

Chapter 47

THE EXPLANATION.

To get rid of a witness whom Marguerite believed to know more of Latin than he allowed was already a triumph, or at least a pledge of security for her; for alone with her husband she could give whatever translation of the Latin that she pleased.

Henri and his wife were then left *tete-à-tete*. He had on his face no appearance of disquietude or menace; decidedly he could not understand Latin.

"Monsieur," said Marguerite, "I wait for you to interrogate me."

"This letter preoccupies you much, *ma mie*; do not alarm yourself thus."

"Sire, because a king does not send a special messenger to another without some reason that he believes important."

"Well *ma mie*, let us leave it for the present; have you not something like a ball this evening?"

"Yes, sire," said Marguerite, astonished, "but that is not extraordinary; you know we dance nearly every evening."

"I have a great chase for to-morrow."

"Each our pleasure, sire; you love the chase, I the dance."

"Yes, ma mie, and there is no harm in that," said Henri, sighing.

"Certainly not; but your majesty sighed as you said it."

"Listen to me, madame; I am uneasy."

"About what, sire?"

"About a current report."

"A report; your majesty uneasy about a report?"

"What more simple; when this report may annoy you."

"Me?"--"Yes, you."

"Sire, I do not understand you."

"Have you heard nothing?"

Marguerite began to tremble. "I am the least curious woman in the world," said she, "I hear nothing but what is cried in my very ears. Besides, I think so little of reports, that I should not listen to them

if I heard them."

"It is then your opinion, madame, that one should despise reports?"

"Absolutely, sire; particularly kings and queens."

"Why so, madame?"

"Because, as every one talks of us, we should have enough to do to listen to them all."

"Well, I believe you are right, ma mie, and I am about to furnish you with an excellent opportunity of exercising your philosophy."

Marguerite believed that the decisive moment had come, and rallied all her courage.

"So be it, sire," said she.

Henri began in the tone of a penitent who has some great sin to acknowledge.

"You know the great interest I take in Fosseuse?"

"Ah!" cried Marguerite, triumphantly, seeing he was not about to accuse her; "yes, yes; the little Fosseuse, your friend."

"Yes, madame."

"My lady in waiting."--"Yes."

"Your passion--your love."

"Ah! you speak now just like one of the reports you were abusing just now."

"It is true, sire, and I ask your pardon," said Marguerite, smiling.

"Ma mie, you are right, public report often lies, and we sovereigns have great reason to establish this theory;" and he laughed ironically.

"Well; and Fosseuse?" said Marguerite.

"She is ill, ma mie, and the doctors do not understand her malady."

"That is strange, sire. Fosseuse, who you say is a pearl of purity, ought to allow the doctors to penetrate into the secret of her illness."

"Alas! it is not so."

"What!" cried the queen; "is she not a pearl of purity?"

"I mean that she persists in hiding the cause of her illness from the doctors."

"But to you, sire, her confidant, her father."

"I know nothing, or at least wish to know nothing."

"Then, sire," said Marguerite, who now believed that she had to confer instead of asking a pardon; "then, sire, I do not know what you want; and wait for you to explain."

"Well, then, ma mie, I will tell you. I wish you--but it is asking a great deal."

"Speak on, sire."

"To have the goodness to go to Fosseuse."

"I go to visit this girl whom every one says has the honor of being your mistress; a thing which you do not deny."

"Gently, gently, ma mie. On my word you will make a scandal with your exclamations; and really I believe that will rejoice the court of France, for in the letter from my brother-in-law that Chicot repeated to me, there was these words, 'Quotidie scandalurn,' which must mean 'daily scandal.' It is not necessary to know Latin to understand that: it is almost French."

"But, sire, to whom did these words apply?"

"Ah! that is what I want to know, but you, who know Latin, can help me to find out."

Marguerite colored up to her ears.

"Well, monsieur," said she, "you wish me to take a humiliating step for the sake of peace, and therefore I will comply."

"Thanks, ma mie, thanks."

"But what is the object of this visit?"

"It is very simple, madame."

"Still, you must tell me, for I am not clever enough to guess it."

"Well! you will find Fosseuse among the ladies of honor, sleeping in their room; and they, you know, are so curious and indiscreet that one cannot tell to what extremity Fosseuse may be reduced."

"But then she fears something," cried Marguerite, with a burst of anger and hatred; "she wishes to hide herself."

"I do not know; all I do know is, that she wishes to quit the room of the maids of honor."

"If she wishes to hide, let her not count on me. I may shut my eyes to certain things, but I will never be an accomplice," said Marguerite.

Henri seemed not to have heard, but he stood for a minute in a thoughtful attitude, and then said, "Margota cum Turenno. Ah! those were the names, madame--'Margota cum Turenno.'"

Marguerite grew crimson.

"Calumnies, sire!" cried she.

"What calumnies?" replied he, with the most natural air possible. "Do you find any calumny in it? It is a passage from my brother's letter--'Margota cum Turenno conveniunt in castello nomine Loignac!'--Decidedly I must get this letter translated."

"Leave this comedy, sire," said Marguerite, tremblingly, "and tell me at once what you want from me."

"Well, I wish, ma mie, that you should separate Fosseuse from the other girls, and send her a discreet doctor; your own, for example."

"Ah! I see what it is," cried the queen, "Fosseuse, the paragon, is near her accouchement."

"I do not say so, ma mie; it is you who affirm it."

"It is so, monsieur; your insinuating tone, your false humility, prove it to me. But there are sacrifices that no man should ask of his wife. Take care of Fosseuse yourself, sire; it is your business, and let the trouble fall on the guilty, not on the innocent."

"The guilty! Ah! that makes me think of the letter again."

"How so?"

"Guilty is 'nocens,' is it not?"

"Yes."

"Well, there was that word in the letter--'Margota cum Turenno, ambo nocentes, conveniunt in castello nomine Loignac.' Mon Dieu! how I regret that my knowledge is not as great as my memory is good."

"Ambo nocentes," repeated Marguerite, in a low voice, and turning very pale, "he understood it all."

"Margota cum Turenno, ambo nocentes," repeated Henri. "What the devil could my brother mean by 'ambo!' Ventre St. Gris, ma mie, it is astonishing that you who know Latin so well have not yet explained it to me. Ah! pardieu! there is 'Turenno' walking under your windows, and looking up as if he expected you. I will call to him to come up; he is very learned, and he will explain it to me."

"Sire, sire, be superior to all the calumniators of France."

"Oh! ma mie, it seems to me that people are not more indulgent in Navarre than in France; you, yourself, were very severe about poor Fosseuse just now."

"I severe?"

"Yes; and yet we ought to be indulgent here, we lead such a happy life, you with your balls, and I with my chase."

"Yes, yes, sire; you are right; let us be indulgent."

"Oh! I was sure of your heart, ma mie."

"You know me well, sire."

"Yes. Then you will go and see Fosseuse?"

"Yes, sire."

"And separate her from the others?"

"Yes, sire."

"And send her your doctor?"

"Yes, sire."

"And if, unluckily, what you say were true, and she had been weak, for women are frail--"

"Well, sire, I am a woman, and know the indulgence due to my sex."

"All! you know all things, ma mie; you are in truth a model of perfection, and I kiss your hands."

"But believe, sire, that it is for the love of you alone that I make this sacrifice."

"Oh! yes, ma mie, I know you well, madame, and my brother of France also, he who speaks so well of you in this letter, and adds, 'Fiat sanum exemplum statim, atque res certior eveniet.' Doubtless, ma mie, it is you who give this good example."

And Henri kissed the cold hand of Marguerite. Then, turning on the threshold of the door, he said:

"Say everything kind from me to Fosseuse, and do for her as you have promised me. I set off for the chase; perhaps I shall not see you till my return, perhaps never--these wolves are wicked beasts. Come, and let me embrace you, ma mie."

Then he embraced Marguerite, almost affectionately, and went out,

leaving her stupefied with all she had heard.