

THE TWO DIANAS.

VOL. III.

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The Fatal Joust.

THE TWO DIANAS

CHAPTER I WHEREIN IT SEEMS AS IF THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS WERE ABOUT TO BEGIN AGAIN

Arnauld du Thill was not at once taken back to the dungeon which he occupied in the conciergerie of Rieux. He was taken to a room adjoining that where the court was sitting, and was left alone for a few moments.

It might be, they told him, that after questioning his adversary, the judges would desire to hear him further. Left to his own reflections, the crafty scamp began by congratulating himself upon the effect he had evidently produced by his clever and bold speech. Brave Martin-Guerre, notwithstanding the righteousness of his cause, would surely find it hard to be so persuasive.

At all events Arnauld had gained time. But on thinking matters over more carefully he could not conceal from himself that he had gained nothing else. The truth which he had so audaciously distorted would finally overwhelm him on all sides. Could he hope that Monsieur de Montmorency himself, whose testimony he had dared to invoke, would take the risk of using his position to shield the avowed misdeeds of his spy? It was doubtful, to say the least.

The result of Arnauld's cogitations was that he gradually relapsed from hope to anxiety, and all things considered, said

to himself that his position was not the most encouraging in the world.

He lowered his head under these discouraging thoughts, when some one came to take him back to prison.

So the tribunal had not thought best to question him further after Martin-Guerre's explanations! Another cause for anxiety.

All this, nevertheless, did not prevent Arnauld du Thill, who noticed everything, from observing that it was not his ordinary jailer who had come to take him, and was with him at that moment.

Why the change? Were they redoubling their precautions against his escape? Did they hope to make him confess? Arnauld determined to be on his guard, and said not a word during the whole walk.

But behold! another cause of amazement. The room to which this new custodian conducted Arnauld was not the one he ordinarily occupied.

The latter had a barred window and a high chimneypiece, which were lacking in the other.

However, everything bore witness to the recent presence of a prisoner,—crumbs of bread still fresh, a half-emptied cup of water, a straw pallet, and a half-opened chest within which could be seen a man's clothes.

Arnauld du Thill, who was well used to restraining his emotions, made no sign of surprise, but as soon as he found himself alone, he hastened to overhaul the chest.

He found nothing but clothes in it; nothing else to indicate its owner. But the clothes were of a color and cut which Arnauld seemed to remember. Especially two jerkins of brown cloth, and yellow tricot breeches, which were neither of a common shade nor shape.

"Oho," said Arnauld, "that would be strange!"

Just as night began to fall, the unknown jailer entered.

"Hallo, Master Martin-Guerre!" said he, laying his hand familiarly upon the pensive Arnauld's shoulder in a way to signify that the jailer knew his prisoner very well, even if the prisoner did not know his jailer.

"What is the matter, pray?" Arnauld asked this very friendly official.

"Well, it's just this, my dear fellow," the man replied; "your affair seems to be looking brighter and brighter. Who do you suppose has obtained leave from the judges, and now asks of yourself the favor of a few moments' conversation?"

"My faith, I can't imagine!" said Arnauld. "How should I know? Who can it be?"

"Your wife, my friend; even Bertrande de Rolles herself, who is beginning to see, doubtless, which one of you has the right on his side. But if I were in your place, I would refuse to receive her,—that I would."

"Why so?" asked Arnauld du Thill.

"Why?" repeated the jailer. "Why, because she has denied you for so long, of course! It is quite time for her to come over to the side of justice and truth, just when to-morrow at the latest the decree of the court will proclaim it publicly and officially! You agree with me, do you not? and I will send your ungrateful spouse about her business without ceremony."

The jailer took a step toward the door, but Arnauld stopped him with a gesture.

"No, no!" said he, "don't send her away. On the other hand, I want to see her. In short, since she has obtained leave from the judges, show Bertrande de Rolles in, my dear friend."

"Hum! Always the same," said the jailer. "Always easy-going and good-natured. If you allow your wife to reassert her former ascendancy so quickly, you take a great risk. However, that's your business."

The jailer withdrew, shrugging his shoulders compassionately.

Two minutes later he returned with Bertrande de Rolles. It was growing darker every instant.

"I will leave you alone," said the jailer, "but I shall come to take Bertrande away before it is quite dark: those are the orders. So you have hardly a quarter of an hour; use it to quarrel or to make up, as you choose."

And he left the cell again.

Bertrande de Rolles came forward, shame-faced and with bent head, toward the pretended Martin-Guerre, who remained seated and silent, leaving it for her to begin the conversation.

"Oh, Martin!" said she at last, in a weak and hesitating voice, when she was at his side; "Martin, can you ever forgive me?"

Her eyes were wet with tears, and she was literally trembling in every limb.

"Forgive you for what?" replied Arnauld, who did not propose to commit himself.

"Why, for my stupid mistake," said Bertrande. "Of course I did very wrong not to recognize you. But was there not some excuse for my mistake, since it seems that at times you were deceived yourself? So it was necessary, I confess, to make me believe in my error, that the whole province, Monsieur le Comte de Montgommery, and justice, which knows everything, should prove to me that you are my true husband, and that the other is only a fraud and an impostor."

"But let us see," said Arnauld; "which is the acknowledged impostor,—the one whom Monsieur de Montgommery brought hither, or the one whom they found in possession of Martin-Guerre's goods and name?"

"Why, the other!" replied Bertrande; "the one who deceived me so, and whom during the last week I have still called my husband, stupid, blind fool that I was!"

"Aha, so the thing seems to be pretty well established now, does it?" asked Arnauld, with emotion.

"*Mon Dieu!* yes, Martin," Bertrande replied in some confusion. "The gentlemen of the court and your master, the worthy nobleman, told me just now that they had no longer any doubt, and that you were surely the true Martin-Guerre, my dear, good husband."

"Ah, indeed," said Arnauld, whose cheek paled in spite of himself.

"Thereupon," continued Bertrande, "they gave me to understand that I would do well to ask your forgiveness, and to become reconciled to you before they pronounce judgment; so I asked and obtained leave to see you."

She stopped a moment, but seeing that her pretended husband gave no sign of replying, she went on,—

"It is only too certain, good Martin-Guerre, that I have been very guilty toward you. But I implore you to reflect that it has been entirely involuntary on my part, as I call the Holy Virgin and the child Jesus to witness! My first mistake was the not having unmasked and discovered the fraud of this Arnauld du Thill. But could I imagine that there could be such a perfect resemblance in the world, and that the good God would amuse Himself by making two of His creatures so exactly alike? Alike in feature and in form, but not, it is true, in character and heart; and it was that difference which should have opened my eyes, I confess. But why? Nothing warned me to be on my guard. Arnauld du Thill talked to me of the past just as you yourself

would have done. He had your ring and your papers, and not a single one of his friends or relatives suspected him. I acted in good faith. I attributed the change in your disposition to the experience you had gained in your extensive travels. Consider, my dear husband, that under the name of that stranger it was you whom I always loved, you to whom I submitted joyfully. Consider that, and you will forgive me for the first mistake, which led me—without intending it or knowing it, so help me God!—to commit the sin for which I shall pass the remainder of my days asking pardon from Heaven and from you."

Bertrande de Rolles again paused in her justification to see if Martin-Guerre would not speak to her and encourage her a little. But he remained persistently silent, and poor Bertrande, with sinking heart, continued,—

"Even if it be impossible, Martin, for you to bear ill-will toward me for this first involuntary wrong, the second, unfortunately, deserves beyond question all your reproaches and all your anger. When you were not at hand, I might mistake another for you; but when you had presented yourself, and I had leisure to compare you with the other, I should have recognized you at once. But consider whether even in that matter my conduct does not admit of some excuse. In the first place, Arnauld du Thill was, as you say, in possession of the title and name which belong to you, and it was extremely repugnant to my feelings to admit a supposition which would make me guilty. In the second place, I was hardly allowed to see you and speak with you. When I was confronted with you, you were not dressed in your ordinary dress, but were wrapped in a long coat which hid your form and your gait from

me. Then, too, I was kept secluded almost as closely as Arnauld du Thill and yourself, and I hardly saw either of you except before the court, always separately and at a considerable distance. In the face of that terrifying resemblance, what means had I of determining the truth? I made up my mind, almost haphazard, in favor of him whom I had called my husband just before. I implore you not to be angry with me for it. The judges to-day assure me that I was mistaken, and that they have abundant proofs of it. Thereupon I come to you, penitent and abashed, trusting only in your kind heart and the love of former days. Was I wrong to rely thus on your indulgence?"

After this direct question, Bertrande made another pause; but the false Martin still remained dumb.

Surely, in thus renouncing Arnauld du Thill Bertrande was adopting a curious method of softening his heart toward her; but she was acting in perfect good faith, and committed herself more and more irrevocably to that view which she believed to be the true one, in order to touch the heart of him whose forgiveness she supposed herself to be imploring.

"As for myself," she resumed humbly, "you will find my disposition much altered. I am no longer the scornful, capricious, ill-tempered virago who made life such a burden to you. The cruel treatment which I have undergone at the hands of that wretched Arnauld, and which ought to have condemned him in my eyes, has had one good result, at least,—in bending and taming my spirit; and you may expect to find me in future as easily managed and obliging as you yourself are gentle and kind-hearted. For you will be gentle and kind with me as you used to be, will you not? You are going to prove that now by

forgiving me; and then I shall know you by your good heart, as I know you already by your features."

"So you do recognize me now, do you?" said Arnauld du Thill, at last.

"Oh, yes! indeed, I do," replied Bertrande; "but I blame myself for having waited for the judgment and decree of the court."

"So you do recognize me?" said Arnauld, persisting in his question. "You do realize now that I am not that intriguing scoundrel who had the assurance to call himself your husband no longer ago than last week, but that I am the real, legitimate Martin-Guerre, whom you have not seen before for many years? Look at me. Do you recognize me now, and acknowledge me as your first and only husband?"

"To be sure I do," said Bertrande.

"By what marks do you recognize me?" asked Arnauld.

"Alas!" said Bertrande, frankly, "only by the outward appearance of your person, I confess. Were you beside Arnauld du Thill and dressed like him, the resemblance is so exact that very likely I could not tell you apart even now. I know you for my true husband because I was told that I was to be taken to him, because you occupy this cell, and not Arnauld's, and because you receive me with the calm severity which I deserve; while Arnauld would be trying still to abuse me and deceive me—"

"Wretched Arnauld!" cried Arnauld himself, harshly. "And you, weak and credulous woman—"

"Don't spare me!" was Bertrande's rejoinder. "I much prefer your reproaches to your silence. When you have said to me all that you have at heart—for I know how kind and indulgent you are—you will soften toward me and forgive me!"

"Very well!" said Arnauld, in a somewhat milder tone. "Don't be downhearted, Bertrande; we will see."

"Ah!" exclaimed Bertrande, "what did I say? Yes, you are, indeed, my own dear Martin-Guerre!"

She threw herself at his feet, and bathed his hands with her honest tears,—for she really believed she was talking with her husband; and Arnauld du Thill, who was observing her distrustfully, could find no excuse for the least suspicion. Her expressions of joy and penitence were not ambiguous.

"Very good!" Arnauld muttered to himself; "you shall pay for all this some day, ingrate!"

Meanwhile he seemed to give way to an irresistible impulse of affection.

"I am weak, and I feel that I am yielding," said he, pretending to wipe away a tear which was not there; and, as if in spite of himself, he breathed a kiss upon the lowly head of the fair penitent.

"What ecstasy!" cried Bertrande; "he has almost forgiven me!"

At this moment the door opened, and the jailer reappeared.

"Humph! Made it up, have you?" said he, testily, as his eye fell upon the sentimental tableau presented by the happy pair. "I was sure of it,—you're such a milksop, Martin!"

"What's that? Do you blame him for his kind heart?" said Bertrande.

"Ha, ha! Come, come!" said Arnould, laughing in the most fatherly way.

"Well, as I said before, it's his business," replied the unmoved jailer; "and it's my business now to carry out my orders. The time has expired, and you cannot stay a minute longer, my weeping beauty."

"What! must I leave him already?" asked Bertrande.

"Yes. You will have time enough to see him to-morrow and all the rest of your days," was the reply.

"True, he will be free to-morrow!" rejoined Bertrande. "To-morrow, dear, we will begin again our peaceful life of former days."

"Postpone your caresses till to-morrow, too," observed the fierce jailer, "for now you must leave."

Bertrande kissed once more the hand which Arnould du Thill held out to her royally, waved a last adieu to him, and preceded the jailer from the cell.

As the latter was closing the door, Arnould called him back.

"May I not have a light, a lamp?" he asked.

"Yes, to be sure, just as you have every evening," said the jailer; "that is, until curfew,—nine o'clock. By our Lady! we don't treat you as harshly as Arnauld du Thill; and then, too, your master, the Comte de Montgomery, is so generous! You are well taken care of to oblige him. In five minutes I will bring your candle, friend Martin."

The light was brought to him very shortly by a turnkey, who withdrew at once, wishing the prisoner good-night, and reminding him anew to extinguish it at curfew.

Arnauld du Thill, when he found himself alone, quickly removed the linen suit that he wore, and clothed himself no less speedily in one of the famous suits, composed of a brown jerkin and yellow tricot small-clothes, which he had discovered in Martin-Guerre's chest.

Then he burned his former costume piece by piece in the flame of his candle, and mingled the ashes with those which were lying on the hearth.

It was all done in less than an hour; and he was enabled to extinguish his light and go virtuously to bed even before the curfew tolled.

"Now, we will see!" said he. "I seem to have been beaten before the court; but it will be very pleasant to succeed in deriving the means of victory from my defeat."

CHAPTER II

A CRIMINAL'S SPEECH AGAINST HIMSELF

We can readily understand that sleep hardly visited Arnould du Thill's eyes that night. He lay stretched upon his straw litter, his eyes wide open, entirely engrossed with reckoning up his chances, laying plans, and marshalling his resources. The scheme he had devised, of substituting himself for poor Martin-Guerre once more, was an audacious one doubtless, but its very impudence endowed it with some chance of success.

Since luck favored him so marvellously, should he let his own audacity betray him?

No; he quickly adopted the course he was to follow, and left himself free to adapt his movements to events as they might shape themselves, and to unforeseen circumstances.

When day broke, he examined his costume, found it unexceptionable, and devoted himself anew to acquiring Martin-Guerre's gait and attitudes. His mimicry of his double's good-natured demeanor was so perfect as almost to be exaggerated. It must be confessed that the miserable blackguard would have made an excellent comedian.

About eight o'clock in the morning, the cell-door grated on its hinges.

Arnould du Thill suppressed a startled movement, and assumed an air of tranquil indifference.

The jailer of the night before reappeared, introducing the Comte de Montgomery.

"The devil! now the crisis is at hand!" said Arnauld du Thill to himself. "I must be on my guard."

He waited anxiously for Gabriel's first word when he should look at him.

"Good-morning, my poor Martin-Guerre," Gabriel began.

Arnauld breathed again. The Comte de Montgomery had looked him straight in the face as he called him by name. The misunderstanding began again, and Arnauld was saved!

"Good-morning, my dear, kind Master," he said to Gabriel, with an effusiveness of gratitude which was in truth not wholly feigned.

He had the assurance to add,—

"Is there anything new, Monseigneur?"

"The sentence will be pronounced this morning in all probability," Gabriel replied.

"At last! God be praised!" cried Arnauld. "I long for the end, I confess. There is no conceivable doubt now,—nothing more to fear, is there, Monseigneur? The right will surely triumph?"

"Indeed I hope so," said Gabriel, gazing at Arnauld more intently than ever. "That villanous Arnauld du Thill is reduced to desperate remedies."

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