

Chapter 85

NEWS FROM AURILLY.

On the following day the king was working at the Louvre with the superintendent of finances, when an attendant entered to inform his majesty that Monsieur de Joyeuse, the eldest son of that family, had just arrived, and was waiting for him in the large audience chamber, having come from Chateau-Thierry, with a message from Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou.

The king precipitately left the business which occupied him, and ran to meet a friend whom he regarded with so much affection.

A large number of officers and courtiers crowded the cabinet; the queen-mother had arrived that evening, escorted by her maids of honor, and these light-hearted girls were, like suns, always attended by their satellites.

The king gave Joyeuse his hand to kiss, and glanced with a satisfied expression around the assembly.

In the angle of the entrance door, in his usual place, stood Henry du Bouchage, rigorously discharging his service and the duties which were imposed on him.

The king thanked him, and saluted him with a friendly recognition, to which Henri replied by a profound reverence.

This good intelligence which prevailed between them made Joyeuse turn his head and smilingly look at his brother, without, however, saluting him in too marked a manner, from the fear of violating etiquette.

"Sire," said Joyeuse, "I am sent to your majesty by Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou, recently returned from the expedition to Flanders."

"Is my brother well, Monsieur l'Amiral?" inquired the king.

"As well, sire, as the state of his mind will permit; however, I will not conceal from your majesty that he appears to be suffering greatly."

"He must need something to change the current of his thoughts after his misfortune," said the king, delighted at the opportunity of proclaiming the check which his brother had met with, while appearing to pity him.

"I believe he does, sire."

"We have been informed that the disaster had been most severe."

"Sire--"

"But that, thanks to you, a great portion of the army had been saved; thanks, Monsieur l'Amiral, thanks. Does poor Monsieur d'Anjou wish to

see us?"

"Most anxiously so, sire."

"In that case we will see him. Are not you of that opinion, madame?" said Henri, turning toward Catherine, whose heart was wrung with feelings, the expression of which her face determinedly concealed.

"Sire," she replied, "I should have gone alone to meet my son; but since your majesty condescends to join with me in this mark of kind consideration, the journey will be a party of pleasure for me."

"You will accompany us, messieurs," said the king to the courtiers; "we will set off to-morrow, and I shall sleep at Meaux."

"Shall I at once announce this excellent news to monseigneur, sire?"

"Not so; what! leave me so soon, Monsieur l'Amiral? not so, indeed. I can well understand that a Joyeuse must be loved and sought after by my brother, but we have two of the same family, thank Heaven. Du Bouchage, you will start for Chateau-Thierry, if you please."

"Sire," said Henri, "may I be permitted, after having announced your majesty's arrival to Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou, to return to Paris?"

"You may do as you please, Du Bouchage," said the king.

Henri bowed and advanced toward the door. Fortunately Joyeuse was watching him narrowly.

"Will you allow me to say one word to my brother?" he inquired.

"Do so; but what is it?" said the king in an undertone.

"The fact is, that he wishes to use the utmost speed to execute the commission, and to return again immediately, which happens to interfere with my projects, sire, and with those of the cardinal."

"Away with you, then, and rate this love-sick swain most roundly."

Anne hurried after his brother, and overtook him in the antechambers.

"Well!" said Joyeuse; "you are setting off very eagerly, Henri."

"Of course, my brother!"

"Because you wish to return here soon again?"

"That is quite true."

"You do not intend, then, to stay any time at Chateau-Thierry?"

"As little as possible."

"Why so?"

"Where others are amusing themselves is not my place."

"On the contrary, Henri, it is precisely because Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou is about to give some fetes that you should remain at Chateau-Thierry."

"It is impossible."

"Because of your wish for retirement, and of the austere projects you have in view?"--"Yes."

"You have been to the king to solicit a dispensation?"

"Who told you so?"

"I know it to be the case."

"It is true, then, for I have been to him."

"You will not obtain it."

"Why so, my brother?"

"Because the king has no interest in depriving himself of such a devoted servant as you are."

"My brother, the cardinal, will therefore do what his majesty will be disinclined to do."

"And all that for a woman?"

"Anne, I entreat you, do not persist any further."

"Ah! do not fear that I shall begin over again; but, once for all, let us to the point. You set off for Chateau-Thierry; well, instead of returning as hurriedly as you seem disposed to do, I wish you to wait for me in my apartments there; it is a long time since we have lived together. I particularly wish to be with you again, you understand."

"You are going to Chateau-Thierry to amuse yourself, Anne, and if I were to remain there I should poison all your pleasures."

"Oh! far from that, I do not care for them; I am of a happy temperament, and quite fitted to drive away all your fits of melancholy."

"Brother--"

"Permit me, comte," said the admiral, with an imperious air of command, "I am the representative of our father here, and I enjoin you to wait for me at Chateau-Thierry. You will find out my apartment, which will be your own also; it is on the ground floor, looking out on the park."

"If you command me to do so, my brother," said Henri, with a resigned air.

"Call it by what name you please, comte, desire or command; but await my arrival."

"I will obey you, my brother."

"And I am persuaded that you will not be angry with me for it," added Joyeuse, pressing the young man in his arms.

The latter withdrew from the fraternal embrace, somewhat ungraciously, perhaps, ordered his horses, and immediately set off for Chateau-Thierry. He hurried thither with the anger of a vexed and disappointed man; that is to say, he pressed his horses to the top of their speed.

The same evening, he was slowly ascending, before nightfall, the hill on which Chateau-Thierry is situated, with the river Marne flowing at its feet.

At his name, the doors of the chateau flew open before him, but, as far as an audience was concerned, he was more than an hour before he could obtain it.

The prince, some told him, was in his apartments; others said he was asleep; he was practicing music, the valet-de-chambre supposed. No one,

however, among the attendants could give a positive reply.

Henri persisted, in order that he might no longer have to think of his service on the king, so that he might abandon himself from that moment to his melancholy thoughts unrestrained.

Won over by his perseverance, it being well known too that he and his brother were on the most intimate terms with the duke, Henri was ushered into one of the salons on the first floor, where the prince at last consented to receive him.

Half an hour passed away, and the shades of evening insensibly closed in.

The heavy and measured footsteps of the Duc d'Anjou resounded in the gallery, and Henri, on recognizing them, prepared to discharge his mission with the accustomed formal ceremonies. But the prince, who seemed very much pressed, quickly dispensed with these formalities on the part of his ambassador, by taking him by the hand and embracing him.

"Good-day, comte," he said; "why should they have given you the trouble to come and see a poor defeated general?"

"The king has sent me, monseigneur, to inform you that he is exceedingly desirous of seeing your highness, and that in order to enable you to recover from your fatigue, his majesty will himself come and pay a visit to Chateau-Thierry, to-morrow at the latest."

"The king will be here to-morrow!" exclaimed Francois, with a gesture of impatience, but recovering himself immediately afterward.

"To-morrow, to-morrow," he resumed; "why, the truth is, that nothing will be in readiness, either here or in the town, to receive his majesty."

Henri bowed, as one whose duty it had been to transmit an order, but whose province it was not to comment upon it.

"The extreme haste which their majesties have to see your royal highness has not allowed them to think of the embarrassment they may be the means of occasioning."

"Well, well," said the prince, hurriedly, "it is for me to make the best use of the time I have at my disposal. I leave you, therefore, Henri; thanks for the alacrity you have shown, for you have traveled fast, I perceive. Go and take some rest."

"Your highness has no other orders to communicate to me?" Henri inquired, respectfully.

"None. Go and lie down. You shall dine in your own apartment. I hold no reception this evening; I am suffering and ill at ease; I have lost my appetite, and cannot sleep, which makes my life a sad, dreary one, and which, you understand, I do not choose to inflict upon any one else.

By-the-by, you have heard the news?"

"No, monseigneur; what news?"

"Aurilly has been eaten up by the wolves--"

"Aurilly!" exclaimed Henri, with surprise.

"Yes, yes--devoured! It is singular how every one who comes near me dies a violent death. Good-night, count; may you sleep well!"

And the prince hurried away rapidly.