

Chapter 52

Two Jealousies.

Lovers are tender towards everything that forms part of the daily life of the object of their affection. Raoul no sooner found himself alone with Montalais, than he kissed her hand with rapture. "There, there," said the young girl, sadly, "you are throwing your kisses away; I will guarantee that they will not bring you back any interest."

"How so? - Why? - Will you explain to me, my dear Aure?"

"Madame will explain everything to you. I am going to take you to her apartments.

"_What!_"

"Silence! and throw away your dark and savage looks. The windows here have eyes, the walls have ears. Have the kindness not to look at me any longer; be good enough to speak to me aloud of the rain, of the fine weather, and of the charms of England."

"At all events - " interrupted Raoul.

"I tell you, I warn you, that wherever people may be, I know not how, Madame is sure to have eyes and ears open. I am not very desirous, you can easily believe, of being dismissed or thrown in to the Bastile. Let

us talk, I tell you, or rather, do not let us talk at all."

Raoul clenched his hands, and tried to assume the look and gait of a man of courage, it is true, but of a man of courage on his way to the torture chamber. Montalais, glancing in every direction, walking along with an easy swinging gait, and holding up her head pertly in the air, preceded him to Madame's apartments, where he was at once introduced. "Well," he thought, "this day will pass away without my learning anything. Guiche showed too much consideration for my feelings; he had no doubt come to an understanding with Madame, and both of them, by a friendly plot, agreed to postpone the solution of the problem. Why have I not a determined, inveterate enemy - that serpent, De Wardes, for instance; that he would bite, is very likely; but I should not hesitate any more. To hesitate, to doubt - better, far, to die."

The next moment Raoul was in Madame's presence. Henrietta, more charming

than ever, was half lying, half reclining in her armchair, her small feet upon an embroidered velvet cushion; she was playing with a kitten with long silky fur, which was biting her fingers and hanging by the lace of her collar.

Madame seemed plunged in deep thought, so deep, indeed, that it required both Montalais and Raoul's voice to disturb her from her reverie.

"Your highness sent for me?" repeated Raoul.

Madame shook her head as if she were just awakening, and then said,
"Good

morning, Monsieur de Bragelonne; yes, I sent for you; so you have
returned from England?"

"Yes, Madame, and am at your royal highness's commands."

"Thank you; leave us, Montalais," and the latter immediately left the
room.

"You have a few minutes to give me, Monsieur de Bragelonne, have you
not?"

"My life is at your royal highness's disposal," Raoul returned with
respect, guessing that there was something serious in these unusual
courtesies; nor was he displeased, indeed, to observe the seriousness of
her manner, feeling persuaded that there was some sort of affinity
between Madame's sentiments and his own. In fact, every one at court, of
any perception at all, knew perfectly well the capricious fancy and
absurd despotism of the princess's singular character. Madame had been
flattered beyond all bounds by the king's attention; she had made herself
talked about; she had inspired the queen with that mortal jealousy which
is the stinging scorpion at the heel of every woman's happiness; Madame,
in a word, in her attempts to cure a wounded pride, found that her heart
had become deeply and passionately attached. We know what Madame had
done to recall Raoul, who had been sent out of the way by Louis XIV.

Raoul did not know of her letter to Charles II., although D'Artagnan had guessed its contents. Who will undertake to account for that seemingly inexplicable mixture of love and vanity, that passionate tenderness of feeling, that prodigious duplicity of conduct? No one can, indeed; not even the bad angel who kindles the love of coquetry in the heart of a woman. "Monsieur de Bragelonne," said the princess, after a moment's pause, "have you returned satisfied?"

Bragelonne looked at Madame Henrietta, and seeing how pale she was, not alone from what she was keeping back, but also from what she was burning to say, said: "Satisfied! what is there for me to be satisfied or dissatisfied about, Madame?"

"But what are those things with which a man of your age, and of your appearance, is usually either satisfied or dissatisfied?"

"How eager she is," thought Raoul, almost terrified; "what venom is it she is going to distil into my heart?" and then, frightened at what she might possibly be going to tell him, and wishing to put off the opportunity of having everything explained, which he had hitherto so ardently wished for, yet had dreaded so much, he replied: "I left, Madame, a dear friend in good health, and on my return I find him very ill."

"You refer to M. de Guiche," replied Madame Henrietta, with imperturbable self-possession; "I _have_ heard he is a very dear friend of yours."

"He is, indeed, Madame."

"Well, it is quite true he has been wounded; but he is better now. Oh! M. de Guiche is not to be pitied," she said hurriedly; and then, recovering herself, added, "But has he anything to complain of? Has he complained of anything? Is there any cause of grief or sorrow that we are not acquainted with?"

"I allude only to his wound, Madame."

"So much the better, then, for, in other respects, M. de Guiche seems to be very happy; he is always in very high spirits. I am sure that you, Monsieur de Bragelonne, would far prefer to be, like him, wounded only in the body... for what, in deed, is such a wound, after all!"

Raoul started. "Alas!" he said to himself, "she is returning to it."

"What did you say?" she inquired.

"I did not say anything Madame."

"You did not say anything; you disapprove of my observation, then? you are perfectly satisfied, I suppose?"

Raoul approached closer to her. "Madame," he said, "your royal highness

wishes to say something to me, and your instinctive kindness and generosity of disposition induce you to be careful and considerate as to your manner of conveying it. Will your royal highness throw this kind forbearance aside? I am able to bear everything; and I am listening."

"Ah!" replied Henrietta, "what do you understand, then?"

"That which your royal highness wishes me to understand," said Raoul, trembling, notwithstanding his command over himself, as he pronounced these words.

"In point of fact," murmured the princess... "it seems cruel, but since I have begun - "

"Yes, Madame, once your highness has deigned to begin, will you condescend to finish - "

Henrietta rose hurriedly and walked a few paces up and down her room.

"What did M. de Guiche tell you?" she said, suddenly.

"Nothing, Madame."

"Nothing! Did he say nothing? Ah! how well I recognize him in that."

"No doubt he wished to spare me."

"And that is what friends call friendship. But surely, M. d'Artagnan, whom you have just left, must have told you."

"No more than De Guiche, Madame."

Henrietta made a gesture full of impatience, as she said, "At least, you know all the court knows."

"I know nothing at all, Madame."

"Not the scene in the storm?"

"No, Madame."

"Not the tete-a-tete in the forest?"

"No, Madame."

"Nor the flight to Chaillot?"

Raoul, whose head dropped like a blossom cut down by the reaper, made an almost superhuman effort to smile, as he replied with the greatest gentleness: "I have had the honor of telling your royal highness that I am absolutely ignorant of everything, that I am a poor unremembered outcast, who has this moment arrived from England. There have rolled so many stormy waves between myself and those I left behind me here, that

the rumor of none of the circumstances your highness refers to, has been able to reach me."

Henrietta was affected by his extreme pallor, his gentleness, and his great courage. The principal feeling in her heart at that moment was an eager desire to hear the nature of the remembrance which the poor lover retained of the woman who had made him suffer so much. "Monsieur de Bragelonne," she said, "that which your friends have refused to do, I will do for you, whom I like and esteem very much. I will be your friend on this occasion. You hold your head high, as a man of honor should; and I deeply regret that you may have to bow before ridicule, and in a few days, it might be, contempt."

"Ah!" exclaimed Raoul, perfectly livid. "It is as bad as that, then?"

"If you do not know," said the princess, "I see that you guess; you were affianced, I believe, to Mademoiselle de la Valliere?"

"Yes, Madame."

"By that right, you deserve to be warned about her, as some day or another I shall be obliged to dismiss Mademoiselle de la Valliere from my service - "

"Dismiss La Valliere!" cried Bragelonne.

"Of course. Do you suppose I shall always be amenable to the tears and protestations of the king? No, no! my house shall no longer be made a convenience for such practices; but you tremble, you cannot stand - "

"No, Madame, no," said Bragelonne, making an effort over himself; "I thought I should have died just now, that was all. Your royal highness did me the honor to say that the king wept and implored you - "

"Yes, but in vain," returned the princess; who then related to Raoul the scene that took place at Chaillot, and the king's despair on his return; she told him of his indulgence to herself and the terrible word with which the outraged princess, the humiliated coquette, had quashed the royal anger.

Raoul stood with his head bent down.

"What do you think of it all?" she said.

"The king loves her," he replied.

"But you seem to think she does not love him!"

"Alas, Madame, I was thinking of the time when she loved me."

Henrietta was for a moment struck with admiration at this sublime disbelief: and then, shrugging her shoulders, she said, "You do not

believe me, I see. How deeply you must love her. And you doubt if she loves the king?"

"I do, until I have a proof of it. Forgive me, Madame, but she has given me her word; and her mind and heart are too upright to tell a falsehood."

"You require a proof! Be it so. Come with me, then."