

Chapter 34

HOW CHICOT RETURNED TO THE LOUVRE, AND WAS RECEIVED BY THE KING HENRI III.

All was quiet at the Louvre, for the king, fatigued with his pilgrimage, had not yet risen, when two men presented themselves together at the gates.

"M. Chicot," cried the younger, "how are you this morning?"

"Ah, M. de Bussy."

"You come for the king's levee, monsieur?"

"And you also, I presume?"

"No; I come to see M. le Duc d'Anjou. You know I have not the honor of being a favorite of his majesty's."

"The reproach is for the king, and not for you."

"Do you come from far? I heard you were traveling."

"Yes, I was hunting. And you?"

"Yes, I have been in the provinces; and now will you be good enough to render me a service?"

"I shall be delighted."

"Well, you can penetrate into the Louvre, while I remain in the ante-chamber; will you tell the duke I am waiting for him?"

"Why not come in with me?"

"The king would not be pleased."

"Bah!"

"Diable! he has not accustomed me to his most gracious smiles."

"Henceforth, for some time, all that will change."

"Ah, ah! are you a necromancer, M. Chicot?"

"Sometimes; come, take courage, and come in with me."

They entered together; one went towards the apartments of the Duc d'Anjou, and the other to those of the king.

Henri was just awake, and had rung, and a crowd of valets and friends had rushed in; already the chicken broth and the spiced wine were served, when Chicot entered, and without saying a word, sat down to eat and drink.

"Par la mordieu!" cried the king, delighted, although he affected anger; "it is that knave of a Chicot, that fugitive, that vagabond!"

"What is the matter, my son?" said Chicot, placing himself on the immense seat, embroidered with fleur-de-lis, on which the king was seated.

"Here is my misfortune returned," said Henri; "for three weeks I have been so tranquil."

"Bah! you always grumble. One would think you were one of your own subjects. Let me hear, Henriquet, how you have governed this kingdom in my absence."

"Chicot!"

"Have you hung any of your curled gentlemen? Ah! pardon, M. Quelus, I did not see you."

"Chicot, I shall be angry," said the king; but he ended by laughing, as he always did; so he went on: "But what has become of you? Do you know that I have had you sought for in all the bad parts of Paris?"

"Did you search the Louvre?"

Just then M. de Monsoreau entered.

"Ah! it is you, monsieur," said the king; "when shall we hunt again?"

"When it shall please your majesty; I hear there are plenty of wild boars at St. Germain en Laye."

"The wild boar is dangerous," said Chicot; "King Charles IX., I remember, was nearly killed by one. And then spears are sharp also; is it not so, Henri? and do you know your chief huntsman must have met a wolf not long ago?"

"Why so?"

"Because he has caught the likeness; it is striking."

M. de Monsoreau grew pale, and turning to Chicot, said:

"M. Chicot, I am not used to jesters, having lived little at court, and I warn you that before my king I do not like to be humiliated, above all when I speak of my duties."

"Well, monsieur," said Chicot, "we are not like you, we court people laughed heartily at the last joke."

"And what was that?"

"Making you chief huntsman."

Monsoreau looked daggers at Chicot.

"Come, come," said Henri, "let us speak of something else."

"Yes, let us speak of the merits of Nôtre Dame de Chartres."

"Chicot, no impiety."

"I impious! it is you, on the contrary; there were two chemises accustomed to be together, and you separated them. Join them together and a miracle may happen."

This illusion to the estrangement of the king and queen made everyone laugh.

Monsoreau then whispered to Chicot, "Pray withdraw with me into that window, I wish to speak to you." When they were alone, he went on, "Now, M. Chicot, buffoon as you are, a gentleman forbids you; do you understand? forbids you to laugh at him, and to remember that others may finish what M. de Mayenne began."

"Ah! you wish me to become your creditor, as I am his, and to give you the same place in my gratitude."

"It seems to me that, among your creditors, you forget the principal."

"Indeed, I have generally a good memory. Who may it be?"

"M. Nicolas David."

"Oh! you are wrong; he is paid."

At this moment Bussy entered.

"Monsieur," said he to the count, "M. le Duc d'Anjou desires to speak with you."

"With me?"

"With you, monsieur."

"Do you accompany me?"

"No, I go first, to tell the duke you are coming," and he rapidly disappeared.

"Well?" said the duke.

"He is coming."

"And he suspects nothing?"

"Nothing; but if he did, what matter? is he not your creature? Does he seem to you less guilty than he did yesterday?"

"No, a hundred times more so."

"He has carried off, by treason, a noble young girl, and married her equally treasonably; either he must ask for the dissolution of the marriage himself, or you must do it for him."

"I have promised."

"I have your word?"

"You have."

"Remember that they know and are anxiously waiting."

"She shall be free, Bussy; I pledge my word."

Bussy kissed the hand which had signed so many false promises. As he did so, M. de Monsoreau entered, and Bussy went to the corridor, where were several other gentlemen. Here he had to wait as patiently as might be for the result of this interview, on which all his future happiness was at stake. He waited for some time, when suddenly the door of the duke's room opened, and the sound of M. de Monsoreau's voice made Bussy tremble, for it sounded almost joyful. Soon the voices approached, and Bussy could see M. de Monsoreau bowing and retiring, and he heard the duke say:

"Adieu, my friend."

"My friend!" murmured Bussy.

Then Monsoreau said, "Your highness agrees with me that publicity is best?"

"Yes, yes; an end to all mysteries."

"Then this evening I will present her to the king."

"Do so; I will prepare him."

"Gentlemen," then said Monsoreau, turning towards those in the corridor, "allow me to announce to you a secret; monseigneur permits me to make public my marriage with Mademoiselle Diana de Méridor, who has been my wife for more than a month, and whom I intend this evening to present to the court."

Bussy, who had been hidden behind a door, staggered, and almost fell at this unexpected blow. However, he darted a glance of contempt at the duke, towards whom he made a step, but he, in terror, shut his door, and Bussy heard the key turn in the lock. Feeling that if he stayed a moment longer he should betray before everyone the violence of his grief, he ran downstairs, got on his horse, and galloped to the Rue St. Antoine. The baron and Diana were eagerly waiting for him, and they saw him enter pale and trembling.

"Madame," cried he, "hate me, despise me; I believed I could do something and I can do nothing. Madame, you are now the recognized wife of M. de Monsoreau, and are to be presented this evening. I am a fool--a miserable dupe, or rather, as you said, M. le Baron, the duke is a coward and a villain."

And leaving the father and daughter overcome with grief, he rushed wildly away.