come with me to show me the house?"

"Useless; as we return from the chase, we will make a detour, and pass through the Porte St. Antoine, and I will point it out to you."

"Very well, and what am I to do to the man if he comes?"

"Only follow him till you learn who he is. I leave to you your mode of action. And not a word to any one."

"No, on my honor."

"And you will go alone?"

"Quite."

"Well, then, it is settled; I show you the door on our way home; then you come with me, and I give you the key." Bussy and the prince then rejoined the rest. The king was charmed with the manner in which M. de Monsoreau had conducted the chase.

"Monseigneur," then said M. de Monsoreau to the duke, "I owe my place and these compliments to you."

"But you know that you must go to-night to Fontainebleau, where the king will hunt to-morrow and the day after."

"I know, monseigneur; I am prepared to start to-night."

"Ah, M. de Monsoreau, there is no more rest for you," said Bussy, "you wished to be chief huntsman, and you are so, and now you will have at least fifty nights' rest less than other men. Luckily you are not married."

At this joke, Monsoreau's face was covered once more with that hideous paleness which gave to him so sinister an aspect.