

## Chapter 6

### LE PETIT COUCHER OF HENRI III.

After this scene, beginning in tragedy and ending in comedy, the king, still angry, went to his room, followed by Chicot, who asked for his supper.

"I am not hungry," said the king.

"It is possible, but I am."

The king did not seem to hear. He unclasped his cloak, took off his cap, and, advancing to the passage which led to St. Luc's room, said to Chicot, "Wait here for me till I return."

"Oh! do not be in a hurry," said Chicot. No sooner was the king gone, than Chicot opened the door and called "Hola!"

A valet came. "The king has changed his mind," said Chicot, "he wishes a good supper here for himself and St. Luc, above all, plenty of wine, and despatch."

The valet went to execute the orders, which he believed to be the king's. Henri meanwhile had passed into St. Luc's room. He found him in bed, having prayers read to him by an old servant who had followed him to the Louvre, and shared his captivity. In a corner, on an armchair, his head buried in his hands, slept the page.

"Who is that young man?" asked the king.

"Did not your majesty authorize me to send for a page."

"Yes, doubtless."

"Well, I have profited by it."

"Oh!"

"Does your majesty repent of having allowed me this little indulgence?"

"No, no, on the contrary, amuse yourself, my son. How are you?"

"Sire, I have a fever."

"Really, your face is red; let me feel your pulse, I am half a doctor."

St. Luc held out his hand with visible ill-humor.

"Oh!" said the king, "intermittent--agitated."

"Yes, sire, I am very ill."

"I will send you my doctor."

"Thank you, sire, but I hate Miron."

"I will watch you myself. You shall have a bed in my room, and we will talk all night."

"Oh!" cried St Luc, "you see me ill, and you want to keep me from sleeping. That is a singular way to treat your patient, doctor."

"But you cannot be left alone, suffering as you are."

"Sire, I have my page, Jean."

"But he sleeps."

"That is what I like best, then he will not disturb me."

"Well, come and assist at my going to bed."

"Then I shall be free to come back to bed?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, so be it. But I shall make a bad courtier, I assure you; I am dying with sleep."

"You shall yawn at your ease."

"Sire, if your majesty will leave me, I will be with you in five minutes."

"Well, then, five minutes, but no longer."

As soon as the door was shut, the page jumped up. "Ah! St. Luc," cried she, "you are going to leave me again. Mon Dieu! I shall die of fright here, if they discover me."

"My dear Jeanne, Gaspard here will protect you."

"Had I not better go back?"

"If you really wish it, Jeanne," said St. Luc, sadly, "you shall. But if you are as good as you are beautiful, if you have any feeling in your heart for me, you will wait here a little. I shall suffer so much from my head and nerves that the king will not long keep so sad a companion."

"Go, then," said Jeanne, "and I will wait."

"My dear Jeanne, you are adorable. Trust me to return as soon as possible, Besides, I have an idea, which I will tell you when I return."

"An idea which will restore your liberty?"

"I hope so."

"Then go,"

"Gaspard," said St. Luc, "prevent any one from entering here, and in a quarter of an hour lock the door, and bring me the key to the king's room."

Then go home, and tell them not to be uneasy about Madame la Comtesse, and come back to-morrow."

Then St. Luc kissed his wife's hand, and went to the king, who was already growing impatient. Jeanne, alone and trembling, hid behind the curtains of the bed. When St. Luc entered he found the king amidst a perfect carpet of flowers, of which the stalks had been cut off—roses, jasmine, violets, and wall-flowers, in spite of the severe weather, formed an odorous carpet for Henry III. The chamber, of which the roof was painted, had in it two beds, one of which was so large as to occupy a third of the room. It was hung with gold and silk tapestry, representing mythological figures and the windows had curtains to match. From the center of the ceiling hung, suspended by a golden chain, a silver gilt lamp, in which burned a perfumed oil. At the side of the bed was a golden satyr, holding in his hand a candelabrum, containing four rose-color wax candles, also perfumed.

The king, with his naked feet resting on the flowers, was seated on a chair of ebony inlaid with gold; he had on his knees seven or eight young spaniels, who were licking his hands. Two servants were curling his hair, his mustachios, and beard, a third was covering his face with a kind of cream, which had a most delightful scent.

"Here," cried Chicot, "the grease and the combs, I will try them too."

"Chicot," said Henri, "your skin is too dry, and will use too much cream, and your beard is so hard, it will break my combs. Well, my son," said he, turning to St. Luc, "how is your head?"

St. Luc put his hand to his head and groaned.

"Imagine!" continued Henri, "I have seen Bussy d'Amboise."

"Bussy!" cried St. Luc, trembling.

"Yes, those fools! five of them attacked him, and let him escape. If you had been there, St. Luc----"

"I should probably have been like the others."

"Oh! no, I wager you are as good as Bussy. We will try to-morrow."

"Sire, I am too ill for anything."

Henri, hearing a singular noise, turned round, and saw Chicot eating up all the supper that had been brought for two.

"What the devil are you doing, M. Chicot?" cried Henri.

"Taking my cream internally, since you will not allow me to do it outwardly."

"Go and fetch my captain of the guards," said Henri.

"What for?" asked Chicot, emptying a porcelain cup of chocolate.

"To pass his sword through your body."

"Ah! let him come, we shall see!" cried Chicot, putting himself in such a comical attitude of defense that every one laughed.

"But I am hungry," cried the king; "and the wretch has eaten up all the supper."

"You are capricious, Henri; I offered you supper and you refused. However, your bouillon is left; I am no longer hungry, and I am going to bed."

"And I also," said St. Luc, "for I can stand no longer."

"Stay, St. Luc," said the king, "take these," and he offered him a handful of little dogs.

"What for?"

"To sleep with you; they will take your illness from you."

"Thanks, sire," said St. Luc, putting them back in their basket, "but I have no confidence in your receipt."

"I will come and visit you in the night, St. Luc."

"Pray do not, sire, you will only disturb me," and saluting the king, he went away. Chicot had already disappeared, and there only remained with the king the valets, who covered his face with a mask of fine cloth, plastered with the perfumed cream, in which were holes for the eyes, nose, and mouth; a cap of silk and silver fixed it on the forehead and ears. They next covered his arms with sleeves made of wadded silk, and then presented him with kid gloves, also greased inside.

These mysteries of the royal toilet finished, they presented to him his soup in a golden cup. Then Henri said a prayer, a short one that night, and went to bed.

When settled there, he ordered them to carry away the flowers, which were beginning to make the air sickly, and to open the window for a moment. Then the valet closed the doors and curtains, and called in Narcissus, the king's favorite dog, who, jumping on the bed, settled himself at once on the king's feet. The valet next put out the wax-lights, lowered the lamp, and went out softly.

Already, more tranquil and nonchalant than the lazy monks of his kingdom in their fat abbeys, the King of France no longer remembered that there was a France.--He slept.

Every noise was hushed, and one might have heard a bat fly in the somber corridors of the Louvre.