

Chapter 67

EXPLANATION.

The danger that Remy braved was a real one, for the traveler, after having passed the village and gone on for a quarter of a league, and seeing no one before him, made up his mind that those whom he sought had remained behind in the village. He would not retrace his steps, but lay down in a field of clover; having made his horse descend into one of those deep ditches which in Flanders serve as divisions between the properties, he was therefore able to see without being seen. This young man, as Remy knew, and Diana suspected, was Henri du Bouchage, whom a strange fatality threw once more into the presence of the woman he had determined to fly. After his conversation with Remy, on the threshold of the mysterious house, that is to say, after the loss of all his hopes, he had returned to the Hotel Joyeuse, quite decided to put an end to a life which he felt to be so miserable, and as a gentleman, and one who had his name to keep untarnished, he decided on the glorious suicide of the field of battle.

Therefore, as they were fighting in Flanders, and his brother had a command there, Henri, on the following day, left his hotel twenty hours after the departure of Diana and Remy.

Letters from Flanders announced the intended coup de main on Antwerp,

and Henri hoped to arrive in time for it. He pleased himself with the idea that he should die sword in hand, in his brother's arms, under a French flag, and that his death would be talked about until the sound even reached the solitude in which the mysterious lady lived. Noble follies! glorious, yet sad dreams!

Just as--full of these thoughts--he came in sight of Valenciennes, from whose church tower eight o'clock was sounding, he perceived that they were about to close the gates. He pushed on, and nearly overturned, on the drawbridge, a man who was fastening the girths of his horse. Henri stopped to make excuses to the man, who turned at the sound of his voice, and then quickly turned away again. Henri started, but immediately thought, "I must be mad; Remy here, whom I left four days ago in the Rue de Bussy; here now, without his mistress. Really, grief must be turning my brain and making me see everything in the form of my own fancies." And he continued his way, convinced that his idea had been pure fancy. At the first hotel that he came to he stopped, gave his horse to a servant, and sat down on a bench before the door, while they prepared his bed and supper. But as he sat there he saw two travelers approaching, and this time he saw more clearly.

"Now," murmured he, "I do not dream, and still I think I see Remy. I cannot remain in this uncertainty; I must clear up my doubts."

He got up and ran down the road after them, but they had disappeared. Then he went to all the hotels and questioned the servants, and after much search discovered that two cavaliers had been seen going toward a

small inn in the Rue de Beffroi. The landlord was just shutting the doors when Henri entered. While the man offered him rooms and refreshment, he looked round, and saw on the top of the staircase Remy going up, lighted by a servant; of his companion he saw nothing. Du Bouchage had no longer any doubts, and he asked himself, with a dreadful sinking of the heart, why Remy had left his mistress and was traveling without her; for Henri had been so occupied in identifying Remy, that he had scarcely looked at his companion. The next morning when he rose, he was much surprised to learn that the two travelers had obtained from the governor permission to go out; and that, contrary to all custom, the gates had been opened for them. Thus, as they had set out at one o'clock, they had six hours' start of him. Henri put his horse to the gallop and passed the travelers at Mons. He saw Remy; but Remy must have been a sorcerer to know him, for he had on a soldier's great coat and rode another horse. Nevertheless, Remy's companion, at a word from him, turned away his head before Henri could see his face. But the young man did not lose courage; he watched them to their hotel, and then questioning, with the aid of an irresistible auxiliary, learned that Remy's companion was a very handsome, but very silent and sad looking young man. Henri trembled. "Can it be a woman?" asked he.

"It is possible," replied the host: "many women travel thus disguised just now, to go and rejoin their lovers in Flanders; but it is our business to see nothing, and we never do."

Henri felt heart-broken at this explanation. Was Remy, indeed, accompanying his mistress dressed as a cavalier; and was she, as the

host suggested, going to rejoin her lover in Flanders? Had Remy lied when he spoke of an eternal regret? was this fable of a past love, which had clothed his mistress forever in mourning, only his invention to get rid of an importunate watcher?

"If it be so," cried Henri, "the time will come when I shall have courage to address this woman and reproach her with all the subterfuges which lower her whom I had placed so high above all ordinary mortals; and seeing nearer this brilliant envelope of a common mind, perhaps I shall fall of myself from the height of my illusions and my love."

And the young man tore his hair in despair at the thought of losing the love which was killing him; for a dead heart is better than an empty one. So he continued to follow them, and to wonder at the cause which took to Flanders, at the same time as himself, these two beings so indispensable to his existence.

At Brussels he gathered information as to the Duc d'Anjou's intended campaign. The Flemings were too hostile to the duke to receive well a Frenchman of distinction, and were too proud of their position to refrain from humiliating a little this gentleman who came from France and questioned them in a pure Parisian accent, which always seemed ridiculous to the Belgians. Henri began to conceive serious fears with reference to this expedition, in which his brother was to bear so prominent a part, and he resolved in consequence to push on rapidly to Antwerp. It was a constant surprise to him to see Remy and his companion, in spite of their desire not to be seen, continue to follow

the same road as himself.

Henri, now hidden in the clover field, felt certain of seeing the face of the young man who accompanied Remy, and thus putting an end to all his doubts. As they passed, unsuspecting of his vicinity, Diana was occupied in braiding up her hair, which she had not dared to untie at the inn.

Henri recognized her, and nearly fainted. The travelers passed on, and then anger took, in Henri's mind, the place of the goodness and patience he had exercised, while he believed Remy and the lady sincere toward him. But after the protestations of Remy, this journey seemed to him a species of treason.

When he had recovered a little from the blow, he rose, shook back his beautiful light hair, and mounted his horse, determined no longer to take those precautions that respect had made him hitherto observe, and he began to follow the travelers openly, and with his face uncovered. No more cloak nor hood, no more stops and hesitation; the road belonged to him as to them, and he rode on, regulating the pace of his horse by that of theirs. He did not mean to speak to them, but only to let them see him. Remy soon perceived him, and, seeing him thus openly advance without any further attempt at concealment, grew troubled; Diana noticed it and turned also.

"Is it not that young man following us?"

Remy, still trying to reassure her, said, "I do not think so, madame. As well as I can judge by the dress, it is some young Walloon soldier going probably to Amsterdam, and passing by the theater of war to seek adventures."

"I feel uneasy about him, Remy."

"Reassure yourself, madame, had he been really the Comte du Bouchage, he would have spoken to us; you know how persevering he was."

"I know also that he was respectful, Remy, or I should never have troubled myself about him, but simply told you to get rid of him."

"Well, madame, if he be so respectful, you would have no more to fear from him on this road than in the Rue de Bussy."

"Nevertheless, Remy, let us change our horses here at Mechlin, in order to get on faster to Antwerp."

"On the contrary, madame, I should say, do not let us enter Mechlin at all; our horses are good, let us push on to that little village which is, I think, called Villebrock; in that manner we shall avoid the town, with its questioners and curious gazers."

"Go on, then, Remy."

They turned to the left, taking a road hardly made, but which visibly

led to Villebrock; Henri also quitted the road, and turned down the lane, still keeping his distance from them.

Remy's disquietude showed itself in his constantly turning to look behind him. At last they arrived at Villebrock. Of 200 houses which this village contained, not one was inhabited; some forgotten dogs and lost cats ran wildly about the solitude, the former calling for their masters by long howls. Remy knocked at twenty doors, but found no one. Henri on his side, who seemed the shadow of the travelers, knocked at the first house as uselessly as they had done, then, divining that the war was the cause of this desertion, waited to continue his journey until the travelers should have decided what to do.

They fed their horses with some corn which they found in an inn, and then Remy said--

"Madame, we are no longer in a friendly country, nor in an ordinary situation; we must not expose ourselves uselessly. We shall certainly fall in with some French, Spanish, or Flemish band, for in the present state of Flanders, adventures of all kinds must be rife. If you were a man I should speak differently; but you are a young and beautiful woman, and would run a double risk for life and honor."

"My life is nothing," said she.

"On the contrary, madame, it is everything. You live for a purpose."

"Well, then, what do you propose? Think and act for me, Remy."

"Then, madame, let us remain here. I see many houses which would afford us a sure shelter. I have arms, and we will defend or hide ourselves, as we shall be strong or weak."

"No, Remy, no, I must go on; nothing must stop me; and if I had fears, they would be for you."

"We will go on then."

They rode on, therefore, without another word, and Henri du Bouchage followed.