

Chapter 80

THE WATCHERS.

The duke kept Bussy near him all day, so as not to lose sight of his movements. Bussy did not care, so that he had his evenings free. At ten o'clock he wrapped himself in his cloak, and with a rope ladder under his arm went towards the Bastille. The duke, who did not know that he had a ladder, and could not believe in any one walking alone at night through the streets of Paris, thought Bussy would certainly call at his hotel for a horse and a servant, and lost ten minutes in preparations. During those ten minutes, Bussy, active and in love, had already gone three-fourths of the distance. He was lucky, as brave people generally are, and met with no accident by the way, and on arriving saw a light in the windows. It was the signal agreed on between him and Diana. He threw his ladder up to the balcony, it had six hooks to it, and was sure to fasten itself somewhere. At the noise, Diana put out her light and opened the window to fasten the ladder. The thing was done in a moment. Diana looked all around; the street seemed deserted. Then she signed to Bussy to mount, and he was up in five seconds. The moment was happily chosen, for while he got in at the window, M. de Monsoreau, after having listened patiently for a quarter of an hour at his wife's door, descended the stairs painfully, leaning on the arm of a confidential valet, and it so happened that he opened the street-door just as the ladder was drawn up, and the window closed. He looked around, but the streets were deserted.

"You have been badly informed," said he to the servant.

"No, monsieur, I have just left the Hôtel d'Anjou, and they told me that the duke had ordered two horses for this evening. But perhaps it was not to come here."

"Where else should he go?" said Monsoreau, with a somber air. He, like all jealous persons, thought the whole world had nothing to do but to torment him.

"Perhaps I should have done better to stay in her room," murmured he. "But they probably have signals for corresponding; she would have warned him of my presence, and I should have learned nothing. It is better to watch outside. Come, conduct me to the hiding-place, whence you say one can see everything."

"Come, monsieur."

About twenty-five steps from the door was an enormous heap of stones belonging to demolished houses, and serving for fortifications to the children of the neighborhood when they played at battles. In the midst was a space, which could contain two people. The valet spread a cloak, on which Monsoreau sat down, while his servant sat at his feet, with a loaded musket placed beside him. Diana had prudently drawn her thick curtains, so that scarcely a ray of light showed through, to betray that there was life in this gloomy house.

They had been watching about ten minutes, when two horses appeared at the end of the street. The valet pointed to them.

"I see," said Monsoreau.

The two men got off their horses, and tied them up at the corner of the Hôtel des Tournelles.

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "I believe we have arrived too late; he must have gone straight from your hotel and must have entered."

"Perhaps so; but if we did not see him go in, we can see him come out."

"Yes, but when?"

"When we please."

"Would it be too curious to ask how you mean to manage?"

"Nothing is more easy; we have but to knock at the door, and ask after M. de Monsoreau. Our lover will be frightened at the noise, and as you enter the house he will come out at the window, and I, who am hidden outside, shall see him."

"And Monsoreau?"

"What can he say? I am his friend, and was uneasy about him, as he looked so ill yesterday; nothing can be more simple."

"It is very ingenious, monseigneur."

"Do you hear what they say?" asked Monsoreau of his valet.

"No, monsieur, but we soon shall, for they are coming nearer."

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "here is a heap of stones which seems made on purpose for us."

"Yes, but wait a moment, perhaps we can see through the opening of the curtain." And they stood for some minutes trying to find a place to peep through. Meanwhile, Monsoreau was boiling with impatience, and his hand approached the musket.

"Oh! shall I suffer this?" murmured he, "shall I devour this affront also? No, my patience is worn out. Mordieu! that I can neither sleep, nor wake, nor even suffer quietly, because a shameful caprice has lodged in the idle brain of this miserable prince. No, I am not a complaisant valet; I am the Comte de Monsoreau, and if he comes near, on my word, I will blow his brains out. Light the match, René."

At this moment, just as the prince was about to seek his hiding-place, leaving his companion to knock at the door, Aurilly touched his arm.

"Well, monsieur, what is it?" asked the prince.

"Come away, monseigneur, come."

"Why so?"

"Do you not see something shining there to the left?"

"I see a spark among that heap of stones."

"It is the match of a musket, or arquebuse."

"Ah! who the devil can be in ambush there?"

"Some friend or servant of Bussy's. Let us go and make a detour, and return another way. The servant will give the alarm, and we shall see Bussy come out of the window."

"You are right; come;" and they went to their horses.

"They are going," said the valet.

"Yes. Did you recognize them?"

"They seemed to me to be the prince and Aurilly."

"Just so. But I shall soon be more sure still."

"What will monsieur do?"

"Come."

Meanwhile, the duke and Aurilly turned into the Rue St. Catherine, intending to return by the boulevard of the Bastille.

Monsoreau went in, and ordered his litter.

What the duke had foreseen happened. At the noise that Monsoreau made, Bussy took the alarm, the light was extinguished, the ladder fixed, and Bussy, to his great regret, was obliged to fly, like Romeo, but without having, like him, seen the sun rise and heard the lark sing. Just as he touched the ground, and Diana had thrown him the ladder, the duke and Aurilly arrived at the corner of the Bastille. They saw a shadow suspended from Diana's window, but this shadow disappeared almost instantaneously at the corner of the Rue St. Paul.

"Monsieur," said the valet to Monsoreau, "we shall wake up the household."

"What do I care?" cried Monsoreau, furiously. "I am master here, I believe, and I have at least the right to do what M. d'Anjou wished to do."

The litter was got ready, and, drawn by two stout horses, it was soon at the Hôtel d'Anjou.

The duke and Aurilly had so recently come in that their horses were not unsaddled. Monsoreau, who had the entree, appeared on the threshold just as the duke, after having thrown his hat on a chair, was holding out his boots to a valet to pull off. A servant, preceding him by some steps, announced M. de Monsoreau. A thunderbolt breaking his windows, could not have astonished the prince more.

"M. de Monsoreau!" cried he, with an uneasiness he could not hide.

"Myself, monseigneur," replied he, trying to repress his emotion, but the effort he made over himself was so violent that his legs failed him, and he fell on to a chair which stood near.

"But you will kill yourself, my dear friend," said the duke; "you are so pale, you look as though you were going to faint."

"Oh, no; what I have to say to your highness is of too much importance; I may faint afterwards."

"Speak, then, my dear comte."

"Not before your people, I suppose."

The duke dismissed everyone.

"Your highness has just come in?" said Monsoreau.

"As you see, comte."

"It is very imprudent of your highness to go by night in the street."

"Who told you I had been in the streets?"

"The dust on your clothes."

"M. de Monsoreau, have you another employment besides that of chief huntsman?"

"Yes, that of spy, monseigneur; all the world follow that calling now, more or less, and I, like the rest."

"And what does this profession bring you, monsieur?"

"Knowledge."

"It is curious."

"Very curious."

"Well, tell me what you have to say."

"I came for that."

"You permit me to sit down?" said the duke.

"No irony, monseigneur, towards an old and faithful servant, who comes at this hour and in this state to do you a service. If I sat down, on my honor, it was because I could not stand."

"A service! to do me a service?"

"Yes."

"Speak, then."

"Monseigneur, I come on the part of a great prince."

"From the king?"

"No; M. le Duc de Guise."

"Ah! that is quite a different thing. Approach, and speak low."