

Chapter 16

THE MARRIAGE.

"The two men approached the window. We gently opened it a little way, and heard one say, 'Are you sure it is here?' 'Yes, monseigneur, quite sure,' said the other. 'It is the fifth house from the corner of the Rue St. Paul.' 'And you are sure of the key?' 'I took the pattern of the lock.' I seized Gertrude's arm in terror. 'And once inside' he went on, 'the servant will admit us; your highness has in your pocket a golden key as good as this one.' 'Open, then.' We heard the key turn in the lock but all at once the ambushed men rushed forward, crying, 'a mort! a mort!' I could not understand this, only I saw that unexpected help had come to us, and I fell on my knees, thanking Heaven. But the prince had only to name himself, when every sword went back into the scabbard, and every foot drew back."

"Yes, yes," said Bussy, "it was for me they came, not for the prince."

"However, this attack caused the prince to retire, and the five gentlemen went back to their hiding-place. It was evident that the danger was over for that night, but we were too unquiet to go to bed. Soon we saw a man on horseback appear, and then the five gentlemen immediately rushed on him. You know the rest, as the gentleman was yourself."

"On the contrary, madame, I know only that I fought and then fainted."

"It is useless to say," continued Diana, with a blush, "the interest that we took in the combat so unequal, but so valiantly sustained. Each blow drew from us a shudder, a cry, and a prayer. We saw your horse fall, and we thought you lost, but it was not so; the brave Bussy merited his reputation. At last, surrounded, menaced on all sides, you retreated like a lion, facing your foes, and came to lean against our door; the same idea came to both of us, to go down and open to you, and we ran towards the staircase; but we had barricaded the door, and it took us some minutes to move the furniture, and as we arrived on the stairs, we heard the door shut. We stopped, and looked at each other, wondering who had entered. Soon we heard steps, and

a man appeared, who tottered, threw up his arms, and fell on the first step. It was evident that he was not pursued, but had put the door, so luckily left open by the duke, between him and his adversaries. In any case we had nothing to fear; it was he who needed our help. Gertrude ran and fetched a lamp, and we found you had fainted, and carried you to the bed. Gertrude had heard of a wonderful cure made by a young doctor in the Rue Beautrellis, and she offered to go and fetch him. 'But,' said I, 'he might betray us.' 'I will take precautions' said she. She took money and the key, and I remained alone near you, and--praying for you."

"Alas!" said Bussy, "I did not know all my happiness, madame."

"In a quarter of an hour Gertrude returned, bringing the young doctor with his eyes bandaged."

"Yes, it was at that moment I recovered my senses and saw your portrait, and thought I saw you enter," said Bussy.

"I did so; my anxiety was stronger than my prudence. The doctor examined your wound and answered for your life."

"All that remained in my mind," said Bussy, "like a dream, and yet something told me," added he, laying his hand upon his heart, "that it was real."

"When the surgeon had dressed your wound, he drew from his pocket a little bottle containing a red liquor, of which he put some drops on your lips. He told me it was to counteract the fever and produce sleep, and said that the only thing then was to keep you quiet. Gertrude then bandaged his eyes again, and took him back to the Rue Beautrellis, but she fancied he counted the steps."

"He did so, madame."

"This supposition frightened us. We feared he would betray us, and we wished to get rid of every trace of the hospitality we had shown you. I gathered up my courage; it was two o'clock, and the streets were deserted; Gertrude was strong, and I aided her, and between us we carried you to the Temple. Luckily we met no one, but when we returned, I fainted with emotion."

"Oh! madame!" cried Bussy, "how can I ever repay you for what you have done for me?"

There was a moment's silence, and they heard the clock of St. Catherine's church strike. "Two o'clock," cried Diana, "and you here!"

"Oh! madame, do not send me away without telling me all. Suppose that God had given you a brother, and tell this brother what he can do for his sister."

"Alas! nothing now; it is too late."

"What happened the next day?" said Bussy; "what did you do on that day when I thought constantly of you, without feeling sure if you were not a vision of my delirium?"

"During that day, Gertrude went out, and met Aurilly. He was more pressing than ever. He said nothing of the night before, but asked for an interview for his master. Gertrude appeared to consent, but she asked until the Wednesday--that is to-day--to decide. Aurilly promised that his master would wait until then. That evening, M. de Monsoreau returned. We told him all, except about you.

"Yes," said he, "I heard of all this. Then he has a key." "Can we not change the lock?" "He will get another key." "Put on bolts?" "He will come with ten men

and force the door. 'But the event which was to give you full power over him?' 'Is postponed indefinitely.' I stood in despair. 'Monsieur,' said I, 'the duke has promised to wait till Wednesday; I ask you to wait till Tuesday.' 'Tuesday evening I will be here, madame,' and without another word he went out. I followed him with my eyes, but instead of going away he stood in the corner by the Hôtel des Tournelles, and seemed determined to watch me all night. Every proof of devotion he gave me was like a knife in my heart. The two days passed rapidly, but what I suffered it is impossible to describe. When Tuesday evening came, I felt exhausted, and all emotion seemed dead within me.

"Gertrude went to the window. 'Madame,' cried she, 'four men! I see four men! They approach, they open the door--they enter! It is, doubtless, the duke and his followers.' For an answer, I drew my poniard, and placed it near me on the table. 'See,' said I. An instant after, Gertrude returned, 'It is the count,' said she. He entered. 'Gertrude tells me,' said he, 'that you took me for the duke, and were ready to kill yourself.' It was the first time I had ever seen him moved. Gertrude was wrong to tell you,' said I. 'You know that I am not alone.' 'Gertrude saw four men.' 'You know who they are?' 'I presume one is a priest, and the others witnesses.' 'Then, you are ready to become my wife?' 'It was so agreed; only I stipulated that except in an urgent case, I would only marry you in the presence of my father.' 'I remember; but do you not think the case urgent?' 'Yes, and the priest may marry us, but, until I have seen my father, I will be your wife only in name.'

"The count frowned, and bit his lips. 'I do not wish to coerce you,' said he; 'you are free; but look here.' I went to the window, and saw a man wrapped in a cloak, who seemed trying to get into the house."

"Oh! mon dieu!" cried Bussy; "and this was yesterday?"

"Yes, about nine o'clock. Presently, another man, with a lantern, joined him. I thought it was the duke and his followers.

"Now,' said, M de Monsoreau, 'shall I go or stay?' I hesitated a moment, in spite of my father's letter and of my given word, but those two men there----"

"Oh! unhappy that I am," cried Bussy, "it was I and Rémy, the young doctor."

"You!" cried Diana.

"Yes, I; I, who, more and more convinced of the reality of my dream, sought for the house where I had been, and the woman, or rather angel, who had appeared to me. Oh! I am unfortunate. Then," continued he, after a pause, "you are his wife?"

"Since yesterday."

There was a fresh silence.

"But," said Diana at last, "how did you enter this house?"

Bussy silently showed his key.

"A key! where did you get it?"

"Had not Gertrude promised the prince to enter tonight? He had seen M. de Monsoreau here, and also myself, and fearing a snare, sent me to find out."

"And you accepted this mission?"

"It was my only method of penetrating to you. Will you reproach me for having sought at once the greatest joy and the greatest grief of my life?"

"Yes, for it is better that you should see me no more, and forget me."

"No, madame; God has brought me to you, to deliver you from the toils in which your enemies have taken you. I vow my life to you. You wish for news of your father?"

"Oh, yes! for, in truth, I know not what has become of him."

"Well, I charge myself with finding out; only think of him who henceforth will live but for you."

"But this key?"

"This key I restore to you, for I will receive it only from your hands; but I pledge you my word as a gentleman, that never sister could trust in a brother more devoted and respectful."

"I trust to the word of the brave Bussy. Here, monsieur," and she gave back the key.

"Madame, in a fortnight we will know more;" and, saluting Diana with a respect mingled with love and sadness, Bussy took leave. Diana listened to his retreating steps with tears in her eyes.