

Chapter 59

WHAT WAS PASSING IN THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE.

While the hotel of the "Brave Chevalier," the abode, apparently, of the most perfect concord, with closed doors and open cellars, showed through the openings of the shutters the light of its candles and the mirth of its guests, an unaccustomed movement took place in that mysterious house of which our readers have as yet only seen the outside.

The servant was going from one room to another, carrying packages which he placed in a trunk. These preparations over, he loaded a pistol, examined his poniard, then suspended it, by the aid of a ring, to the chain which served him for a belt, to which he attached besides a bunch of keys and a book of prayers bound in black leather.

While he was thus occupied, a step, light as that of a shadow, came up the staircase, and a woman, pale and phantom-like under the folds of her white veil, appeared at the door, and a voice, sad and sweet as the song of a bird in the wood, said: "Remy, are you ready?"

"Yes, madame, I only wait for your box."

"Do you think these boxes will go easily on our horses?"

"Oh! yes, madame, but if you have any fear, I can leave mine; I have

all I want there."

"No, no, Remy, take all that you want for the journey. Oh! Remy! I long to be with my father; I have sad presentiments, and it seems an age since I saw him."

"And yet, madame, it is but three months; not a longer interval than usual."

"Remy, you are such a good doctor, and you yourself told me, the last time we quitted him, that he had not long to live."

"Yes, doubtless; but it was only a dread, not a prediction. Sometimes death seems to forget old men, and they live on as though by the habit of living; and often, besides, an old man is like a child, ill to-day and well to-morrow."

"Alas! Remy, like the child also, he is often well to-day and dead to-morrow."

Remy did not reply, for he had nothing really reassuring to say, and silence succeeded for some minutes.

"At what hour have you ordered the horses?" said the lady, at last.

"At two o'clock."

"And one has just struck."

"Yes, madame."

"No one is watching outside?"

"No one."

"Not even that unhappy young man?"

"Not even he."

And Remy sighed.

"You say that in a strange manner, Remy."

"Because he also has made a resolution."

"What is it?"

"To see us no more; at least, not to try to see us any more."

"And where is he going?"

"Where we are all going--to rest."

"God give it him eternally," said the lady, in a cold voice, "and yet--"

"Yet what, madame?"

"Had he nothing to do here?"

"He had to love if he had been loved."

"A man of his name, rank, and age, should think of his future."

"You, madame, are of an age, rank, and name little inferior to his, and you do not look forward to a future."

"Yes, Remy, I do," cried she, with a sudden flashing of the eyes; "but listen! is that not the trot of a horse that I hear?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Can it be ours?"

"It is possible; but it is an hour too soon."

"It stops at the door, Remy."

Remy ran down and arrived just as three hurried blows were struck on the door.

"Who is there?" said he.

"I!" replied a trembling voice, "I, Grandchamp, the baron's valet."

"Ah! mon Dieu! Grandchamp, you at Paris! speak low! Whence do you come?"

"From Meridor. Alas, dear M. Remy!"

"Well," cried the lady from the top of the stairs, "are they our horses, Remy?"

"No, madame, it is not them. What is it, Grandchamp?"

"You do not guess?"

"Alas! I do; what will she do, poor lady."

"Remy," cried she again, "you are talking to some one?"

"Yes, madame."

"I thought I knew the voice."

"Indeed, madame."

She now descended, saying:

"Who is there? Grandchamp?"

"Yes, madame, it is I," replied the old man sadly, uncovering his white head.

"Grandchamp! you! oh! mon Dieu! my presentiments were right; my father is dead?"

"Indeed, madame, Meridor has no longer a master."

Pale, but motionless and firmly, the lady listened; Remy went to her and took her hand softly.

"How did he die; tell me, my friend?" said she.

"Madame, M. le Baron, who could no longer leave his armchair, was struck a week ago by an attack of apoplexy. He muttered your name for the last time, then ceased to speak, and soon was no more."

Diana went up again without another word. Her room was on the first story, and looked only into a courtyard. The furniture was somber, but rich, the hangings, in Arras tapestry, represented the death of our Saviour, a prie-Dieu and stool in carved oak, a bed with twisted columns, and tapestries like the walls, were the sole ornaments of the room. Not a flower, no gilding, but in a frame of black was contained a portrait of a man, before which the lady now knelt down, with dry eyes, but a sad heart. She fixed on this picture a long look of indescribable

love. It represented a young man about twenty-eight, lying half naked on a bed; from his wounded breast the blood still flowed, his right hand hung mutilated, and yet it still held a broken sword. His eyes were closed as though he were about to die, paleness and suffering gave to his face that divine character which the faces of mortals assume only at the moment of quitting life for eternity. Under the portrait, in letters red as blood, was written, "Aut Cæsar aut nihil." The lady extended her arm, and spoke as though it could hear her.

"I had begged thee to wait, although thy soul must have thirsted for vengeance; and as the dead see all, thou hast seen, my love, that I lived only not to kill my father, else I would have died after you; and then, you know, on your bleeding corpse I uttered a vow to give death for death, blood for blood, but I would not do it while the old man called me his innocent child. Thou hast waited, beloved, and now I am free: the last tie which bound me to earth is broken. I am all yours, and now I am free to come to you."

She rose on one knee, kissed the hand, and then went on: "I can weep no more--my tears have dried up in weeping over your tomb. In a few months I shall rejoin you, and you then will reply to me, dear shade, to whom I have spoken so often without reply." Diana then rose, and seating herself in her chair, muttered, "Poor father!" and then fell into a profound reverie. At last she called Remy.

The faithful servant soon appeared.

"Here I am, madame."

"My worthy friend, my brother--you, the last person who knows me on this earth--say adieu to me."

"Why so, madame?"

"Because the time has come for us to separate."

"Separate!" cried the young man. "What do you mean, madame?"

"Yes, Remy. My project of vengeance seemed to me noble and pure while there remained an obstacle between me and it, and I only contemplated it from afar off; but now that I approach the execution of it--now that the obstacle has disappeared--I do not draw back, but I do not wish to drag with me into crime a generous and pure soul like yours; therefore you must quit me, my friend."

Remy listened to the words of Diana with a somber look.

"Madame," replied he, "do you think you are speaking to a trembling old man? Madame, I am but twenty-six; and snatched as I was from the tomb, if I still live, it is for the accomplishment of some terrible action--to play an active part in the work of Providence. Never, then, separate your thoughts from mine, since we both have the same thoughts, sinister as they may be. Where you go, I will go; what you do I will aid in; or if, in spite of my prayers, you persist in dismissing me--"

"Oh!" murmured she, "dismiss you! What a word, Remy!"

"If you persist in that resolution," continued the young man, "I know what I have to do, and all for me will end with two blows from a poniard--one in the heart of him whom you know, and the other in your own."

"Remy! Remy!" cried Diana, "do not say that. The life of him you threaten does not belong to you--it is mine--I have paid for it dearly enough. I swear to you, Remy, that on the day on which I knelt beside the dead body of him"--and she pointed to the portrait--"on that day I approached my lips to that open wound, and the trembling lips seemed to say to me, 'Avenge me, Diana!--avenge me!'"

"Madame--"

"Therefore, I repeat, vengeance is for me, and not for you; besides, for whom and through whom did he die? By me and through me."

"I must obey you, madame, for I also was left for dead. Who carried me away from the middle of the corpses with which that room was filled?--You. Who cured me of my wounds?--You. Who concealed me?--You always. Order, then, and I will obey, provided that you do not order me to leave you."

"So be it, Remy; you are right; nothing ought to separate us more."

Remy pointed to the portrait.

"Now, madame," said he, "he was killed by treason--it is by treason that he must be revenged. Ah! you do not know one thing--the hand of God is with us, for to-night I have found the secret of the 'Aqua tofana,' that poison of the Medicis and of Rene the Florentine."

"Really?"

"Come and see, madame."

"But where is Grandchamp?"

"The poor old man has come sixty leagues on horseback; he is tired out, and has fallen asleep on my bed."

"Come, then," said Diana; and she followed Remy.