## Chapter 14

## THE SHADE OF CHICOT.

The king, as we have said, was never deceived as to the character of his friends; he knew perfectly well that D'Epernon was working for his own advantage, but as he expected to have had to give and receive nothing in return, whereas he had got forty-five guards, he had thought it a good idea. Besides, it was a novelty, which was a thing that a poor king of France could not always get, and especially Henri III., who, when he had gone through his processions, counted his dogs, and uttered his usual number of sighs, had nothing left to do. Therefore he became more and more pleased with the idea as he returned to his room.

"These men are doubtless brave, and will be perhaps very devoted," thought he; "and forty-five swords always ready to leap from their scabbards are a grand thing."

This thought brought to his mind the other devoted swords that he regretted so bitterly. He became sad again, and inquired for Joyeuse. They replied that he had not returned.

"Then call my valets-de-chambre."

When he was in bed, they asked if his reader should attend, for Henri was subject to long fits of wakefulness, and was often read to sleep.

"No," replied the king, "I want no one; only if M. de Joyeuse returns, bring him to me."

"If he returns late, sire?"

"Alas! he is always late; but whatever be the hour, bring him here."

The servants extinguished the candles and lighted a lamp of essences, which gave a pale blue flame, that the king liked. Henri was tired, and soon slept, but not for long; he awoke, thinking he heard a noise in the room.

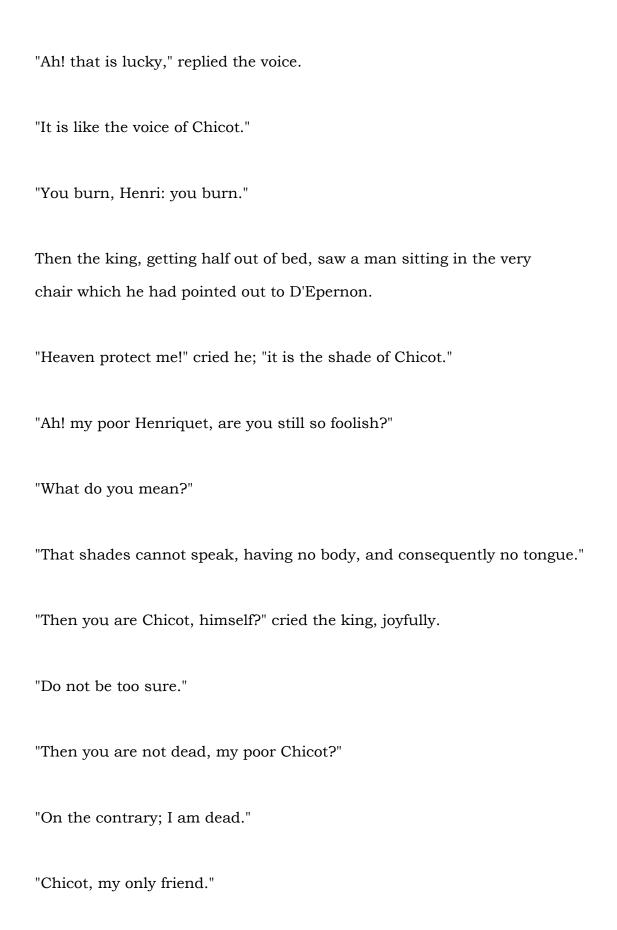
"Joyeuse," he asked; "is it you?"

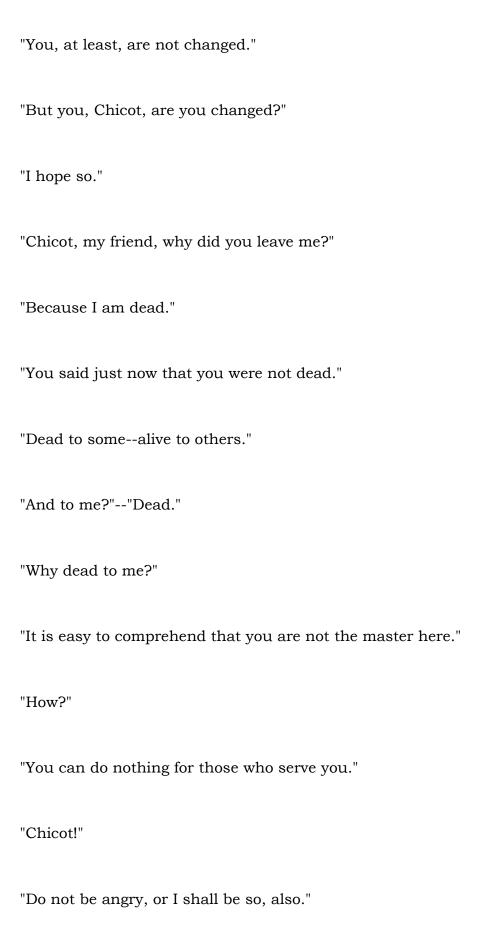
No one replied. The light burned dim, and only threw faint circles on the ceiling of carved oak.

"Alone, still!" murmured the king. "Mon Dieu! I am alone all my life, as I shall be after death."

"'Alone after death'; that is not certain," said a powerful voice near the bed.

The king started up and looked round him in terror. "I know that voice," cried he.





"Speak then, my friend," said the king, fearful that Chicot would vanish.

"Well, I had a little affair to settle with M. de Mayenne, you remember?"

"Perfectly."

"I settled it; I beat this valiant captain without mercy. He sought for me to hang me; and you, whom I thought would protect me, abandoned me, and made peace with him. Then I declared myself dead and buried by the aid of my friend Gorenflot, so that M. de Mayenne has ceased to search for me."

"What a frightful courage you had, Chicot; did you not know the grief your death would cause me?"

"I have never lived so tranquilly as since the world thought me dead."

"Chicot, my head turns; you frighten me--I know not what to think."

"Well! settle something."

"I think that you are dead and--"

"Then I lie; you are polite."

"You commence by concealing some things from me; but presently, like the orators of antiquity, you will tell me terrible truths."

"Oh! as to that, I do not say no. Prepare, poor king!"

"If you are not a shade, how could you come unnoticed into my room, through the guarded corridors?" And Henri, abandoning himself to new terrors, threw himself down in the bed and covered up his head.

"Come, come," cried Chicot; "you have only to touch me to be convinced."

"But how did you come?"

"Why, I have still the key that you gave me, and which I hung round my neck to enrage your gentlemen, and with this I entered."

"By the secret door, then?"

"Certainly."

"And why to-day more than yesterday?"

"Ah! that you shall hear."

Henri, sitting up again, said like a child, "Do not tell me anything disagreeable, Chicot; I am so glad to see you again."

"I will tell the truth; so much the worse if it be disagreeable."

"But your fear of Mayenne is not serious?"

"Very serious, on the contrary. You understand that M. de Mayenne gave me fifty blows with a stirrup leather, in return for which I gave him one hundred with the sheath of my sword. No doubt he thinks, therefore, that he still owes me fifty, so that I should not have come to you now, however great your need, had I not known him to be at Soissons."

"Well, Chicot, I take you now under my protection, and I wish that you should be resuscitated and appear openly."

"What folly!"

"I will protect you, on my royal word."

"Bah! I have better than that."

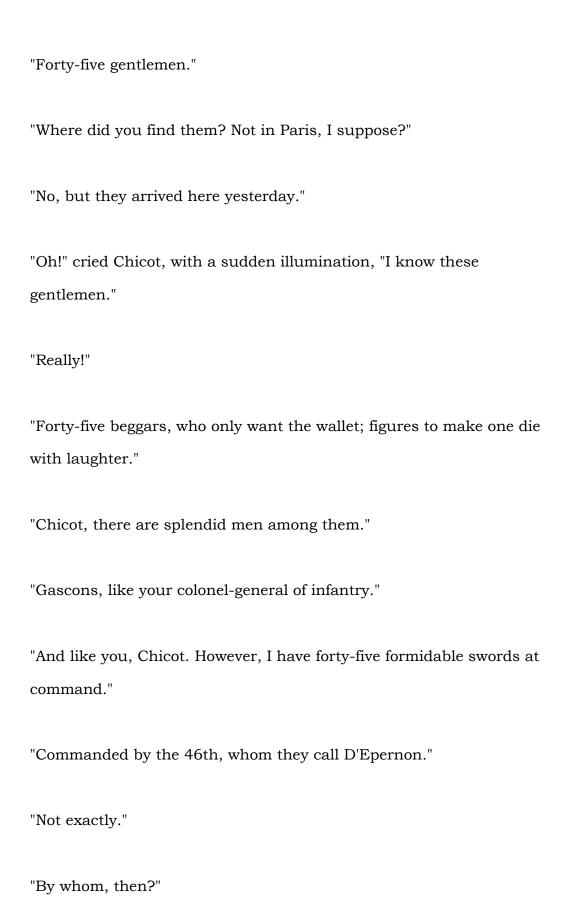
"What?"

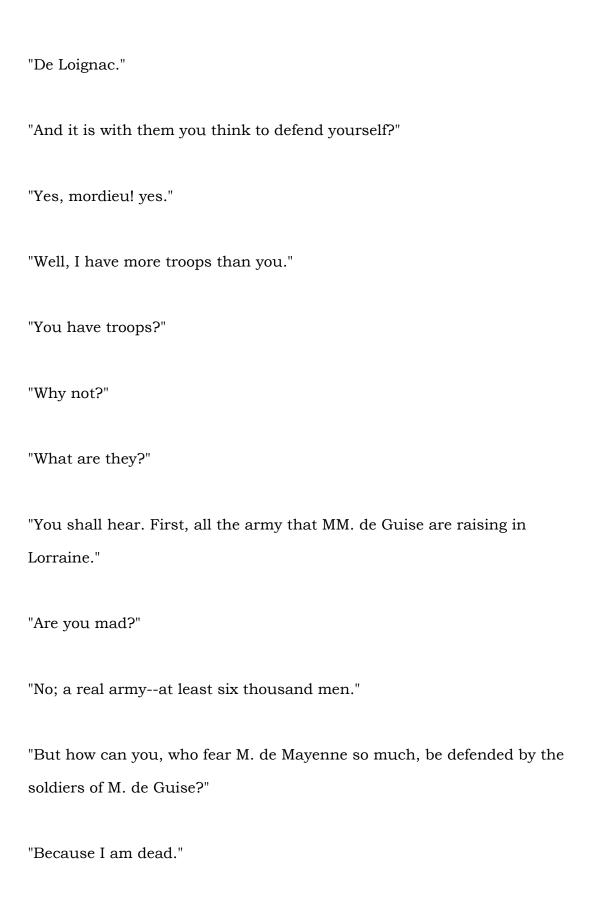
"My hole, where I remain."

"I forbid it," cried the king, jumping out of bed.

"Henri, you will catch cold; go back to bed, I pray."

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"You are right, but you exasperated me. How, when I have enough guards,
Swiss, Scotch, and French, for my own defense, should I not have enough
for yours?"
"Let us see: you have the Swiss--"
"Yes, commanded by Tocquenot."
"Good! then you have the Scotch--"
"Commanded by Larchant."
"Very well! and you have the French guards--"
"Commanded by Crillon. And then--but I do not know if I ought to tell
you--"
"I did not ask you."
"A novelty, Chicot!"
"A novelty?"
"Yes; imagine forty-five brave gentlemen."
"Forty-five? What do you mean?"
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"Again this joke!" "No; I have changed my name and position." "What are you, then?" "I am Robert Briquet, merchant and leaguer." "You a leaguer?" "A devoted one, so that I keep away from M. de Mayenne. I have, then, for me, first, the army of Lorraine--six thousand men; remember that number." "I listen." "Then, at least one hundred thousand Parisians." "Famous soldiers!" "Sufficiently so to annoy you much: 6,000 and 100,000 are 106,000; then there is the pope, the Spaniards, M. de Bourbon, the Flemings, Henry of Navarre, the Duc d'Anjou--" "Have you done?" interrupted Henri, impatiently.

"There still remain three classes of people."

"What are they?"

"First the Catholics, who hate you because you only three parts exterminated the Huguenots: then the Huguenots, who hate you because you

have three parts exterminated them; and the third party is that which desires neither you, nor your brother, nor M. de Guise, but your brother-in-law, Henri of Navarre."

"Provided that he abjure. But these people of whom you speak are all France."

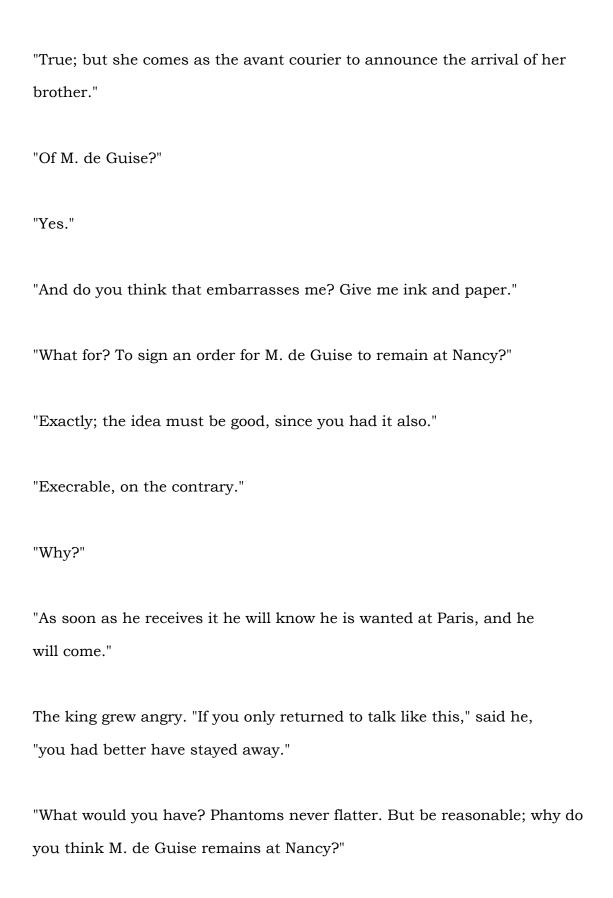
"Just so. These are my troops as a leaguer; now add, and compare."

"You are joking, are you not, Chicot?"

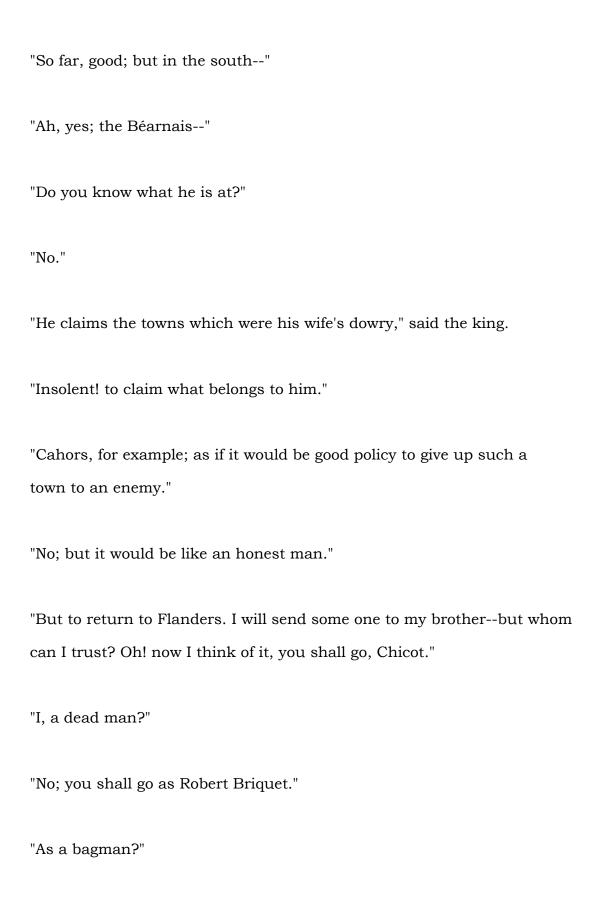
"Is it a time to joke, when you are alone, against all the world?"

Henri assumed an air of royal dignity. "Alone I am," said he, "but at the same time I alone command. You show me an army, but where is the chief? You will say, M. de Guise; but do I not keep him at Nancy? M. de Mayenne, you say yourself, is at Soissons, the Duc d'Anjou is at Brussels, and the king of Navarre at Pau; so that if I am alone, I am free. I am like a hunter in the midst of a plain, waiting to see his prey come within his reach."









"Do you refuse?"--"Certainly."

"You disobey me!"

"I owe you no obedience--"

Henri was about to reply, when the door opened and the Duc de Joyeuse was announced.

"Ah! there is your man," said Chicot; "who could make a better ambassador?"

Chicot then buried himself in the great chair, so as to be quite invisible in the dim light. M. de Joyeuse did not see him. The king uttered a cry of joy on seeing his favorite, and held out his hand.

"Sit down, Joyeuse, my child," said he; "how late you are."

"Your majesty is very good," answered Joyeuse, approaching the bed, on which he sat down.