

Chapter 76

HOW M. DE ST. LUC ACQUITTED HIMSELF OF THE COMMISSION GIVEN TO HIM BY BUSSY.

Let us leave St. Luc a little while in Schomberg's room, and see what had passed between him and Bussy.

Once out of the hall, St. Luc had stopped, and looked anxiously at his friend.

"Are you ill?" said he, "you are so pale; you look as though you were about to faint."

"No, I am only choking with anger."

"You do not surely mind those fellows?"

"You shall see."

"Come, Bussy, be calm."

"You are charming, really; be calm, indeed! if you had had half said to you that I have had, some one would have been dead before this."

"Well, what do you want?"

"You are my friend; you have already given me a terrible proof of it."

"Ah! my dear friend," said St. Luc, who believed Monsoreau dead and buried, "do not thank me, it is not worth while; certainly the thrust was a good one, and succeeded admirably, but it was the king who showed it me, when he kept me here a prisoner at the Louvre."

"Dear friend."

"Never mind Monsoreau; tell me about Diana. Was she pleased at last? Does she pardon me? When will the wedding take place?"

"Oh! my dear friend, we must wait till Monsoreau is dead."

"What!" cried St. Luc, starting back as though he had put his foot on a pointed nail.

"Yes; poppies are not such dangerous plants as you thought; he did not die from his fall on them, but is alive and more furious than ever."

"Really?"

"Yes, and he talks of nothing but vengeance, and of killing you on the first occasion."

"And I have announced his death to everyone; he will find his heirs in mourning. But he shall not give me the lie; I shall meet him again, and if he escapes me a second time----"

"Calm yourself, my dear St. Luc; really, I am better off than you would think; it is the duke whom he suspects, and of whom he is jealous. I am his dear Bussy--his precious friend. That is only natural, for it was that fool of a Rémy who cured him.

"What an idiot he must have been!"

"He has an idea that, as an honest man and a doctor, it is his duty to cure people. However, Monsoreau says he owes his life to me, and confides his wife to my care."

"Ah! I understand that this makes you wait more patiently for his death. However, I am quite thunderstruck at the news."

"But, now, my friend, let us leave Monsoreau."

"Yes, let us enjoy life while he is still ill; but once he is well, I shall order myself a suit of mail, have new locks put on my doors, and you must ask the Duc d'Anjou if his mother has not given him some antidote against poison. Meanwhile, let us amuse ourselves."

"Well, my dear friend, you see you have only rendered me half a service."

"Do you wish me to finish it?"

"Yes, in another way."

"Speak."

"Are you great friends with those four gentlemen?"

"Ma foi! we are something like cats and dogs in the sun; as long as we an get the heat, we agree, but if one of us took the warmth from another, then I do not answer for the consequences."

"Well, will you go for me to M. Quelus, first?"

"Ah!"

"And ask him what day it will please him that I should cut his throat, or he mine?"

"I will."

"You do not mind it?"

"Not the least in the world. I will go at once if you wish it."

"One moment; as you go, just call on M. Schomberg and make him the same proposal."

"Schomberg too? Diable, how you go on! Well, as you wish."

"Then, my dear St. Luc, as you are so amiable, go also to M. Maugiron, and ask him to join the party."

"What, three! Bussy, you cannot mean it. I hope that is all."

"No; from him go to D'Epernon."

"Four!"

"Even so, my dear friend; I need not recommend to a man like you to proceed with courtesy and politeness towards these gentlemen. Let the thing be done in gallant fashion."

"You shall be content, my friend. What are your conditions?"

"I make none; I accept theirs."

"Your arms?"

"What they like."

"The day, place, and hour?"

"Whatever suits them."

"But----"

"Oh! never mind such trifles, but do it quickly; I will walk in the little garden of the Luxembourg; you will find me there when you have executed your commission."

"You will wait, then?"

"Yes."

"It may be long."

"I have time."

We know how St. Luc found the four young men, and accompanied them to Schomberg's house. St. Luc remained in the ante-chamber, waiting until, according to the etiquette of the day, the four young men were installed in the saloon ready to receive him. Then an usher came and saluted St. Luc, who followed him to the threshold of the saloon, where he announced M. d'Espinay de St. Luc.

Schomberg then rose and saluted his visitor, who, to mark the character of the visit, instead of returning it, put on his hat. Schomberg then, turning towards Quelus, said,

"I have the honor to present to you M. Jacques de Levis, Comte de Quelus."

The two gentlemen bowed, and then the same ceremony was gone through with the others. This done, the four friends sat down, but St. Luc remained standing and said to Quelus,

"M. le Comte, you have insulted M. le Comte Louis de Clermont d'Amboise, Seigneur de Bussy, who presents to you his compliments, and calls you to single combat on any day and hour, and with such arms as may please you. Do you accept?"

"Certainly; M. de Bussy does me much honor."

"Your day and hour, M. le Comte?"

"To-morrow morning at seven o'clock."

"Your arms?"

"Rapier and dagger, if that suits M. de Bussy."

St. Luc bowed. Then he addressed the same questions to the others, and received the same answers.

"If we all choose the same day and hour, M. de Bussy will be rather embarrassed," said Schomberg.

"Certainly," replied St. Luc, "M. de Bussy may be embarrassed, but he says that the circumstance would not be new to him, as it has already happened at the Tournelles."

"And he would fight us all four?"

"All four."

"Separately?"

"Separately, or at once."

The four young men looked at each other; then Quelus, red with anger, said:

"It is very fine of M. de Bussy, but however little we may be worth, we can each do our own work; we will accept, therefore, the count's proposal,

fighting separately, or rather, which will be still better, as we do not seek to assassinate a gallant man, chance shall decide which of us shall fight M. de Bussy."

"And the three others?"

"Oh! M. de Bussy has too many friends, and we too many enemies, for them to remain with folded arms. Do you agree to this, gentlemen?"

"Yes!" cried all.

"If MM. Ribeirac, Antragues, and Livarot would join the party, it would be complete."

"Gentlemen," said St. Luc, "I will transmit your desires to M. de Bussy, and I believe I may promise that he is too courteous not to agree to your wishes. It therefore only remains for me to thank you in his name."

Then he took his leave, after throwing his purse to the four lackeys, whom he found outside, to drink to their masters' healths.