

Chapter 86

WHICH WILL ELUCIDATE THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER.

The evening before M. de Monsoreau had returned to his home from the Hôtel Guise, and had found Bussy there. Then, in his friendship for this brave gentleman, he had taken him aside, and said:

"Will you permit me to give you a piece of advice?"

"Pray do."

"If I were you, I should leave Paris to-morrow."

"I! and why so?"

"All that I can tell you is, that your absence may save you from great embarrassment."

"How so?"

"Are you ignorant of what is to take place to-morrow?"

"Completely."

"On your honor?"

"On my word as a gentleman."

"M. d'Anjou has confided nothing to you?"

"Nothing; M. d'Anjou confides nothing to me beyond what all the world knows."

"Well! I, who am not the Duc d'Anjou, who love my friends for their own sakes, and not for mine, I will tell you, my dear count, that he is preparing for grave events to-morrow, and that the parting of Guise and Anjou meditate a stroke which may end in the fall of the king."

Bussy looked at M. de Monsoreau with suspicion, but his whole manner expressed so much sincerity that it was impossible to doubt him.

"Count," replied he, "my sword belongs to the Duc d'Anjou. The king, against whom I have done nothing, hates me, and has never let slip an occasion of doing or saying something wounding to me; and to-morrow I tell you--but you alone, remember--I am about to risk my life to humiliate Henri de Valois in the person of his favorites."

"Then you are resolved to risk all the consequences of your adherence to the duke?"

"Yes."

"You know where it may lead you?"

"I know where I will stop; whatever complaints I have against the king, I will never lift a hand against him; but I will let others do what they like, and I will follow M. d'Anjou to protect him in case of need."

"My dear comte," said Monsoreau, "the Duc d'Anjou is perfidious and a traitor; a coward, capable, from jealous or fear, of sacrificing his most faithful servant--his most devoted friend; abandon him, take a friend's counsel, pass the day in your little house at Vincennes, go where you like, except to the procession of the Fête Dieu."

"But why do you follow the duke yourself?"

"For reasons which concern my honor. I have need of him for a little while longer."

"Well! that is like me; for things which concern my honor I must follow the duke."

The Comte de Monsoreau pressed his hand, and they parted.

The next morning Monsoreau announced to his wife his approaching departure for Compiègne, and gave all the necessary orders. Diana heard the news with joy. She knew from her husband of the duel which was arranged between Bussy and D'Epernon, but had no fear for the result, and looked forward to it with pride. Bussy had presented himself in the morning to the Duc d'Anjou, who, seeing him so frank, loyal, and devoted, felt some remorse; but two things combated this return of good feeling--firstly, the great empire Bussy had over him, as every powerful mind has over a weak one, and which annoyed him; and, secondly, the love of Bussy for Diana, which awoke all the tortures of jealousy in his heart. Monsoreau, it was true, inspired him with equal dislike and fear, but he thought, "Either Bussy will accompany me and aid my triumph, and then if I triumph, I do not care for Monsoreau, or Bussy will abandon me, and then I owe him nothing, and I will abandon him in return."

When they were in the church, the duke saw Rémy enter, and going up to his master, slide a note into his hand.

"It is from her," thought he; "she sends him word that her husband is leaving Paris."

Bussy put the note into his hat, opened, and read it, and the prince saw his face radiant with joy and love. The duke looked round; if Monsoreau had been there, perhaps he would not have had patience to wait till the evening to denounce Bussy.

The mass over, they returned to the Louvre, where a collation waited for the king in his room, and for his gentlemen in the gallery. On entering the Louvre, Bussy approached the duke.

"Pardon, monseigneur," said he, "but can I say two words to you?"

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Very much so."

"Will it not do during the procession? we shall walk side by side."

"Monseigneur must excuse me, but what I wished to ask is, that I need not accompany you."

"Why so?"

"Monseigneur, to-morrow is a great day, and I would wish to retire to-day to my little house at Vincennes."

"Then you do not join the procession with the king and court?"

"No, monseigneur, if you will excuse me."

"Will you not rejoin me at St. Geneviève?"

"Monseigneur, I wish to have the whole day to myself."

"But if anything should occur when I have need of my friends?"

"As monseigneur would only want me to draw my sword against my king, it is a double reason for excusing myself," replied Bussy; "my sword is engaged against M. d'Epernon."

Monsoreau had told the duke the night before that he might reckon on Bussy; this change, therefore, must have been occasioned by Diana's note.

"Then," said the duke, "you abandon your chief and master?"

"Monseigneur, he who is about to risk his life in a bloody duel, as ours will be, has but one master, and it is to Him my last devotions will be paid."

"You know that I am playing for a throne, and you leave me."

"Monseigneur, I have worked enough for you; I will work again to-morrow, do not ask me for more than my life."

"It is well!" said the duke, in a hollow voice, "you are free; go, M. de Bussy."

Bussy, without caring for the prince's evident anger, ran down the staircase of the Louvre, and went rapidly to his own house.

The duke called Aurilly. "Well! he has condemned himself," said he.

"Does he not follow you?"

"No."

"He goes to the rendezvous?"

"Yes."

"Then it is for this evening?"

"It is."

"Is M. de Monsoreau warned?"

"Of the rendezvous--yes; but not yet of the man."

"Then you have decided to sacrifice the count?"

"I have determined to revenge myself; I fear now but one thing."

"What is that?"

"That Monsoreau will trust to his strength, and that Bussy will escape him."

"Reassure yourself, monseigneur."

"Why?"

"Is M. de Bussy irrevocably condemned?"

"Yes, mordieu! A man who dictates to me--who takes away from me her whom I was seeking for--who is a sort of lion, of whom I am less the master than the keeper--yes, Aurilly, he is condemned without mercy."

"Well, then, be easy, for if he escape Monsoreau, he will not escape from another."

"And who is that?"

"Does your highness order me to name him?"

"Yes, I do."

"It is M. d'Epernon."

"D'Epernon! who was to fight him to-morrow?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"How is that?"

Aurilly was about to reply, when the duke was summoned; for the king was at table, and had sent for his brother.

"You shall tell me during the procession," said the duke.

We will now tell our readers what had passed between Aurilly and D'Epernon. They had long known each other, for Aurilly had taught D'Epernon to play on the lute, and, as he was fond of music, they were often together. He called upon Aurilly to tell him of his approaching duel, which disquieted him not a little. Bravery was never one of D'Epernon's prominent qualities, and he looked on a duel with Bussy as certain death. When Aurilly heard it, he told D'Epernon that Bussy practised fencing every morning with an artist, lately arrived, who was said to have borrowed from all nations their best points, until he had become perfect. During this recital D'Epernon grew livid with terror.

"Ah! I am doomed," said he.

"Well?"

"But it is absurd to go out with a man who is sure to kill me."

"You should have thought of that before making the engagement."

"Peste! I will break the engagement."



"He is a fool who gives up his life willingly at twenty-five. But, now I think of it----"

"Well."

"M. de Bussy is sure to kill me."

"I do not doubt it."

"Then it will not be a duel, but an assassination."

"Perhaps so."

"And if it be, it is lawful to prevent an assassination by----"

"By?"

"A murder."

"Doubtless."

"What prevents me, since he wishes to kill me, from killing him first?"

"Oh, mon Dieu! nothing; I thought of that myself."

"It is only natural."

"Very natural."

"Only, instead of killing him with my own hands, I will leave it to others."

"That is to say, you will hire assassins?"

"Ma foi! yes, like M. de Guise for St. Megrin."

"It will cost you dear."

"I will give three thousand crowns."

"You will only get six men for that, when they know who they have to deal with."

"Are not six enough?"

"M. de Bussy would kill four before they touched him. Do you remember the fight in the Rue St. Antoine?"

"I will give six thousand; if I do the thing, I will take care he does not escape."

"Have you your men?"

"Oh, there are plenty of unoccupied men-soldiers of fortune."

"Very well; but take care."

"Of what?"

"If they fail they will denounce you."

"I have the king to protect me."

"That will not hinder M. de Bussy from killing you."

"That is true."

"Should you like an auxiliary?"

"I should like anything which would aid me to get rid of him."

"Well, a certain enemy of your enemy is jealous."

"And he is now laying a snare for him?"

"Ah!"

"Well?"

"But he wants money; with your six thousand crowns he will take care of your affair as well as his own. You do not wish the honor of the thing to be yours, I suppose?"

"Mon Dieu! no; I only ask to remain in obscurity."

"Send your men, and he will use them."

"But I must know who it is."

"I will show you in the morning."

"Where?"

"At the Louvre."

"Then he is noble?"

"Yes:"

"Aurilly, you shall have the six thousand crowns."

"Then it is settled?"

"Irrevocably."

"At the Louvre, then?"

"Yes, at the Louvre."

We have seen in the preceding chapter how Aurilly said to D'Epernon, "Be easy, Bussy will not fight to-morrow."