

## Chapter 24

### THE AMBUSH.

Chicot made a slight opening through the hedge, that he might see those who came and went. The road was almost deserted as far as he could see; there was no one but a man poorly clothed measuring the ground with a long, pointed stick. Chicot had nothing to do, and therefore was preparing to watch this man, when a more important object attracted his attention.

The window of Gorenflot's room opened with folding-doors on to a balcony, and Chicot saw them open, and Gorenflot come out, with his most gallant manner and winning smile, leading a lady almost hidden under a mantle of velvet and fur.

"Oh!" thought Chicot, "here is the penitent. She looks young; it is very odd, but I find resemblances in every one I see. And here comes the squire; as for him, there is no mistake; I know him, and if he be Mayneville--ventre de biche!--why should not the lady be Madame de Montpensier? And, morbleu! that woman is the duchess!"

After a moment, he saw the pale head of Borromée behind them.

"What are they about?" thought Chicot; "does the duchess want to board with Gorenflot?"

At this moment Chicot saw M. de Mayneville make a sign to some one outside. Chicot looked round, but there was no one to be seen but the man measuring. It was to him, however, that the sign was addressed, for he had ceased measuring, and was looking toward the balcony. Borromée began also to gesticulate behind Mayneville, in a manner unintelligible to Chicot, but apparently clear to this man, for he went further off, and stationed himself in another place, where he stopped at a fresh sign. Then he began to run quickly toward the gate of the priory, while M. de Mayneville held his watch in his hand.

"Diable!" said Chicot, "this is all very odd."

As the man passed him, he recognized Nicholas Poulain, the man to whom he had sold his armor the day before. Shortly after, they all re-entered the room and shut the window, and then the duchess and her squire came out of the priory and went toward the litter which waited for them. Gorenflot accompanied them to the door, exhausting himself in bows and salutations. The curtains of the litter were still open, when a monk, in whom Chicot recognized Jacques, advanced from the Porte St. Antoine, approached, and looked earnestly into it. The duchess then went away, and Nicholas Poulain was following, when Chicot called out from his hiding place--

"Come here, if you please."

Poulain started, and turned his head.

"Do not seem to notice, M. Nicholas Poulain," said Chicot.

The lieutenant started again. "Who are you, and what do you want?" asked he.

"I am a friend, new, but intimate; what I want will take long to explain; come here to me."

"To you?"

"Yes; here in the ditch."

"What for?"

"You shall know when you come."

"But--"

"Come and sit down here, without appearing to notice me."

"Monsieur?"

"Oh! M. Robert Briquet has the right to be exacting."

"Robert Briquet!" cried Poulain, doing as he was desired.

"That is right; it seems you were taking measures in the road."

"I!"

"Yes; there is nothing surprising that you should be a surveyor, especially as you acted under the eyes of such great people."

"Great people! I do not understand."

"What! you did not know?"

"What do you mean?"

"You did not know who that lady and gentlemen on the balcony were?"

"I declare--"

"Oh! how fortunate I am to be able to enlighten you. Only imagine, M. Poulain; you had for admirers Madame de Montpensier and M. de Mayneville. Do not go away. If a still more illustrious person--the king--saw you--"

"Ah! M. Briquet--"

"Never mind; I am only anxious for your good."

"But what harm have I done to the king, or to you, or anybody?"

"Dear M. Poulain, my ideas may be wrong, but it seems to me that the king would not approve of his lieutenant of the Provostry acting as surveyor for M. de Mayneville; and that he might also take it ill that you should omit in your daily report the entrance of Madame de Montpensier and M. de Mayneville, yesterday, into his good city of Paris."

"M. Briquet, an omission is not an offense, and his majesty is too good--"

"M. Poulain, I see clearer than you, and I see--"

"What?"

"A gallows."

"M. Briquet!"

"And more--a new cord, four soldiers at the four cardinal points, a number of Parisians around, and a certain lieutenant of my acquaintance at the end of the cord."

Nicholas Poulain trembled so that he shook the hedge. "Monsieur!" cried he, clasping his hands.

"But I am your friend, dear M. Poulain, and I will give you a counsel."

"A counsel?"

"Yes; and very easy to follow. Go at once, you understand, to--"

"Whom?"

"Let me think. To M. d'Epernon."

"M. d'Epernon, the king's friend?"

"Take him aside, and tell him all about this."

"This is folly."

"No, it is wisdom. It is clear that if I denounce you as the man of the cuirasses and measures, they will hang you; but if, on the contrary, you disclose all, with a good grace, they will reward you. You do not appear convinced, however. Well! that will give me the trouble of returning to the Louvre, but I do not mind doing that for you," and he began to rise.

"No, no; stay here, I will go."

"Good! But you understand, no subterfuges, or to-morrow I shall send a little note to the king, whose intimate friend I have the honor to be, so that if you are not hanged till the day after to-morrow, you will

only be hanged the higher."

"I will go; but you abuse your position."

"Oh! M. Poulain, you were a traitor five minutes ago, and I make you the savior of your country. Now, go quickly, for I am in a hurry. The Hotel d'Epernon--do not forget."

Nicholas Poulain ran off, with a despairing look.

"Ah! it was time," said Chicot, "for some one is leaving the priory. But it is not Jacques; that fellow is half as tall again."

Chicot then hastened to the Croix Faubin, where he had given the rendezvous. The monk, who was there to meet him, was a giant in height; his monk's robe, hastily thrown on, did not hide his muscular limbs, and his face bore anything but a religious expression. His arms were as long as Chicot's own, and he had a knife in his belt.

As Chicot approached, he turned and said, "Are you M. Robert Briquet?"

"I am."

"Then I have a letter for you from the reverend prior."

Chicot took the letter, and read as follows:

"My dear friend, I have reflected since we parted; it is impossible for me to let the lamb confided to me go among the wolves of the world. I mean, you understand, our little Jacques, who has fulfilled your message to the king. Instead of him, who is too young, I send you a good and worthy brother of our order; his manners are good, and his humor innocent, and I am sure you will like him. I send you my benediction. Adieu, dear friend."

"What fine writing," said Chicot; "I will wager it is the treasurer's."

"It was Brother Borromée who wrote it," said the Goliath.

"In that case you will return to the priory, my friend."--"I?"

"Yes; and tell his reverence that I have changed my mind, and intend to travel alone."

"What! you will not take me, monsieur?" said the man, with astonishment, mixed with menace.

"No, my friend."

"And why, if you please?"

"Because I must be economical, and you would eat too much."

"Jacques eats as much as I do."



"Yes, but Jacques was a monk."

"And what am I?"

"You, my friend, are a gendarme, or a foot soldier."

"What do you mean? Do you not see my monk's robe?"

"The dress does not make the monk, my friend; tell Brother Borromée that, if you please."

The giant disappeared, grumbling, like a beaten hound.