

Chapter 75

HOW AURILLY EXECUTED THE COMMISSION OF THE DUC D'ANJOU.

To the confusion occasioned by the departure of the troops a profound silence succeeded. When Remy believed the house to be empty, he went down to prepare for his departure and that of Diana; but on opening the door of the room below, he was much surprised to see a man sitting by the fire, evidently watching him, although he pretended to look careless. Remy approached, according to his custom, with a slow, halting step, and uncovering his head, bald like that of an old man. He could not, however, see the features of the man by the fire.

"Pardon, monsieur," said he, "I thought myself alone here."

"I also thought so," replied the man, "but I see with pleasure that I shall have companions."

"Oh! very sad companions, monsieur; for except an invalid young man whom

I am taking back to France--"

"Ah!" said Aurilly, "I know whom you mean."

"Really."

"Yes; you mean the young lady."

"What young lady?"

"Oh! do not be angry, my good friend; I am the steward of the house of Joyeuse, and I rejoined my young master by his brother's order, and at his departure the comte recommended to my good offices a young lady and an old servant, who were returning to France."

As he thus spoke, he approached Remy with a smiling and affectionate look. But Remy stepped back, and a look of horror was painted for an instant on his face.

"You do not reply; one would say you were afraid of me," said Aurilly, with his most smiling face.

"Monsieur," replied Remy, "pardon a poor old man, whom his misfortunes and his wounds have rendered timid and suspicious."

"All the more reason, my friend, for accepting the help and support of an honest companion; besides, as I told you just now, I speak on the part of a master who must inspire you with confidence."

"Assuredly, monsieur," replied Remy, who, however, still moved back.

"You quit me," said Aurilly.

"I must consult my mistress; I can decide nothing, you understand."

"Oh! that is natural; but permit me to present myself. I will explain my directions in all their details."

"No, no, thank you: madame is perhaps asleep, and her sleep is sacred to me."

"As you wish. Besides, I have told you what my master told me to say."

"To me?"

"To you and the young lady."

"Your master, M. le Comte du Bouchage, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Thank you, monsieur."

When he had shut the door, all the appearances of age vanished, except the bald head, and Remy mounted the staircase with an agility more like a young man of twenty-five, than the old man he had appeared to be a few minutes before.

"Madame! madame!" cried he, in an agitated voice.

"Well, what is it, Remy; is not the duke gone?"

"Yes, madame, but there is a worse demon here; a demon on whom, during six years, I have daily called down Heaven's vengeance, as you have on his master."

"Aurilly?"

"Yes, Aurilly; the wretch is below, forgotten by his infernal accomplice."

"Forgotten, do you say, Remy? Oh! you are wrong; you, who know the duke, know that he never leaves to chance any evil deed, if he can do it himself. No, no, Remy; Aurilly is not forgotten, but left here for some bad design, believe me!"

"Oh! about him, madame, I can believe anything."

"Does he know me?"

"I do not think so."

"And did he recognize you?"

"Oh! madame," said Remy, with a sad smile, "no one recognizes me."

"Perhaps he guesses who I am?"

"No, for he asked to see you."

"I am sure he must have suspicions."

"In that case nothing is more easy, and I thank God for pointing out our path so plainly. The village is deserted, the wretch is alone. I saw a poniard in his belt, but I have a knife in mine."

"One moment, Remy; I do not ask the life of that wretch of you, but before you kill him, let us find out what he wants of us; perhaps we may make his evil intentions useful. How did he represent himself to you, Remy?"

"As the steward of M. du Bouchage, madame."

"You see he lies; therefore, he has some reason for lying. Let us find out his intentions, and conceal our own."

"I will act as you wish, madame."

"What does he ask now?"

"To accompany us."

"In what character?"

"As the count's steward."

"Tell him I accept."

"Oh! madame."

"Add that I am thinking of going to England, where I have relations, but have not quite decided; lie like him, Remy; to conquer we must fight with equal arms."

"But he will see you?"

"I will wear my mask. Besides, I suspect he knows me."

"Then, if he knows you, there must be a snare."

"Let us pretend to fall into it."

"But--"

"What do you fear, we can but die? Are you not ready to die for the accomplishment of our vow?"

"Yes, but not to die without vengeance."

"Remy," cried Diana, her eyes sparkling with wild excitement, "be easy, we will be revenged; you on the servant, and I on the master."

"Well, madame, then, so be it."

And Remy went down, but still hesitating.

The brave young man had, at the sight of Aurilly, felt, in spite of himself, that nervous shudder that one feels at the sight of a reptile; he wished to kill him because he feared him. But as he went down, his resolution returned, and he determined, in spite of Diana's opinion, to interrogate Aurilly--to confound him, and if he discovered that he had any evil intentions, to kill him on the spot.

Aurilly waited for him impatiently. Remy advanced armed with an unshakable resolution, but his words were quiet and calm.

"Monsieur," said he, "my mistress cannot accept your proposal."

"And why not?"

"Because you are not the steward of M. du Bouchage."

Aurilly grew pale. "Who told you so?" said he.

"No one; but M. du Bouchage, when he left, recommended to my care the person whom I accompany, and never spoke of you."

"He only saw me after he left you."

"Falsehoods, monsieur; falsehoods."

Aurilly drew himself up--Remy looked like an old man.

"You speak in a singular tone, my good man," said he, frowning; "take care, you are old, and I am young; you are feeble, and I am strong."

Remy smiled, but did not reply.

"If I wished ill to you or your mistress," continued Aurilly. "I have but to raise my hand."

"Oh!" said Remy, "perhaps I was wrong, and you wish to do her good."

"Certainly I do."

"Explain to me then what you desire."

"My friend, I will make your fortune at once, if you will serve me."

"And if not?"

"In that case, as you speak frankly, I will reply as frankly, that I will kill you; I have full power to do so."

"Kill me!" said Remy. "But if I am to serve you, I must know your

projects."

"Well, you have guessed rightly, my good man; I do not belong to the Comte du Bouchage."

"Ah! and to whom do you belong?"

"To a more powerful lord."

"Take care; you are lying again."

"Why so?"

"There are not many people above the house of Joyeuse."

"Not that of France?"

"Oh! oh!"

"And see how they pay." said Aurilly, sliding into Remy's hand one of the rouleaux of gold.

Remy shuddered and took a step back, but controlling himself, said:

"You serve the king?"

"No, but his brother, the Duc d'Anjou."

"Oh! very well! I am the duke's most humble servant."

"That is excellent."

"But what does monseigneur want?"

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, trying again to slip the gold into Remy's hand, "is in love with your mistress."

"He knows her, then?"

"He has seen her."

"Seen her! when?"

"This evening."

"Impossible; she has not left her room."

"No, but the prince, by his conduct, has shown that he is really in love."

"Why, what did he do?"

"Took a ladder and climbed to the balcony."--"Ah! he did that?"

"Yes, and it seems she is very beautiful."

"Then you have not seen her?"

"No; but from what he said I much wish to do so, if only to judge of the exaggeration of his love. Thus, then, it is agreed; you will aid me?"
and he again offered him the gold.

"Certainly I will, but I must know what part I am to play," said Remy, repulsing his hand.

"First tell me is the lady the mistress of M. du Bouchage, or of his brother?"

The blood mounted to Remy's face.

"Of neither," said he: "the lady upstairs has no lover."

"No lover! But then she is a wonder; morbleu! a woman who has no lover! we have found the philosopher's stone."

"Then," said Remy, "what does M. le Duc d'Anjou want my mistress to do?"

"He wants her to come to Chateau-Thierry, where he is going at his utmost speed."

"This is, upon my word, a passion very quickly conceived."

"That is like monseigneur."

"I only see one difficulty," said Remy.

"What is that?"

"That my mistress is about to embark for England."

"Diable! this, then, is where you must try to aid me."--"How?"

"By persuading her to go in an opposite direction."

"You do not know my mistress, monsieur; she is not easily persuaded. Besides, even if she were persuaded to go to Chateau-Thierry instead of England, do you think she would yield to the prince?"

"Why not?"

"She does not love the duke."

"Bah! not love a prince of the blood."

"But if Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou suspects my mistress of loving M. du Bouchage, or M. de Joyeuse, how did he come to think of carrying her off from him she loved?"

"My good man," said Aurilly, "you have trivial ideas, and I fear we shall never understand each other; I have preferred kindness to violence, but if you force me to change my plans, well! I will change them."

"What will you do?"

"I told you I had full powers from the duke to kill you and carry off the lady."

"And you believe you could do it with impunity?"

"I believe all my master tells me to believe. Come, will you persuade your mistress to come to France?"

"I will try, but I can answer for nothing."

"And when shall I have the answer?"

"I will go up at once and see what I can do."

"Well, go up; I will wait. But one last word; you know that your fortune and life hang on your answer."

"I know it."

"That will do; I will go and get the horses ready."

"Do not be in too great a hurry."

"Bah! I am sure of the answer; no one is cruel to a prince."

"I fancied that happened sometimes."

"Yes, but very rarely."

While Remy went up, Aurilly proceeded to the stables without feeling any doubt as to the result.

"Well!" said Diana, on seeing Remy.

"Well, madame, the duke has seen you."

"And--"

"And he says he loves you."

"Loves me! but you are mad, Remy."

"No; I tell you that he--that man--that wretch, Aurilly, told me so."

"But, then, he recognized me?"

"If he had, do you think that Aurilly would have dared to present

himself and talk to you of love in the prince's name? No, he did not recognize you."

"Yes, you must be right, Remy. So many things have passed during six years through that infernal brain, that he has forgotten me. Let us follow this man."

"But this man will recognize you."

"Why should his memory be better than his master's?"

"Oh! it is his business to remember, while it is the duke's to forget. How could he live if he did not forget? But Aurilly will not have forgotten; he will recognize you, and will denounce you as an avenging shade."

"Remy, I thought I told you I had a mask, and that you told me you had a knife."

"It is true, madame; and I begin to think that God is assisting us to punish the wicked." Then, calling Aurilly from the top of the staircase, "Monsieur," said he.

"Well!" replied Aurilly.

"My mistress thanks M. du Bouchage for having provided thus for her safety, and accepts with gratitude your obliging offer."

"It is well," said Aurilly, "the horses are ready."

"Come, madame, come," said Remy, offering his arm to Diana.

Aurilly waited at the bottom of the staircase, lantern in hand, all anxiety to see the lady.

"Diable!" murmured he, "she has a mask. But between this and Chateau-Thierry the silk cords will be worn out or cut."