

certain imperious tones of his voice and certain contractions of his brow, indications which from time to time escaped him, that the tiger, though he concealed his claws, remained none the less a terrible wild beast with all its sanguinary and ferocious instincts intact.

Whether it was that Marie did not suspect the wicked passions of her interlocutor, or that, knowing them, she felt beyond reach of their influence, nothing in her manner betrayed either circumspection or restraint.

"Marquis," she said, "I have learned from a trustworthy source the hatred you bear towards the Chevalier Sforzi; now I declare to you frankly that I take an extraordinary interest in that young gentleman. To persist in your projects of vengeance against him will be to declare war against me! Do you wish to have me for your enemy?"

"Princess," replied the marquis, with a feigned but constrained smile, "Monsieur Sforzi is very fortunate!"

"Monsieur de la Tremblais," interrupted Marie, impetuously, "I care nothing for what you may be pleased to think; I only desire to have from you a positive promise not to make any attempt against the person of the chevalier. Do not suppose by this that I suspect his courage—quite the contrary. Monsieur Sforzi's sword is one of those valiant blades which, in accordance with the Spanish axiom, never leave their scabbards without cause, and never return to them without honour. What I fear for Monsieur Sforzi is not a deadly and implacable struggle, but treachery. Will you promise me, marquis, not to attack the chevalier, except with equal force, and in the open light of day? Give me that promise, and I leave you with full liberty of action."

"Princess," replied the marquis, "if Monsieur Sforzi had been my equal, if noble blood had run in his veins, I should not have waited for the permission your highness deigns to give me, before avenging the wrongs I charge him with. Unfortunately, madame, he is not so. Monsieur Sforzi—I crave your pardon for having to express myself so rudely concerning your protégé—is nothing but an adventurer, whom I defy even to give the name of his father. You can therefore, madame, understand that to treat Monsieur Sforzi as an equal would for ever degrade me."

The marquis paused for a moment or two, as if undecided, but then continued:

"There are things, princess, which a heart, rightly placed, shrinks from saying; and it is with profound sadness, and only because you compel me to do it, I now recall to your remembrance the fact that I represent for your party an entire province of the kingdom, the province of Auvergne. I belong, body and soul, to messieurs your illustrious brothers; nobody more than myself recognizes the legitimacy of their pretensions; I recognize, also, that your mind, your heart, your courage, are those of a man. Do not sacrifice to a vulgar sentiment the grave interests confided to you."

During the delivery of this address, Marie had exhibited unequivocal signs of impatience. She had refrained from interrupting the marquis's flow of eloquence, however. It was in a sharp tone she replied:

"Monsieur de la Tremblais, your discourse, in spite of the oratorical precautions with which you have surrounded it, is of rare impertinence! It simply signifies that a wild and shameful love is unsettling my reason, and making me forgetful of my dignity. I will not condescend to defend myself against your insolent aspersions, but confine myself to the expression of my will and my intentions. You are free to disregard them both. Only, I repeat, if any misfortune reaches Monsieur Sforzi, I will avenge him! We are not here in Auvergne, but in Paris! At a sign from me, ten thousand of the best swords in the capital will flash in the sunlight or glitter in the shade! Between you and me, marquis, the struggle is not equal. Do not expose yourself to my anger!"

Marie had spoken with a frankness and determination not to be misunderstood; the marquis smiled with the most amiable air, and replied, in the gentlest tone he could assume:

"Princess, all France knows your answer to her majesty the queen, who accused you of conspiring against the royal authority: 'Madame, I am like those brave soldiers whose hearts are swollen with their victories.' Allow me, therefore, princess, to attribute the fire of your language rather to the richness of your blood than to any unmerited contempt of my person. If it were otherwise, I should be obliged—in deference to take up the gauntlet you have thrown before me, and sever myself from your party. I regret that the respect I owe to your high position prevents my saying more."

"Let no such consideration weigh with you, then," cried Marie. "In this house I am only Marie. Say plainly whatever you have to say."

"Well, then, madame," replied the marquis, while a perfidious smile gave a sardonic expression to his countenance, "I must tell you that the Chevalier Sforzi, that model of constancy and of all human perfection, is playing unworthily with your love."

"What more? Pray continue."

"Alas! the chevalier's heart—that receptacle of all the virtues—has never been beaten for you, madame; but has long been entirely devoted to a rival—to a Demoiselle Diane d'Erlanges."

"Anything else, monsieur?" demanded Marie, coldly.

"It appears to me, madame, that what I have already told you is of sufficient importance."

"You think so, monsieur? To me, all that you have said is perfectly indifferent."

"What, madame!—to affect for you a passion which he feels for another!"

"Monsieur Sforzi has never professed to love me," interrupted Marie. "On the contrary, he frankly avowed to me that he adored a noble demoiselle of the province of Auvergne, and named her to me, as you have done, Diane d'Erlanges. More than that, I am well aware that this young lady arrived a few days ago in Paris."

This reply produced a prodigious and inexpressible effect on the marquis. The veins on his forehead swelled—a strange phenomenon also produced in the Chevalier Sforzi—his eyes flashed with fury; while the muscles of his face, contracted beyond measure, gave to it an expression of implacable evil-mindedness.

"What, Marquis!" cried Marie, "do you feel for the Demoiselle d'Erlanges the same sentiment you but a moment ago blamed me for feeling in regard to the Chevalier Sforzi? Come, marquis, frankness for frankness; confession for confession. It will be for our mutual interest to unite ourselves in our misfortune. Renounce your designs against the person of Monsieur Sforzi, and I will give up Diane d'Erlanges to you."

"I love her with a wild, consuming passion," cried the marquis, hoarsely—"a passion that resembles hatred, and that almost terrifies me! She shall be mine, though it cost me my head to gain her! Let us make a pact, then, madame."

"For the moment, then," cried Marie, "let it be no longer a question of Monsieur Sforzi, but of Diane d'Erlanges. The immense interests confided to my care leave me but little leisure. Will you undertake the discovery of this noble and seductive demoiselle? If you need able and intelligent agents, at a word from me the most crafty and experienced adventurers in Paris will blindly obey your orders. As to the expense, marquis, do not shrink from it, whatever it may be; the loss of my entire fortune would not deter me."

"Princess," cried De la Tremblais, "I have the honour to resemble your highness in this: that what I will—I will."

While the marquis and Marie were forming their plan of future operations, De Maurevert, with light heart and smiling features, was making his way in triumph through the streets of Paris.

"It is quite astonishing," he said to himself, "how buoyant the weight of a well-filled purse in my pocket makes me feel. I could almost fancy that if I found myself loaded with a thousand livres in gold I should absolutely fly. And this mantle so richly ornamented—I will wager it cost at least three thousand crowns. The devil's in it if I do not manage to sell it for two-thirds of its value! Now, two thousand crowns placed out at ten per cent. would bring me in two hundred crowns a year. Nothing is so good for soldiers as to have fixed incomes. It gives them a stamp of regularity and order, and has the best effect on mothers of families, enabling us sometimes to contract an advantageous marriage. Love of gaming and good cheer has, hitherto, always been my ruin. Upon consideration, I will certainly invest the proceeds of this mantle."

Discoursing in this fashion to himself, De Maurevert was walking at a brisk pace, when suddenly he uttered an exclamation of pleasure and surprise, and rushing towards a man who was passing along near him, by the house walls, seized him round the body and embraced him lustily.

"By entire Olympus!" he cried. "I am in luck to-day! Friend Lehardy, for three days, in obedience to the voice of my conscience, I have been seeking you in every nook and corner of Paris! Friend Lehardy, I feel a real affection for you; but, may the devil fly away with me, if you refuse to conduct me to your mistress, Mademoiselle d'Erlanges, if I will not incontinently wring your neck!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

UNSUCCESSFUL DIPLOMACY.

It was not without great difficulty that Lehardy could release himself from the captain's powerful embrace, and was well nigh stifled when he at length succeeded in getting free.

"Dear friend!" cried De Maurevert, "the joy he experiences in meeting me is so great as to take away from him the use of speech! The fact is, my good Lehardy, your mistress has no idea of the excellent news I have to give her! By Cupid!—I must take care how I communicate it, or the excess of her delight may have the effect of turning her brain. Now, go on before me, and do not forget, my well-beloved Lehardy, that if you make the least attempt to escape from me I will massacre you on the spot."

"Monsieur De Maurevert," responded the servant, "two days ago I would rather have allowed myself to be killed than obey you; but my mistress is now in such a pitiable state of body and mind, I have so vainly tried all other means to ease her sufferings, that I accept your offer without hesitation. What is the excellent news you have to give her, captain?"

"Do not be uneasy, Lehardy, and leave me to manage matters in my own way. I also have known in all their severity the pains of love. My torments have always been brief, I admit, but extremely violent. I remember once, among others, having been obliged to drink forty bottles of wine in twenty-four hours, before being able to forget the cruelty of a faithless one. Ah! if Mademoiselle Diane would only give herself up to hippocras, in less than a

week she would have forgotten the Chevalier Sforzi."

Lehardy stopped before a house of gloomy appearance, in the Rue du Paon, not far from the King David hostelry.

"Captain," he said, introducing a key into the lock of the door, "I beg of you not to be guilty of any imprudence. You cannot imagine to what an extent my good mistress is affected by the conduct of Monsieur Sforzi."

"Sforzi is completely innocent of all crime against the right of love," replied De Maurevert.

"Yet you yourself accused him, captain—"

"I retract the accusation. Conduct me to your mistress, I tell you; I will explain all to her in two words. By the way, Lehardy, what house is this in which Mademoiselle Diane is living?"

"It belongs to my mistress's aunt, the Dowager Madame Lamirande."

"It does not appear to be a particularly luxurious dwelling."

"The Dowager Madame Lamirande is not very rich. She possesses only about four thousand livres a year."

"Four thousand livres a year—hardly as much as her highness spends every day of her life," thought the captain.

Lehardy, after begging De Maurevert to wait a moment, went to prepare his mistress for the visit of the adventurer.

She was kneeling upon a *prie-Dieu* when her faithful servant entered her apartment, her face bathed in tears. So absorbed was she, indeed, that he had to address her three times before she became aware of his presence.

"Ah!—is it you, Lehardy?" she said, vaguely, and trying to smile. "What do you want with me?"

"Mademoiselle," he replied, with an embarrassed air, "I hardly know how to approach the subject which brings me to you; you have so severely forbidden me to speak to you of Monsieur Sforzi."

At this name Diane started; a blush suddenly overspread her features, and in a voice which she attempted to render firm, but which resembled rather a sob, she cried:

"Silence, Lehardy! The Chevalier Sforzi!—I do not know that gentleman; I have never heard his name!—I know nothing of the person of whom you are speaking."

"My good and honored mistress," replied the servant, "how great may be your distress, your remorse, some day, if you should learn, when it is too late to repair your injustice, that Monsieur Sforzi was never blameworthy. Everything induces me to believe that Monsieur le Chevalier has been odiously calumniated."

Diane sprang from her *prie-Dieu*, and, with joy and terror, rushed towards her servant.

"Can what you say be possible?" she cried. "Can heaven at length have taken pity on my sufferings? No, no; you are mistaken, Lehardy. You fear the consequences of my great sorrow, and are trying to distract my despair by a generous falsehood. But you are wrong; for I am beginning to accustom myself to the thought of Monsieur Sforzi's unworthy abandonment! I repeat, I no longer know that gentleman."

"That means—you still love him madly, and I applaud you for so doing!" cried a snoring voice at that moment.

Mademoiselle Diane turned in the direction from which the voice had come, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Captain De Maurevert!" she cried.

"Himself, at your service," replied the adventurer, tranquilly. "Excuse me, I beg, for breaking somewhat abruptly, and without being invited, in upon the conversation between yourself and Lehardy. The fault is his. If, instead of leaving me to kick my heels in the ante-chamber, he had set me down to a flagon of old wine, I should have waited his return with patience. By Cupid!—my good Demoiselle d'Erlanges, you are much changed! Certainly your beauty is still incomparable; but, for all that, you are hardly recognizable. Leave mademoiselle and me together, Lehardy; we have to speak of matters of importance."

Fearing that his mistress might give him a contrary order, Lehardy hastened to obey; but he did not quit the room before recommending De Maurevert, by an expressive and supplicating look, to deal gently with the poor girl's weakness.

"Mademoiselle," continued the adventurer, taking advantage of Diane's silent emotion, "you see before you at once the most abominable and the most repentant rascal that has ever existed in the world. My remorse—and my presence here at this moment proves it—is as great as my offence."

"Your offence—your remorse, captain?" murmured Diane. "To what offence are you referring?"

"To the shameful trickery I have employed to separate you from my gentle companion, Raoul."

Diane started.

"But I have been deceived," continued De Maurevert. "Up to the present time I have looked upon myself as a model of constancy and fidelity, and from this erroneous point of view I said to myself: since my tenderest passion has never lasted beyond a week, it is probable that four days will suffice for Mademoiselle d'Erlanges to forget Raoul completely. Meeting Lehardy, I painted to him the chevalier's conduct in the blackest colors—made him out a perfect monster."

"What!" cried Diane, beside herself with emotion, "was all you told Lehardy concerning Monsieur Sforzi untrue, then?"

"A mere tissue of lies."

"Good heavens, is it possible!" murmured Diane, raising towards heaven her eyes bathed in tears of happiness and beaming with gratitude.

An incredible change instantly took place in her appearance. Her face, a moment before pale and dimmed by suffering, shone with a celestial brightness; her glance, though drowned in tears, recovered its wonted vivacity. Her beauty became so touching, so ideal, that De Maurevert himself felt deeply affected by the sight of it.

"By the virtues of Notre Dame de Paris," he muttered to himself, "if Mademoiselle Diane were now to tell me she was going to take her flight towards the azure vault, I should readily believe her! What a pity it is that her highness is so rich, I might have been so happy with Mademoiselle d'Erlanges!"

In a little while the visage of Diane lost the look of chaste rapture which had animated it. A cloud passed over her brow, and her head, like the blossom of a flower beaten by the passage of a storm, bent downward. The first moment of her joy passed, she had reflected.

"Captain," she said, "it would not be loyal on your part, by abusing the esteem I have hitherto felt for Monsieur Sforzi, to endeavor to make him appear innocent in my eyes if he is really guilty. What interest had you in speaking to Lehardy as you did?"

"I repeat, mademoiselle—I desired to separate you from the chevalier."

"With what object, captain? I cannot understand in what way our affection could be prejudicial to you."

De Maurevert remained silent for a moment. "Mademoiselle," he said at length, "if I do not decide to come frankly to the truth, we may talk all day without any good resulting. At your age, with the education you have received, with the solitary and secluded life you have led, you can know only the infantile side of love. To love with the view of marrying, and to marry because you love, is an extremely simple matter. Unfortunately, mademoiselle, things do not always arrange themselves with such delightful simplicity. For the most part, gentlemen do not light the hymeneal torch because they are smitten with the charms of their affianced brides; what they seek, above everything, is fortune! The credit of the family to which they ally themselves counts equally for so much dowry. Now, mademoiselle, the chevalier, young, handsome, brave, and gallant, might in this way hope to make a magnificent match."

"And I being ruined, and my family possessing no influence at Court—is not that what you were about to add, captain? And according to your view, the brotherly love which Monsieur Sforzi has professed for me is calculated to destroy his future?"

"Precisely, mademoiselle. It is indisputable that if Raoul had the good sense to resemble the young men of his day, his love for you would considerably impede him in his career; but the chevalier is altogether a singular person. From the hour he was obliged to renounce the hope of marrying you, he would lose all his qualities and would sink into complete discouragement. It is his interest, therefore, to marry you. Do not interrupt me, I beg; let me finish what I was about to say. I have to speak to you on a most delicate point. I rely on the rectitude of your judgment, and on the affection you bear Raoul, to appreciate my reasoning rightly."

"There is," continued De Maurevert, "a most high and powerful lady—whose name I cannot possibly mention—greatly smitten with Raoul. Now, mademoiselle, I happen to know that this great lady is as generous as she is powerful. Do you not think that it would be a pleasant thing to make your rival furnish you dowry? To me it appears a magnificent opportunity. Besides, this lady is capricious to excess, and I would wager my head that in less than a month she will have utterly forgotten the chevalier—even his name!"

If the captain had not been too completely occupied with the contemplation of this very characteristic scheme to think of noticing the effect produced by his words on Diane, he would certainly have spared himself the trouble of finishing his discourse.

"Captain," she said, with calm dignity, "I do not know, and I do not care to know, whether you have spoken in your own name or as the ambassador of Monsieur Sforzi. The title of 'friend' which you accord to Monsieur Sforzi is a grief, great enough in my eyes to justify—to compel, indeed—an eternal rupture between the Chevalier Sforzi and Mademoiselle d'Erlanges! I beseech you, captain, not to add another word! I feel neither hatred nor anger towards you. Your birth has made you noble, but nature has refused you the instincts and qualities of your condition. You are to be pitied more than blamed. Adieu, captain for ever."

Diane spoke with such firmness that De Maurevert—a thing that rarely happened to him—lost all his presence of mind. He passively obeyed, and took his departure in silence.

"Lehardy," he said rapidly, in passing the servant, "I am not at all sure I have not committed an act of stupendous stupidity. Go at once to your mistress."

The faithful servant rushed to Diane, but reached her only in time to see her fall senseless to the floor.

As soon as she was outside of the Dowager Lamirande's house, De Maurevert moved away at a pace that was almost like that of flight.

"Devil's horns!" he said to himself, "I would give a hundred crowns that Raoul had not fallen in her highness's way! This little Diane is really an adorable creature! Who knows whether,