

Chapter 44

HOW D'EPERNON HAD HIS DOUBLET TORN, AND HOW CHOMBERG WAS STAINED BLUE.

While M. la Hurière piled signature upon signature, while Chicot consigned Gorenflot to the Corne d'Abondance, while Bussy returned to life in the happy little garden full of perfume and love, the king, annoyed at all he had seen in the city, and furious against his brother, whom he had seen pass in the Rue St. Honoré, accompanied by MM. de Guise and Monsoreau, and followed by a whole train of gentlemen, re-entered the Louvre, accompanied by Maugiron and Quelus. He had gone out with all four of his friends, but, at some steps from the Louvre, Schomberg and D'Epernon had profited by the first crush to disappear, counting on some adventures in such a turbulent night. Before they had gone one hundred yards D'Epernon had passed his sword-sheath between the legs of a citizen who was running, and who tumbled down in consequence, and Schomberg had pulled the cap off the head of a young and pretty woman. But both had badly chosen their day for attacking these good Parisians, generally so patient; for a spirit of revolt was prevalent in the streets, and the bourgeois rose, crying out for aid, and the husband of the young woman launched his apprentices on Schomberg. He was brave; therefore he stopped, put his hand on his sword, and spoke in a high tone. D'Epernon was prudent; he fled.

Henri had entered his room at the Louvre, and, seated in his great armchair, was trembling with impatience, and seeking a good pretext for getting into a passion. Maugiron was playing with Narcissus, the large greyhound, and Quelus was sitting near.

"They go on!" cried Henri, "their plot advances; sometimes tigers, sometimes serpents; when they do not spring they glide."

"Oh, sire!" said Quelus, "are there not always plots in a kingdom? What the devil could all the sons, brothers, and cousins of kings do if they did not plot?" And Quelus irreverently turned his back to the king.

"Hear, Maugiron," said the king, "with what nonsense he tries to put me off."

"Well, sire, look at Narcissus; he is a good dog, but when you pull his ears, he growls, and when you tread on his toes he bites."

"Here is the other comparing me to my dog!"

"Not so, sire; I place Narcissus far above you, for he knows how to defend himself, and you do not." And he also turned his back.

"That is right," cried the king, "my good friends, for whom they accuse me of despoiling the kingdom, abandon me, insult me! Ah, Chicot! if you were here."

At this moment, however, the door opened, and D'Epernon appeared, without hat or cloak, and with his doublet all torn.

"Bon Dieu!" cried Henri, "what is the matter?"

"Sire," said D'Epernon, "look at me; see how they treat the friends of your majesty."

"Who has treated you thus?"

"Mordieu, your people; or rather the people of; M. le Duc d'Anjou, who cried, 'Vive la Messe!' 'Vive Guise!' 'Vive François!--vive everyone, in fact, except the king."

"And what did you do to be treated thus?"

"I? nothing. What can a man do to a people? They recognized me for your majesty's friend, and that was enough."

"But Schomberg?"

"Well?"

"Did he not come to your aid? did he not defend you?"

"Corboeuf! he had enough to do on his own account."

"How so?"

"I left him in the hands of a dyer whose wife's cap he had pulled off, and who, with his five or six apprentices, seemed likely to make him pass an unpleasant quarter of an hour."

"Par la mordieu! and where did you leave my poor Schomberg? I will go myself to his aid. They may say," continued he, looking at Maugiron and Quelus, "that my friends abandon me, but they shall never say that I abandon them."

"Thanks, sire," said a voice behind Henri; "thanks, but here I am; I extricated myself without assistance; but, mein Gott! it was not without trouble."

"It is Schomberg's voice," cried all, "but where the devil is he?"

"Here I am," cried the voice; and indeed, in the corner of the room they saw something that looked not like a man but a shadow.

"Schomberg," cried the king, "where do you come from, and why are you that color?"

Indeed, Schomberg from head to foot was of a most beautiful blue.

"Der Teufel!" cried he, "the wretches! It is not wonderful that the people ran after me."

"But what is the matter?"

"The matter is, that they dipped me in a vat, the knaves; I believed that it was only water, but it was indigo."

"Oh, mordieu!" cried Quelus, bursting out laughing, "indigo is very dear; you must have carried away at least twenty crowns' worth of indigo."

"I wish you had been in my place."

"And you did not kill any one?"

"I left my poniard somewhere, that is all I know, up to the hilt in a sheath of flesh; but in a second I was taken, carried off, dipped in the vat, and almost drowned."

"And how did you get out of their hands?"

"By committing a cowardice, sire."

"What was that?"

"Crying, 'Vive la Ligue!'"

"That was like me; only they made me add, 'Vive le Duc d'Anjou!'" said D'Epernon.

"And I also," cried Schomberg; "but that is not all."

"What, my poor Schomberg, did they make you cry something else?"

"No, that was enough, God knows; but just as I cried, 'Vive le Duc d'Anjou,' guess who passed."

"How can I guess?"

"Bussy; his cursed Bussy, who heard me."

"He could not understand."

"Parbleu! it was not difficult to understand. I had a poniard at my throat, and I was in a vat."

"And he did not come to your rescue?"

"It seemed as though he was in a dreadful hurry; he scarcely seemed to touch the ground."

"Perhaps he did not recognize you, as you were blue."

"Ah! very likely."

"He would be excusable," said the king; "for, indeed, my poor Schomberg, I should hardly have known you myself."

"Never mind; we shall meet some other time, when I am not in a vat."

"Oh! as for me," said D'Epernon, "it is his master I should like to punish."

"The Duc d'Anjou, whose praises they are singing all over Paris," said Quelus.

"The fact is, that he is master of Paris to-night," said D'Epernon.

"Ah, my brother! my brother!" cried the king. "Ah! yes, sire; you cry, 'my brother,' but you do nothing against him; and yet it is clear to me that he is at the head of some plot." said Schomberg.

"Eh, mordieu! that is what I was saying just before you came in, to these gentlemen, and they replied by shrugging their shoulders and turning their backs."

"Not because you said there was a plot, sire, but because you do nothing to suppress it."

"And, now," said Quelus, "we say, 'Save us,' sire; or rather, save yourself; tomorrow M. de Guise will come to the Louvre, and ask you to name a chief for the League; if you name M. d'Anjou, as you promised, he, at the head of one hundred thousand Parisians, excited by this night, can do what he likes."

"Then," said Henri, "if I take a decisive step, you will support me?"

"Yes, sire."

"If, sire, you will only give me time to remodel my dress," said D'Epernon.

"Go to my room, D'Epernon; my valet de chambre will give you what you want."

"And I, sire, must have a bath," said Schomberg.

"Go to my bath."

"Then I may hope, sire, that my insult will not remain unavenged."

Henri remained silent a moment, and then said, "Quelus, ask if M. d'Anjou has returned to the Louvre."

Quelus went, but came back, and said that the duke had not yet returned.

"Well, you, Quelus and Maugiron, go down and watch for his entrance."

"And then?"

"Have all the doors shut."

"Bravo! sire."

"I will be back in ten minutes, sire," said D'Epernon.

"And my stay will depend on the quality of the dye," said Schomberg.

"Come as soon as possible," said the king.

The young men went out, and the king, left alone, kneeled down on his prie-Dieu.