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AN ENEMY TO THE KING

CHAPTER I.

TWO ENCOUNTERS BY NIGHT

Hitherto I have written with the sword, after the fashion of greater men, and requiring no secretary. I now take up the quill to set forth, correctly, certain incidents which, having been noised about, stand in danger of being inaccurately reported by some imitator of Brantome and De l'Estoile. If all the world is to know of this matter, let it know thereof rightly.

It was early in January, in the year 1578, that I first set out for Paris. My mother had died when I was twelve years old, and my father had followed her a year later. It was his last wish that I, his only child, should remain at the château, in Anjou, continuing my studies until the end of my twenty-first year. He had chosen that I should learn manners as best I could at home, not as page in some great household or as gentleman in the retinue of some high personage. "A De Launay shall have no master but God and the King," he said. Reverently I had fulfilled his injunctions, holding my young impulses in leash. I passed the time in sword practice with our old steward, Michel, who had followed my father in the wars under Coligny, in hunting in our little patch of woods, reading the Latin authors in the flowery garden of the château, or in my favorite chamber,—that one at the top of the new tower which had been built in the reign of Henri II. to replace the original black tower from which the earliest De Launay of note got the title of *Sieur de la Tournoire*. All this while I was holding in curb my impatient desires. So almost resistless are the forces that impel the young heart, that there must have been a hard struggle within me had I had to

wait even a month longer for the birthday which finally set me free to go what ways I chose. I rose early on that cold but sunlit January day, mad with eagerness to be off and away into the great world that at last lay open to me. Poor old Michel was sad that I had decided to go alone. But the only servant whom I would have taken with me was the only one to whom I would entrust the house of my fathers in my absence,—old Michel himself. I thought the others too rustic. My few tenants would have made awkward lackeys in peace, sorry soldiers in war.

Michel had my portmanteau fastened on my horse, which had been brought out into the courtyard, and then he stood by me while I took my last breakfast in La Tournoire; and, in my haste to be off, I would have eaten little had he not pressed much upon me, reminding me how many leagues I would have to ride before meeting a good inn on the Paris road. He was sad, poor old Michel, at my going, and yet he partook of some of my own eagerness. At last I had forced down my unwilling throat food enough to satisfy even old Michel's solicitude. He girded on me the finest of the swords that my father had left, placed over my violet velvet doublet the new cloak I had bought for the occasion, handed me my new hat with its showy plumes, and stood aside for me to pass out. In the pocket of my red breeches was a purse holding enough golden crowns to ease my path for some time to come. I cast one last look around the old hall and, trying to check the rapidity of my breath, and the rising of the lump in my throat, strode out to the courtyard, breathed the fresh air with a new ecstasy, mounted the steaming horse, gave Michel my hand for a moment, and, purposely avoiding meeting his eyes, spoke a last kind word to the old man. After acknowledging the farewells of the other servants, who stood in line trying to look joyous, I started my horse with a little jerk of the rein, and was borne swiftly through the porte, over the bridge, and out into the world. Behind me was the home of my fathers and my childhood; before me was Paris. It was a fine, bracing winter morning, and I was twenty-one. A good horse was under me, a sword was at my side, there was money in my pocket. Will I ever feel again as I did that morning?

Some have stupidly wondered why, being a Huguenot born and bred, I did not, when free to leave La Tournoire, go at once to offer

my sword to Henri of Navarre or to some other leader of our party. This is easily answered. If I was a Huguenot, I was also a man of twenty-one; and the latter much more than the former. Paris was the centre of the world. There was the court, there were the adventures to be had, there must one go to see the whole of life; there would I meet men and make conquests of women. There awaited me the pleasures of which I had known only by report, there the advancement, the triumphs in personal quarrels; and, above all else, the great love affair of my dreams. Who that is a man and twenty-one has not such dreams? And who that is a man and seventy would have been without them? Youth and folly go together, each sweetening the other. The greatest fool, I think, is he who would have gone through life entirely without folly. What then mattered religion to me? Or what mattered the rivalry of parties, except as they might serve my own personal ambitions and desires? Youth was ebullient in me. The longing to penetrate the unknown made inaction intolerable to me. I must rush into the whirlpool; I must be in the very midst of things; I longed for gaiety, for mystery, for contest; I must sing, drink, fight, make love. It is true that there would have been some outlet for my energies in camp life, but no gratification for my finer tastes, no luxury, no such pleasures as Paris afforded,—little diversity, no elating sense of being at the core of events, no opportunities for love-making. In Paris were the pretty women. The last circumstance alone would have decided me.

I had reached twenty-one without having been deeply in love. I had, of course, had transient periods of inclination towards more than one of the demoiselles in the neighborhood of La Tournoire; but these demoiselles had rapidly become insipid to me. As I grew older, I found it less easy to be attracted by young ladies whom I had known from childhood up. I had none the less the desire to be in love; but the woman whom I should love must be new to me, a mystery, something to fathom and yet unfathomable. She must be a world, inexhaustible, always retaining the charm of the partly unknown. I had high aspirations. No pretty maid, however low in station, was unworthy a kiss and some flattery; but the real *affaire d'amour* of my life must have no elements but magnificent ones. She must be some great lady of the court, and our passion must be attended by circumstances of mystery, danger, everything to compli-

cate it and raise it to an epic height. Such was the amour I had determined to find in Paris. Remember, you who read this, that I am disclosing the inmost dreams of a man of twenty-one. Such dreams are appropriate to that age; it is only when they are associated with middle age that they become ridiculous; and when thoughts of amatory conquest are found in common with gray hairs, they are loathsome. If I seem to have given my mind largely up to fancies of love, consider that I was then at the age when such fancies rather adorn than deface. Indeed, a young man without thoughts of love is as much an anomaly as is an older man who gives himself up to them.

I looked back once at La Tournoire, when I reached the top of the hill that would, in another minute, shut it from my view. I saw old Michel standing at the porte. I waved my hand to him, and turned to proceed on my way. Soon the lump in my throat melted away, the moisture left my eyes, and only the future concerned me. Every object that came into sight, every tree along the roadside, now interested me. I passed several travellers, some of whom seemed to envy me my indifference to the cold weather, my look of joyous content.

About noon I overtook, just where the road left a wood and turned to cross a bridge, a small cavalcade consisting of an erect, handsome gentleman of middle age, and several armed lackeys. The gentleman wore a black velvet doublet, and his attire, from his snowy ruff to his black boots, was in the best condition. He had a frank, manly countenance that invited address. At the turn of the road he saw me, and, taking me in at a glance, he fell behind his lackeys that I might come up to him. He greeted me courteously, and after he had spoken of the weather and the promise of the sky, he mentioned, incidentally, that he was going to Paris. I told him my own destination, and we came to talking of the court. I perceived, from his remarks, that he was well acquainted there. There was some talk of the quarrels between the King's favorites and those of his brother, the Duke of Anjou; of the latter's sulkiness over his treatment at the hands of the King; of the probabilities for and against Anjou's leaving Paris and putting himself at the head of the malcontent and Huguenot parties; of the friendship between Anjou and his sister Marguerite, who remained at the Court of France while her husband, Henri of Navarre, held his mimic Huguenot court in Béarn. Presently, the name of the Duke of Guise came up.

Now we Huguenots held, and still hold, Henri de Guise to have been a chief instigator of the event of St. Bartholomew's Night, in 1572. Always I had in my mind the picture of Coligny, under whom my father had fought, lying dead in his own courtyard, in the Rue de Bethizy, his murder done under the direction of that same Henri, his body thrown from his window into the court at Henri's orders, and there spurned by Henri's foot. I had heard, too, of this illustrious duke's open continuance of his amour with Marguerite, queen of our leader, Henri of Navarre. When I spoke of him to the gentleman at whose side I rode, I put no restraint on my tongue.

"The Duke of Guise!" I said. "All that I ever wish to say of him can be very quickly spoken. If, as you Catholics believe, God has an earthly representative in the Pope, then I think the devil has one in Henri de Guise."

The gentleman was quiet for a moment, and looked very sober. Then he said gravely:

"All men have their faults, monsieur. The difference between men is that some have no virtues to compensate for their vices."

"If Henri de Guise has any virtues," I replied, "he wears a mask over them; and he conceals them more effectually than he hides his predilection for assassination, his amours, and his design to rule France through the Holy League of which he is the real head."

The gentleman turned very red, and darted at me a glance of anger. Then restraining himself, he answered in a very low tone:

"Monsieur, the subject can be discussed by us in only one way, or not at all. You are young, and it would be too pitiful for you to be cut off before you have even seen Paris. Doubtless, you are impatient to arrive there. It would be well, then, if you rode on a little faster. It is my intention to proceed at a much slower pace than will be agreeable to you."

And he reined in his horse.

I reined in mine likewise. I was boiling with wrath at his superior tone, and his consideration for my youth, but I imitated his coolness as well as I could.

"Monsieur," said I, "whether or not I ever see Paris is not a matter to concern you. I cannot allow you to consider my youth. You wish to be obliging; then consider that nothing in the world would be a greater favor to me than an opportunity to maintain with my sword my opinion of Henri de Guise."

The man smiled gently, and replied without passion:

"Then, as we certainly are not going to fight, let my refusal be, not on account of your youth, but on account of my necessity of reaching Paris without accident."

His horse stood still. His lackeys also had stopped their horses, which stood pawing and snorting at a respectful distance. It was an awkward moment for me. I could not stand there trying to persuade a perfectly serene man to fight. So with an abrupt pull of the rein I started my horse, mechanically applied the spur, and galloped off. A few minutes later I was out of sight of this singularly self-controlled gentleman, who resented my description of the Duke of Guise. I was annoyed for some time to think that he had had the better of the occurrence; and I gave myself up for an hour to the unprofitable occupation of mentally reenacting the scene in a manner more creditable to myself.

"I may meet him in Paris some day," I said to myself, "and find an occasion to right myself in his estimation. He shall not let my youth intercede for me again."

Then I wished that I had learned his name, that I might, on reaching Paris, have found out more about him. Having in his suite no gentlemen, but several lackeys, he was, doubtless, not himself an important personage, but a follower of one. Not wishing to meet him again until circumstances should have changed, I passed the next inn to which I came, guessing that he would stop there. He must have done so, for he did not come up with me that day, or at any time during my journey.

It was at sunset on a clear, cold evening that, without further adventure, I rode into Paris through the Porte St. Michel, and stared, as I proceeded along the Rue de la Harpe, at the crowds of people hurrying in either direction in each of the narrow, crooked streets, each person so absorbed in his own errand, and so used to the

throng and the noise, that he paid no heed to the animation that so interested and stirred me. The rays of the setting sun lighted up the towers of the colleges and abbeys at my right, while those at my left stood black against the purple and yellow sky. I rode on and on, not wishing to stop at an inn until I should have seen more of the panorama that so charmed me. At last I reached the left bank of the Seine, and saw before me the little Isle of the City, the sunlit towers of Notre Dame rising above the wilderness of turrets and spires surrounding them. I crossed the Pont St. Michel, stopping for a moment to look westward towards the Tour de Nesle, and then eastward to the Tournelle, thus covering, in two glances, the river bank of the University through which I had just come. Emerging from the bridge, I followed the Rue de la Barillerie across the Isle of the City, finding everywhere the same bustle, the same coming and going of citizens, priests, students, and beggars, all alert, yet not to be surprised by any spectacle that might arise before them. Reaching the right arm of the Seine, I stopped again, this time on the Pont-au-Change, and embraced, in a sweeping look from left to right, the river bank of the town, the Paris of the court and the palaces, of the markets and of trade, the Paris in which I hoped to find a splendid future, the Paris into which, after taking this comprehensive view from the towers of the Louvre and the Tour de Bois away leftward, to the Tour de Billy away right ward, I urged my horse with a jubilant heart. It was a quite dark Paris by the time I plunged into it. The Rue St. Denis, along which I rode, was beginning to be lighted here and there by stray rays from windows. The still narrower streets, that ran, like crooked corridors in a great château, from the large thoroughfare, seemed to be altogether dark.

But, dark as the city had become, I had determined to explore some of it that night, so charming was its novelty, so inviting to me were its countless streets, leading to who knows what? I stopped at a large inn in the Rue St. Denis, saw my tired horse well cared for by an hostler, who seemed amazed at my rustic solicitude for details, had my portmanteau deposited in a clean, white-washed chamber, overlooking the street, ate a supper such as only a Paris innkeeper can serve and a ravenous youth from the country can devour, and went forth afoot, after curfew, into the now entirely dark and no longer crowded street, to find what might befall me.

It had grown colder at nightfall, and I had to draw my cloak closely around me. A wind had come up, too, and the few people whom I met were walking with head thrust forward, the better to resist the breeze when it should oppose them. Some were attended by armed servants bearing lanterns. The sign-boards, that hung from the projecting stories of the tall houses, swung as the wind swayed, and there was a continual sound of creaking. Clouds had risen, and the moon was obscured much of the time, so that when I looked down some of the narrower streets I could not see whether they ended within a short distance, turned out of sight, or continued far in the same direction. Being accustomed to the country roads, the squares of smaller towns, and the wide avenues of the little park at La Tournoire, I was at first surprised at the narrowness of the streets. Across one of them lay a drunken man, peacefully snoring. His head touched the house on one side of the street, and his feet pressed the wall on the opposite side. It surprised me to find so many of the streets no wider than this. But there was more breathing room wherever two streets crossed and where several of them opened into some great place. The crookedness and curvature of the streets constantly tempted me to seek what might be beyond, around the corner, or the bend; and whenever I sought, I found still other corners or bends hiding the unknown, and luring me to investigate.

I had started westward from the inn, intending to proceed towards the Louvre. But presently, having turned aside from one irregular street into another, I did not know what was the direction in which I went. The only noises that I heard were those caused by the wind, excepting when now and then came suddenly a burst of loud talk, mingled mirth and jangling, as quickly shut off, when the door of some cabaret opened and closed. When I heard footsteps on the uneven pebble pavement of the street, and saw approaching me out of the gloom some cloaked pedestrian, I mechanically gripped the handle of my sword, and kept a wary eye on the stranger,—knowing that in passing each other we must almost touch elbows. His own suspicious and cautious demeanor and motions reflected mine.

At night, in the narrow streets of a great town, there exists in every footfall heard, every human figure seen emerging from the dark-

ness, the possibility of an encounter, an adventure, something unexpected. So, to the night roamer, every human sound or sight has an unwonted interest.

As I followed the turning of one of the narrowest streets, the darkness, some distance ahead of me, was suddenly cleft by a stream of light from a window that was quickly opened in the second story of a tall house on the right-hand side of the way. Then the window was darkened by the form of a man coming from the chamber within. At his appearance into view I stood still. Resting for a moment on his knees on the window-ledge, he lowered first one leg, then the other, then his body, and presently he was hanging by his hands over the street. Then the face of a woman appeared in the window, and as the man remained there, suspended, he looked up at her inquiringly.

"It is well," she said, in a low tone; "but be quick. We are just in time." And she stood ready to close the window as soon as he should be out of the way.

"Good night, adorable," he replied, and dropped to the street. The lady immediately closed the window, not even waiting to see how the man had alighted.

Had she waited to see that, she would have seen him, in lurching over to prevent his sword from striking the ground, lose his balance on a detached paving-stone, and fall heavily on his right arm.

"*Peste!*" he hissed, as he slowly scrambled to his feet. "I have broken my arm!"

With his right arm hanging stiff by his side, and clutching its elbow with his left hand, as if in great pain, he hastened away from the spot, not having noticed me. I followed him.

After a second turn, the street crossed another. In the middle of the open space at the junction, there stood a cross, as could be seen by the moonlight that now came through an interval in the procession of wind-driven clouds.

Just as the man with the hurt arm, who was slender, and had a dandified walk, entered this open space, a gust of wind came into it with him; and there came, also, from the other street, a robust gen-

tleman of medium height, holding his head high and walking briskly. Caught by the gust of wind, my gentleman from the second story window ran precipitantly into the other. The robust man was not sent backward an inch. He took the shock of meeting with the firmness of an unyielding wall, so that the slender gentleman rebounded. Each man uttered a brief oath, and grasped his sword, the slender one forgetting the condition of his arm.

"Oh, it is you," said the robust man, in a virile voice, of which the tone was now purposely offensive. "The wind blows fragile articles into one's face to-night."

"It blows gentlemen into muck-heaps," responded the other, quickly.

The hearty gentleman gave a loud laugh, meant to aggravate the other's anger, and then said:

"We do not need seconds, M. de Quelus," putting into his utterance of the other's name a world of insult.

"Come on, then, M. Bussy d'Amboise," replied the other, pronouncing the name only that he might, in return, hiss out the final syllable as if it were the word for something filthy.

Both whipped out their swords, M. de Quelus now seemingly unconscious of the pain in his arm.

I looked on from the shadow in which I had stopped, not having followed De Quelus into the little open space. My interest in the encounter was naturally the greater for having learned the names of the antagonists. At La Tournoire I had heard enough of the court to know that the Marquis de Quelus was the chief of the King's effeminate chamberlains, whom he called his minions, and that Bussy d'Amboise was the most redoubtable of the rufflers attached to the King's discontented brother, the Duke of Anjou; and that between the dainty gentlemen of the King and the bullying swordsmen of the Duke, there was continual feud.

Bussy d'Amboise, disdainful even to remove his cloak, of which he quickly gathered the end under his left arm, made two steps and a thrust at De Quelus. The latter made what parade he could for a moment, so that Bussy stepped back to try a feint. De Quelus, trying

to raise his sword a trifle higher, uttered an ejaculation of pain, and then dropped the point. Bussy had already begun the motion of a lunge, which it was too late to arrest, even if he had discovered that the other's arm was injured and had disdained to profit by such an advantage. De Quelus would have been pierced through had not I leaped forward with drawn sword and, by a quick thrust, happened to strike Bussy's blade and make it diverge from its course.

De Quelus jumped back on his side, as Bussy did on his. Both regarded me with astonishment.

"Oh, ho, an ambush!" cried Bussy. "Then come on, all of you, messieurs of the daubed face and painted beard! I shall not even call my servants, who wait at the next corner."

And he made a lunge at me, which I diverted by a parry made on instinct, not having had time to bring my mind to the direction of matters. Bussy then stood back on guard.

"You lie," said De Quelus, vainly trying to find sufficient strength in his arm to lift his sword. "I was alone. My servants are as near as yours, yet I have not called. As for this gentleman, I never saw him before."

"That is true," I said, keeping up my guard, while Bussy stood with his back to the cross, his brows knit in his effort to make out my features.

"Oh, very well," said Bussy. "I do not recognize him, but he is evidently a gentleman in search of a quarrel, and I am disposed to be accommodating."

He attacked me again, and I surprised myself, vastly, by being able to resist the onslaughts of this, the most formidable swordsman at the court of France. But I dared not hope for final victory. It did not even occur to me as possible that I might survive this fight. The best for which I hoped was that I might not be among the easiest victims of this famous sword.

"Monsieur," said De Quelus, while Bussy and I kept it up, with offence on his part, defence on mine, "I am sorry that I cannot intervene to save your life. My arm has been hurt in a fall, and I cannot even hold up my sword."

"I know that," I replied. "That is why I interfered."

"The devil!" cried Bussy. "Much as I detest you, M. de Quelus, you know I would not have attacked you had I known that. But this gentleman, at least, has nothing the matter with his arm."

And he came for me again.

Nothing the matter with my arm! Actually a compliment upon my sword-handling from the most invincible fighter, whether in formal duel or sudden quarrel, in France! I liked the generosity which impelled him to acknowledge me a worthy antagonist, as much as I resented his overbearing insolence; and I began to think there was a chance for me.

For the first time, I now assumed the offensive, and with such suddenness that Bussy fell back, out of sheer surprise. He had forgotten about the cross that stood in the centre of the place, and, in leaping backward, he struck this cross heavily with his sword wrist. His glove did not save him from being jarred and bruised; and, for a moment, he relaxed his firm grasp of his sword, and before he could renew his clutch I could have destroyed his guard and ended the matter; but I dropped my point instead.

Bussy looked at me in amazement, and then dropped his.

"Absurd, monsieur! You might very fairly have used your advantage. Now you have spoiled everything. We can't go on fighting, for I would not give you another such opening, nor would I kill a man who gives me my life."

"As you will, monsieur," said I. "I am glad not to be killed, for what is the use of having fought Bussy d'Amboise if one may not live to boast of it?"

He seemed pleased in his self-esteem, and sheathed his sword. "I am destined not to fight to-night," he answered. "One adversary turns out to have a damaged arm, which would make it a disgrace to kill him, and the other puts me under obligation for my life. But, M. de Quelus, your arm will recover."

"I hope so, if for only one reason," replied Quelus.

Bussy d'Amboise then bowed to me, and strode on his way. He was joined at the next crossing of streets by four lackeys, who had

been waiting in shadow. All had swords and pistols, and one bore a lantern, which had been concealed beneath his cloak.

De Quelus, having looked after him with an angry frown, now turned to me, and spoke with affability:

"Monsieur, had you not observed the condition of my arm, I should have resented your aid. But as it is, I owe you my life no less than he owes you his, and it may be that I can do more than merely acknowledge the obligation."

I saw here the opportunity for which a man might wait months, and I was not such a fool as to lose it through pride.

"Monsieur," I said, "I am Ernanton de Launay, Sieur de la Tournoire. I arrived in Paris to-day, from Anjou, with the desire of enlisting in the French Guards."

De Quelus smiled. "You desire very little for a gentleman, and one who can handle a sword so well."

"I know that, but I do not bring any letters, and I am not one who could expect the favor of a court appointment. I am a Huguenot."

"A Huguenot?" said De Quelus. "And yet you come to Paris?"

"I prefer to serve the King of France. He is at present on good terms with the Huguenots, is he not?"

"Yes, — at least, he is not at war with them. Well, gentlemen like you are not to be wasted, even though Huguenots. Attach yourself to Duret's company of the guards for the present, and who knows when you may win a vacant captaincy? I will bring you to the attention of the King. Can you be, to-morrow at eleven o'clock, at the principal gate of the Louvre?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Very well. I will speak to Captain Duret, also, about you."

He looked at my active figure, neither tall nor short, neither broad nor too thin, observed the length of my arm, and remembered that I had made so respectable a showing with the sword against Bussy, I could see that he was thinking, "It is well to have in one's debt as many such strong and honest young gentlemen as can be had. Even a Huguenot may be useful in these days."

Then, when so many leaders contended, every man was desirous of gaining partisans. At court, wise people were scrupulous to repay obligations, in the hope of securing future benefit. I divined De Quelus's motives, but was none the less willing to profit by them as to the possible vacant captaincy.

"Then I thank you, monsieur, and will keep the appointment," I said.

"You are alone," said De Quelus. "One does not know when one may have one's throat cut for a sou, after dark in the streets of Paris. Will you accept the escort of two of my servants? They are waiting for me in the next street. One does not, you know, let one's servants wait too near windows out of which one expects to drop," he added with a smile.

"I thank you, monsieur, but I have already fared so well alone to-night, that I should fear to change my fortune by taking attendants."

"Then good night, monsieur. No, thank you. I can sheathe my own sword. My arm has lost its numbness. *Parbleu*, I should like to meet Bussy d'Amboise now."

And he strode away, leaving me standing by the cross.

I hesitated between returning to the inn, and resuming my exploration of the streets. I decided to go back, lest I be shut out for the night.

I had made my way some distance, in the labyrinth of streets, when, on reaching another junction of ways, I heard steps at some distance to the left. Looking in that direction, I saw approaching a little procession headed by two men servants, one of whom carried a lantern. I stepped back into the street from which I had just emerged, that I might remain unseen, until it should pass. Peering around the street corner, I saw that behind the two servants came a lady, whose form indicated youth and elegance, and who leaned on the arm of a stout woman, doubtless a servant. Behind these two came another pair of lackeys.

The lady wore a mask, and although heavily cloaked, shivered in the January wind, and walked as rapidly as she could. The four men