

## Chapter 15

### THE MARRIAGE.

"A strange man," said Bussy.

"Yes, is he not, monsieur? When he was gone I felt sadder and more frightened than ever. This icy respect, this ironical obedience, this repressed passion, which now and then showed itself in his voice, frightened me more than a will firmly expressed, and which I could have opposed, would have done. The next day was Sunday; I had never in my life missed divine service, so I took a thick veil and went to St. Catherine's, followed by Gertrude, and no one seemed to remark us.

"The next day the count came to announce to me that the duke had fulfilled his promise, and had obtained for him the place of chief huntsman, which had been promised to M. de St. Luc. A week passed thus: the count came twice to see me, and always preserved the same cold and submissive manner. The next Sunday I went again to the church. Imprudently, in the midst of my prayers, I raised my veil. I was praying earnestly for my father, when Gertrude touched me on the arm. I raised my head, and saw with terror M. le Duc d'Anjou leaning against the column, and looking earnestly at me. A man stood by him."

"It was Aurilly," said Bussy.

"Yes, that was the name that Gertrude told me afterwards. I drew my veil quickly over my face, but it was too late: he had seen me, and if he had not recognized me, at least my resemblance to her whom he believed dead had struck him. Uneasy, I left the church, but found him standing at the door and he offered to me the holy water as I passed. I feigned not to see him, and went on. We soon discovered that we were followed. Had I known anything of Paris, I would have attempted to lead them wrong, but I knew no more of it than from the church to the house, nor did I know any one of whom I could ask a quarter of an hour's hospitality; not a friend, and only one protector, whom I feared more than an enemy."

"Oh! mon Dieu!" cried Bussy, "why did not Heaven, or chance, throw me sooner in your path?"

Diana thanked the young man with a look.

"But pray go on," said Bussy, "I interrupt you, and yet I am dying to hear more."

"That evening M. de Monsoreau came. I did not know whether to tell him of what had happened, but he began, 'You asked me if you could go to mass, and I told you you were free, but that it would be better not to do so. You would not believe me: you went this morning to St. Catherine's, and by a fatality the prince was there and saw you.' 'It is true, monsieur; but I do not know if he recognized me.' 'Your face struck him; your resemblance to the woman he regrets appeared to him extraordinary, he followed you home, and made inquiries, but learned nothing, for no one knew anything.' 'Mon Dieu!' cried I. 'The duke is persevering,' said he. 'Oh! he will forget me, I hope.'

"No one forgets you who has once seen you," said he. 'I did all I could to forget you, and I have not succeeded.' And the first passionate look that I had seen flashed from the eyes of the count. I was more terrified by it than I had been by the sight of the prince. I remained mute. 'What will you do?' asked the count. 'Can I not change my abode--go to the other end of Paris, or, better still, return to Anjou?' 'It will be useless; the duke is a terrible bloodhound, and now he is on your track, he will follow you wherever you go till he finds you.' 'Oh! mon Dieu! you frighten me.' 'I tell you the simple truth.' 'Then what do you advise me to do?' 'Alas!' said he, with a bitter irony. 'I am a man of poor imagination. I had formed a plan, but it does not suit you; I can find no other.' 'But the danger is perhaps less pressing than you imagine.'

"The future will show us, madame," said the count, rising. 'I can but add that the Comtesse de Monsoreau would have the less to fear from the

prince, as my new post places me under the direct protection of the court.' I only replied by a sigh. He smiled bitterly, and as he went down-stairs I heard him giving vent to oaths. The next day, when Gertrude went out, she was accosted by a young man whom she recognized as the one who had accompanied the prince, but she remained obstinately silent to all his questions. This meeting inspired me with profound terror; I feared that M. de Monsoreau would not come, and that they would invade the house in his absence. I sent for him, he came at once. I told him all about the young man, whom I described.

"It was Aurilly," he said, "and what did Gertrude answer?" "She did not answer at all." "She was wrong," said he. "Why?" "We must gain time." "Time?" "Yes, I am now dependent on the Duc d'Anjou; in a fortnight, in a week perhaps, he will be in my power. We must deceive him to get him to wait." "Mon Dieu!" "Certainly; hope will make him patient. A complete refusal will push him to extremities." "Monsieur, write to my father; he will throw himself at the feet of the king. He will have pity on an old man." "That is according to the king's humor, and whether he be for the time friendly or hostile to the duke. Besides, it would take six days for a messenger to reach your father, and six days for him to come here. In twelve days, if we do not stop him, the duke will have done all he can do."

"And how to stop him?" I cried. A smile passed over the lips of M. de Monsoreau at this first appeal to his protection. "Madame," said he, "will you permit me to pass two or three hours in your room? I may be seen going out, and would rather wait till dark." I signed him to sit down. We conversed; he was clever and had traveled much, and at the end of the time I understood, better than I had ever done before, the influence he had obtained over my father. When it grew dark, he rose and took leave. Gertrude and I then approached the window, and could distinctly see two men examining the house. The next day, Gertrude, when she went out, found the same young man in the same place. He spoke to her again, and this time she answered him. On the following day she told him that I was the widow of a counselor, who, being poor, lived in retirement. He tried to learn more, but could extract nothing further from her. The next day, Aurilly, who seemed to doubt her story, spoke of Anjou, of Beaugé, and Méridor. Gertrude declared these names to be perfectly unknown to her. Then he avowed that he came from the Duc d'Anjou, who had seen and fallen in love with me; then came

magnificent offers for both of us, for her, if she would introduce the prince into my house, and for me, if I would receive him.

"Every evening M. de Monsoreau came, to hear what was going on, and remained from eight o'clock to midnight, and it was evident that his anxiety was great. On Saturday evening he arrived pale and agitated.

"'You must promise to receive the duke on Tuesday or Wednesday,' said he. 'Promise! and why?' 'Because he has made up his mind to come in, and he is just now on the best terms with the king; we have nothing to expect from him.' 'But before then will anything happen to help me?' 'I hope so. I expect from day to day the event which is to place the duke in my power. But tomorrow I must leave you, and must go to Monsoreau.' 'Must you?' cried I with a mixture of joy and terror. 'Yes, I have there a rendezvous which is indispensable to bring about the event of which I speak.' 'But if you fail, what are we to do?' 'What can I do against a prince, if I have no right to protect you, but yield to bad fortune?'

"'Oh! my father! my father!' cried I. The count looked at me. 'What have you to reproach me with?' said he. 'Nothing, on the contrary.' 'Have I not been a devoted friend, and as respectful as a brother?' 'You have behaved throughout like a gallant man.' 'Had I not your promise?' 'Yes.' 'Have I once recalled it to you?' 'No.' 'And yet you prefer to be the mistress of the duke, to being my wife?' 'I do not say so, monsieur.' 'Then decide.' 'I have decided.' 'To be Countess of Monsoreau?' 'Rather than mistress of the duke.' 'The alternative is flattering. But, meanwhile, let Gertrude gain time until Tuesday.' The next day Gertrude went out, but did not meet Aurilly. We felt more frightened at his absence than we had done at his presence. Night came, and we were full of terror. We were alone and feeble, and for the first time I felt my injustice to the count."

"Oh! madame!" cried Bussy, "do not be in a hurry to think so, his conduct conceals some mystery, I believe."

"All was quiet," continued Diana, "until eleven o'clock. Then five men came out of the Rue St Antoine, and hid themselves by the Hôtel des Tournelles.

We began to tremble; were they there for us? However, they remained quiet, and a quarter of an hour passed; then we saw two other men approach. By the moonlight Gertrude recognized Aurilly. 'Alas! mademoiselle; it is they,' cried she. 'Yes,' cried I, trembling, 'and the five others are to help them.' 'But they must force the door,' said Gertrude, 'perhaps the neighbors will come and help us.' 'Oh! no, they do not know us, and they will not fight against the duke. Alas! Gertrude, I fear we have no real defender but the count.' 'Well! then, why do you always refuse to marry him?' I sighed."