

CHAPTER XXII.

CONDEMNATION.

WHILST the Lords of the Council were taking leave, the Coadjutor drew gradually nearer to the young lovers, who stood beside each other in an obscure corner of the oratory, near the altar; and at a moment when no one could remark him, he leant towards Fabian and rapidly whispered: "They will send you to the Bastille. Leave this while you are unobserved. You will find friends in the ante-chamber."

The young man shook his head sadly, as if to say "Of what use would it be?"

"Oh! go, go!" murmured Mademoiselle de Montglat, who had caught the words of Paul de Gondl.

The Coadjutor understood the cause of his hesitation, and quickly added:

"The Queen will assuredly pardon this poor girl. Away! all may yet be well with you!"

Fabian hastily raised the hand of Elizabeth to his lips, and with a grateful sign to his protector, glided silently into the ante-chamber, which was then, whether through chance or design, completely hid in obscurity. He had made but a few cautious steps along the room, when he felt his hand grasped by another.

"Are you Monsieur Fabian de Croissi?" whispered a voice in his ear.

"Yes!" replied Fabian.

"Follow me then," was the reply, and he felt himself conducted through the secret issue, the door of which immediately closed behind him.

It was full time. The almost inaudible conversation between the Queen and the Baron in the oratory had just terminated. De Croissi turned round, and remarking his brother's absence, an expression of astonishment spread over his features.

"What has become," she exclaimed, "of that unhappy young man, who, but a minute ago—?"

"Would you arrest him in our very presence?" said the Queen Regent severely. "The young man is doubtless in some neighbouring apartment. Go and seek him; but recollect, that though we wish our secret placed beyond the reach of indiscretion, I will hear of no harsh measures being used towards him."

The Baron made a low reverence, and with an anxious air, withdrew. The Queen heaved such a sigh as is given when a painful scene has closed; but as her eye wandered round the apartment, it rested on the young Countess de Montglat.

"Ah! all is not yet finished," she impatiently exclaimed. "Approach, Elizabeth de Montglat!"

The young lady advanced with a pensive, but calm and resigned air.

"From this moment you are no longer in my service," continued the Regent coldly; "your name shall be erased from the list of my maids of honour, and you will yourself inform Madame de Motteville of this. To-morrow the walls of the Carmelite Convent shall enclose you for ever!"

This terrible sentence produced in Elizabeth no sign of emotion, whether it were that she had fallen into the torpor of despair, or that anxiety for the fate of another absorbed all her faculties. This apparent indifference irritated the fiery Queen, who had expected some token of contrition and humility.

"Begone!" she said, pointing towards the door; "I have no farther need of your services or your company."

In spite of this imperative injunction, the young Countess remained fixed and motionless, with her head bent towards the door; her attention evidently so directed towards that quarter, that she had not heard the orders of the Queen. The fury of Anne of Austria was about to burst forth, when she was interrupted by the hurried entrance into the oratory of the Baron de Croissi, pale and agitated.

"Madame!" he cried, "there is treachery somewhere—the young man has disappeared, although Monsieur Gabouri is certain that he did not leave the cloisters with your Majesty's councillors."

"Can it be possible?" exclaimed the Queen.

A personage clad in black, who was no other than Gabouri, the mysterious porter of the cloister door, now appeared on the threshold of the oratory, and confirmed De Croissi's assertions.

"This is somewhat extraordinary," said the Queen, anxiously. "Unless he were a magician, he could not vanish thus, like an apparition."

"He is saved!" cried Elizabeth, whose previous pre-occupation this event sufficiently explained. "Oh! Madame! my noble sovereign! every thing else is just, every thing else is right, and I shall suffer without complaint, whatever punishment you may appoint for me."

She then retired from the oratory with a profound reverence, leaving the Regent in her turn almost unconscious of the words that had been spoken.

A few minutes of unbroken silence succeeded her departure.

"Gabouri!" said the Queen at last, "the more I think of it, the more it seems to me impossible that this man can have left the palace. We cannot order a search at this moment without