

Chapter 57

THE IDEAS OF THE DUC D'ANJOU.

Bussy returned home, but instead of St. Luc, whom he expected, he found only a letter fixing their meeting for the next day. About six in the morning St. Luc started, and rode straight to Bussy's house.

"Accept the hospitality of my poor hut, St. Luc," said Bussy, "I am encamped here."

"Yes, like a conqueror on the field of battle."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, dear Bussy, that my wife has no secrets from me, and has told me all. Receive my compliments, but, since you have sent for me, permit me to give you a piece of advice."

"Well."

"Get rid as soon as possible of that abominable Monsoreau; no one at the court knows of your love for his wife, so when you marry the widow, no one will say you killed him on purpose."

"There is but one obstacle to this project, which presented itself to my mind, as to yours."

"What is it?"

"That I have sworn to Diana to respect the life of her husband, as long as he does not attack me."

"You were very wrong."

"Why so?"

"Because if you do not take the initiative, he will discover you, and will kill you."

"I cannot break my oath to Diana. Besides, he who is now a monster in all eyes, would be thought an angel in his tomb."

"Therefore I do not advise you to kill him yourself."

"Oh, St. Luc, no assassins."

"Who spoke of assassins?"

"Of what then?"

"Nothing; an idea passed through my mind; I will tell you what it was at another time. I do not love this Monsoreau much more than you, although I have not the same reason to detest him, so let us speak of the wife instead of the husband."

Bussy smiled. "You are a capital companion, St Luc," said he, "and you may count on my friendship. Now my friendship consists of three things, my purse, my sword, and my life. Now, what about Diana?"

"I wished to ask if you were not coming to Méridor."

"My dear friend, I thank you, but you know my scruples."

"I know all. At Méridor you fear to meet Monsoreau, although he is eighty leagues off; fear to have to shake his hand, and it is hard to shake the hand of the man you wish to strangle; you fear to see him embrace Diana, and it is hard to see that of the woman you love."

"Ah! how well you understand!" cried Bussy, with rage; "but, my dear friend, did you not hear last night the noise of bells and guns?"

"Yes; and we wondered what it meant."

"It meant that the Duc d'Anjou arrived last night."

St. Luc jumped up. "The duke here! We heard he was imprisoned at the Louvre."

"That is just why he is now at Angers. He managed to escape through a window, and came here."

"Well?"

"Well, here is an excellent opportunity to revenge yourself for the king's persecutions. The prince has already a party, he will soon have troops, and we shall have something like a little civil war."

"Oh! oh!"

"And I reckoned on you to help us."

"Against the king?" said St. Luc, with sudden coldness.

"Not precisely against the king, but against those who fight against us."

"My dear Bussy, I came here for country air, not to fight against his majesty."

"But let me present you to monseigneur."

"Useless, my dear Bussy, I do not like Angers."

"My dear St. Luc, you will do me a great service by consenting; the duke asked me what I came here for, and, not being able to tell because of his own passion for Diana, I said that I had come to draw to his cause all the gentlemen in the Canton; I even told him I had a rendezvous with one this morning."

"Well! tell him you have seen the gentleman, and that he asks six months to consider. Listen, I will always help you to defend Diana, you shall help me to defend my wife. We will make a treaty for love, but not for politics."

"I see, I must yield to you, St. Luc, for you have the advantage over me. I want you, and you do not want me."

"On the contrary, it is I who claim your protection."

"How so?"

"Suppose the rebels besiege and sack Méridor."

The two friends laughed; then, as the duke had sent to inquire for Bussy, they separated with renewed promises of friendship, and charmed with each other.

Bussy went to the ducal palace, where already all the nobility of the provinces were arriving. He hastened to arrange an official reception, a repast and speeches, and having thus cut out some hours' occupation for the prince, mounted his other horse, and galloped to Méridor. The duke made some good speeches, and produced a great effect, giving himself out for a prince persecuted by the king on account of the love of the Parisians for him. When Bussy returned, it was four in the afternoon; he dismounted, and presented himself to the duke all covered with dust.

"Ah! my brave Bussy, you have been at work?"

"You see, monseigneur."

"You are very hot."

"I have ridden fast."

"Take care not to get ill again."

"There is no danger."

"Whence do you come?"

"From the environs. Is your highness content? have you had a numerous assemblage?"

"Yes, I am pretty well satisfied, but I missed some one."

"Who?"

"Your protege, the Baron de Méridor."

Bussy changed color.

"And yet we must not neglect him," continued the duke, "he is influential here."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. He was the correspondent of the League at Angers, chosen by M. de Guise, and the Guises choose their men well. He must come, Bussy."

"But if he does not come?"

"I will go to him."

"To Méridor?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, why not, certainly," cried Bussy, with flashing eyes, "a prince may do anything."

"Then you think he is still angry with me?"

"How should I know?"

"You have not seen him?"

"No."

"As one of the great men of the province, I thought----"

"I was not sufficiently fortunate in the former promises I made him to be in a hurry to present myself to him."

"Has he not attained his object?"

"How so?"

"He wanted his daughter to marry the count, and she has done so."

Bussy turned his back on the duke, who, at the same moment, moved towards another gentleman who entered the room. Bussy began to reflect on what the duke's projects were with regard to the baron--whether they were

purely political, or whether he was still seeking to approach Diana; but he imagined that, embroiled with his brother, banished from the Louvre, and the chief of provincial insurrection, he had sufficiently grave interests at stake to outweigh his love fancies. He passed the night banqueting with the duke and the Angevin gentlemen, then in dancing with the Angevin ladies. It is needless to say that he was the admiration of the latter, and the hatred of the husbands, several of whom looked at him in a way which did not please him, so that, curling his mustachios, he invited three or four of them to take a walk with him by moonlight; but his reputation had preceded him, and they all declined.

At the door Bussy found a laughing face waiting for him, which he believed to be eighty leagues off.

"Ah," cried he joyfully, "it is you, Rémy."

"Yes monsieur."

"I was going to write to you to join me."

"Really!"

"On my word."

"That is capital; I was afraid you would scold me."

"For what?"

"For coming without leave. But I heard that Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou had escaped, and had fled here. I knew you were here also, and I thought there might be civil war, and many holes made in skins, so I came."

"You did well, Rémy; I wanted you."

"How is Gertrude, monsieur?"

"I will ask Diana the first time I see her."

"And, in return, every time I see her I will ask for news of Madame de Monsoreau."

"You are charming."

Meanwhile they had reached Bussy's lodging.

"Here is my palace; you must lodge as you can."

"It will not be difficult; I could sleep standing, I am so tired."

Bussy rose early the next morning, and went to the ducal palace, leaving word for Rémy to follow him. The duke had prepared a list of important things to be done: firstly, a walk round the walls to examine the fortifications; secondly, a review of the inhabitants and their arms; thirdly, a visit to the arsenal; fourthly, correspondence.

"Ah!" cried the duke, "you already!"

"Ma foi! yes, monseigneur; I could not sleep, your highness's interests were so much on my mind. What shall we do this morning? Shall we hunt?"

"How!" said the duke, "you pretend to have been thinking all night of my interests, and the result of so much meditation is to propose to me a hunt!"

"True," said Bussy; "besides, we have no hounds."

"And no chief huntsman."

"Ah, ma foi! the chase would be more agreeable without him."

"Ah, I am not like you--I want him; he would have been very useful to us here."

"How so?"

"He has property here."

"He!"

"He or his wife."

Bussy bit his lips.

"Méridor is only three leagues off, you know that," continued the duke, "you, who brought the old baron to me."

"Dame! I brought him because he hung on to my cloak. However, my protection did not do him much good."

"Listen," said the duke, "I have an idea."

"Diable!" said Bussy, who was always suspicious of the duke's ideas.

"Yes; it is that, if Monsoreau had the advantage over you at first, you shall have it now."

"What do you mean?"

"It is very simple; you know me, Bussy?"

"I have that misfortune."

"Think you I am the man to submit to an affront with impunity?"

"Explain yourself, monseigneur."

"Well, he stole the young girl I loved to make her his wife; now I will steal his wife!"

Bussy tried to smile, but made a grimace instead.

"Steal his wife!" stammered he.

"Nothing more easy, she is here, and you told me she hated her husband; therefore, without too much vanity, I may flatter myself she will give me the preference, if I promise her----"

"What, monseigneur?"

"To get rid of her husband for her."

"You will do that?"

"You shall see. Meanwhile I will pay a visit to Méridor."

"You will dare?"

"Why not?"

"You will present yourself before the old baron, whom you abandoned after promising me----"

"I have an excellent excuse to give him."

"Where the devil will you find it?"

"Oh! I will say to him, I did not break this marriage, because Monsoreau, who knew that you were one of the principal agents to the League, threatened to denounce you to the king."

"Has your highness invented that?"

"Not entirely."

"Then I understand."

"Yes, I shall make him believe that by marrying his daughter I saved his life."

"It is superb."

"Well! order the horses, and we will go to Méridor."

"Immediately, monseigneur." Bussy then went to the door, but turned back and said, "How many horses will your highness have?"

"Oh, four or five, what you like."

"If you leave it to me, I shall take a hundred."

"What for?" cried the prince, surprised.

"To have at least twenty-five I can rely on in case of attack."

"Attack!"

"Yes, I have heard that there are thick woods in that neighborhood, and it would not surprise me if we fell into some ambush."

"Ah, do you think so?"

"Monseigneur knows that true courage does not exclude prudence; I will order one hundred and fifty."

And he moved towards the door.

"A moment," said the prince. "Do you think I am in safety at Angers?"

"Why, the town is not very strong, but well defended----"

"Yes, but it may be badly defended; however brave you are, you can be but in one place at a time."

"True."

"Then if I am not in safety here--and I am not if Bussy doubts----"

"I did not say I doubted."

"If I am not safe, I had better make myself so. I will go to the castle and entrench myself."

"You are right, monseigneur."

"And then another idea."

"The morning is fruitful."

"I will make the Méridors come here."

"Monseigneur, you are grand to-day. Now let us visit the castle."

Bussy went out while the prince was getting ready, and found Rémy waiting. He wrote hastily a little note, picked a bunch of roses from the conservatory, rolled the note round the stems, went to the stable, brought out his horse, and, putting Rémy on it, and giving him the bouquet, led him out of the city.

"Now," said he, "let Roland go; at the end of this road you will find the forest, in the forest a park, round the park a wall, and at that part of the wall where Roland stops, throw over this bouquet."

"He whom you expect does not come," said the note, "because he who was not expected has come, and is more menacing than ever, for he loves still. Take with the lips and the heart all that is invisible to the eyes in this paper."

In half an hour Rémy reached his destination, carried by his horse, and threw over the bouquet; a little cry from the other side told him it had been received. Then Rémy returned, in spite of his horse, which seemed much put out at losing its accustomed repast on the acorns. Rémy joined Bussy as he was exploring a cave with the prince.

"Well," said he to his messenger, "what did you hear or see?"

"A wall, a cry, seven leagues," replied Rémy laconically.