

Chapter 56

THE DIPLOMACY OF THE DUC D'ANJOU.

When the duke and Bussy were left alone, the duke said, "Let us talk."

François, who was very quick, had perceived that Bussy had made more advances to him than usual, therefore he judged that he was in some embarrassing situation, and that he might, by a little address, get an advantage over him. But Bussy had had time to prepare himself, and he was quite ready.

"Yes, let us talk, monseigneur," replied he.

"The last day I saw you, my poor Bussy, you were very ill."

"It is true, monseigneur, I was very ill, and it was almost a miracle that saved me."

"There was near you a doctor very devoted to you, for he growled at everyone who approached you."

"True, prince, Rémy loves me."

"He kept you rigorously to your bed, did he not?"

"At which I was in a great rage, as your highness might have seen."

"But, if that were the case, why did you not send the doctor to the devil, and come out with me as I begged you to do? But as it was a grave affair, you were afraid to compromise yourself."

"Did you say I was afraid?"

"I did say so."

"Well, then, it was a lie!" said Bussy, jumping up from his chair; you lied to yourself, monseigneur, for you do not believe a single word of what you say. There are twenty scars on my body, which prove the contrary. I never knew fear, and, ma foi, I know people who cannot say the same."

"You have always unanswerable arguments, M. de Bussy," cried the duke, turning very pale; "when you are accused, you cry louder than your accuser, and then you think you are right."

"Oh! I am not always right, I know well, but I know on what occasions I am wrong."

"And what are they?"

"When I serve ungrateful people."

"Really, monsieur, I think you forget yourself," said the duke, with some dignity. Bussy moved towards the door, but the prince stopped him.

"Do you deny, monsieur," said he, "that after refusing to go out with me, you went out immediately after?"

"I deny nothing, monseigneur, but I will not be forced to confession."

"Tell me why you would not go out with me."

"I had business."

"At home?"

"Or elsewhere."

"I thought that when a gentleman was in the service of a prince, his principal business was that of the prince."

"And who does your business generally, monseigneur, if not I?"

"I do not say no; generally I find you faithful and devoted, and, I will say more, I excuse your bad humor."

"You are very good."

"Yes, for you had some reason to be angry."

"Ah! you confess it."

"Yes, I promised you the disgrace of M. de Monsoreau. It seems you hate him very much."

"I! not at all. I find him very ugly, and should have liked him away from court, not to have had to look at him. It seems, however, that you admire him, and there is no accounting for tastes."

"Well, then, as that was your sole excuse, you were doubly wrong to refuse to accompany me, and then to go out after, and commit follies."

"Follies! what did I do?"

"Doubtless, you do not like MM. d'Epernon and Schomberg, neither do I, but one must have some prudence. Kill them, and I should be grateful to you, but do not exasperate them."

"What did I do to them?"

"Why, you had D'Epernon stoned."

"I!"

"Yes, so that his clothes were torn to pieces."

"Good! and what about M. Schomberg?"

"You will not deny that you had him dyed indigo color? When I saw him three hours after, he was still bright blue. Do you call that a joke?" And the prince laughed in spite of himself, and Bussy joined him.

"Then," said he, "they think it was I who played them these tricks!"

"Perhaps it was I."

"And you have the conscience to reproach a man who had such fine ideas."

"Well, I pardon you. But I have another complaint to make. What did you do to deliver me from my unlucky situation?"

"You see, I came to Anjou."

"It seems to me that you would have been more useful nearer."

"Ah! there we differ; I preferred coming to Anjou."

"Your caprice is a bad reason."

"But, if I came to gather your partisans?"

"Ah! that is different. What have you done?"

"I will explain that to you to-morrow; at present I must leave you."

"Why!"

"I have to see an important person."

"Oh, very well; but be prudent."

"Prudent! are we not the strongest here?"

"Never mind, risk nothing. Have you done much?"

"I have only been here two days."

"But you keep yourself concealed, I hope."

"I should think so. Look at my dress; am I in the habit of wearing cinnamon-colored clothes?"

"And where are you lodging?"

"Ah! I hope you will appreciate my devotion; in a tumble-down old house, near the ramparts. But you, my prince, how did you get out of the Louvre? How was it that I found you on the road, with M. d'Aubigné for a companion?"

"Because I have friends."

"You! friends!"

"Yes, friends that you do not know."

"Well, and who are they?"

"The King of Navarre and D'Aubigné, whom you saw."

"The King of Navarre! Ah! true, did you not conspire together?"

"I never conspired, M. de Bussy."

"No; ask poor La Mole and Coconnas."

"La Mole," said the prince, gloomily, "died for another crime than the one alleged against him."

"Well, never mind him. How the devil did you get out of the Louvre?"

"Through the window."

"Which window?"

"That of my bedroom."

"Then you knew of the rope-ladder?"

"What rope-ladder?"

"In the cupboard."

"Ah! it seems you knew it," cried the prince, turning pale.

"Oh! your highness knows I have sometimes had the happiness of entering that room."

"In the time of my sister Margot. Then you came in by the window?"

"As you came out. All that astonishes me is, that you knew of the ladder."

"It was not I who found it."

"Who then?"

"I was told of it."

"By whom?"

"By the King of Navarre."

"Ah! the King of Navarre knew of it; I should not have thought so. However, now you are here safe and sound, we will put Anjou in flames, and Béarn and Angoumois will catch the light, so we shall have a fine blaze."

"But did you not speak of a rendezvous?"

"It is true; the interest of the conversation was making me forget. Adieu, monseigneur."

"Do you take your horse?"

"If it will be useful to you, monseigneur, you may keep it, I have another."

"Well! I accept; we will settle that later."

The duke gave Bussy his hand, and they separated.