

Chapter 34

THE FOUR WINDS.

Chicot, with his little horse, which ought to have been a big one to have carried him, after having slept at Fontainebleau, made a detour to the right, and proceeded toward the little village of Orgeval. He would have gone further that day, but his horse failed him. He put up, therefore, at a good hotel, and went through the rooms to select one where the doors closed well, and chose an apartment which had just been repaired, and the door of which was furnished with a formidable lock.

Before going to bed, although the hotel had appeared almost empty, he locked the door and placed a heavy table and a chest of drawers against it. He then put his purse under his pillow, and repeated to himself three times over the translation of the king's letter. There was an extremely high wind blowing, and as it howled in the neighboring trees, it was with a feeling of great satisfaction that Chicot plunged into a very comfortable bed.

He had a lamp by his bedside, and he occupied himself for some time in reading a book which he had brought with him; but, although he liked the book, in reading the third Chapter he fell asleep. The wind moaned about the house, sometimes like a child crying, and sometimes like a husband scolding his wife; and as Chicot slept, it seemed to him, in his dreams, that the tempest came nearer and nearer. All at once a sudden squall of

invincible force broke locks and bolts--pushed the chest of drawers, which fell on the lamp, which it extinguished, and on the table, which it smashed.

Chicot had the faculty of waking quickly, and with all his senses about him, so he jumped out of bed and got hold in an instant of his purse and his sword. It was quite dark, but it seemed to him that the whole room was being torn to pieces by the four winds of heaven; for the chairs were falling, and the table breaking more and more under the weight of the drawers. As he could do nothing against the gods of Olympus, he contented himself with standing in one corner, with his sword held out before him, so that if any of these mythological personages approached, they would spit themselves upon it.

At last he profited by a momentary cessation in the uproar to cry loudly, "Help! help!"

He made so much noise that it seemed to quiet the elements, as if Neptune had pronounced the famous *_Quos ego_*, and, after six or seven minutes, during which Eurus, Notus, Boreas and Aquilo seemed to beat a retreat, the host appeared with a lantern and enlightened the scene, which looked deplorably like a field of battle. The great chest of drawers was overturned on the broken table; the door was held only by one of its hinges, and the bolts were broken; three or four chairs were on the floor with their legs in the air, and, to crown all, the crockery, which had been on the table, lay in bits on the floor.

"This is a regular pandemonium," cried Chicot, recognizing his host.

"Oh! monsieur," cried the host, clasping his hands, "what has happened?"

"Are there demons lodging here?" asked Chicot.

"Oh! what weather," replied the host pathetically.

"But the bolts do not hold; this house must be made of card-board. I would rather go away;--I prefer the road."

"Oh! my poor furniture," sighed the host.

"But my clothes! where are they? They were on this chair."

"If they were there, they ought to be there still," replied the host.

"What! 'if they were there.' Do you think I came here yesterday in this costume?"

"Mon Dieu! monsieur," answered the host, with embarrassment, "I know you were clothed."

"It is lucky you confess it."

"But--"

"But what?"

"The wind has dispersed everything."

"Ah! that is a reason."

"You see."

"But, my friend, when the wind comes in it comes from outside, and it must have come in here if it made this destruction."

"Certainly, monsieur."

"Well, the wind in coming in here should have brought with it the clothes of others, instead of carrying mine out."

"So it should, and yet the contrary seems to have happened."

"But what is this? The wind must have walked in the mud, for here are footmarks on the floor." And Chicot pointed out the traces left by a muddy boot, on seeing which the host turned pale.

"Now, my friend," said Chicot, "I advise you to keep a watch over these winds which enter hotels, penetrate rooms by breaking doors, and retire, carrying away the clothes of the guests."

The host drew back toward the door. "You call me thief!" said he.

"You are responsible for my clothes, and they are gone--you will not deny that?"

"You insult me."

Chicot made a menacing gesture.

"Hola!" cried the host; "hola! help!"

Four men armed with sticks immediately appeared.

"Ah! here are the four winds," cried Chicot, making a thrust with his sword at one of them; but they all rapidly disappeared, not, however, before one of them had whispered something to the host.

"Your clothes shall be found," growled he.

"Well! that is all I ask."

They soon made their appearance, but visibly deteriorated.

"Ah! there are nails in your staircase; what a devil of a wind it was," said Chicot.

"Now you will go to bed again?" said the host.

"No, I thank you, I have slept enough; leave me your lantern and I will read."

Chicot replaced the chest of drawers against the door, dressed himself, got into bed again, and read till daybreak, when he asked for his horse, paid his bill, and went away, saying to himself--

"We shall see, to-night."