

Chapter 41

THE RUE DE LA FERRONNERIE.

Chicot had good legs, and he would have made the best use of them to join the man who had beaten Gorenflot if he had not imagined that there might be danger in trying to recognize a man who so evidently wished to avoid it. He thought the best way not to seem to watch them was to pass them; so he ran on, and passed them at the corner of the Rue Tirechappe, and then hid himself at the end of the Rue des Bourdonnais. The two men went on, their hats slouched over their eyes, and their cloaks drawn up over their faces, with a quick and military step, until they reached the Rue de la Ferronnerie. There they stopped and looked round them. Chicot, who was still ahead, saw in the middle of the street, before a house so old that it looked falling to pieces, a litter, attached to which were two horses. The driver had fallen asleep, while a woman, apparently unquiet, was looking anxiously through the blind. Chicot hid himself behind a large atone wall, which served as stalls for the vegetable sellers on the days when the market was held in this street, and watched. Scarcely was he hidden, when he saw the two men approach the litter, one of whom, on seeing the driver asleep, uttered an impatient exclamation, while the other pushed him to awaken him. "Oh, they are compatriots!" thought Chicot. The lady now leaned out of the window, and Chicot saw that she was young, very pale, but very beautiful. The two men approached the litter, and the taller of the two took in both of his the little white hand which was stretched out to him.

"Well, ma mie," asked he, "how are you?"

"I have been very anxious," replied she.

"Why the devil did you bring madame to Paris?" said the other man rudely.

"Ma foi! it is a malediction that you must always have a petticoat tacked to your doublet!"

"Ah, dear Agrippa," replied the man who had spoken first, "it is so great a grief to part from one you love."

"On my soul, you make me swear to hear you talk! Did you come to Paris to make love? It seems to me that Béarn is large enough for your sentimental promenades, without continuing them in this Babylon, where you have nearly got us killed twenty times to-day. Go home, if you wish to make love, but, here, keep to your political intrigues, my master."

"Let him scold, ma mie, and never mind him; I think he would be ill if he did not."

"But, at least, ventre St. Gris, as you say, get into the litter, and say your sweet things to madame; you will run less risk of being recognized there than in the open street."

"You are right, Agrippa. Give me a place, ma mie, if you permit me to sit by your side."

"Permit, sire; I desire it ardently," replied the lady.

"Sire!" murmured Chicot, who, carried away by an impulse, tried to raise his head, and knocked it against the stone wall. Meanwhile the happy lover profited by the permission given, and seated himself in the litter.

"Oh! how happy I am," he cried, without attending in the least to the impatience of his friend--"ventre St. Gris, this is a good day. Here are my good Parisians, who execrate me with all their souls, and would kill me if they could, working to smooth my way to the throne, and I have in my arms the woman I love. Where are we, D'Aubigné? when I am king, I will erect here a statue to the genius of the Béarnais."

"The Béarn----" began Chicot, but he stopped, for he had given his head a second bump.

"We are in the Rue de la Ferronnerie, sire," said D'Aubigné, "and it does not smell nice."

"Get in then, Agrippa, and we will go on."

"Ma foi, no, I will follow behind; I should annoy you, and, what is worse, you would annoy me."

"Shut the door then, bear of Béarn, and do as you like." Then to the coachman he said, "Lavarrenne, you know where."

The litter went slowly away, followed by D'Aubigné.

"Let me see," said Chicot, "must I tell Henri what I have seen? Why should I? two men and a woman, who hide themselves; it would be cowardly. I will not tell; that I know it myself is the important point, for is it not I who reign? His love was very pretty, but he loves too often, this dear Henri of Navarre. A year ago it was Madame de Sauve, and I suppose this was La Fosseuse. However, I love the Béarnais, for I believe some day he will do an ill turn to those dear Guises. Well! I have seen everyone to-day but the Duc d'Anjou; he alone is wanting to my list of princes. Where can my François III. be? Ventre de biche, I must look for the worthy monarch."

Chicot was not the only person who was seeking for the Duc d'Anjou, and unquiet at his absence. The Guises had also sought for him on all sides, but they were not more lucky than Chicot. M. d'Anjou was not the man to risk himself imprudently, and we shall see afterwards what precautions had kept him from his friends. Once Chicot thought he had found him in the Rue Bethisy; a numerous group was standing at the door of a wine-merchant; and in this group Chicot recognized M. de Monsoreau and M. de Guise, and

fancied that the Duc d'Anjou could not be far off. But he was wrong. MM. de Monsoreau and Guise were occupied in exciting still more an orator in his stammering eloquence. This orator was Gorenflot, recounting his journey to Lyons, and his duel in an inn with a dreadful Huguenot. M. de Guise was listening intently, for he began to fancy it had something to do with the silence of Nicolas David. Chicot was terrified; he felt sure that in another moment Gorenflot would pronounce his name, which would throw a fatal light on the mystery. Chicot in an instant cut the bridles of some of the horses that were fastened up, and giving them each a violent blow, sent them galloping among the crowd, which opened, and began to disperse in different directions. Chicot passed quickly through the groups, and approaching Gorenflot, took Panurge by the bridle and turned him round. The Duc de Guise was already separated from them by the rush of the people, and Chicot led off Gorenflot to a kind of cul-de-sac by the church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois.

"Ah! drunkard!" said he to him, "ah! traitor! you will then always prefer a bottle of wine to your friend.'

"Ah! M. Chicot," stammered the monk.

"What! I feed you, wretch, I give you drink, I fill your pockets and your stomach, and you betray me."

"Ah! M. Chicot!"

"You tell my secrets, wretch."

"Dear friend."

"Hold your tongue; you are but a sycophant, and deserve punishment."

And the monk, vigorous and strong, powerful as a bull, but overcome by wine and repentance, remained without defending himself in the hands of Chicot, who shook him like a balloon full of air.

"A punishment to me, to your friend, dear M. Chicot!"

"Yes, to you," said Chicot, striking him over the shoulders with his stick.

"Ah! if I were but fasting."

"You would beat me, I suppose; I, your friend."

"My friend! and you treat me thus!"

"He who loves well chastises well," said Chicot, redoubling his proofs of friendship. "Now," said he, "go and sleep at the Corne d'Abondance."

"I can no longer see my way," cried the monk, from whose eyes tears were falling.

"Ah!" said Chicot, "if you wept for the wine you have drunk! However, I will guide you."

And taking the ass by the bridle, he led him to the hotel, where two men assisted Gorenflot to dismount, and led him up to the room which our readers already know.

"It is done," said the host, returning.

"He is in bed?"

"Yes, and snoring."

"Very well. But as he will awake some day or other, remember that I do not wish that he should know how he came here; indeed, it will be better that he should not know that he has been out since the famous night when he made such a noise in the convent, and that he should believe that all that has passed since is a dream."

"Very well, M. Chicot; but what has happened to the poor monk?"

"A great misfortune. It appears that at Lyons he quarreled with an agent of M. de Mayenne's and killed him."

"Oh! mon Dieu!"

"So that M. de Mayenne has sworn that he will have him broken on the wheel."

"Make yourself easy, monsieur; he shall not go out from here on any pretext."

"Good. And now," said Chicot, as he went away, "I must find the Duc d'Anjou."