

Chapter 97

THE END.

The king, pale with anxiety, and shuddering at the slightest noise, employed himself in conjecturing, with the experience of a practised man, the time that it would take for the antagonists to meet and that the combat would last.

"Now," he murmured first, "they are crossing the Rue St. Antoine--now they are entering the field--now they have begun." And at these words, the poor king, trembling, began to pray.

Rising again in a few minutes, he cried:

"If Quelus only remembers the thrust I taught him! As for Schomberg, he is so cool that he ought to kill Ribeirac; Maugiron, also, should be more than a match for Livarot. But D'Epernon, he is lost; fortunately he is the one of the four whom I love least. But if Bussy, the terrible Bussy, after killing him, falls on the others! Ah, my poor friends!"

"Sire!" said Crillon, at the door.

"What! already?"

"Sire, I have no news but that the Duc d'Anjou begs to speak to your majesty."

"What for?"

"He says that the moment has come for him to tell you what service he rendered your majesty, and that what he has to tell you will calm a part of your fears."

"Well, let him come."

At this moment they heard a voice crying, "I must speak to the king at once!"

The king recognized the voice, and opened the door.

"Here, St. Luc!" cried he. "What is it? But, mon Dieu! what is the matter? Are they dead?"

Indeed, St. Luc, pale, without hat or sword, and spotted with blood, rushed into the king's room.

"Sire!" cried he, "vengeance! I ask for vengeance!"

"My poor St. Luc, what is it? You seem in despair."

"Sire, one of your subjects, the bravest, noblest, has been murdered this night--traitorously murdered!"

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Sire, you do not love him, I know; but he was faithful, and, if need were, would have shed all his blood for your majesty, else he would not have been my friend."

"Ah!" said the king, who began to understand; and something like a gleam of joy passed over his face.

"Vengeance, sire, for M. de Bussy!"

"M. de Bussy?"

"Yes, M. de Bussy, whom twenty assassins poniarded last night. He killed fourteen of them."

"M. de Bussy dead?"

"Yes, sire."

"Then he does not fight this morning?"

St. Luc cast a reproachful glance on the king, who turned away his head, and, in doing so, saw Crillon still standing at the door. He signed to him to bring in the duke.

"No, sire, he will not fight," said St. Luc; "and that is why I ask, not for vengeance--I was wrong to call it so--but for justice. I love my king, and am, above all things, jealous of his honor, and I think that it is a deplorable service which they have rendered to your majesty by killing M. de Bussy."

The Duc d'Anjou had just entered, and St. Luc's words had enlightened the king as to the service his brother had boasted of having rendered him.

"Do you know what they will say?" continued St. Luc. "They will say, if your friends conquer, that it is because they first murdered Bussy."

"And who will dare to say that?"

"Pardieu! everyone," said Crillon.

"No, monsieur, they shall not say that," replied the king, "for you shall point out the assassin."

"I will name him, sire, to clear your majesty from so heinous an accusation," said St. Luc.

"Well! do it."

The Duc d'Anjou stood quietly by.

"Sire," continued St. Luc, "last night they laid a snare for Bussy, while he visited a woman who loved him; the husband, warned by a traitor, came to his house with a troop of assassins; they were everywhere--in the street--in the courtyard, even in the garden."

In spite of his power over himself, the duke grew pale at these last words.

"Bussy fought like a lion, sire, but numbers overwhelmed him, and--"

"And he was killed," interrupted the king, "and justly; I will certainly not revenge an adulterer."

"Sire, I have not finished my tale. The unhappy man, after having defended himself for more than half an hour in the room, after having triumphed over his enemies, escaped, bleeding, wounded, and mutilated: he only wanted some one to lend him a saving hand, which I would have done had I not been seized by his assassins, and bound, and gagged. Unfortunately, they forgot to take away my sight as well as my speech, for I saw two men approach the unlucky Bussy, who was hanging on the iron railings. I heard him entreat them for help, for in these two men he had the right to reckon on two friends. Well, sire, it is horrible to relate--it was still more horrible to see and hear--one ordered him to be shot, and the other obeyed."

"And you know the assassins?" cried the king, moved in spite of himself.

"Yes," said St. Luc, and turning to the prince, with an expression of intense hatred, he cried, "the assassin, sire, was the prince, his friend."

The duke stood perfectly quiet and answered, "Yes, M. de St. Luc is right; it was I, and your majesty will appreciate my action, for M. de Bussy was my servant; but this morning he was to fight against your majesty."

"You lie, assassin!" cried St. Luc. "Bussy, full of wounds, his hands cut to pieces, a ball through his shoulder, and hanging suspended on the iron trellis-work, might have inspired pity in his most cruel enemies; they would have succored him. But you, the murderer of La Mole and of Coconnas, you killed Bussy, as you have killed, one after another, all your friends. You killed Bussy, not because he was the king's enemy, but because he was the confidant of your secrets. Ah! Monsoreau knew well your reason for this crime."

"Cordieu!" cried Crillon, "why am I not king?"

"They insult me before you, brother," said the duke, pale with terror.

"Leave us, Crillon," said the king. The officer obeyed.

"Justice, sire, justice!" cried St. Luc again.

"Sire," said the duke, "will you punish me for having served your majesty's friends this morning?"

"And I," cried St. Luc, "I say that the cause which you espouse is accursed, and will be pursued by the anger of God. Sire, when your brother protects our friends, woe to them." The king shuddered.

Then they heard hasty steps and voices, followed by a deep silence; and then, as if a voice from heaven came to confirm St. Luc's words, three blows were struck slowly and solemnly on the door by the vigorous arm of Crillon. Henri turned deadly pale.

"Conquered," cried he; "my poor friends!"

"What did I tell you, sire?" cried St. Luc. "See how murder succeeds."

But the king saw nothing, heard nothing; he buried his face in his hands, and murmured. "Oh! my poor friends; who will tell me about them?"

"I, sire," said Chicot.--"Well!" cried Henri.

"Two are dead, and the third is dying."

"Which is the third?"--"Quelus."

"Where is he?"--"At the Hôtel Boissy."

The king said no more, but rushed from the room.

St. Luc had taken Diana home to his wife, and this had kept him from appearing sooner at the Louvre. Jeanne passed three days and nights watching her through the most frightful delirium. On the fourth day, Jeaune, overcome by fatigue, went to take a little rest: two hours after, when she returned, Diana was gone.

Quelus died at the Hôtel Boissy, in the king's arms, after lingering for thirty days.

Henri was inconsolable. He raised three magnificent tombs for his friends, on which their effigies were sculptured, life-size, in marble. He had innumerable masses said for them, and prayed for their souls himself night and morning. For three months Chicot never left his master. In September, Chicot received the following letter, dated from the Priory of Beaume:

"DEAR M. CHICOT--The air is soft in this place, and the vintage promises to be good this year. They say that the king, whose life I saved, still grieves much. Bring him to the priory, dear M. Chicot; we will give him wine of 1550, which I have discovered in my cellar, and which is enough to make one forget the greatest grief; for I find in the Holy Writ these words, 'Good wine rejoices the heart of man.' It is in Latin. I will show it you. Come, then, dear M. Chicot; come, with the king, M. d'Epernon, and M. de St. Luc, and we will fatten them all.

"The reverend prior,

"DOM GORENFLOT,

"Your humble servant and friend."P.S.--Tell the king that I have not yet had time to pray for

the souls of his friends; but when the vintage is over; I shall

not fail to do so. "Amen," said Chicot; "here are poor devils well recommended to Heaven."

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THE END