

## Chapter 77

HOW KING HENRI III. DID NOT INVITE CRILLON TO BREAKFAST, AND  
HOW CHICOT  
INVITED HIMSELF.

The day after the events that we have just related had taken place in the forest of La Fere, the king of France left his bath at about nine in the morning. His valet-de-chambre, after having rolled him in a blanket of fine wool, and sponged him with that thick Persian wadding which looks like the fleece of a sheep, had given him over to the barbers and dressers, who in their turn gave place to the perfumers and courtiers. When these last were gone, the king sent for his maitre d'hotel, and ordered something more than his ordinary bouillon, as he felt hungry that morning. This good news spread joy throughout the Louvre, and the smell of the viands was already beginning to be perceptible, when Crillon, colonel of the French guards, entered to take his majesty's orders.

"Ma foi, my good Crillon," said the king, "watch as you please over my safety, but do not force me to play the king. I am quite joyful and gay this morning, and feel as if I weighed but an ounce, and could fly away. I am hungry, Crillon; do you understand that, my friend?"

"I understand it very well, sire, for I am very hungry myself."

"Oh! you, Crillon," said the king, laughing, "are always hungry."

"Not always, sire; your majesty exaggerates--only three times a day."

"And I about once a year, when I receive good news."

"Harnibleu! it appears that you have received good news, sire? So much the better, for they become every day more rare."

"Not at all, Crillon; but you know the proverb."

"Ah! yes--'no news are good news.' I do not trust to proverbs, and above all to that one. You have no news from Navarre, then?"

"None--a proof that there is nothing to tell."

"And from Flanders?"

"Nothing."

"A proof that they are fighting. And from Paris?"

"Nothing."

"A proof that they are plotting."

"But, Crillon, I believe I am going to have a child, for the queen

dreamed so last night."

"Well! I am happy to hear that your majesty is hungry this morning.

Adieu, sire."

"Go, my good Crillon."

"Harnibleu! sire, since your majesty is so hungry, you ought to invite me to breakfast with you."

"Why so, Crillon?"

"Because they say your majesty lives on air, and the air of the times is very bad. Now I should have been happy to be able to say, 'These are all pure calumnies; the king eats like every one else.'"

"No, Crillon, no; let me believe as they do. I do not wish to eat like a simple mortal. Remember this, Crillon--a king ought always to remain poetical, and only show himself in a noble position. Thus, for example, do you remember Alexander?"

"What Alexander?"

"Alexander Magnus. Ah! you do not know Latin, I remember. Well, King Alexander loved to bathe before his soldiers, because he was so well made, handsome and plump that they compared him to Apollo and even to Antinous."

"Oh! oh! sire, you would be devilishly in the wrong to bathe before yours, for you are very thin, my poor king."

"Brave Crillon, go," said Henry, striking him on the shoulder; "you are an excellent fellow, and do not flatter me; you are no courtier, my old friend."

"That is why you do not invite me to breakfast," replied Crillon, laughing good-humoredly, and taking his leave quite contentedly, for the tap on the shoulder consoled him for not getting the breakfast.

When he was gone, the breakfast was laid at once. The maitre d'hotel had surpassed himself.

A certain partridge soup, with a purée of truffles and chestnuts, attracted the king's attention, after he had eaten some fine oysters. Thus the ordinary broth, that faithful old friend of the king's, implored vainly from its golden basin; it attracted no attention. The king began to attack the partridge soup, and was at his fourth mouthful, when a light step near him made the floor creak, and a well-known voice behind him said sharply,

"A plate!"

The king turned. "Chicot!" cried he.

"Himself."

And Chicot, falling at once into his old habits, sat down in a chair, took a plate and a fork, and began on the oysters, picking out the finest, without saying a word.

"You here! you returned!" cried Henri.

"Hush!" said Chicot, with his mouth full; and he drew the soup toward him.

"Stop, Chicot! that is my dish."

Chicot divided it equally, and gave the king back half. Then he poured himself out some wine, passed from the soup to a pâté made of tunny fish, then to stuffed crab, swallowed as a finish the royal broth, then, with a great sigh, said:

"I can eat no more."

"Par la mordieu! I hope not, Chicot."

"Ah! good-morning, my king. How are you? You seem to me very gay this morning."

"Am I not, Chicot?"

"You have quite a color; is it your own?"

"Parbleu!"

"I compliment you on it."

"The fact is, I feel very well this morning."

"I am very glad of it. But have you no little tit-bits left for breakfast?"

"Here are cherries preserved by the ladies of Montmartre."

"They are too sweet."

"Nuts stuffed with raisins."

"Bah! they have left the stones in the raisins."

"You are not content with anything."

"Well! really, on my word, everything degenerates, even cooking, and you begin to live very badly at your court."

"Do they live better at that of the king of Navarre?"

"Well!--I do not say no."

"Then there must be great changes."

"Ah! you do not know how right you are."

"Tell me about your journey! that will amuse me."

"Willingly; that is what I came for. Where shall I begin?"

"At the beginning. How did you make your journey?"

"Oh! delightfully."

"And met with no disagreeable adventures--no bad company?"

"Oh! who would dream of annoying an ambassador of his Most Christian Majesty? You calumniate your subjects, my son."

"I asked," said the king, flattered by the tranquillity that reigned in his kingdom, "because you had no official character, and might have run some risk."

"I tell you, Henriquet, that you have the most charming kingdom in the world. Travelers are nourished gratis; they are sheltered for the love of God; they walk on flowers; and as for the wheel ruts, they are carpeted with velvet and fringed with gold. It is incredible, but true."

"Then you are content?"

"Enchanted."

"Yes, yes; my police is well organized."

"Marvelously; I must do them justice."

"And the road is safe?"

"As that of Paradise."

"Chicot, we are returning to Virgil."

"To what part?"

"To the Bucolics. 'O fortunatos nimium!'"

"Ah! very well; but why this exception in favor of plowmen?"

"Alas! because it is not the same in towns."

"The fact is, Henri, that the towns are the centers of corruption."

"Judge of it. You go 500 leagues without accident, while I go only to Vincennes, three-fourths of a league, and narrowly escape assassination by the way."



"Oh! bah!"

"I will tell you about it, my friend; I am having it written. Without my Forty-five guardsmen I should have been a dead man."

"Truly! where did it take place?"

"You mean, where was it to have taken place?"

"Yes."

"At Bel-Esbat."

"Near the convent of our friend Gorenflot?"

"Just so."

"And how did he behave under the circumstances?"

"Wonderfully, as usual. Chicot, I do not know if he had heard any rumor; but instead of snoring in bed, he was up in his balcony, while all his convent kept the road."

"And he did nothing else?"

"Who?"

"Dom Modeste."

"He blessed me with a majesty peculiar to himself, Chicot."

"And his monks?"

"They cried 'Vive le Roi!' tremendously."

"And were they not armed?"

"They were completely armed, which was a wonderful piece of thoughtfulness on the part of the worthy prior; and yet this man has said nothing, and asked for nothing. He did not come the next day, like D'Epernon, to search my pockets, crying, 'Sire, something for having saved the king.'"

"Oh! as for that, he is incapable of it; besides, his hands would not go into your pockets."

"Chicot, no jests about Dom Modeste; he is one of the greatest men of my reign; and I declare that on the first opportunity I will give him a bishopric."

"And you will do well, my king."

"Remark one thing, Chicot, that a great man from the ranks of the people

is complete; we gentlemen, you see, inherit in our blood certain vices and virtues. Thus, the Valois are cunning and subtle, brave, but idle; the Lorraines are ambitious, greedy, and intriguing; the Bourbons are sensual, without ideas, force, or will. Look at Henri: when Nature, on the contrary, draws a great man from among the people, like Gorenflot, he is complete."

"You think so?"

"Yes; learned, modest, cunning, and brave, you could make of him what you liked--minister, general, or pope."

"Pray stop, sire. If the brave man heard you he would burst his skin, for, in spite of what you say, Dom Modeste is very vain."

"You are jealous, Chicot."

"I! Heaven forbid! Jealous!"

"I am but just; noble blood does not blind me. 'Stemmata quid faciunt?'"

"Bravo! and you say, then, Henri, that you were nearly assassinated?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"By the League, mordieu!"

"How does the League get on?"

"Just the same."

"Which means that it grows daily."

"Oh! political bodies never live which grow big too young. They are like children, Chicot."

"Then you are content, my son?"

"Nearly so."

"You are happy?"

"Yes, Chicot, and I am very glad to see you return."

"'Habemus consulem facetum,' as Cato said."

"You bring good news, do you not?"

"I should think so."

"You keep me in suspense."

"Where shall I begin?"

"I have already said, from the beginning; but you always wander from the point. You say that the journey was good?"

"You see I have returned whole."

"Yes; then let me hear of your arrival in Navarre. What was Henri doing when you arrived?"

"Making love."

"To Margot?"

"Oh! no."

"It would have astonished me had it been so; he is always unfaithful to his wife--the rascal! Unfaithful to a daughter of France! Luckily, she pays him back. And when you arrived, what was the name of Margot's rival?"

"Fosseuse."

"A Montmorency. Come, that is not so bad for a bear of Béarn. They spoke here of a peasant, a gardener's daughter."

"Oh! that is very old."

"Then he is faithless to Margot?"

"As much as possible."

"And she is furious?"

"Enraged."

"And she revenges herself?"

"I believe so."

Henri rubbed his hands joyfully.

"What will she do?" cried he. "Will she move heaven and earth--bring Spain on Navarre--Artois and Flanders on Spain? Will she call in her little brother Henriquet against her husband Henri?"

"It is possible."

"You saw her?"

"Yes."

"Then they execrate each other?"

"I believe that in their hearts they do not adore each other."

"But in appearance?"

"They are the best friends in the world."

"Yes, but some fine morning some new love will embroil them completely."

"Well! this new love has come."

"Bah!"

"Yes, on my honor; but shall I tell you what I fear?"

"Yes."

"That this new love, instead of embroiling, will reconcile them."

"Then there is a new love, really?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! yes."

"Of Henri's?"

"Of Henri's."

"For whom?"

"You wish to know all, do you not?"

"Yes, Chicot; tell me all about it."

"Well, my son, then I must go back to the beginning."

"Go back, but be quick."

"You wrote a letter to the Béarnais?"

"Well?"

"And I read it."

"What do you think of it?"

"That if it was not delicate, at least it was cunning."

"It ought to have embroiled them?"

"Yes, if Henri and Margot had been an ordinary, commonplace couple."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Henri is no fool."



"Oh!"

"And that he guessed."

"Guessed what?"

"That you wished to make him quarrel with his wife."

"That was clear."

"Yes; but what was less clear was your object in doing so."

"Ah! diable! the object--"

"Yes, this Béarnais thought your aim was to make him quarrel with his wife, that you might not have to pay her dowry."

"Oh!"

"Mon Dieu, yes; that is what got into the head of that devil of a Béarnais."

"Go on, Chicot," said the king, beginning to look annoyed.

"Well! scarcely had he guessed that, than he became what you look now, sad and melancholy; so much so, that he hardly thought of Fosseuse."

"Bah!"

"Yes, really, and then he conceived that other love I told you of."

"But this man is a Turk--a Pagan. And what did Margot say?"

"This time, my son, you will be astonished. Margot was delighted."

"But what is the name of this new mistress?"

"Oh! she is a beautiful and strong person, capable of defending herself if she is attacked."

"And did she defend herself?"

"Oh, yes!"

"So that Henri was repulsed?"

"At first."

"And afterward?"

"Oh! Henri is persevering, and he returned to the charge."

"So that?"

"So that he won her."

"How?"

"By petards."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"The truth."

"Petards! Who is this belle that is taken with petards?"

"It is Mademoiselle Cahors."

"Mademoiselle Cahors!"

"Yes, a large and beautiful girl, who has one foot on the Got, and the other on the hills, and whose guardian is, or rather was, M. de Vesin, a brave gentleman of my acquaintance."

"Mordieu!" cried Henri, furiously, "my city! he has taken my city."

"Why, you see, Henri, you would not give it to him, and he was obliged to take it. But, apropos, here is a letter that he asked me to deliver into your own hand."

And Chicot, drawing out a letter, gave it to the king. It was the one

Henri had written after taking Cahors, and it finished with these words:

"Quod mihi dixisti profuit multum, cognosco meos devotos; nosce tuos;  
Chicotus cætera expediet."

Which meant, "What you told me was very useful; I know my friends; know yours. Chicot will tell you the rest."