

Chapter 54

BUSSY AND DIANA.

Faintings from love seldom last any length of time, nor are they very dangerous. Diana was not long in opening her eyes, and finding herself supported by Bussy.

"Oh!" murmured she, "it was shocking, count, to surprise us thus."

Bussy expected other words, men are so exacting, but Diana said no more, and, disengaging herself gently from his arms, ran to her friend, who, seeing her faint, had returned softly, and stood a little way off.

"Is it thus that you receive me, madame?"

"No, M. de Bussy, but----"

"Oh! no 'but,' madame," sighed Bussy, drawing near again.

"No, no, not on your knees!"

"Oh! let me pray to you an instant, thus!" cried the count. "I have so longed for this place."

"Yes, but to come to it, you jumped over the wall. Not only is it not suitable for a man of your rank, but it is very imprudent."

"How so?"

"If you had been seen?"

"Who could have seen me?"

"Our hunters, who, a quarter of an hour ago, passed by this wall."

"Do not be uneasy, madame, I hide myself too carefully to be seen."

"Hidden! really!" said Jeanne, "tell us how, M. de Bussy."

"Firstly, if I did not join you on the road, it was not my fault, I took one route and you another. You came by Rambouillet, and I by Chartres. And then judge if your poor Bussy be not in love; I did not dare to join you. It was not in the presence of your father and your servants that I wished to meet you again, for I did not desire to compromise you, so I made the journey stage by stage, devoured by impatience. At last you arrived. I had taken a lodging in the village, and, concealed behind the window, I saw you pass."

"Oh! mon Dieu! are you then at Angers under your own name?"

"For what do you take me? I am a traveling merchant; look at my costume, it is of a color much worn among drapers and goldsmiths. I have not been remarked."

"Bussy, the handsome Bussy, two days in a provincial town and not remarked; who would believe that at court?" said Jeanne.

"Continue, count," said Diana, blushing; "how do you come here from the town?"

"I have two horses of a chosen race; I leave the village on one, stopping to look at all the signs and writings, but when out of sight my horse takes to a gallop, which brings him the four miles in half an hour. Once in the wood of Méridor I ride to the park wall, but it is very long, for the park is large. Yesterday I explored this wall for more than four hours, climbing up here and there, hoping to see you. At last, when I was almost in despair, I saw you in the evening returning to the house; the two great dogs of the baron were jumping round you. When you had disappeared, I jumped over, and saw the marks on the grass where you had been sitting. I fancied you might have adopted this place, which is charming, during the heat of the sun, so I broke away some branches that I might know it again, and sighing, which hurts me dreadfully----"

"From want of habit," said Jeanne.

"I do not say no, madame; well, then, sighing, I retook my way to the town. I was very tired, I had torn my dress in climbing trees, but I had seen you, and I was happy."

"It is an admirable recital," said Jeanne, "and you have surmounted dreadful obstacles; it is quite heroic; but in your place I would have preserved my doublet, and above all, have taken care of my white hands. Look at yours, how frightful they are with scratches."

"Yes, but then I should not have seen her whom I came to see."

"On the contrary, I should have seen her better than you did."

"What would you have done then?"

"I would have gone straight to the Château de Méridor. M. le Baron would have pressed me in his arms, Madame de Monsoreau would have placed me

by her at table, M. de St. Luc would have been delighted to see me, and his wife also. It was the simplest thing in the world, but lovers never think of what is straight before them."

Bussy smiled at Diana. "Oh, no," he said, "that would not have done for me."

"Then I no longer understand what good manners are."

"No," said Bussy, "I could not go to the castle; M. le Baron would watch his daughter."

"Good!" said Jeanne, "here is a lesson for me," and kissing Diana on the forehead, she ran away. Diana tried to stop her, but Bussy seized her hands, and she let her friend go. They remained alone.

"Have I not done well, madame," said Bussy, "and do you not approve?"

"I do not desire to feign," said Diana, "besides, it would be useless; you know I approve; but here must stop my indulgence; in calling for you as I did just now I was mad--I was guilty."

"Mon Dieu! What do you say?"

"Alas I count, the truth; I have a right to make M. de Monsoreau unhappy, to withhold from him my smiles and my love, but I have no right to bestow them on another: for, after all, he is my master."

"Now, you will let me speak, will you not?"

"Speak!"

"Well! of all that you have just said, you do not find one word in your heart."

"How!"

"Listen patiently; you have overwhelmed me with sophisms. The commonplaces of morality do not apply here; this man is your master, you say, but did you choose him? No; fate imposed him on you, and you submitted. Now, do you mean to suffer all your life the consequences, of this odious constraint? I will deliver you from it."

Diana tried to speak, but Bussy stopped her.

"Oh! I know what you are going to say; that if I provoke M. de Monsoreau and kill him, you will see me no more. So be it; I may die of grief, but you will live free and happy, and you may render happy some gallant man, who in his joy will sometimes bless my name, and cry, 'Thanks, Bussy, thanks, for having delivered us from that dreadful Monsoreau;' and you, yourself, Diana, who will not dare to thank me while living, will thank me dead."

Diana seized his hand.

"You have not yet implored me, Bussy; you begin with menaces."

"Menace you! oh! could I have such an intention, I, who love you so ardently, Diana. I know you love me; do not deny it, I know it, for you have avowed it. Here, on my knees before you, my hand on my heart, which has never lied, either from interest or from fear, I say to you, Diana, I love you, for my whole life. Diana, I swear to you, that if I die for you, it will be in adoring you. If you still say to me, 'go,' I will go without a sigh, or complaint, from this place where I am so happy, and I should say, 'this woman does not

love me, and never will love me.' Then I should go away, and you would see me no more, but as my devotion for you is great, my desire to see you happy would survive the certainty that I could never be happy myself."

Bussy said this with so much emotion, and, at the same time firmness, that Diana felt sure that he would do all he said, and she cried,--

"Thanks, count, for you take from me all remorse by your threats."

Saying these words, she gave him her hand, which he kissed passionately. Then they heard the light steps of Jeanne, accompanied by a warning cough. Instinctively the clasped hands parted. Jeanne saw it.

"Pardon, my good friends, for disturbing you," said she, "but we must go in if we do not wish to be sent for. M. le Comte, regain, if you please, your excellent horse, and let us go to the house. See what you lose by your obstinacy, M. de Bussy, a dinner at the château, which is not to be despised by a man who has had a long ride, and has been climbing trees, without counting all the amusement we could have had, or the glances that might have passed. Come, Diana, come away."

Bussy looked at the two friends with a smile. Diana held out her hand to him.

"Is that all?" said he; "have you nothing to say?"

"Till to-morrow," replied she.

"Only to-morrow."

"To-morrow, and always."

Bussy uttered a joyful exclamation, pressed his lips to her hand, and ran off. Diana watched him till he was out of sight.

"Now!" said Jeanne, when he had disappeared, "will you talk to me a little?"

"Oh! yes."

"Well! to-morrow I shall go to the chase with St. Luc and your father."

"What, you will leave me alone at the château!"

"Listen, dear friend; I also have my principles, and there are certain things that I cannot consent to do."

"Oh, Jeanne!" cried Diana, growing pale, "can you say such things to me?"

"Yes, I cannot continue thus."

"I thought you loved me, Jeanne. What cannot you continue?"

"Continue to prevent two poor lovers from talking to each other at their ease." Diana seized in her arms the laughing young woman.

"Listen!" said Jeanne, "there are the hunters calling us, and poor St. Luc is impatient."