

Chapter 69

HOW M. LE DUC D'ANJOU WENT TO MÉRIDOR TO CONGRATULATE MADAME DE MONSOREAU ON THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND, AND FOUND HIM THERE BEFORE HIM.

As soon as the duke left his mother, he hastened to Bussy to know the meaning of all his signs. Bussy, who was reading St. Luc's letter for the fifth time, received the prince with a gracious smile.

"How! monseigneur takes the trouble to come to my house to seek me."

"Yes mordieu, I want an explanation."

"From me?"

"Yes, from you."

"I listen, monseigneur."

"You tell me to steel myself against the suggestions of my mother, and to sustain the attack valiantly. I do so; and in the hottest of the fight you tell me to surrender."

"I gave you all those charges, monseigneur, because I was ignorant of the object for which your mother came; but now that I see that she has come to promote your highness's honor and glory----"

"How! what do you mean?"

"Doubtless: what does your highness want? To triumph over your enemies, do you not? For I do not believe, as some people say, that you wish to become King of France."

The duke looked sullen.

"Some might counsel you to it, but believe me they are your most cruel enemies. Consider for yourself, monseigneur; have you one hundred thousand men--ten millions of livres--alliance with foreigners--and, above all, would you turn against your king?"

"My king did not hesitate to turn against me."

"Ah! there you are right. Well! declare yourself--get crowned--take the title of King of France--and if you succeed, I ask no better; I should grow great with you."

"Who speaks of being king?" cried the duke, angrily; "you discuss a question which I have never proposed, even to myself."

"Well, then, that is settled. Let them give you a guard and five hundred thousand livres. Obtain, before peace is signed, a subsidy from Anjou, to carry on the war. Once you have it, you can keep it. So, we should have arms and money, and we could do----God knows what."

"But once they have me at Paris, they will laugh at me."

"Oh! impossible, monseigneur; did you not hear what the queen mother offered you?"

"She offered me many things."

"That disquiets you?"

"Yes."

"But, among other things, she offered you a company of guards, even if I commanded it."

"Yes, she offered that."

"Well, accept; I will be captain; Antragues and Livarot lieutenants; and Ribeirac ensign. Let us get up your company for you, and see if they dare to laugh at you then."

"Ma foi! I believe you are right, Bussy; I will think of it."

"Do so, monseigneur."

"What were you reading so attentively when I came in?"

"Oh! a letter, which interests you still more than me. Where the devil were my brains, that I did not show it to you?"

"What is it?"

"Sad news, monseigneur; Monsoreau is dead."

"What!" cried the duke, with a surprise which Bussy thought was a joyful one.

"Dead, monseigneur."

"M. de Monsoreau!"

"Mon Dieu! yes; are we not all mortal?"

"Yes; but so suddenly."

"Ah! but if you are killed?"

"Then, he was killed?"

"So it seems; and by St. Luc, with whom he quarreled."

"Oh, that dear St. Luc!"

"I did not think he was one of your highness's friends."

"Oh, he is my brother's, and, since we are to be reconciled, his friends are mine. But are you sure?"

"As sure as I can be. Here is a letter from St. Luc, announcing it; and I have sent Rémy, my doctor, to present my condolences to the old baron."

"Oh, Monsoreau!" cried the prince, with his malignant smile.

"Why monseigneur, one would say you hated the poor count."

"No, it was you."

"Of course I did; did he not humiliate me through you?"

"You remember it still."

"But you, monseigneur, whose friend and tool he was----"

"Well, well, get my horse saddled, Bussy."

"What for?"

"To go to Méridor; I wish to pay a visit to Madame Monsoreau. I have been projecting one for some time, and I do not know why it has not taken place sooner."

"Now Monsoreau is dead," thought Bussy, "I do not care; I will protect Diana. I will go with him, and see her."

A quarter of an hour after, the prince, Bussy, and ten gentlemen rode to Méridor, with that pleasure which fine weather, turf, and youth always inspire in men on horseback.

The porter at the château came to ask the names of the visitors.

"The Duc d'Anjou," replied the prince.

The porter blew his horn, and soon windows were opened, and they heard the noise of bolts and bars as the door was unfastened, and the old baron appeared on the threshold, holding in his hand a bunch of keys. Immediately behind him stood a lady.

"Ah, there is the beautiful Diana!" cried the duke; "do you see her, Bussy?"

Diana, indeed, came out of the house, and behind her came a litter, on which lay Monsoreau, his eyes shining with fever and jealousy as he was carried along.

"What does this mean?" cried the duke to his companion, who had turned whiter than the handkerchief with which he was trying to hide his emotion.

"Long live the Duc d'Anjou!" cried Monsoreau, raising his hand in the air by a violent effort.

"Take care, you will hurt yourself," said a voice behind him. It was Rémy.

Surprise does not last long at court, so, with a smile, the duke said, "Oh, my dear count, what a happy surprise! Do you know we heard you were dead?"

"Come near, monseigneur, and let me kiss your hand. Thank God, not only I am not dead, but I shall live; I hope to serve you with more ardor than ever."

As for Bussy, he felt stunned, and scarcely dared to look at Diana. This treasure, twice lost to him, belonged still to his rival.

"And you, M. de Bussy," said Monsoreau, "receive my thanks, for it is almost to you that I owe my life."

"To me!" stammered the young man, who thought the count was mocking him.

"Yes, indirectly, it is true, for here is my saviour," said he, turning to Rémy, who would willingly have sunk into the earth. Then, in spite of his signs, which he took for precautions to himself, he recounted the care and skill which the young doctor had exhibited towards him.

The duke frowned, and Bussy looked thunders. The poor fellow raised his hands to heaven.

"I hear," continued the count, "that Rémy one day found you dying, as he found me. It is a tie of friendship between us, M. de Bussy, and when Monsoreau loves, he loves well; it is true that when he hates, it is also with all his heart."

"Come, then," said the duke, getting off his horse, "deign, beautiful Diana, to do us the honors of the house, which we thought to find in grief, but which we find still the abode of joy. As for you, Monsoreau, rest--you require it."

"Monseigneur!" said the count, "it shall never be said that Monsoreau, while he lived, allowed another to do the honors of his house to you; my servants will carry me, and wherever you go, I shall follow."

Bussy approached Diana, and Monsoreau smiled; he took her hand, and he smiled again. It was only the duke he feared.

"Here is a great change, M. le Comte," said Diana.

"Alas! why is it not greater!"