

Chapter 32

Monsieur is Jealous of Guiche.

Monsieur entered the room abruptly, as persons do who mean well and think they confer pleasure, or as those who hope to surprise some secret, the terrible reward of jealous people. Madame, almost out of her senses with joy at the first bars of music, was dancing in the most unrestrained manner, leaving the dinner, which had been already begun, unfinished. Her partner was M. de Guiche, who, with his arms raised, and his eyes half closed, was kneeling on one knee, like the Spanish dancers, with looks full of passion, and gestures of the most caressing character. The princess was dancing round him with a responsive smile, and the same air of alluring seductiveness. Montalais stood by admiringly; La Valliere, seated in a corner of the room, looked on thoughtfully. It is impossible to describe the effect which the presence of the prince produced upon this gleeful company, and it would be equally impossible to describe the effect which the sight of their happiness produced upon Philip. The Comte de Guiche had no power to move; Madame remained in the middle of one of the figures and of an attitude, unable to utter a word. The Chevalier de Lorraine, leaning his back against the doorway, smiled like a man in the very height of the frankest admiration. The pallor of the prince, and the convulsive twitching of his hands and limbs, were the first symptoms that struck those present. A dead silence succeeded the merry music of the dance. The Chevalier de Lorraine took advantage of this interval to salute Madame and De Guiche most respectfully, affecting

to join them together in his reverences as though they were the master and mistress of the house. Monsieur then approached them, saying, in a hoarse tone of voice, "I am delighted; I came here expecting to find you ill and low-spirited, and I find you abandoning yourself to new amusements; really, it is most fortunate. My house is the pleasantest in the kingdom." Then turning towards De Guiche, "Comte," he said, "I did not know you were so good a dancer." And, again addressing his wife, he said, "Show a little more consideration for me, Madame; whenever you intend to amuse yourselves here, invite me. I am a prince, unfortunately, very much neglected."

Guiche had now recovered his self-possession, and with the spirited boldness which was natural to him, and sat so well upon him, he said, "Your highness knows very well that my very life is at your service, and whenever there is a question of its being needed, I am ready; but to-day, as it is only a question of dancing to music, I dance."

"And you are perfectly right," said the prince, coldly. "But, Madame," he continued, "you do not remark that your ladies deprive me of my friends; M. de Guiche does not belong to you, Madame, but to me. If you wish to dine without me you have your ladies. When I dine alone I have my gentlemen; do not strip me of everything."

Madame felt the reproach and the lesson, and the color rushed to her face. "Monsieur," she replied, "I was not aware, when I came to the court of France, that princesses of my rank were to be regarded as the

women in Turkey are. I was not aware that we were not allowed to be seen; but, since such is your desire, I will conform myself to it; pray do not hesitate, if you should wish it, to have my windows barred, even."

This repartee, which made Montalais and De Guiche smile, rekindled the prince's anger, no inconsiderable portion of which had already evaporated in words.

"Very well," he said, in a concentrated tone of voice, "this is the way in which I am respected in my own house."

"Monseigneur, monseigneur," murmured the chevalier in the duke's ear, in such a manner that every one could observe he was endeavoring to calm him.

"Come," replied the prince, as his only answer to the remark, hurrying him away, and turning round with so hasty a movement that he almost ran against Madame. The chevalier followed him to his own apartment, where the prince had no sooner seated himself than he gave free vent to his fury. The chevalier raised his eyes towards the ceiling, joined his hands together, and said not a word.

"Give me your opinion," exclaimed the prince.

"Upon what?"

"Upon what is taking place here."

"Oh, monseigneur, it is a very serious matter."

"It is abominable! I cannot live in this manner."

"How miserable all this is," said the chevalier. "We hoped to enjoy tranquillity after that madman Buckingham had left."

"And this is worse."

"I do not say that, monseigneur."

"Yes, but I say it; for Buckingham would never have ventured upon a fourth part of what we have just now seen."

"What do you mean?"

"To conceal oneself for the purposes of dancing, and to feign indisposition in order to dine *_tete-a-tete_*."

"No, no, monseigneur."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the prince, exciting himself like a self-willed child; "but I will not endure it any longer, I must learn what is really going on."

"Oh, monseigneur, an exposure - "

"By Heaven, monsieur, _shall_ I put myself out of the way, when people show so little consideration for me? Wait for me here, chevalier, wait for me here." The prince disappeared in the neighboring apartment and inquired of the gentleman in attendance if the queen-mother had returned from chapel.

Anne of Austria felt that her happiness was now complete; peace restored to her family, a nation delighted with the presence of a young monarch who had shown an aptitude for affairs of great importance; the revenues of the state increased; external peace assured; everything seemed to promise a tranquil future. Her thoughts recurred, now and then, to the poor young nobleman whom she had received as a mother, and had driven away as a hard-hearted step-mother, and she sighed as she thought of him.

Suddenly the Duc d'Orleans entered her room. "Dear mother," he exclaimed hurriedly, closing the door, "things cannot go on as they are now."

Anne of Austria raised her beautiful eyes towards him, and with an unmoved suavity of manner, said, "What do you allude to?"

"I wish to speak of Madame."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, madame."

"I suppose that silly fellow Buckingham has been writing a farewell letter to her."

"Oh! yes, madame; of course, it is a question of Buckingham."

"Of whom else could it be, then? for that poor fellow was, wrongly enough, the object of your jealousy, and I thought - "

"My wife, madame, has already replaced the Duke of Buckingham."

"Philip, what are you saying? You are speaking very heedlessly."

"No, no. Madame has so managed matters, that I am still jealous."

"Of whom, in Heaven's name?"

"Is it possible you have not remarked it? Have you not noticed that M. de Guiche is always in her apartments - always with her?"

The queen clapped her hands together, and began to laugh. "Philip," she said, "your jealousy is not merely a defect, it is a disease."

"Whether a defect or a disease, madame, I am the sufferer from it."

"And do you imagine that a complaint which exists only in your own imagination can be cured? You wish it to be said you are right in being jealous, when there is no ground whatever for your jealousy."

"Of course, you will begin to say for this gentleman what you already said on the behalf of the other."

"Because, Philip," said the queen dryly, "what you did for the other, you are going to do for this one."

The prince bowed, slightly annoyed. "If I give you facts," he said, "will you believe me?"

"If it regarded anything else but jealousy, I would believe you without your bringing facts forward; but as jealousy is the case, I promise nothing."

"It is just the same as if your majesty were to desire me to hold my tongue, and sent me away unheard."

"Far from it; you are my son, I owe you a mother's indulgence."

"Oh, say what you think; you owe me as much indulgence as a madman deserves."

"Do not exaggerate, Philip, and take care how you represent your wife to me as a woman of depraved mind - "

"But facts, mother, facts!"

"Well, I am listening."

"This morning at ten o'clock they were playing music in Madame's apartments."

"No harm in that, surely."

"M. de Guiche was talking with her alone - Ah! I forgot to tell you, that, during the last ten days, he has never left her side."

"If they were doing any harm they would hide themselves."

"Very good," exclaimed the duke, "I expected you to say that. Pray remember with precision the words you have just uttered. This morning I took them by surprise, and showed my dissatisfaction in a very marked manner."

"Rely upon it, that is quite sufficient; it was, perhaps, even a little too much. These young women easily take offense. To reproach them for an error they have not committed is, sometimes, almost equivalent to telling them they might be guilty of even worse."

"Very good, very good; but wait a minute. Do not forget what you have just this moment said, that this morning's lesson ought to have been sufficient, and that if they had been doing what was wrong, they would have hidden themselves."

"Yes, I said so."

"Well, just now, repenting of my hastiness of the morning, and imagining that Guiche was sulking in his own apartments, I went to pay Madame a visit. Can you guess what, or whom, I found there? Another set of musicians; more dancing, and Guiche himself - he was concealed there."

Anne of Austria frowned. "It was imprudent," she said. "What did Madame say?"

"Nothing."

"And Guiche?"

"As much - oh, no! he muttered some impertinent remark or another."

"Well, what is your opinion, Philip?"

"That I have been made a fool of; that Buckingham was only a pretext, and that Guiche is the one who is really to blame in the matter."

Anne shrugged her shoulders. "Well," she said, "what else?"

"I wish De Guiche to be dismissed from my household, as Buckingham was, and I shall ask the king, unless - "

"Unless what?"

"Unless you, my dear mother, who are so clever and so kind, will execute the commission yourself."

"I will not do it, Philip."

"What, madame?"

"Listen, Philip; I am not disposed to pay people ill compliments every day; I have some influence over young people, but I cannot take advantage of it without running the chances of losing it altogether. Besides, there is nothing to prove that M. de Guiche is guilty."

"He has displeased me."

"That is your own affair."

"Very well, I know what I shall do," said the prince, impetuously.

Anne looked at him with some uneasiness. "What do you intend to do?" she said.

"I will have him drowned in my fish-pond the very next time I find him in my apartments again." Having launched this terrible threat, the prince expected his mother would be frightened out of her senses; but the queen was unmoved.

"Do so," she said.

Philip was as weak as a woman, and began to cry out, "Every one betrays me, - no one cares for me; my mother, even, joins my enemies."

"Your mother, Philip, sees further in the matter than you do, and does not care about advising you, since you will not listen to her."

"I will go to the king."

"I was about to propose that to you. I am now expecting his majesty; it is the hour he usually pays me a visit; explain the matter to him yourself."

She had hardly finished when Philip heard the door of the ante-room open with some noise. He began to feel nervous. At the sound of the king's footsteps, which could be heard upon the carpet, the duke hurriedly made his escape. Anne of Austria could not resist laughing, and was laughing

still when the king entered. He came very affectionately to inquire after the even now uncertain health of the queen-mother, and to announce to her that the preparations for the journey to Fontainebleau were complete. Seeing her laugh, his uneasiness on her account diminished, and he addressed her in a vivacious tone himself. Anne of Austria took him by the hand, and, in a voice full of playfulness, said, "Do you know, sire that I am proud of being a Spanish woman?"

"Why, madame?"

"Because Spanish women are worth more than English women at least."

"Explain yourself."

"Since your marriage you have not, I believe, had a single reproach to make against the queen."

"Certainly not."

"And you, too, have been married some time. Your brother, on the contrary, has been married but a fortnight."

"Well?"

"He is now finding fault with Madame a second time."

"What, Buckingham still?"

"No, another."

"Who?"

"Guiche."

"Really? Madame is a coquette, then?"

"I fear so."

"My poor brother," said the king, laughing.

"You don't object to coquettes, it seems?"

"In Madame, certainly I do; but Madame is not a coquette at heart."

"That may be, but your brother is excessively angry about it."

"What does he want?"

"He wants to drown Guiche."

"That is a violent measure to resort to."

"Do not laugh; he is extremely irritated. Think of what can be done."

"To save Guiche - certainly."

"Of, if your brother heard you, he would conspire against you as your uncle did against your father."

"No; Philip has too much affection for me for that, and I, on my side, have too great a regard for him; we shall live together on very good terms. But what is the substance of his request?"

"That you will prevent Madame from being a coquette and Guiche from being amiable."

"Is that all? My brother has an exalted idea of sovereign power. To reform a man, not to speak about reforming a woman!"

"How will you set about it?"

"With a word to Guiche, who is a clever fellow, I will undertake to convince him."

"But Madame?"

"That is more difficult; a word will not be enough. I will compose a homily and read it to her."

"There is no time to be lost."

"Oh, I will use the utmost diligence. There is a repetition of the ballet this afternoon."

"You will read her a lecture while you are dancing?"

"Yes, madame."

"You promise to convert her?"

"I will root out the heresy altogether, either by convincing her, or by extreme measures."

"That is all right, then. Do not mix me up in the affair; Madame would never forgive me all her life, and as a mother-in-law, I ought to desire to live on good terms with my new-found daughter."

"The king, madame, will take all upon himself. But let me reflect."

"What about?"

"It would be better, perhaps, if I were to go and see Madame in her own apartment."

"Would that not seem a somewhat serious step to take?"

"Yes; but seriousness is not unbecoming in preachers, and the music of the ballet would drown half my arguments. Besides, the object is to prevent any violent measures on my brother's part, so that a little precipitation may be advisable. Is Madame in her own apartment?"

"I believe so."

"What is my statement of grievances to consist of?"

"In a few words, of the following: music uninterruptedly; Guiche's assiduity; suspicions of treasonable plots and practices."

"And the proofs?"

"There _are_ none."

"Very well; I will go at once to see Madame." The king turned to look in the mirrors at his costume, which was very rich, and his face, which was radiant as the morning. "I suppose my brother is kept a little at a distance," said the king.

"Fire and water cannot be more opposite."

"That will do. Permit me, madame, to kiss your hands, the most beautiful

hands in France."

"May you be successful, sire, as the family peacemaker."

"I do not employ an ambassador," said Louis, "which is as much as to say that I shall succeed." He laughed as he left the room, and carelessly adjusted his ruffles as he went along.