

Chapter 95

THE FRIENDS OF BUSSY.

The friends of the Duc d'Anjou had passed as good and tranquil a night as those of the king, although their master had not taken the same care of them. After a good supper, they had all retired to sleep at Antragues's house, which was nearest to the field of battle. Antragues, before supper, had gone to take leave of a little milliner whom he adored, Ribeirac had written to his mother, and Livarot had made his will. They were up early in the morning, and dressed themselves in red breeches and socks, that their enemies might not see their blood, and they had doublets of gray silk. They wore shoes without heels, and their pages carried their swords, that their arms might not be fatigued.

The weather was splendid, for love, war, or walking; and the sun gilded the roofs, on which the night dew was sparkling. The streets were dry, and the air delightful.

Before leaving the house, the young men had sent to the Hôtel d'Anjou to inquire for Bussy, and had received a reply that he had gone out the evening before and had not yet returned.

"Oh!" said Antragues, "I know where he is; the king ordered a grand chase at Compiègne, and M. de Monsoreau was to set off yesterday. It is all right, gentlemen; he is nearer the ground than we are, and may be there before us. We will call for him in passing."

The streets were empty as they went along; no one was to be seen except peasants coming from Montreuil or Vincennes, with milk or vegetables.

The young men went on in silence until they reached the Rue St. Antoine.

Then, with a smile, they glanced at Monsoreau's house.

"One could see well from there, and I am sure poor Diana will be more than once at the window," said Antragues.

"I think she must be there already," said Ribeirac, "for the window is open."

"True, but what can be the meaning of that ladder before it?"

"It is odd."

"We are not the only ones to wonder," said Livarot, "see those peasants, who are stopping their carts to look."

The young men arrived under the balcony. "M. de Monsoreau," they cried, "do you intend to be present at our combat? if so, be quick, for we wish to arrive first."

They waited, but no one answered.

"Did you put up that ladder?" asked Antragues of a man who was examining the ground.

"God forbid!" replied he.

"Why so?"

"Look up."

"Blood!" cried Ribeirac.

"The door has been forced," said Antragues; and seizing the ladder, he was on the balcony in a moment.

"What is it?" cried the others, seeing him turn pale.

A terrible cry was his only answer. Livarot mounted behind him. "Corpses! death everywhere!" cried he. And they both entered the room. It bore horrible traces of the terrible combat of the previous night. A river of blood flowed over the room; and the curtains were hanging in strips from sword cuts.

"Oh! poor Rémy!" cried Antragues, suddenly.

"Dead!"

"Yes."

"But a regiment of troopers must have passed through the room," cried Livarot. Then, seeing the door of the corridor open, and traces of blood indicating that one or more of the combatants had also passed through there, he followed it. Meanwhile, Antragues went into the adjoining room; there also blood was everywhere, and this blood led to the window. He leaned out and looked into the little garden. The iron spikes still held the livid corpse of the unhappy Bussy. At this sight, it was not a cry, but a yell, that Antragues uttered. Livarot ran to see what it was, and Ribeirac followed.

"Look!" said Antragues, "Bussy dead! Bussy assassinated and thrown out of window."

They ran down.

"It is he," cried Livarot.

"His wrist is cut."

"He has two balls in his breast."

"He is full of wounds."

"Ah! poor Bussy! we will have vengeance!"

Turning round they came against a second corpse.

"Monsoreau!" cried Livarot.

"What! Monsoreau also."

"Yes, pierced through and through."

"Ah! they have assassinated all our friends."

"And his wife? Madame de Monsoreau!" cried Antragues; but no one answered.

"Bussy, poor Bussy."

"Yes, they wished to get rid of the most formidable of us all."

"It is cowardly! it is infamous!"

"We will tell the duke."

"No," said Antragues, "let us not charge any one with the care of our vengeance. Look, my friends, at the noble face of the bravest of men; see his blood, that teaches that he never left his vengeance to any other person. Bussy! we will act like you, and we will avenge you."

Then, drawing his sword, he dipped it in Bussy's blood.

"Bussy," said he, "I swear on your corpse, that this blood shall be washed off by the blood of your enemies."

"Bussy," cried the others, "we swear to kill them or die."

"No mercy," said Antragues.

"But we shall be but three."

"True, but we have assassinated no one, and God will strengthen the innocent. Adieu, Bussy!"

"Adieu, Bussy!" repeated the others; and they went out, pale but resolute, from that cursed house, around which a crowd had begun to collect.

Arriving on the ground, they found their opponents waiting for them.

"Gentlemen," said Quelus, rising and bowing, "we have had the honor of waiting for you."

"Excuse us," said Antragues, "but we should have been here before you, but for one of our companions."

"M. de Bussy," said D'Epernon, "I do not see him. Where is he?"

"We can wait for him," said Schomberg.

"He will not come."

All looked thunderstruck; but D'Epernon exclaimed:

"Ah! the brave man par excellence--is he, then, afraid?"

"That cannot be," said Quelus.

"You are right, monsieur," said Livarot.

"And why will he not come?"

"Because he is dead."

"Dead!" cried they all, but D'Epernon turned rather pale.

"And dead because he has been assassinated," said Antragues. "Did you not know it, gentlemen?"

"No; how should we?"

"Besides, is it certain?"

Antragues drew his sword. "So certain that here is his blood," said he.

"M. de Bussy assassinated!"

"His blood cries for vengeance! do you not hear it, gentlemen?" said Ribeirac.

"What do you mean?"

"'Seek whom the crime profits,' the law says," replied Ribeirac.

"Ah! gentlemen, will you explain yourselves?" cried Maugiron.

"That is just what we have come for."

"Quick! our swords are in our hands!" said D'Epernon.

"Oh! you are in a great hurry, M. le Gascon; you did not crow so loud when we were four against four!"

"Is it our fault, if you are only three?"

"Yes, it is your fault; he is dead because you preferred him lying in his blood to standing here; he is dead, with his wrist cut, that that wrist might no longer hold a sword; he is dead, that you might not see the lightning of those eyes, which dazzled you all. Do you understand me? am I clear?"

"Enough, gentlemen!" said Quelus. "Retire, M. d'Epernon! we will fight three against three. These gentlemen shall see if we are men to profit by a misfortune which we deplore as much as themselves. Come, gentlemen," added the young man, throwing his hat behind him, and raising his left hand, while he whirled his sword with the right, "God is our judge if we are assassins!"

"Ah! I hated you before," cried Schomberg, "and now I execrate you!"

"On your guard, gentlemen!" cried Antragues.

"With doublets or without?" said Schomberg.

"Without doublets, without shirts; our breasts bare, our hearts uncovered!"

The young men threw off their doublets and shirts.

"I have lost my dagger," said Quelus; "it must have fallen on the road."

"Or else you left it at M. de Monsoreau's, in the Place de la Bastile," said Antragues.

Quelus gave a cry of rage, and drew his sword.

"But he has no dagger, M. Antragues," cried Chicot, who had just arrived.

"So much the worse for him; it is not my fault," said Antragues.