

## Chapter 25

### THE FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

On descending into the court, M. de Méridor found a fresh horse, which Bussy had had prepared for him; another waited for Bussy, and attended by Rémy, they started. As they went along, the baron could not but ask himself by what strange confidence he had accompanied, almost blindly, the friend of the prince to whom he owed all his misfortunes. Would it not have been better to have braved the Duc d'Anjou, and instead of following Bussy where it pleased him to lead, to have gone at once to the Louvre, and thrown himself at the feet of the king? What could the prince say to him? How could he console him? Could soft words heal his wound?

When they stopped, "What," said the baron, "does the Duc d'Anjou live in this humble house?"

"Not exactly, monsieur, but if it is not his dwelling, it is that of a lady whom he has loved."

A cloud passed over the face of the old gentleman. "Monsieur," said he, "we provincials are not used to the easy manners of Paris; they annoy us. It seems to me that if the Duc d'Anjou wishes to see the Baron de Méridor, it ought to be at his palace, and not at the house of one of his mistresses."

"Come, come, baron!" said Bussy, with his smile, which always carried conviction with it, "do not hazard false conjectures. On my honor, the lady who you are going to see is perfectly virtuous and worthy in all respects."

"Who is she then?"

"She is the wife of a friend of yours."

"Really! but then, monsieur, why did you say the duke loved her?"

"Because I always speak truth. But enter, and you shall see accomplished all I have promised you."

"Take care; I wept for my child, and you said, 'Console yourself, monsieur, the mercy of God is great;' to promise me a consolation to my grief was almost to promise me a miracle."

"Enter, monsieur," said Bussy, with his bright smile. Bussy went in first, and, running up to Gertrude, said, "Go and tell Madame de Monsoreau that M. de Bussy is here, and desires to speak to her. But," continued he, in a low voice, "not a word of the person who accompanies me."

"Madame de Monsoreau!" said the old man in astonishment. But as he feebly mounted the staircase, he heard the voice of Diana crying,--

"M. de Bussy. Gertrude? Oh! let him come in!"

"That voice!" cried the baron, stopping. "Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!"

At that moment, as the baron tremblingly held on to the banister, and looked around him, he saw at the top of the staircase, Diana, smiling, and more beautiful than ever. At this sight the old man uttered a cry and would have fallen, had he not caught hold of Bussy, who stood by him.

"Diana alive! Diana, oh, my God!"

"Mon Dieu! M. de Bussy!" cried Diana, running down, "what is the matter with my father?"

"He thought you dead, madame, and he wept, as a father must weep for a daughter like you."

"How!" cried Diana; "and no one undeceived him?"

"No one."

"No," cried the old man, recovering a little, "no one, not even M. de Bussy."

"Ungrateful," said Bussy.

"Oh! yes! you are right; for this moment repays me for all my griefs. Oh! my Diana! my beloved Diana!" cried he, drawing his daughter to him with one hand, and extending the other to Bussy. But all at once he cried, "But you said I was to see Madame de Monsoreau. Where is she?"

"Alas! my father!" cried Diana.

Bussy summoned up all his strength. "M. de Monsoreau is your son-in-law," he said.

"What! my son-in-law! and every one--even you, Diana--left me in ignorance."

"I feared to write, my father; he said my letters would fall into the hands of the prince. Besides, I thought you knew all."

"But why all these strange mysteries?"

"Ah, yes, my father; why did M. de Monsoreau let you think me dead, and not let you know I was his wife?"

The baron, overwhelmed, looked from Bussy to Diana.

"M. de Monsoreau my son-in-law!" stammered he.

"That cannot astonish you, father; did you not order me to marry him?"

"Yes, if he saved you."

"Well! he did save me," said Diana, sinking on to a chair, "not from misfortune, but from shame."

"Then why did he let me think you dead? I, who wept for you so bitterly. Why did he let me die of despair, when a single word would have restored me?"

"Oh! there is some hidden mystery," cried Diana; "my father, you will not leave me again; M. de Bussy, you will protect us."

"Alas! madame! it belongs to me no more to enter into your family secrets. Seeing the strange maneuvers of your husband, I wished to bring you a defender; you have your father, I retire."

"He is right," said the old man, sadly.

"M. de Monsoreau feared the Duc d'Anjou, and so does M. de Bussy."

Diana cast a glance at the young man. He smiled and said, "M. le Baron, excuse, I beg, the singular question I am about to ask; and you also, madame, for I wish to serve you. M. le Baron, ask Madame de Monsoreau if she be happy in the marriage which she has contracted in obedience to your orders."

Diana burst into tears for her only answer. The eyes of the baron filled also, for he began to fear that his friendship for M. de Monsoreau had tended to make his daughter unhappy.

"Now!" said Bussy, "is it true that you voluntarily promised him your daughter's hand?"

"Yes, if he saved her."

"And he did save her. Then, monsieur, I need not ask if you mean to keep your promise."

"It is a law for all, and above all for gentlemen; you know that, M. de Bussy. My daughter must be his."

"Ah!" cried Diana, "would I were dead!"

"Madame," said Bussy, "you see I was right, and that I can do no more here. M. le Baron gives you to M. de Monsoreau, and you yourself promised to marry him when you should see your father again safe and well."

"Ah! you tear my heart, M. de Bussy," cried Diana, approaching the young man; "my father does not know that I fear this man, that I hate him; my father sees in him only my saviour, and I think him my murderer."

"Diana! Diana!" cried the baron, "he saved you."

"Yes," cried Bussy, "but if the danger were less great than you thought; what do we know? There is some mystery in all this, which I must clear up. But I protest to you, that if I had had the happiness to be in the place of M. de Monsoreau, I would have saved your young and beautiful daughter without exacting a price for it."

"He loved her," said M. de Méridor, trying to excuse him.

"And I, then----" cried Bussy; and, although he stopped, frightened at what he was about to say, Diana heard and understood.

"Well!" cried she, reddening, "my brother, my friend, can you do nothing for me?"

"But the Duc d'Anjou," said the baron.

"I am not aware of those who fear the anger of princes," said Bussy; "and, besides, I believe the danger lies not with him, but with M. de Monsoreau."

"But if the duke learns that Diana is alive, all is lost."

"I see," said Bussy, "you believe M. de Monsoreau more than me. Say no more; you refuse my aid; throw yourself, then, into the arms of the man who has already so well merited your confidence. Adieu, baron; adieu, madame, you will see me no more."

"Oh!" cried Diana, taking his hand. "Have you seen me waver for an instant; have you ever seen me soften towards him? No. I beg you, on my knees, M. de Bussy, not to abandon me."

Bussy seized her hands, and all his anger melted away like snow before the sun.

"Then so be it, madame," said he; "I accept the mission, and in three days--for I must have time to go to Chartres to the prince--you shall see me again." Then, in a low tone to her, he said, "We are allied against this Monsoreau; remember that it was not he who brought you back to your father, and be faithful to me."