

Chapter 31

M. de Lorraine's Jealousy.

The Duc d'Orleans uttered a cry of delight on perceiving the Chevalier de Lorraine. "This is fortunate, indeed," he said; "by what happy chance do I see you? Had you indeed disappeared, as every one assured me?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"A caprice?"

"I to venture upon caprices with your highness! The respect - "

"Put respect out of the way, for you fail in it every day. I absolve you; but why did you leave me?"

"Because I felt that I was of no further use to you."

"Explain yourself."

"Your highness has people about you who are far more amusing than I can ever be. I felt I was not strong enough to enter into contest with them, and I therefore withdrew."

"This extreme diffidence shows a want of common sense. Who are those with whom you cannot contend? De Guiche?"

"I name no one."

"This is absurd. Does De Guiche annoy you?"

"I do not say he does; do not force me to speak, however; you know very well that De Guiche is one of our best friends."

"Who is it, then?"

"Excuse me, monseigneur, let us say no more about it." The chevalier knew perfectly well that curiosity is excited in the same way as thirst – by removing that which quenches it; or in other words, by denying an explanation.

"No, no," said the prince; "I wish to know why you went away."

"In that case, monseigneur, I will tell you; but do not get angry. I remarked that my presence was disagreeable."

"To whom?"

"To Madame."

"What do you mean?" said the duke in astonishment.

"It is simple enough; Madame is very probably jealous of the regard you are good enough to testify for me."

"Has she shown it to you?"

"Madame never addresses a syllable to me, particularly since a certain time."

"Since _what_ time?"

"Since the time when, M. de Guiche having made himself more agreeable to her than I could, she receives him at every and any hour."

The duke colored. "At any hour, chevalier; what do you mean by that?"

"You see, your highness, I have already displeased you; I was quite sure I should."

"I am not displeased; but what you say is rather startling. In what respect does Madame prefer De Guiche to you?"

"I shall say no more," said the chevalier, saluting the prince ceremoniously.

"On the contrary, I require you to speak. If you withdraw on that account, you must indeed be very jealous."

"One cannot help being jealous, monseigneur, when one loves. Is not your royal highness jealous of Madame? Would you not, if you saw some one always near Madame, and always treated with great favor, take umbrage at it? One's friends are as one's lovers. Your highness has sometimes conferred the distinguished honor upon me of calling me your friend."

"Yes, yes,; but you used a phrase which has a very equivocal significance; you are unfortunate in your phrases."

"What phrase, monseigneur?"

"You said, 'treated with great favor.' What do you mean by favor?"

"Nothing can be more simple," said the chevalier, with an expression of great frankness; "for instance, whenever a husband remarks that his wife summons such and such a man near her; whenever this man is always to be found by her side, or in attendance at the door of her carriage; whenever the bouquet of the one is always the same color as the ribbons of the other; when music and supper parties are held in private apartments; whenever a dead silence takes place immediately the husband makes his appearance in his wife's rooms; and when the husband suddenly finds that he has, as a companion, the most devoted and the kindest of men, who, a week before, was with him as little as possible; why, then - "

"Well, finish."

"Why, then, I say, monseigneur, one possibly may get jealous. But all these details hardly apply; for our conversation had nothing to do with them."

The duke was evidently very much agitated, and seemed to struggle with himself a good deal. "You have not told me," he then remarked, "why you absented yourself. A little while ago you said it was from a fear of intruding; you added, even, that you had observed a disposition on Madame's part to encourage De Guiche."

"Pardon me, monseigneur, I did not say that."

"You did, indeed."

"Well, if I did say so, I observed nothing but what was very inoffensive."

"At all events, you remarked something."

"You embarrass me, monseigneur."

"What does that matter? Answer me. If you speak the truth, why should you feel embarrassed?"

"I always speak the truth, monseigneur; but I also always hesitate when it is a question of repeating what others say."

"Ah! repeat? It appears that it is talked about, then?"

"I acknowledge that others have spoken to me on the subject."

"Who?" said the prince.

The chevalier assumed almost an angry air, as he replied, "Monseigneur, you are subjecting me to cross-examination; you treat me as a criminal at the bar; the rumors which idly pass by a gentleman's ears do not remain there. Your highness wishes me to magnify rumors until it attains the importance of an event."

"However," said the duke, in great displeasure, "the fact remains that you withdrew on account of this report."

"To speak the truth, others have talked to me of the attentions of M. de Guiche to Madame, nothing more; perfectly harmless, I repeat, and more than that, allowable. But do not be unjust, monseigneur, and do not attach any undue importance to it. It does not concern you."

"M. de Guiche's attentions to Madame do not concern me?"

"No, monseigneur; and what I say to you I would say to De Guiche himself,

so little do I think of the attentions he pays Madame. Nay, I would say it even to Madame herself. Only you understand what I am afraid of - I am afraid of being thought jealous of the favor shown, when I am only jealous as far as friendship is concerned. I know your disposition; I know that when you bestow your affections you become exclusively attached. You love Madame - and who, indeed, would not love her? Follow me attentively as I proceed: - Madame has noticed among your friends the handsomest and most fascinating of them all; she will begin to influence you on his behalf in such a way that you will neglect the others. Your indifference would kill me; it is already bad enough to have to support Madame's indifference. I have, therefore, made up my mind to give way to the favorite whose happiness I envy, even while I acknowledge my sincere friendship and sincere admiration for him. Well, monseigneur, do you see anything to object to in this reasoning? Is it not that of a man of honor? Is my conduct that of a sincere friend? Answer me, at least, after having so closely questioned me."

The duke had seated himself, with his head buried in his hands. After a silence long enough to enable the chevalier to judge the effect of this oratorical display, the duke arose, saying, "Come, be candid."

"As I always am."

"Very well. You know that we already observed something respecting that mad fellow, Buckingham."

"Do not say anything against Madame, monseigneur, or I shall take my leave. It is impossible you can be suspicious of Madame?"

"No, no, chevalier; I do not suspect Madame; but in fact, I observe - I compare - "

"Buckingham was a madman, monseigneur."

"A madman about whom, however, you opened my eyes thoroughly."

"No, no," said the chevalier, quickly; "it was not I who opened your eyes, it was De Guiche. Do not confound us, I beg." And he began to laugh in so harsh a manner that it sounded like the hiss of a serpent.

"Yes, yes; I remember. You said a few words, but De Guiche showed the most jealousy."

"I should think so," continued the chevalier, in the same tone. "He was fighting for home and altar."

"What did you say?" said the duke, haughtily, thoroughly roused by this insidious jest.

"Am I not right? for does not M. de Guiche hold the chief post of honor in your household?"

"Well," replied the duke, somewhat calmed, "had this passion of Buckingham been remarked?"

"Certainly."

"Very well. Do people say that M. de Guiche's is remarked as much?"

"Pardon me, monseigneur; you are again mistaken; no one says that M. de Guiche entertains anything of the sort."

"Very good."

"You see, monseigneur, that it would have been better, a hundred times better, to have left me in my retirement, than to have allowed you to conjure up, by aid of any scruples I may have had, suspicions which Madame will regard as crimes, and she would be in the right, too."

"What would you do?"

"Act reasonably."

"In what way?"

"I should not pay the slightest attention to the society of these new Epicurean philosophers; and, in that way, the rumors will cease."

"Well, I will see; I will think it over."

"Oh, you have time enough; the danger is not great; and then, besides, it is not a question of danger or of passion. It all arose from a fear I had to see your friendship for me decrease. From the very moment you restore it, with so kind an assurance of its existence, I have no longer any other idea in my head."

The duke shook his head as if he meant to say: "If you have no more ideas, I have, though." It being now the dinner hour, the prince sent to inform Madame of it; but she returned a message to the effect that she could not be present, but would dine in her own apartment.

"That is not my fault," said the duke. "This morning, having taken them by surprise in the midst of a musical party, I got jealous; and so they are in the sulks with me."

"We will dine alone," said the chevalier, with a sigh; "I regret De Guiche is not here."

"Oh! De Guiche will not remain long in the sulks; he is a very good-natured fellow."

"Monseigneur," said the chevalier, suddenly, "an excellent idea has struck me, in our conversation just now. I may have exasperated your highness, and caused you some dissatisfaction. It is but fitting that I

should be the mediator. I will go and look for the count, and bring him back with me."

"Ah! chevalier, you are really a very good-natured fellow."

"You say that as if you were surprised."

"Well, you are not so tender-hearted every day."

"That may be; but confess that I know how to repair a wrong I may have done."

"I confess that."

"Will your highness do me the favor to wait here a few minutes?"

"Willingly; be off, and I will try on my Fontainebleau costume."

The chevalier left the room, called his different attendant with the greatest care, as if he were giving them different orders. All went off in various directions; but he retained his *_valet de chambre_*.

"Ascertain, and immediately, too, of M. de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments. How can one learn it?"

"Very easily, monsieur. I will ask Malicorne, who will find out from Mlle. de Montalais. I may as well tell you, however, that the inquiry

will be useless; for all M. de Guiche's attendants are gone, and he must have left with them."

"Ascertain, nevertheless."

Ten minutes had hardly passed, when the valet returned. He beckoned his master mysteriously towards the servants' staircase, and showed him into a small room with a window looking out upon the garden. "What is the matter?" said the chevalier; "why so many precautions?"

"Look, monsieur," said the valet, "look yonder, under the walnut-tree."

"Ah?" said the chevalier. "I see Manicamp there. What is he waiting for?"

"You will see in a moment, monsieur, if you wait patiently. There, do you see now?"

"I see one, two, four musicians with their instruments, and behind them, urging them on, De Guiche himself. What is he doing there, though?"

"He is waiting until the little door of the staircase, belonging to the ladies of honor, is opened; by that staircase he will ascend to Madame's apartments, where some new pieces of music are going to be performed during dinner."

"This is admirable news you tell me."

"Is it not, monsieur?"

"Was it M. de Malicorne who told you this?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"He likes you, then?"

"No, monsieur, it is Monsieur that he likes."

"Why?"

"Because he wishes to belong to his household."

"And most certainly he shall. How much did he give you for that?"

"The secret which I now dispose of to you, monsieur."

"And which I buy for a hundred pistoles. Take them."

"Thank you, monsieur. Look, look, the little door opens; a woman admits the musicians."

"It is Montalais."

"Hush, monseigneur; do not call out her name; whoever says Montalais says Malicorne. If you quarrel with the one, you will be on bad terms with the other."

"Very well; I have seen nothing."

"And I," said the valet, pocketing the purse, "have received nothing."

The chevalier, being now certain that Guiche had entered, returned to the prince, whom he found splendidly dressed and radiant with joy, as with good looks. "I am told," he exclaimed, "that the king has taken the sun as his device; really, monseigneur, it is you whom this device would best suit."

"Where is De Guiche?"

"He cannot be found. He has fled - has evaporated entirely. Your scolding of this morning terrified him. He could not be found in his apartments."

"Bah! the hair-brained fellow is capable of setting off post-haste to his own estates. Poor man! we will recall him. Come, let us dine now."

"Monseigneur, to-day is a very festival of ideas; I have another."

"What is it?"

"Madame is angry with you, and she has reason to be so. You owe her revenge; go and dine with her."

"Oh! that would be acting like a weak and whimsical husband."

"It is the duty of a good husband to do so. The princess is no doubt wearied enough; she will be weeping in her plate, and here eyes will get quite red. A husband who is the cause of his wife's eyes getting red is an odious creature. Come, monseigneur, come."

"I cannot; for I have directed dinner to be served here."

"Yet see, monseigneur, how dull we shall be; I shall be low-spirited because I know that Madame will be alone; you, hard and savage as you wish to appear, will be sighing all the while. Take me with you to Madame's dinner, and that will be a delightful surprise. I am sure we shall be very merry; you were in the wrong this morning."

"Well, perhaps I was."

"There is no perhaps at all, for it is a fact you were so."

"Chevalier, chevalier, your advice is not good."

"Nay, my advice is good; all the advantages are on your own side. Your violet-colored suit, embroidered with gold, becomes you admirably. Madame will be as much vanquished by the man as by the action. Come, monseigneur."

"You decide me; let us go."

The duke left his room, accompanied by the chevalier and went towards Madame's apartments. The chevalier hastily whispered to the valet, "Be sure there are some people before that little door, so that no one can escape in that direction. Run, run!" And he followed the duke towards the ante-chambers of Madame's suite of apartments, and when the ushers were about to announce them, the chevalier said, laughing, "His highness wishes to surprise Madame."