

Chapter 60

THE LABORATORY.

Remy led the lady into a neighboring room; and pushing a spring which was hidden under a board in the floor, and which, opening, disclosed a straight dark staircase, gave his hand to Diana to help her to descend. Twenty steps of this staircase, or rather ladder, led into a dark and circular cave, whose only furniture was a stove with an immense hearth, a square table, two rush chairs, and a quantity of phials and iron boxes. In the stove a dying fire still gleamed, while a thick black smoke escaped through a pipe fastened into the wall. From a still placed on the hearth a few drops of a liquid, yellow as gold, was dropping into a thick white phial. Diana looked round her without astonishment or terror; the ordinary feelings of life seemed to be unknown to her who lived only in the tomb. Remy lighted a lamp, and then approached a well hollowed out in the cave, attached a bucket to a long cord, let it down into the well, and then drew it up full of a water as cold as ice and as clear as crystal.

"Approach, madame," said he.

Diana drew near. In the bucket he let fall a single drop of the liquid contained in the phial, and the entire mass of the water became instantaneously yellow; then the color evaporated, and the water in ten minutes became as clear as before.

Remy looked at her.

"Well?" said she.

"Well, madame," said he, "now dip in that water, which has neither smell nor color, a glove or a handkerchief; soak it in scented soap, pour some of it into the basin where you are about to wash your hands or face, and you will see, as was seen at the court of Charles IX., the flower kill by its perfume, the glove poison by its contact, the soap kill by its introduction into the pores of the skin. Pour a single drop of this pure oil on the wick of a lamp or candle, and for an hour the candle or lamp will exhale death, and burn at the same time like any other."

"You are sure of what you say, Remy?"

"All this I have tried. See these birds who can now neither drink nor eat; they have drunk of water like this. See this goat who has browsed on grass watered with this same water; he moves and totters; vainly now should we restore him to life and liberty; his life is forfeited, unless, indeed, nature should reveal to his instinct some of those antidotes to poison which animals know, although men do not."--"Can I see this phial, Remy?"

"Yes, madame, presently."

Remy then separated it from the still with infinite care, then corked it

with soft wax, tied the top up in cloth, and then presented it to Diana.

She took it, held it up to the light, and, after looking at it, said:

"It will do; when the time arrives we will choose gloves, lamp, soap, or flowers, as convenient. Will the liquor keep in metal?"--"It eats it away."

"But then, perhaps, the bottle will break?"

"I think not--see the thickness of the crystal; besides, we can shut it up in a covering of gold."

"Listen, Remy! I hear horses; I think ours have arrived."

"Probably, madame, it is about the time; but I will go and send them away."

"Why so?"

"Are they not useless?"

"Instead of going to Meridor, we will go into Flanders. Keep the horses."

"Ah! I understand!" and Remy's eyes gave forth a flash of sinister joy.

"But Grandchamp; what can we do with him?" said he.

"He has need of repose. He shall remain here, and sell this house, which we require no longer. But restore to liberty that unhappy animal, whom you were forced to torture. As you say, God may care for its recovery."

"This furnace, and these stills?"

"Leave them here."

"But these powders, essences, and acids?"

"Throw them in the fire, Remy."

"Go away, then, or put on this glass mask."

Then, taking similar precautions for himself, he blew up the fire again, poured in the powder, which went off in brilliant sparks, some green and some yellow; and the essences, which, instead of being consumed, mounted like serpents of fire into the pipe, with a noise like distant thunder.

"Now," said Remy, "if any one now discovers this cave, he will only think that an alchemist has been here, and though they still burn sorcerers, they respect alchemists."

"And besides," said the lady, "if they do burn us, provided I have only finished my task, I should not mind that sort of death more than any

other."

At this moment they heard knocking.

"Here are our horses, madame," said Remy; "go up quickly, and I will close the trap-door."

Diana obeyed, and found Grandchamp, whom the noise had awakened, at the door.

The old man was not a little surprised to hear of his mistress's intended departure, who informed him of it without telling him where she was going.

"Grandchamp, my friend," said she, "Remy and I are going to accomplish a pilgrimage on which we have long determined; speak of this journey to none, and do not mention my name to any one."

"Oh! I promise you, madame," replied the old servant; "but we shall see you again?"

"Doubtless, Grandchamp; if not in this world, in the next. But, apropos, Grandchamp, this house is now useless to us."

Diana drew from a drawer a bundle of papers.

"Here are the title-deeds; let or sell this house; but if, in the course of a month, you do not find a purchaser, abandon it and return to Meridor."

"But if I find some one, how much am I to ask?"

"What you please, Grandchamp."

"Shall I take the money to Meridor?"

"Keep it for yourself, my good Grandchamp."

"What, madame, such a sum?"

"Yes, I owe it to you for your services; and I have my father's debts to pay as well as my own. Now, adieu!"

Then Diana went upstairs, cut the picture from the frame, rolled it up, and placed it in her trunk.

When Remy had tied the two trunks with leather thongs, and had glanced into the street to see that there were no lookers-on, he aided his mistress to mount.

"I believe, madame," said he, "that this is the last house in which we shall live so long."

"The last but one, Remy."

"And what will be the other?"

"The tomb, Remy."

Chapter 61

WHAT MONSEIGNEUR FRANCOIS, DUC D'ANJOU, DUC DE BRABANT AND
COMTE DE
FLANDERS, WAS DOING IN FLANDERS.

Our readers must now permit us to leave the king at the Louvre, Henri of Navarre at Cahors, Chicot on the road, and Diana in the street, to go to Flanders to find M. le Duc d'Anjou, recently named Duc de Brabant, and to whose aid we have sent the great admiral of France--Anne, duc de Joyeuse.

At eighty leagues from Paris, toward the north, the sound of French voices was heard, and the French banner floated over a French camp on the banks of the Scheldt. It was night; the fires, disposed in an immense circle, bordered the stream, and were reflected in its deep waters.