

Chapter 47 THE CHESS OF M. CHICOT, AND THE CUP AND BALL OF M. QUELUS.

Chicot returned joyfully to the Louvre. It was a great satisfaction to him to have saved a brave gentleman like Bussy.

M. de Guise, after having received in the morning the principal Leaguers, who came to bring him the registers filled with signatures, and after having made them all swear to recognize the chief that the king should appoint, went out to visit M. d'Anjou, whom he had lost sight of about ten the evening before. The duke found the prince's valet rather unquiet at his master's absence, but he imagined that he had slept at the Louvre.

The Due de Guise asked to speak to Aurilly, who was most likely to know where his master was. Aurilly came, but stated he had been separated from the prince the evening before by a pressure of the crowd, and had come to the Hôtel d'Anjou to wait for him, not knowing that his highness had intended to sleep at the Louvre. He added that he had just sent to the Louvre to inquire, and that a message had been returned that the duke was still asleep.

"Asleep at eleven o'clock! not likely. You ought to go to the Louvre, Aurilly."

"I did think of it, monseigneur, but I feared that this was only a tale invented to satisfy my messenger, and that the prince was seeking pleasure elsewhere, and might be annoyed at my seeking him."

"Oh, no; the duke has too much sense to be pleasure-seeking on a day like this. Go to the Louvre; you will be sure to find him there."

"I will if you wish it; but what shall I say to him?"

"Say that the convocation at the Louvre is fixed for two o'clock, and that it is necessary that we should have a conference first. It is not at the time when the king is about to choose a chief for the League that he should be sleeping."

"Very well, monseigneur, I will beg his highness to come here."

"And say that I am waiting impatiently for him. Meanwhile I will go and seek M. de Bussy."

"But if I do not find his highness, what am I to do?"

"Then make no further search for him. In any event I shall be at the Louvre at a quarter before two."

Aurilly passed through the courtiers who crowded the Louvre, and made his way to the duke's apartments. At the door he found Chicot playing chess. Aurilly tried to pass, but Chicot, with his long legs blocked up the doorway. He was forced to touch him on the shoulder.

"Ah, it is you, M. Aurilly."

"What are you doing, M. Chicot?"

"Playing chess, as you see."

"All alone?"

"Yes, I am studying; do you play?"

"Very little."

"Yes, I know you are a musician, and music is so difficult an art, that those who give themselves to it must sacrifice all their time."

"You seem very serious over your game."

"Yes, it is my king who disquiets me; you must know, M. Aurilly, that at chess the king is a very insignificant person, who has no will, who can only go one step forward or back, or one to the right or left, while he is surrounded by active enemies, by knights who jump three squares at a time, by a crowd of pawns who surround him, so that if he be badly counseled he is a ruined king in no time, ma foi."

"But, M. Chicot, how does it happen that you are studying this at the door of his royal highness' room?"

"Because I am waiting for M. Quelus, who is in there."

"Where?"

"With his highness."

"With his highness! What is he doing there? I did not think they were such friends."

"Hush!" then he whispered in Aurilly's ear "he is come to ask pardon of the duke for a little quarrel they had yesterday."

"Really!"

"It was the king who insisted on it; you know on what excellent terms the brothers are just now. The king would not suffer an impertinence of Quelus's to pass, and ordered him to apologize."

"Really!"

"Ah! M. Aurilly, I think that we are entering the golden age; the Louvre is about to become Arcadia, and the two brothers Arcades ambo."

Aurilly smiled, and passed into the ante-chamber, where he was courteously saluted by Quelus, between whose hands a superb cup and ball of ebony inlaid with ivory was making rapid evolutions.

"Bravo! M. Quelus," said Aurilly.

"Ah! my dear M. Aurilly, when shall I play cup and ball as well as you play the lute?"

"When you have studied your plaything as long as I have my instrument. But where is monseigneur? I thought you were with him."

"I have an audience with him, but Schomberg comes first."

"What! M. de Schomberg, also!"

"Oh! mon Dieu; yes. The king settled all that. He is in the next room. Enter, M. Aurilly, and remind the prince that we are waiting for him."

Aurilly opened the second door and saw Schomberg reclining on a kind of couch, from which he amused himself by sending from a tube little balls of earth through a gold ring, suspended from the ceiling by a silk thread, while a favorite dog brought him back the balls as they fell.

"Ah! guten morgen, M. Aurilly, you see I am amusing myself while I wait for my audience."

"But where is monseigneur?"

"Oh! he is occupied in pardoning D'Epernon and Maugiron. But will you not enter, you who are privileged?"

"Perhaps it would be indiscreet."

"Not at all; enter, M. Aurilly, enter." And he pushed him into the next room, where the astonished musician perceived D'Epernon before a mirror, occupied in stiffening his mustachios, while Maugiron, seated near the window, was cutting out engravings, by the side of which the bas-reliefs on the temple of Venus Aphrodite would have looked holy.

The duke, without his sword, was in his armchair between these two men, who only looked at him to watch his movements, and only spoke to him to say something disagreeable: seeing Aurilly, he got up to meet him.

"Take care monseigneur," said Maugiron, "you are stepping on my figures."

"Mon Dieu!" cried the musician, "he insults my master!"

"Dear M. Aurilly," said D'Epernon, still arranging his mustachois, "how are you?"

"Be so kind as to bring me here your little dagger," said Maugiron.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, do you not remember where you are?"

"Yes, yes, my dear Orpheus, that is why I ask for your dagger; you see M. le Duc has none."

"Aurilly!" cried the duke, in a tone full of grief and rage, "do you not see that I am a prisoner?"

"A prisoner! to whom?"

"To my brother; you might know that by my jailers."

"Oh! if I had but guessed it."

"You would have brought your lute to amuse his highness," said a mocking voice behind them, "but I thought of it, and sent for it; here it is."

"How does your chess go on, Chicot?" said D'Epernon.

"I believe I shall save the king, but it is not without trouble. Come, M. Aurilly, give me your poniard in return for the lute; a fair exchange."

The astonished musician obeyed.

"There is one rat in the trap," said Quelus, who returned to his post in the antechamber, only exchanging his cup and ball for Schomberg's shooting tube.

"It is amusing to vary one's pleasures," said Chicot; "so for a change I will go and sign the League."