

Chapter 64

THE PROJECT OF M. DE ST. LUC.

When the repast was over, Monsoreau took St. Luc's arm and went out. "Do you know," said he, "that I am very happy to have found you here, for the solitude of Méridor frightened me."

"What, with your wife? As for me, with such a companion I should find a desert delightful."

"I do not say no, but still----"

"Still, what?"

"I am very glad to have met you here."

"Really, monsieur, you are very polite, for I cannot believe that you could possibly fear ennui with such a companion, and such a country."

"Bah! I pass half my life in the woods."

"The more reason for being fond of them, it seems to me. I know I shall be very sorry to leave them; unluckily, I fear I shall be forced to do so before long."

"Why so?"

"Oh! monsieur, when is man the arbiter of his own destiny? He is like the leaf of the tree, which the wind blows about. You are very fortunate."

"Fortunate; how?"

"To live amongst these splendid trees."

"Oh! I do not think I shall stay here long; I am not so fond of nature, and I fear these woods; I think they are not safe."

"Why? on account of their loneliness, do you mean?"

"No, not that, for I suppose you see friends here."

"Not a soul."

"Ah! really. How long is it since you had any visitor?"

"Not since I have been here."

"Not one gentleman from the court at Angers?"

"Not one."

"Impossible."

"It is true."

"Then I am wrong."

"Perfectly; but why is not the park safe, are there bears here?"

"Oh, no."

"Wolves?"

"No."

"Robbers?"

"Perhaps. Tell me, monsieur, Madame de St. Luc seemed to me very pretty; is she not?"

"Why, yes."

"Does she often walk in the park?"

"Often; she adores the woods, like myself."

"And do you accompany her?"

"Always."

"Nearly always?"

"What the devil are you driving at?"

"Oh; mon Dieu, nothing; or, at least, a trifle."

"I listen."

"They told me----"

"Well?"

"You will not be angry?"

"I never am so."

"Besides, between husbands, these confidences are right; they told me a man had been seen wandering in the park."

"A man."

"Yes."

"Who came for my wife?"

"Oh! I do not say that."

"You would be wrong not to tell me, my dear Monsoreau. Who saw him? pray tell me."

"Oh! to tell you the truth, I do not think it was for Madame de St. Luc that he came."

"For whom, then?"

"Ah! I fear it is for Diana."

"Oh! I should like that better."

"What?"

"Certainly; you know we husbands are an egotistical set. Everyone for himself, and God for us all."

"The devil rather."

"Then you think a man entered here?"

"I think so."

"And I do more than think," said St. Luc, "for I saw him."

"You saw a man in the park?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Alone?"

"With Madame de Monsoreau."

"Where?"

"Just here to the left." And as they had walked down to the old copse, St. Luc pointed out the spot where Bussy always came over.

"Ah!" continued he, "here is a wall in a bad state; I must warn the baron."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"Of what?"

"Of climbing over here to talk to my wife." St. Luc seemed to reflect.

"Diable!" said he, "it could only have been----"

"Whom?"

"Why, yourself."

"Are you joking, M. de St. Luc?"

"Ma foi, no; when I was first married I did such things."

"Come! you are trying to put me off; but do not fear, I have courage. Help me to seek, you will do me an immense favor."

St. Luc shook his head. "It must have been you," said he.

"Do not jest, I beg of you; the thing is serious."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Oh! and how does this man come?"

"Secretly."

"Often?"

"I fear so; look at the marks in the wall."

"Well, I suspected it, but I always fancied it was you."

"But I tell you, no!"

"Oh, I believe you, my dear sir."

"Well, then----"

"It must have been some one else."

Monsoreau began to look black, but St. Luc preserved his easy nonchalance.

"I have an idea," said he.

"Tell me."

"If it were----"

"Well!"

"But, no."

"Pray speak."

"The Duc d'Anjou."



"I thought so at first, but I have made inquiries, and it could not have been he."

"Oh! he is very cunning."

"Yes, but it was not he."

"Wait, then."

"Well!"

"I have another idea; if it was neither you nor the duke, it must have been I."

"You?"

"Why not?"

"You to come on horseback to the outside of the park, when you live inside!"

"Oh, mon Dieu! I am such a capricious being."

"You, who fled away when you saw me!"

"Oh! any one would do that."

"Then you were doing wrong," cried the count, no longer able to keep in his anger.

"I do not say so."

"You are mocking me," cried the count, growing very pale, "and have been doing so for a quarter of an hour."

"You are wrong, monsieur," said St. Luc, drawing out his watch, and looking steadily at him; "it has been twenty minutes."

"You insult me."

"And you insult me with your questions like a constable."

"Ah! now I see clearly."

"How wonderful, at ten o'clock in the morning. But what do you see?"

"I see that you act in concert with the traitor, the coward, whom I saw yesterday."

"I should think so; he is my friend."

"Then I will kill you in his place."

"Bah! in your own house, and without crying, gare. Ah! M. de Monsoreau, how badly you have been brought up, and how living among beasts spoils the manners."

"Do you not see that I am furious?" howled the count.

"Yes, indeed, I do see it, and it does not become you at all; you look frightful."

The count drew his sword.

"Ah!" said St. Luc, "you try to provoke me; you see I am perfectly calm."

"Yes, I do provoke you."

"Take the trouble to get over the wall; on the other side we shall be on neutral ground."

"What do I care!"

"I do; I do not want to kill you in your own house."

"Very well!" said Monsoreau, climbing over.

"Take care; pray do not hurt yourself, my dear count; those stones are loose," said St. Luc. Then he also got over.