

Chapter 33

HOW THE DUC D'ANJOU LEARNED THAT DIANA WAS NOT DEAD.

The month of April had arrived. The great cathedral of Chartres was hung with white, and the king was standing barefooted in the nave. The religious ceremonies, which were for the purpose of praying for an heir to the throne of France, were just finishing, when Henri, in the midst of the general silence, heard what seemed to him a stifled laugh. He turned round to see if Chicot were there, for he thought no one else would have dared to laugh at such a time. It was not, however, Chicot who had laughed at the sight of the two chemises of the Holy Virgin which were said to have such a prolific power, and which were just being drawn from their golden box; but it was a cavalier who had just stopped at the door of the church, and who was making his way with his muddy boots through the crowd of courtiers in their penitents' robes and sacks. Seeing the king turn, he stopped for a moment, and Henri, irritated at seeing him arrive thus, threw an angry glance at him. The newcomer, however, continued to advance until he reached the velvet chair of M. le Duc d'Anjou, by which he knelt down. He, turning round, said, "Bussy!"

"Good morning, monseigneur."

"Are you mad?"

"Why so?"

"To come here to see this nonsense."

"Monseigneur, I wish to speak to you at once."

"Where have you been for the last three weeks?"

"That is just what I have to tell you."

"Well, you must wait until we leave the church."

"So much the worse."

"Patience, here is the end."

Indeed, the king was putting on one of these chemises, and the queen another. Then they all knelt down, and afterwards the king, taking off his holy tunic, left the church.

"Now, monseigneur," said Bussy, "shall we go to your house?"

"Yes, at once, if you have anything to tell me."

"Plenty of things which you do not expect."

When they were in the hotel the duke said, "Now sit down and tell me all; I feared you were dead."

"Very likely, monseigneur."

"You left me to look after my beautiful unknown. Who is this woman, and what am I to expect?"

"You will reap what you have sown, monseigneur--plenty of shame."

"What do you mean?" cried the duke.

"What I said."

"Explain yourself, monsieur; who is this woman?"

"I thought you had recognized her."

"Then it was her?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"You saw her?"

"Yes."

"And she spoke to you?"

"Certainly. Doubtless you had reason to think her dead, and you perhaps hoped she was so."

The duke grew pale.

"Yes, monseigneur," continued Bussy, "although you pushed to despair a young girl of noble race, she escaped from death; but do not breathe yet, do not think yourself absolved, for, in preserving her life, she found a misfortune worse than death."

"What is it? what has happened to her?"

"Monseigneur, a man preserved her honor and saved her life, but he made her pay for this service so dearly that she regrets his having rendered it."

"Finish."

"Well, monseigneur, Mademoiselle de Méridor, to escape becoming the mistress of the Duc d'Anjou, has thrown herself into the arms of a man whom she detests, and is now Madame de Monsoreau."

At these words the blood rushed furiously into the duke's face.

"Is this true?" said he.

"Pardieu! I said it," said Bussy, haughtily.

"I did not mean that; I did not doubt your word, Bussy, I wondered only if it were possible that one of my gentlemen had had the audacity to interfere between me and a woman whom I honored with my love."

"And why not?"

"Then you would have done so?"

"I would have done better; I would have warned you that your honor was being lost."

"Listen, Bussy," said the prince, becoming calmer, "I do not justify myself, but M. de Monsoreau has been a traitor towards me."

"Towards you?"

"Yes, he knew my intentions."

"And they were?"

"To try and make Diana love me."

"Love you!"

"Yes, but in no case to use violence."

"Those were your intentions?" said Bussy, with an ironical smile.

"Certainly, and these intentions I preserved to the last, although M. de Monsoreau constantly combated them."

"Monseigneur, what do you say! This man incited you to dishonor Diana?"

"Yes."

"By his counsels?"

"By his letters. Would you like to see them?"

"Oh! if I could believe that!"

"You shall see."

And the duke, opening a little cabinet, and taking out a letter, said, "Since you doubt your prince's words, read."

Bussy took it and read,--

"MONSEIGNEUR,"Be quite easy; the coup-de-main can be executed without risk,

for the young person sets off this evening to pass a week with an aunt who lives at the château of Lude. I charge myself with it, and you need take no trouble as for the scruples of the young lady, be sure that they will vanish in the presence of your highness: meanwhile I act; and this evening she will be at the château of Beaugé. "Your highness's respectful servant,

"BRYAN DE MONSOREAU." "Well, what do you say, Bussy?"

"I say that you are well served, monseigneur."

"You mean betrayed."

"Ah, true; I forgot the end."

"The wretch! he made me believe in the death woman----"

"Whom he stole from you; it is black enough."

"How did he manage?"

"He made the father believe you the ravisher, and offered himself to rescue the lady, presented himself at the château of Beaugé with a letter from the Baron de Méridor, brought a boat to the windows, and carried away the prisoner; then shut her up in the house you know of, and by constantly working upon her fears, forced her to become his wife."

"Is it not infamous?"

"Only partly excused by your conduct, monseigneur."

"Ah! Bussy, you shall see how I will revenge myself!"

"Princes do not revenge themselves, they punish," said Bussy.

"How can I punish him?"

"By restoring happiness to Madame de Monsoreau."

"But can I?"

"Certainly."

"How?"

"By restoring her to liberty. The marriage was forced, therefore it is null."

"You are right."

"Get it set aside, then, and you will have acted like a gentleman and a prince."

"Ah, ah!" said the prince, "what warmth! you are interested in it, Bussy."

"I! not at all, except that I do not wish people to say that Louis de Clermont serves a perfidious prince and a man without honor."

"Well, you shall see. But how to do it?"

"Nothing more easy; make her father act."

"But he is buried in Anjou."

"Monseigneur, he is here in Paris."

"At your house?"

"No, with his daughter. Speak to him, monseigneur, that he may see in you, not what he does now, an enemy, but a protector--that he who now curses your name may bless you."

"And when can I see him?"

"As soon as you return Paris."

"Very well."

"It is agreed, then?"

"Yes."

"On your word as a gentleman?"

"On my faith as a prince."

"And when do you return?"

"This evening; will you accompany me?"

"No, I go first; where shall I meet your highness?"

"To-morrow; at the king's levee."

"I will be there, monseigneur."

Bussy did not lose a moment, and the distance that took the duke fifteen hours to accomplish, sleeping in his litter, the young man, who returned to Paris, his heart beating with joy and love, did in five, to console the baron and Diana the sooner.