

Chapter 60

WHAT M. DE MONSOREAU CAME TO ANNOUNCE.

As M. de Monsoreau approached, he remarked the dilapidation of the wall; it was almost in steps, and the brambles had been torn away, and were lying about. He looked at the horse standing there. The animal had a saddle-cloth embroidered in silver, and in one corner an F. and an A. There was no doubt, then, that it came from the prince's stables; the letters stood for François d'Anjou. The count's suspicions at this sight became real alarm; the duke had come here, and had come often, for, besides the horse waiting there, there was a second that knew the way. He tied up his horse near to the other, and began to scale the wall. It was an easy task; there were places for both feet and hands, and the branches of an oak-tree, which hung over, had been carefully cut away. Once up, he saw at the foot of a tree a blue mantilla and a black cloak, and not far off a man and woman, walking hand in hand, with their backs turned to the wall, and nearly hidden by the trees. Unluckily, with M. de Monsoreau's weight a stone fell from the wall on the crackling branches with a great noise.

At this noise the lovers must have turned and seen him, for the cry of a woman was heard, and a rustling of the branches as they ran away like startled deer. At this cry, Monsoreau felt cold drops on his forehead, for he recognized Diana's voice. Full of fury, he jumped over the wall, and with his drawn sword in his hand, tried to follow the fugitives, but they had disappeared, and, there was not a trace or a sound to guide him. He stopped, and considered that he was too much under the influence of passion to act with prudence against so powerful a rival. Then a sublime idea occurred to him; it was to climb back again over the wall, and carry off with his own the horse he had seen there. He retraced his steps to the wall and climbed up again; but on the other side no horse was to be seen; his idea was so good, that before it came to him it had come to his adversary. He uttered a howl of rage, clenching his fists, but started off at once on foot. In two hours and a half, he arrived at the gates of the city, dying with hunger and fatigue, but determined to interrogate every sentinel, and find out by what gate a man had entered with two horses. The first sentinel he applied to said that, about two hours before, a horse without a rider had passed through the gate, and had taken the road to the palace; he feared some accident must have happened to his rider. Monsoreau ground his teeth with passion, and went on to the castle. There he found great life and

gaiety, windows lighted up, and animation everywhere. He went first to the stable, and found his horse in the stall he had taken him from; then, without changing his dress, he went to the dining-room. The prince and all his gentlemen were sitting round a table magnificently served and lighted. The duke, who had been told of his arrival, received him without surprise, and told him to sit down and sup with him.

"Monseigneur," replied he, "I am hungry, tired, and thirsty; but I will neither eat, drink, nor sit down till I have delivered my important message."

"You come from Paris?"

"Yes, in great haste."

"Well, speak."

Monsoreau advanced, with a smile on his lips and hatred in his heart, and said, "Monseigneur, your mother is advancing hastily to visit you."

The duke looked delighted. "It is well," said he; "M. de Monsoreau, I find you to-day, as ever, a faithful servant; let us continue our supper, gentlemen."

Monsoreau sat down with them, but gloomy and preoccupied. He still seemed to see the two figures among the trees, and to hear the cry of Diana.

"You are overcome with weariness," said the prince to him, "really, you had better go to bed."

"Yes," said Livarot, "or he will go to sleep in his chair."

"Pardon, monseigneur, I am tired out."

"Get tipsy," said Antragues; "there is nothing so good when you are tired. To your health, count!"

"You must give us some good hunts," said Ribeirac, "you know the country."

"You have horses and woods here," said Antragues.

"And a wife," added Livarot.

"We will hunt a boar, count," said the prince.

"Oh, yes, to-morrow!" cried the gentlemen.

"What do you say, Monsoreau?"

"I am always at your highness's orders, but I am too much fatigued to conduct a chase to-morrow; besides which, I must examine the woods."

"And we must leave him time to see his wife," cried the duke.

"Granted," cried the young men; "we give him twenty-four hours to do all he has to do."

"Yes, gentlemen, I promise to employ them well."

"Now go to bed," said the duke, and M. de Monsoreau bowed, and went out, very happy to escape.