

Chapter 70

TRANSFIGURATION.

After her prayer Diana rose so beautiful and radiant that the comte uttered a cry of surprise and admiration. She appeared to be waking out of a long sleep, of which the dreams had fatigued her and weighed upon her mind; or rather, she was like the daughter of Jairus, called from death and rising from her funeral couch, already purified and ready for heaven. Awakening from her lethargy, she cast around her a glance so sweet and gentle, that Henri began to believe he should see her feel for his pain, and yield to a sentiment of gratitude and pity. While the gendarmes, after their frugal repast, slept about among the ruins, while Remy himself yielded to it, Henri came and sat down close to Diana, and in a voice so low and sweet that it seemed a murmur of the breeze, said:

"Madame, you live. Oh! let me tell you all the joy which overflows my heart when I see you here in safety, after having seen you on the threshold of the tomb."

"It is true, monsieur," replied she; "I live through you, and I wish I could say I was grateful."

"But, madame," replied Henri, with an immense effort, "if it is only that you are restored to those you love?"

"What do you mean?"

"To those you are going to rejoin through so many perils."

"Monsieur, those I loved are dead! those I am going to rejoin are so also."

"Oh, madame!" cried Henri, falling on his knees, "throw your eyes on me--on me, who have suffered so much and loved so much. Oh, do not turn away; you are young, and beautiful as the angels in heaven; read my heart, which I open to you, and you will see that it contains not an atom of that love that most men feel. You do not believe me? Examine the past hours; which of them has given me joy, or even hope? yet I have persevered. You made me weep; I devoured my tears. You made me suffer; I hid my sufferings. You drove me to seek death, and I went to meet it without a complaint. Even at this moment, when you turn away your head, when each of my words, burning as they are, seems a drop of iced water falling on your heart, my soul is full of you, and I live only because you live. Just now, was I not ready to die with you? What have I asked for? Nothing. Have I touched your hand? Never, but to draw you from a mortal peril. I held you in my arms to draw you from the waves--nothing more. All in me has been purified by the devouring fire of my love."

"Oh, monsieur! for pity's sake do not speak thus to me."

"Oh, in pity do not condemn me. He told me you loved no one; oh! repeat to me this assurance; it is a singular favor for a man in love to ask to

be told that he is not loved, but I prefer to know that you are insensible to all. Oh, madame, you who are the only adoration of my life, reply to me."

In spite of Henri's prayers, a sigh was the only answer.

"You say nothing," continued the comte; "Remy at least had more pity for me, for he tried to console him. Oh! I see you will not reply, because you do not wish to tell me that you came to Flanders to rejoin some one happier than I, and yet I am young, and am ready to die at your feet."

"M. le Comte," replied Diana, with majestic solemnity, "do not say to me things fit only to be said to a woman; I belong to another world, and do not live for this. Had I seen you less noble--less good--less generous, had I not for you in the bottom of my heart the tender feeling of a sister for a brother, I should say, 'Rise, comte, and do not importune with love my ears, which hold it in horror.' But I do not say so, comte, because I suffer in seeing you suffer. I say more; now that I know you, I will take your hand and place it on my heart, and I will say to you willingly, 'See, my heart beats no more; live near me, if you like, and assist day by day, if such be your pleasure, at this painful execution of a body which is being killed by the tortures of the soul;' but this sacrifice, which you may accept as happiness--"

"Oh, yes!" cried Henri, eagerly.

"Well, this sacrifice I ought to forbid. This very day a change has

taken place in my life; I have no longer the right to lean on any human arm--not even on the arm of that generous friend, that noble creature, who lies there, and for a time finds the happiness of forgetfulness.

Alas! poor Remy," continued she, with the first change of tone that Henri remarked in her voice, "your waking will also be sad; you do not know the progress of my thought; you cannot read in my eyes that you will soon be alone, and that alone I must go to God."

"What do you mean, madame? do you also wish to die?"

Remy, awakened by the cry of the young count, began to listen.

"You saw me pray, did you not?" said Diana.

"Yes," answered Henri.

"This prayer was my adieu to earth; the joy that you remarked on my face--the joy that fills me even now, is the same you would see in me if the angel of death were to come and say to me, 'Rise, Diana, and follow me.'"

"Diana! Diana! now I know your name; Diana, cherished name!" murmured the young man.

"Oh, silence!" cried she, "forget this name which escaped me; no living person has the right to pierce my heart by pronouncing it."

"Oh! madame, do not tell me you are going to die."

"I do not say that," replied she in her grave voice; "I say that I am about to quit this world of tears--of hatreds--of bad passions--of vile interests and desires. I say that I have nothing left to do among the creatures whom God created my fellow mortals; I have no more tears, no more blood in my heart; no more thoughts--they are dead. I am a worthless offering, for in renouncing the world I sacrifice nothing, neither desires nor hopes; but such as I am I offer myself to my God, and he will accept me--he who has made me suffer so much, and yet kept me from sinking under it."

Remy, who had heard this, rose slowly, and said, "You abandon me?"

"For God," said Diana, raising her thin white hand to heaven.

"It is true," said Remy, sadly; and seizing her hand he pressed it to his breast.

"Oh! what am I by these two hearts?" said Henri.

"You are," replied Diana, "the only human creature, except Remy, on whom I have looked twice for years."

Henri knelt. "Thanks, madame," said he, "I bow to my destiny. You belong to God; I cannot be jealous."

As he rose, they heard the sound of trumpets on the plain, from which the water was rapidly disappearing. The gendarmes seized their arms and were on horseback at once.

Henri listened. "Gentlemen," cried he, "those are the admiral's trumpets; I know them. Oh, God! may they announce my brother!"

"You see that you still wish something, and still love something; why, then, should you choose despair, like those who desire nothing--like those who love no one?"

"A horse!" cried Henri; "who will lend me a horse?"

"But the water is still all around us," said the ensign.

"But you see that the plain is practicable; they must be advancing, since we hear their trumpets."

"Mount to the top of the bank, M. le Comte, the sky is clear, perhaps you will see."

Henri climbed up; the trumpets continued to sound at intervals, but were seemingly stationary.

