

## Chapter 84

### WHERE CHICOT WAKES.

"Your majesty," said Quelus, "knows only half the business, and that the least interesting half. Assuredly, we have all dined with M. de Bussy, and to the honor of his cook, be it said, dined well. There was, above all, a certain wine from Austria or Hungary, which really appeared to me marvelous. But during the repast, or rather after it, we had the most serious and interesting conversation concerning your majesty's affairs."

"You make the exordium very long."

"How talkative you are, Valois!" cried Chicot.

"Oh! oh! M. Gascon," said Henri, "if you do not sleep, you must leave the room."

"Pardieu, it is you who keep me from sleeping, your tongue clacks so fast."

Quelus, seeing it was impossible to speak seriously, shrugged his shoulders, and rose in anger.

"We were speaking of grave matters," said he.

"Grave matters?"

"Yes," said D'Epernon, "if the lives of eight brave gentlemen are worth the trouble of your majesty's attention."

"What does it mean, my son?" said Henri, placing his hand on Quelus's shoulder.

"Well, sire, the result of our conversation was, that royalty is menaced--weakened, that is to say, that all the world is conspiring against you. Sire, you are a great king, but you have no horizon before you; the nobility have raised so many barriers before your eyes, that you can see nothing, if it be not the still higher barriers that the people have raised. When, sire, in battle one battalion places itself like a menacing wall before another, what happens? Cowards look behind them, and seeing an open space, they fly; the brave lower their heads and rush on."

"Well, then forward!" cried the king, "mordieu! am I not the first gentleman in my kingdom? Were they not great battles that I fought in my youth? Forward, then, gentlemen, and I will take the lead; it is my custom in the mêlée."

"Oh! yes, sire," cried the young men, with one voice.

"And," said Quelus, "against these ramparts which are closing round your majesty, four men will march, sure to be applauded by you, and glorified by posterity."

"What do you mean, Quelus?" cried the king, with eyes in which joy was tempered by solicitude; "who are these four men?"

"I, and these other gentlemen," replied Quelus, with pride; "we devote ourselves, sire."

"To what?"

"To your safety."

"Against whom?"

"Against your enemies."

"Private enmities of young men?"

"Oh! sire, that is the expression of vulgar prejudice; speak like a king, sire, not like a bourgeois. Do not profess to believe that Maugiron detests Antragues, that Schomberg dislikes Livarot, that D'Epéron is jealous of Bussy, and that I hate Ribeirac. Oh! no. They are all young, and agreeable, and might love each other like brothers: it is not, therefore, a rivalry between man and man, which places the swords in our hands; it is the quarrel of France with Anjou, the dispute as to the rights of the populace against the prerogatives of the king. We present ourselves as champions of royalty in those lists, where we shall be met by the champions of the League, and we came to say, 'Bless us, sire, smile on those who are going to die for you.' Your blessing will, perhaps, give us the victory, your smile will make us die happy."

Henri, overcome with emotion, opened his arms to Quelus and the others. He united them in his heart; and it was not a spectacle without interest, a picture without expression, but a scene in which manly courage was allied to softer emotions, sanctified by devotion. Chicot looked on, and his face, ordinarily indifferent or sarcastic, was not the least noble and eloquent of the six.

"Ah!" cried the king, "I am proud to-day, not of being King of France, but of being your friend; at the same time, as I know my own interests best, I will not accept a sacrifice, of which the result will deliver me up, if you fall, into the hands of my enemies. France is enough to make war on Anjou; I know my brother, the Guises, and the League, and have often conquered more dangerous foes."

"But, sire, soldiers do not reason thus, they never take ill luck into their calculations."

"Pardon me, Maugiron; a soldier may act blindly, but the captain reflects."

"Reflect, then, sire, and let us act, who are only soldiers," said Schomberg: "besides, I know no ill luck; I am always successful."

"Friend, friend," said the king, sadly, "I wish I could say as much. It is true, you are but twenty."

"Sire," said Quelus, "on what day shall we meet MM. Bussy, Livarot, Antragues and Ribeirac?"

"Never; I forbid it absolutely."

"Sire, excuse us, the rendezvous was arranged before the dinner, words were said which cannot be retracted."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Henri, "the king absolves from oaths and promises by saying, 'I will, or I will not,' for the king is all-powerful. Tell these gentlemen, therefore, that I have menaced you with all my anger if you come to blows; and that you may not doubt it yourselves, I swear to exile you, if----"

"Stop! sire; do not swear; because, if for such a cause we have merited your anger, and this anger shows itself by exiling us, we will go into exile with joy, because, being no longer on your majesty's territories, we can then keep our promises, and meet our adversaries."

"If these gentlemen approach you within range of an arquebuse, I will throw them all into the Bastile."

"Sire, if you do so we will all go barefooted, and with cords round our necks, to M. Testu, the governor, and pray to be incarcerated with them."

"I will have them beheaded, then; I am king, I hope."

"We will cut our throats at the foot of their scaffold."

Henri kept silent for a long time; then, raising his eyes, said, "God will surely bless a cause defended by such noble hearts."

"Yes, they are noble hearts," said Chicot, rising; "do what they wish, and fix a day for their meeting. It is your duty, my son."

"Oh I mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" murmured Henri.

"Sire, we pray you," cried all the four gentlemen, bending their knees.

"Well! so be it. Let us trust that God will give us the victory. But let us prepare for the conflict in a Christian manner. If I had time, I would send all your swords to Rome, that the Pope might bless them. But we have the shrine of St. Genevieve, which contains most precious relics: let us fast, and do penance, and keep holy the great day of the Fête Dieu, and then the next day----"

"Ah! sire, thanks; that is in eight days!" cried the young men.

And they seized the hands of the king, who embraced them all once more, and, going into his oratory, melted into tears.

"Our cartel is ready," said Quelus, "we have but to add the day and hour. Write, Maugiron, the day after the Fête Dieu. Here is a table."

"It is done," said Maugiron, "now who will carry the letter?"

"I will, if you please," said Chicot, approaching, "but I wish to give you a piece of advice. His majesty speaks of fasts and macerations. That is all very well after the combat, but before, I prefer good nourishment, generous wine, and eight hours' sleep every night."

"Bravo, Chicot!"

"Adieu, my little lions," replied the Gascon, "I go to the Hôtel Bussy." He went three steps and returned, and said, "Apropos, do not quit the king during the Fête Dieu; do not go to the country, any of you, but stay by the Louvre. Now, I will do your commission."

## Chapter 84

### WHERE CHICOT WAKES.

"Your majesty," said Quelus, "knows only half the business, and that the least interesting half. Assuredly, we have all dined with M. de Bussy, and to the honor of his cook, be it said, dined well. There was, above all, a certain wine from Austria or Hungary, which really appeared to me marvelous. But during the repast, or rather after it, we had the most serious and interesting conversation concerning your majesty's affairs."

"You make the exordium very long."

"How talkative you are, Valois!" cried Chicot.

"Oh! oh! M. Gascon," said Henri, "if you do not sleep, you must leave the room."

"Pardieu, it is you who keep me from sleeping, your tongue clacks so fast."

Quelus, seeing it was impossible to speak seriously, shrugged his shoulders, and rose in anger.

"We were speaking of grave matters," said he.

"Grave matters?"

"Yes," said D'Epernon, "if the lives of eight brave gentlemen are worth the trouble of your majesty's attention."

"What does it mean, my son?" said Henri, placing his hand on Quelus's shoulder.

"Well, sire, the result of our conversation was, that royalty is menaced--weakened, that is to say, that all the world is conspiring against you. Sire, you are a great king, but you have no horizon before you; the nobility have raised so many barriers before your eyes, that you can see nothing, if it be not the still higher barriers that the people have raised. When, sire, in battle one battalion places itself like a menacing wall before another, what happens? Cowards look behind them, and seeing an open space, they fly; the brave lower their heads and rush on."

"Well, then forward!" cried the king, "mordieu! am I not the first gentleman in my kingdom? Were they not great battles that I fought in my youth? Forward, then, gentlemen, and I will take the lead; it is my custom in the mêlée."

"Oh! yes, sire," cried the young men, with one voice.

"And," said Quelus, "against these ramparts which are closing round your majesty, four men will march, sure to be applauded by you, and glorified by posterity."

"What do you mean, Quelus?" cried the king, with eyes in which joy was tempered by solicitude; "who are these four men?"

"I, and these other gentlemen," replied Quelus, with pride; "we devote ourselves, sire."

"To what?"

"To your safety."



"Against whom?"

"Against your enemies."

"Private enmities of young men?"

"Oh! sire, that is the expression of vulgar prejudice; speak like a king, sire, not like a bourgeois. Do not profess to believe that Maugiron detests Antragues, that Schomberg dislikes Livarot, that D'Epéron is jealous of Bussy, and that I hate Ribeirac. Oh! no. They are all young, and agreeable, and might love each other like brothers: it is not, therefore, a rivalry between man and man, which places the swords in our hands; it is the quarrel of France with Anjou, the dispute as to the rights of the populace against the prerogatives of the king. We present ourselves as champions of royalty in those lists, where we shall be met by the champions of the League, and we came to say, 'Bless us, sire, smile on those who are going to die for you.' Your blessing will, perhaps, give us the victory, your smile will make us die happy."

Henri, overcome with emotion, opened his arms to Quelus and the others. He united them in his heart; and it was not a spectacle without interest, a picture without expression, but a scene in which manly courage was allied to softer emotions, sanctified by devotion. Chicot looked on, and his face, ordinarily indifferent or sarcastic, was not the least noble and eloquent of the six.

"Ah!" cried the king, "I am proud to-day, not of being King of France, but of being your friend; at the same time, as I know my own interests best, I will not accept a sacrifice, of which the result will deliver me up, if you fall, into the hands of my enemies. France is enough to make war on Anjou; I know my brother, the Guises, and the League, and have often conquered more dangerous foes."

"But, sire, soldiers do not reason thus, they never take ill luck into their calculations."

"Pardon me, Maugiron; a soldier may act blindly, but the captain reflects."

"Reflect, then, sire, and let us act, who are only soldiers," said Schomberg: "besides, I know no ill luck; I am always successful."

"Friend, friend," said the king, sadly, "I wish I could say as much. It is true, you are but twenty."

"Sire," said Quelus, "on what day shall we meet MM. Bussy, Livarot, Antragues and Ribeirac?"

"Never; I forbid it absolutely."

"Sire, excuse us, the rendezvous was arranged before the dinner, words were said which cannot be retracted."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Henri, "the king absolves from oaths and promises by saying, 'I will, or I will not,' for the king is all-powerful. Tell these gentlemen, therefore, that I have menaced you with all my anger if you come to blows; and that you may not doubt it yourselves, I swear to exile you, if----"

"Stop! sire; do not swear; because, if for such a cause we have merited your anger, and this anger shows itself by exiling us, we will go into exile with joy, because, being no longer on your majesty's territories, we can then keep our promises, and meet our adversaries."

"If these gentlemen approach you within range of an arquebuse, I will throw them all into the Bastile."

"Sire, if you do so we will all go barefooted, and with cords round our necks, to M. Testu, the governor, and pray to be incarcerated with them."

"I will have them beheaded, then; I am king, I hope."

"We will cut our throats at the foot of their scaffold."

Henri kept silent for a long time; then, raising his eyes, said, "God will surely bless a cause defended by such noble hearts."

"Yes, they are noble hearts," said Chicot, rising; "do what they wish, and fix a day for their meeting. It is your duty, my son."

"Oh I mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" murmured Henri.

"Sire, we pray you," cried all the four gentlemen, bending their knees.

"Well! so be it. Let us trust that God will give us the victory. But let us prepare for the conflict in a Christian manner. If I had time, I would send all your swords to Rome, that the Pope might bless them. But we have the shrine of St. Genevieve, which contains most precious relics: let us fast, and do penance, and keep holy the great day of the Fête Dieu, and then the next day----"

"Ah! sire, thanks; that is in eight days!" cried the young men.

And they seized the hands of the king, who embraced them all once more, and, going into his oratory, melted into tears.

"Our cartel is ready," said Quelus, "we have but to add the day and hour. Write, Maugiron, the day after the Fête Dieu. Here is a table."

"It is done," said Maugiron, "now who will carry the letter?"

"I will, if you please," said Chicot, approaching, "but I wish to give you a piece of advice. His majesty speaks of fasts and macerations. That is all very well after the combat, but before, I prefer good nourishment, generous wine, and eight hours' sleep every night."

"Bravo, Chicot!"

"Adieu, my little lions," replied the Gascon, "I go to the Hôtel Bussy." He went three steps and returned, and said, "Apropos, do not quit the king during the Fête Dieu; do not go to the country, any of you, but stay by the Louvre. Now, I will do your commission."