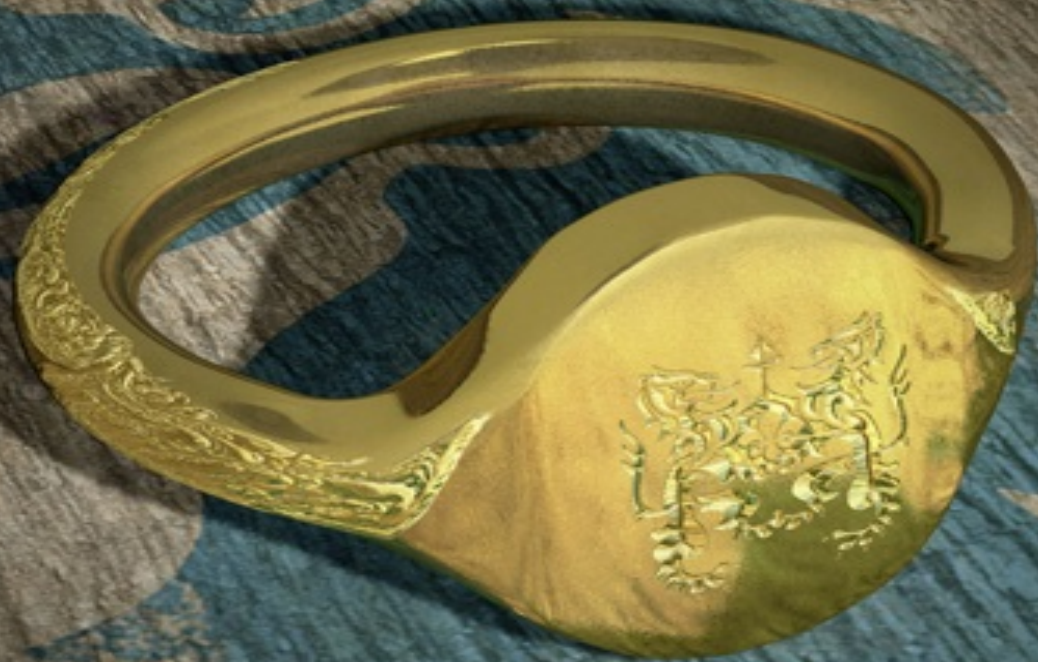


'This is the original *Game of Thrones*'

GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

THE ROYAL SUCCESSION



MAURICE DRUON

THE ROYAL SUCCESSION

Book Four of The Accursed Kings



MAURICE DRUON

Translated from French by
Humphrey Hare



HarperCollins *Publishers*

‘History is a novel that has been lived’

E. & J. DE GONCOURT

‘It is terrifying to think how much research is needed to determine the truth of even the most unimportant fact’

STENDHAL

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By Maurice Druon

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About the Publisher

GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

Over the years, more than one reviewer has described my fantasy series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, as historical fiction about history that never happened, flavoured with a dash of sorcery and spiced with dragons. I take that as a compliment. I have always regarded historical fiction and fantasy as sisters under the skin, two genres separated at birth. My own series draws on both traditions ... and while it undoubtedly drew much of my inspiration from Tolkien, Vance, Howard, and the other fantasists who came before me, *A Game of Thrones* and its sequels were also influenced by the works of great historical novelists like Thomas B. Costain, Mika Waltari, Howard Pyle ... and Maurice Druon, the amazing French writer who gave us the *The Accursed Kings*, seven splendid novels that chronicle the downfall of the Capetian kings and the beginnings of the Hundred Years War.

Druon's novels have not been easy to find, especially in English translation (and the seventh and final volume was never translated into English at all). The series has *twice* been made into a television series in France, and both versions are available on DVD ... but only in French, undubbed, and without English subtitles. Very frustrating for English-speaking Druon fans like me.

The Accursed Kings has it all. Iron kings and strangled queens, battles and betrayals, lies and lust, deception, family rivalries, the curse of the Templars, babies switched at birth, she-wolves, sin, and swords, the doom of a great dynasty ... and all of it (well, most of it) straight from the pages of history. And believe me, the Starks and the Lannisters have nothing on the Capets and Plantagenets.

Whether you're a history buff or a fantasy fan, Druon's epic will keep you turning pages. This was the original game of thrones. If you like *A Song of Ice and Fire*, you will love *The Accursed Kings*.

George R.R. Martin

The Characters in this Book



THE QUEEN OF FRANCE:

CLÉMENTCE OF HUNGARY, grand-daughter of Charles II of Anjou-Sicily and of Marie of Hungary, second wife and widow of Louis X, the Hutin, King of France and Navarre, aged 23.

LOUIS X'S CHILDREN:

JEANNE OF NAVARRE, daughter of Louis X and his first wife, Marguerite of Burgundy, aged 5. JEAN called THE POSTHUMOUS, son of Louis X and Clémence of Hungary, King of France.

THE REGENT:

PHILIPPE, second son of Philip IV, the Fair, and brother to Louis X, Count of Poitiers, Peer of the Kingdom, Count Palatine of Burgundy, Lord of Salins, Regent, then Philippe V, the Long, aged 23.

HIS BROTHER:

CHARLES, third son of Philip the Fair, Count de La Marche and future King Charles IV, the Fair, aged 22.

HIS WIFE:

JEANNE OF BURGUNDY, daughter of Count Othon of Burgundy and of the Countess Mahaut of Artois, heiress to the County of Burgundy, aged 23.

HIS CHILDREN:

JEANNE, also called of Burgundy, aged 8.

MARGUERITE, aged 6.

ISABELLE, aged 5.

LOUIS-PHILIPPE of France.

THE VALOIS BRANCH:

MONSEIGNEUR CHARLES, son of Philippe III and of Isabella of Aragon, brother of Philip the Fair, Count of the Appanage of Valois, Count of Maine, Anjou, Alençon, Chartres, Perche, Peer of the Kingdom, ex-Titular Emperor of Constantinople, Count of Romagna, aged 46.

PHILIPPE OF VALOIS, son of the above and of Marguerite of Anjou-Sicily, the future King Philippe V, aged 23.

THE EVREUX BRANCH:

MONSEIGNEUR LOUIS OF FRANCE, son of Philippe III and of Marie of Brabant, half-brother of Philip the Fair and of Charles of Valois, Count of Evreux and Etampes, aged 40.

PHILIPPE OF EVREUX, his son.

THE CLERMONT-BOURBON BRANCH:

ROBERT, COUNT OF CLERMONT, sixth son of Saint Louis, aged 60.

LOUIS OF BOURBON, son of the above.

THE ARTOIS BRANCH, DESCENDED FROM A BROTHER OF SAINT LOUIS:

THE COUNTESS MAHAUT OF ARTOIS, Peer of the Kingdom, widow of the Count Palatine Othon I
mother of Jeanne and Blanche of Burgundy, mother-in-law of Philippe of Poitiers and of Charles of
La Marche, aged about 45.

ROBERT III OF ARTOIS, nephew of the above, Count of Beaumont-le-Roger, Lord of Conches, aged 29.

THE DUCHY OF BURGUNDY FAMILY:

AGNÈS OF FRANCE, youngest daughter of Saint Louis, dowager Duchess of Burgundy, widow of Duke
Robert II, mother of Marguerite of Burgundy, aged about 57.

EUDES V, her son, Duke of Burgundy, brother of Marguerite and uncle of Jeanne of Navarre, aged
about 35.

THE COUNTS OF VIENNOIS:

THE DAUPHIN JEAN II de la Tour du Pin, brother-in-law of Queen Clémence.

THE DAUPHINIET GUIGUES, his son.

THE GREAT OFFICERS OF THE CROWN:

GAUCHER DE CHÂTILLON, Constable of France.

RAOUL DE PRESLES, jurist, one-time Councillor to Philip the Fair.

MILLE DE NOYERS, jurist, one-time Marshal of the Army, brother-in-law of the Constable.

HUGUES DE BOUVILLE, one-time Grand Chamberlain to Philip the Fair.

THE SENESCHAL DE JOINVILLE, companion-in-arms to Saint Louis, a chronicler.

ANSEAU DE JOINVILLE, son of the above, Councillor to the Regent.

ADAM HÉRON, Grand Chamberlain to the Regent.

COUNT JEAN DE FOREZ.

JEAN DE CORBEIL and JEAN DE BEAUMONT, called the Déramé, Marshals.

PIERRE DE GALARD, Grand Master of the Crossbowmen.

ROBERT DE GAMACHES and GUILLAUME DE SERIZ, Chamberlains.

GEOFFROY DE FLEURY, Bursar.

THE CARDINALS:

JACQUES DUÈZE, Cardinal in Curia, then Pope Jean XXII, aged 72.

FRANCESCO CAETANI, nephew of Pope Boniface VIII.

ARNAUD D'AUCH, Cardinal Camerlingo.

NAPOLÉON ORSINI, JACQUES and PIERRE COLONNA, BÉRENGER FRÉDOL, elder and younger brother
ARNAUD DE PÉLAGRUE, STEFANESCHI, and MANDAGOUT, etc.

THE BARONS OF ARTOIS:

The Lords of VARENNES, SOUASTRE, CAUMONT, FIENNES, PICQUIGNY, KIÉREZ, HAUTPONLIEU, BEAUVAIN
etc.

THE LOMBARDS:

SPINELLO TOLOMEI, a Siennese banker living in Paris.

GUCCIO BAGLIONI, his nephew, aged 20.

BOCCACCIO, a traveller, father of the poet Boccaccio.

THE CRESSAY FAMILY:

DAME ELIABEL, widow of the Lord of Cressay.

JEAN and PIERRE, her sons, aged 24 and 22 respectively.

MARIE, her daughter, aged 18.

ROBERT DE COURTENAY, Archbishop of Rheims.

GUILLAUME DE MELLO, Councillor to the Duke of Burgundy.

MESSIRE VARAY, Consul of Lyons.

GEOFFROY COQUATRIX, a Burgess of Paris, an army contractor.

MADAME DE BOUVILLE, wife of the one-time Chamberlain.

BÉATRICE D'HIRSON, niece of the Chancellor of Artois, Lady-in-Waiting to the Countess Mahaut.

All the above names have their place in history.

Philip III of France (1245-1285) m.1 Isabella of Aragon (1247-1271)

m.2 Marie of Brabant (1254-1321)

Louis (1265-1276) Philip IV (1268-1314) m. Joan I, Queen of Navarre (1273-1305) Charles, Count of Valois, Titular Emperor of Constantinople, Count of Romagna (1270-)

Louis Capet, Count of Evreux (1270-) Blanche (1278-1305) Margaret of France (1282-)

Louis X (1289-1316)

Isabella (1292-)

Philippe V (1295-)

Charles IV (1294-)

m.1

m.

m.

m.

Marguerite of Burgundy (1293-1315)

Edward II, King of England (1284-)

Jeanne of Burgundy (1293-)

Blanche of Burgundy (1296-)

m.2

Clémence of Hungary (1295-)

The House of Capet 1316

The Royal Succession



Queens wore white mourning.

The wimple of fine linen, enclosing her neck and imprisoning her chin to the lip, revealing only the centre of her face, was white; so was the great veil covering her forehead and eyebrows; so was the dress which, fastened at the wrists, reached to her feet. Queen Clémence of Hungary, widowed twenty-three after ten months of marriage to King Louis X, had donned these almost conventual garments and would doubtless wear them for the rest of her life.

Prologue



IN THREE HUNDRED AND twenty-seven years, from the election of Hugues Capet to the death of Philip the Fair, only eleven Kings had reigned in France and each one had left a son to ascend the throne.

It was a prodigious dynasty, which Providence seemed to have marked out for duration and permanence. Only two of the eleven reigns had covered less than fifteen years.

This singular continuity in the exercise and transmission of power had allowed, if not determined the formation of national unity.

For the feudal link, a purely personal one between vassal and suzerain, between the weaker and the stronger, was substituted gradually another relationship, another compact uniting the members of the vast human community which had for long been subject to similar vicissitudes and an identical law.

If the concept of the nation had not yet become evident, its symbol already existed in the person of the sovereign, the supreme source of authority and the ultimate court of appeal. Whoever thought of the King also thought of France.

And Philip the Fair, throughout his life, had set himself to cement this nascent unity with a powerful centralized administration and the systematic destruction of external and internal rivalry.

Hardly had the Iron King died, when his son, Louis X, followed him to the grave. The population could not help but see in these two deaths, kings struck down in their prime, one following so quickly on the other, the finger of fate.

Louis X, the Hutin, had reigned eighteen months, six days and ten hours. During this short period of time, this pitiful monarch had destroyed the greater part of his father's achievement. His reign had seen the murder of his Queen and the hanging of his first minister; famine had ravaged France; two provinces had rebelled; and an army had been engulfed in the Flanders mud. The great nobles were infringing on the royal prerogatives once more; reaction was all-powerful; and the Treasury empty.

Louis X had ascended the throne at a moment when the world lacked a Pope; he died before a Pontiff had been elected, and Christendom trembled on the verge of schism.

And now France was without a king.

For Louis X, by his marriage to Marguerite of Burgundy, had left only a daughter of five years of age, Jeanne of Navarre, who was suspected strongly of bastardy. By his second marriage, he had bequeathed but an expectation: Queen Clémence was pregnant; but would not be brought to bed for five months. Moreover, it was being canvassed openly that the Hutin had been poisoned.

No disposition had been made for a regency; and personal ambitions resulted in individual attempts to seize power. In Paris the Count of Valois endeavoured to have himself proclaimed Regent. At Dijon the Duke of Burgundy, brother of the murdered Marguerite and the powerful head of a baronial league, undertook to avenge the memory of his sister by championing the rights of his niece. At Lyons the Count of Poitiers, elder surviving brother of the Hutin, was grappling with the intrigues of the Cardinals and vainly striving to force the Conclave to a decision. The Flemings were but awaiting the occasion to take up arms again; while the nobility of Artois was pertinaciously conducting a civil war.

All this was enough to remind the people of the curse pronounced two years before by the Grand

Master of the Templars from among the faggots of his pyre. In that age of superstition, it might well have seemed, in the first week of June 1316, that the Capets were an accursed race.

PART ONE

PHILIPPE AND THE CLOSED GATES



The White Queen



QUEENS WORE white mourning.

The wimple of fine linen, enclosing her neck and imprisoning her chin to the lip, revealing only the centre of her face, was white; so was the great veil covering her forehead and eyebrows; so was the dress which, fastened at the wrists, reached to her feet. Queen Clémence of Hungary, widowed twenty-three after ten months of marriage to King Louis X, had donned these almost conventual garments and would doubtless wear them for the rest of her life.

Henceforth no one would look on her wonderful golden hair, on the perfect oval of her face, and on the calm, lustrous splendour which had struck all beholders and made her beauty famous.

The narrow and pathetic mask, framed in its immaculate linen, bore the marks of sleepless nights and days of weeping. Even her gaze had altered, never coming to rest but seeming to flutter across the surface of people and of things. The lovely Queen Clémence already looked like the effigy on her tomb.

Nevertheless, beneath the folds of her dress, a new life was forming: Clémence was pregnant; and she was obsessed by the thought that her husband would never know his child.

‘If only Louis had lived long enough to see his child born!’ she thought. ‘Five months, only five months longer! How happy he would have been, particularly if it is a son. If I had only become pregnant on our wedding night!’

The Queen turned wearily to look at the Count of Valois, who was strutting up and down the room like a cock on a dunghill.

‘But why, Uncle, why should anyone have been so wicked as to poison him?’ she asked. ‘Did he not do all the good in his power? Why are you always searching for the wickedness of man when doubtless, there is but a manifestation of the Divine Will?’

‘You are on this occasion alone in rendering to God that which seems rather to belong to the machinations of the Devil,’ replied Charles of Valois.

The great crest of his hood falling on his shoulder, his nose strong, his cheeks bloated and high of colour, his stomach thrust well to the fore, dressed in the same suit of black velvet with silver clasps which he had worn eighteen months earlier at the funeral of his brother Philip the Fair, Monseigneur of Valois had just returned from Saint-Denis, where he had been burying his nephew, Louis X. The ceremony had created a problem or two for him, because, for the first time since the ritual of royal burials had been established, the officers of the household, having cried: ‘The King is dead!’ had been unable to add: ‘Long live the King!’; and no one knew before whom the various rites, normally appropriate to the new sovereign, should be performed.

‘Very well! Break your wand before me,’ Valois had said to the Grand Chamberlain, Mathieu de Trye. ‘I am the eldest of the family and take precedence.’

But his half-brother, the Count of Evreux, had taken exception to this peculiar innovation, for Charles of Valois would certainly have taken advantage of it as an argument for his being recognized as Regent.

‘The eldest of the family, if you mean it in that sense,’ the Count of Evreux had said, ‘is not you Charles. Our Uncle Robert of Clermont is the son of Saint Louis. Have you forgotten that he is still alive?’

‘You know very well that poor Robert is mad and that his clouded mind cannot be relied on for anything,’ Valois had replied, shrugging his shoulders.

In the end, after the funeral feast, which had been held in the abbey, the Grand Chamberlain had broken the insignia of his office before an empty chair.

‘Did not Louis give alms to the poor? Did he not pardon many prisoners?’ Clémence went on, as she were trying to convince herself. ‘He had a generous heart, I assure you. If he sinned, he repented.’

It was clearly not the moment to contest the virtues with which the Queen embellished the recent memory of her husband. Nevertheless, Charles of Valois found it impossible to control an outburst of ill-humour.

‘I know, Niece, I know,’ he replied, ‘that you had a most pious influence on him, and that he was extremely generous ... to you. But one cannot rule by Paternosters alone, nor by heaping presents on those one loves. Repentance is not enough to disarm the hatreds one has sown.’

‘So now,’ Clémence thought, ‘Charles, who laid a claim to power while Louis was alive, is denying him already. And soon I shall be reproached with all the presents he gave me. I have become the foreigner.’

She was too weak to overcome to find the strength for indignation. She merely said: ‘I cannot believe that Louis was so hated that anyone would wish to kill him.’

‘All right, don’t believe it, Niece,’ cried Valois; ‘but it’s the fact! There’s the proof of the dog that licked the linen used for removing the entrails during the embalming and died an hour later. There ...’

Clémence closed her eyes and clutched the arms of her chair in order not to reel at the vision conjured up in her mind. How could anyone speak so cruelly of her husband, the King who had slept beside her, the father of the child she carried, compelling her to imagine the corpse beneath the knives of the embalmers?

Monseigneur of Valois continued to develop his macabre thesis. When would he stop talking, the fat, restless, vain authoritarian who, dressed sometimes in blue, sometimes in red, sometimes in black, had appeared at every important or tragic hour in Clémence’s life during the ten months she had been in France, to lecture her, deafen her with words and compel her to act against her will? Even on the morning of her marriage at Saint-Lyé, Uncle Valois, whom Clémence had scarcely ever seen, had almost spoiled the ceremony by instructing her in court intrigues of which she understood nothing. Clémence remembered Louis coming to meet her on the Troyes road, the country church, the room in the little castle, so hastily furnished as a nuptial chamber. ‘Did I realize my happiness? No, I must now weep in front of him,’ she thought.

‘Who the author of this appalling crime may be,’ went on Valois, ‘we do not yet know; but we shall discover him, Niece, I give you my solemn promise. If I am given the necessary powers, that is, the powers of kings ...’

Valois never lost an opportunity of reminding people of the fact that he had worn two crowns, which, though they were purely nominal, still put him on an equal footing with sovereign princes.¹ For

‘We kings have enemies who are less hostile to our persons than to the decisions of our power; and

there are many people who might have an interest in making you a widow. There are the Templars whose Order, as I said at the time, it was a great mistake to suppress. They formed a secret conspiracy and swore to kill my brother and his sons. My brother is dead, his eldest son has followed him. There are the Roman Cardinals. Do you remember Cardinal Caetani's attempt to cast a spell on Louis and your brother-in-law of Poitiers, both of whom he wished to destroy? The attempt was discovered, but Caetani may well have struck by other means. What do you expect? One cannot remove the Pope from the throne of Saint Peter, as my brother did, without arousing resentment. It is also possible that supporters of the Duke of Burgundy may still feel bitter about Marguerite's punishment, to say nothing of the fact that you replaced her.'

Clémence looked Charles of Valois straight in the eye, which embarrassed him and made him flush a little. He had had some hand in Marguerite's murder. He now realized that Clémence knew it through Louis's rash confidences no doubt.

But Clémence said nothing; it was a subject she was chary of broaching. She felt that she was involuntarily to blame. For her husband, whose virtues she boasted, had nevertheless had his first wife strangled so that he might marry her, Clémence, the niece of the King of Naples. Need one look further for the cause of God's punishment?

'And then there is your neighbour, the Countess Mahaut,' Valois hurried on, 'who is not the woman to shrink from crime, even the worst ...'

'How does she differ from you?' thought Clémence, not daring to reply. 'Nobody seems to shrink much from killing at this Court.'

'And less than a month ago, to compel her to submit, Louis confiscated her county of Artois.'

For a moment Clémence wondered if Valois were not inventing all these possible culprits in order to conceal the fact that he was himself the author of the crime. But she was immediately horror-struck at the thought, for which there was indeed no possible basis. No, she refused to suspect anyone; she wanted Louis to have died a natural death. Nevertheless, Clémence gazed unconsciously out of the open window towards the south where, beyond the trees of the Forest of Vincennes, lay the Château de Conflans, Countess Mahaut's summer residence. A few days before Louis's death, Mahaut accompanied by her daughter, the Countess of Poitiers, had paid Clémence a visit: an extremely polite visit. Clémence had not left them alone for a single instant. They had admired the tapestries in her room.

'Nothing is more degrading than to imagine that there is a criminal among the people about one,' thought Clémence, 'and to start looking for treason in every face.'

'That is why, my dear Niece,' went on Valois, 'you must return to Paris as I asked you. You know how fond of you I am. I arranged your marriage. Your father was my brother-in-law. Listen to me and you would have listened to him, had God spared him. The hand that struck down Louis may intend pursuing its vengeance on you and on the child you carry. I cannot leave you here, in the middle of the forest, at the mercy of the machinations of the wicked, and I shall be easy only when you are living close to me.'

For the last hour Valois had been trying to persuade Clémence to return to the Palace of the Cité because he had decided to go there himself. It formed part of his plan for assuming the regency and facing the Council of Peers with the accomplished fact. Whoever was master in the Palace had the trappings of power. But to install himself there on his own might look as if he were usurping it by force. If, on the other hand, he entered the Cité in his niece's wake, as her nearest relative and protector, no one could oppose it. The Queen's condition was, at this moment, the best pledge of respect and the most effective instrument of government.

Clémence turned her head, as if to ask for help, towards a third person who was standing silently a few paces from her, his hands crossed on the hilt of a long sword, as he listened to the conversation.

‘Bouville, what should I do?’ she murmured.

Hugues de Bouville, ex-Grand Chamberlain to Philip the Fair, had been appointed Curator of the Stomach by the first Council which had followed on the death of the Hutin. This good man, now growing stout and grey, but still extremely alert, who had been an exemplary royal servant for thirty years, took his new duties most seriously, if not tragically. He had formed a corps of carefully picked gentlemen, who mounted guard in detachments of twenty-four over the Queen’s door. He himself had donned his armour and, in the heat of June, large drops of sweat were running down under his coat of mail. The walls, the courtyards, indeed the whole perimeter of Vincennes, were stuffed with archers. Every kitchen-hand was constantly escorted by a sergeant-at-arms. Even the ladies-in-waiting were searched before entering the royal apartments. Never had a human life been guarded so closely as that which slumbered in the womb of the Queen of France.

In theory Bouville shared his duties with the old Sire de Joinville, who had been appointed Second Curator; the latter had been selected because he happened to be in Paris where he had come to draw, and he did twice a year, with the fussy punctuality of an old man, the income from the endowments conferred on him in three successive reigns, and in particular when Saint Louis was canonized. But the Hereditary Seneschal of Champagne was now ninety-two years old; he was practically the doyen of the high French nobility. He was half-blind and this last journey from his Château de Wassy in the Haute-Marne had tired him out. He spent most of his time dozing in the company of his two white-bearded equerries, so that all the duties had to be performed by Bouville alone.

For Queen Clémence, Bouville was linked with all her happiest memories. He had been the ambassador who had come to ask her hand in marriage and had escorted her from Naples; he was her utterly devoted confidant and probably the only true friend she had at the French Court. Bouville had perfectly understood that Clémence did not wish to leave Vincennes.

‘Monseigneur,’ he said to Valois, ‘I can better assure the safety of the Queen in this manor with its close, surrounding walls than in the great Palace of the Cité, open to all comers. And if you are worried about the Countess Mahaut being near, I can inform you, for I am kept in touch with everything that goes on in the neighbourhood, that Madame Mahaut’s wagons are at this moment being loaded for Paris.’

Valois was considerably annoyed by the air of importance Bouville had assumed since he had become Curator, and by his insistence on remaining there, stuck to his sword, by the Queen’s side.

‘Monsieur Hugues,’ he said haughtily, ‘your duty is to watch over the stomach, not to decide where the royal family shall reside, nor to defend the whole kingdom on your own.’

Not in the least perturbed, Bouville replied: ‘I must also remind you, Monseigneur, that the Queen cannot appear in public until forty days have elapsed since her bereavement.’

‘I know the custom as well as you do, my good man! Who said that the Queen would show herself in public? She shall travel in a closed coach. Really, Niece,’ Valois cried, turning to Clémence, ‘anyone would think that I was trying to send you to the country of the Great Khan, and that Vincennes was two thousand leagues from Paris!’

‘You must understand, Uncle,’ Clémence replied weakly, ‘that living at Vincennes is my last gift from Louis. He gave me this house, in there, and you were present’ – she fluttered her hand towards the room in which Louis X had died – ‘that I might live in it. It seems to me that he has not really departed. You must understand that it’s here that we had ...’

But Monseigneur of Valois could not understand the claims of memory or the imaginings of sorrow.

‘Your husband, for whom we pray, my dear Niece, belongs henceforth to the kingdom’s past. But you carry its future. By exposing your life, you expose that of your child. Louis, who sees you from on high, would never forgive you.’

The shot went home, and Clémence sank back in her chair without another word.

But Bouville declared that he could decide nothing without the agreement of the Sire de Joinville and sent someone to look for him. They waited several minutes. Then the door opened, and they waited again. At last, dressed in a long robe such as had been worn at the time of the Crusade, trembling in every limb, his skin mottled and like the bark of a tree, his eyes with their faded iris watering, Saint Louis’s last companion-at-arms entered, dragging his feet, supported by his equerrier who tottered almost as much as he did. He was given a seat with all the respect to which he was entitled, and Valois began to explain his intentions about the Queen. The old man listened, solemnly nodding his head, obviously delighted still to have some part to play. When Valois had finished, the Seneschal fell into a meditation they were careful not to disturb; they waited for the oracle to speak. Suddenly he asked: ‘But where is the King then?’

Valois looked crestfallen. So much useless trouble, and when time pressed! Did the Seneschal still understand what was said to him?

‘But the King is dead, Messire de Joinville,’ he replied, ‘and we buried him this morning. You know that you have been appointed Curator.’

The Seneschal frowned and seemed to be making a great effort to recollect. Indeed, failure of memory was no new thing with him; when he was nearly eighty and dictating his famous *Memoirs*, he had not realized that towards the end of the second part he was repeating almost word for word what he had already said in the first.

‘Yes, our young Sire Louis,’ he said at last. ‘He is dead. It was to himself that I presented my great book. Do you know that this is the fourth king I have seen die?’

He announced this as if it were an exploit in itself.

‘Then, if the King is dead, the Queen is Regent,’ he declared.

Monseigneur of Valois turned purple in the face. He had had appointed as Curators a senile idiot and a mediocrity, believing he could manage them as he wished; but he was hoist with his own petard for it was they who were creating his worst difficulties.

‘The Queen is not Regent, Messire Seneschal; she is pregnant,’ he cried. ‘She cannot in any circumstances be Regent until it is known whether she will give birth to a king! Look at her condition, see if she is in a fit state to carry out the duties of the kingdom!’

‘You know that I see very little,’ replied the old man.

With her hand to her forehead, Clémence merely thought: ‘When will they stop? When will they leave me in peace?’

Joinville began explaining in what circumstances, after the death of King Louis VIII, Queen Blanche of Castile had assumed the regency, to the satisfaction of all.

‘Madame Blanche of Castile, and this was only whispered, was not as pure as the image that had been created of her. It appears that Count Thibaut of Champagne, who was a good friend of Messire my father’s, served her even in her bed ...’

They had to let him talk. Though the Seneschal easily forgot what had happened the day before, he had a precise memory for the things he had been told as a small child. He had found an audience and was making the most of it. His hands, shaking with a senile trembling, clawed unceasingly at the sides of his robe over his knees.

‘And even when our sainted King left for the Crusade, where I was with him ...’

‘The Queen resided in Paris during that time, did she not?’ interjected Charles of Valois.

‘Yes, yes ...’ said the Seneschal.

Clémence was the first to give way.

‘Very well, Uncle, so be it!’ she said. ‘I will do as you wish and return to the Cité.’

‘Ah! A wise decision at last, which I am sure Messire de Joinville approves.’

‘Yes, yes ...’

‘I shall go and take the necessary measures. Your escort will be under the command of my son Philippe, and our cousin, Robert of Artois.’

‘Thank you, Uncle, thank you,’ said Clémence, on the verge of collapse. ‘But now, I ask you, please let me pray.’

An hour later, the Count of Valois’s orders had set the Château of Vincennes in turmoil. Wagons were being brought out of the coach-house; whips were cracking on the cruppers of the great Percheron horses; servants were running to and fro; the archers had laid down their weapons to lend a hand to the stablemen. Since the King’s death they had all felt they should talk in low voices, but now everyone found an occasion to shout; and, if anyone had really wished to make an attempt on the Queen’s life, this would have been the very moment to choose.

Within the manor the upholsterers were taking down the hangings, removing the furniture, carrying out tables, dressers and chests. The officers of the Queen’s household and the ladies-in-waiting were busy packing. There was to be a first convoy of twenty vehicles, and doubtless they would have made two journeys to complete the move.

Clémence of Hungary, in the long white robe to which she was not yet accustomed, went from room to room, escorted always by Bouville. There was dust, sweat and tumult everywhere, and that sense of pillage that goes with moving house. The Bursar, inventory in hand, was superintending the dispatch of the plate and valuables which had been collected together and now covered the whole floor of a room: dishes, ewers, the dozen silver-gilt goblets Louis had had made for Clémence, the great gold reliquary containing a fragment of the True Cross, which was so heavy that the man carrying it staggered as if he were on his way to Calvary.

In the Queen’s chamber the first linen-maid, Eudeline, who had been the mistress of Louis X before his marriage to Marguerite, was in charge of packing the clothes.

‘What is the use of taking all these dresses, since they will never be of any use to me again?’ said Clémence.

And the jewels too, packed in heavy iron chests, the brooches, rings and precious stones Louis had lavished on her during the brief period of their marriage, were all henceforth useless objects. Even the three crowns, laden with emeralds, rubies and pearls, were too high and too ornate for a widow to wear. A simple circlet of gold with short lilies, placed over her veil, would be the only jewel to which she would ever have a right.

‘I have become a white Queen, as I saw my grandmother, Marie of Hungary, become,’ she thought. ‘But my grandmother was over sixty and had borne thirteen children. My husband will never even see his.’

‘Madame,’ asked Eudeline, ‘am I to come with you to the Palace? No one has given me orders.’

Clémence looked at the beautiful, fair woman who, forgetting all jealousy, had been of such great help to her during the last months and particularly during Louis’s illness. ‘He had a child by her, and he banished her, shut her up in a nunnery. Is that why Heaven has punished us?’ She felt laden with all the sins Louis had committed before he knew her, and that she was destined to redeem them by her suffering. She would have her whole life in which to pay God, with her tears, her prayers and her

charity, the heavy price for Louis's soul.

~~'No,' she murmured, 'no, Eudeline, don't come with me. Someone who loved him must remain here.'~~

Then, dismissing even Bouville, she took refuge in the only quiet room, the only room left undisturbed, the chamber in which her husband had died.

It was dark behind the drawn curtains. Clémence went and knelt by the bed, placing her lips against the brocade coverlet.

Suddenly she heard a nail scratching against cloth. She felt a terror which proved to her that she still had a will to live. For a moment she remained still, holding her breath, while the scratching went on behind her. Warily she turned her head. It was the Seneschal de Joinville, who had been put in a corner of the room to wait till it was time to leave.

The Cardinal who Did not Believe in Hell



THE JUNE NIGHT WAS beginning to grow pale; already in the east a thin grey streak low in the sky was the harbinger of the sun, soon to rise over the city of Lyons.

It was the hour when the wagons set out for the city, bringing fruit and vegetables from the neighbouring countryside; the hour when the owls fell silent and the sparrows had not yet begun to twitter. It was also the hour when Cardinal Jacques Duèze, behind the narrow windows of one of the apartments of honour in the Abbey of Ainay, thought about death.

The Cardinal had never had much need of sleep; and as he grew older he needed still less. Three hours of sleep were quite enough. A little after midnight he rose and sat at his desk. A man of quick intellect and prodigious knowledge, trained in all the intellectual disciplines, he had composed treatises on theology, law, medicine and alchemy which carried weight among the scholars and savants of his time.

In this period, when the great hope of poor and princes alike was the manufacture of gold, Duèze's doctrines on the elixirs for the transmutation of metals were much referred to.

'The materials from which elixirs can be made are three,' could be read in his work entitled *The Philosophers' Elixir*, 'the seven metals, the seven spirits and other things ... The seven metals are sun, moon, copper, tin, lead, iron, and quicksilver; the seven spirits are quicksilver, sulphur, sal-ammoniac, orpiment, tutty, magnesia, marcasite; and the other things are quicksilver, human blood, horses' blood and urine, and human urine.'²

At seventy-two the Cardinal was still finding fields in which he had not given his thoughts expression, and was completing his work while others slept. He used as many candles as a whole community of monks.

During the nights he also worked at the huge correspondence which he maintained with numerous prelates, abbots, jurists, scholars, chancellors and sovereign princes all over Europe. His secretary and his copyists found their whole day's work ready for them in the morning.

Or again, he might consider the horoscope of one of his rivals in the Conclave, comparing it to his own sky, and asking the planets whether he would don the tiara. According to the stars, his greatest chance of becoming Pope was between the beginning of August and the beginning of September of the present year. And now it was already the 10th of June and nothing seemed to be shaping to that end.

Then came that painful moment before the dawn. As if he had a premonition that he would leave the world precisely at that hour, the Cardinal felt a sort of diffused distress, a vague unease both of body and of mind. In his fatigue he questioned his past actions. His memories were of an extraordinary destiny. A member of a family of burgesses of Cahors, and still completely unknown at an age at which most men in those times had already made their career, his life seemed to have begun only at forty-four, when he had left suddenly for Naples in the company of an uncle, who was going there on

business. The voyage, being away from home, the discovery of Italy, had had a curious effect on him. A few days after landing, he had become the pupil of the tutor to the royal children and had thrown himself into abstract study with a passion, a frenzy, a quickness of comprehension and a precision of memory which the most intelligent adolescent might have envied. He was no more subject to hunger than he was to the need for sleep. A piece of bread had often sufficed him for a whole day, and prison life would have been perfectly agreeable to him provided he had been furnished with books. He had soon become a doctor of canon law, then a doctor of civil law, and his name had begun to be known. The Court of Naples sought the advice of the cleric from Cahors.

This thirst for knowledge was succeeded by a thirst for power. Councillor to King Charles II of Anjou-Sicily (the grandfather of Queen Clémence), then Secretary to the Secret Councils and the holder of numerous ecclesiastical benefices, he had been appointed Bishop of Fréjus ten years after his arrival, and a little later succeeded to the post of Chancellor of the kingdom of Naples, that is to say the first minister of a state which included both southern Italy and the whole county of Provence.

So fabulous a rise among the intrigues of courts had not been accomplished merely with the talents of a jurist or a theologian. An event known to but few people, since it was a secret of the Church, shows the cunning and impudence of which Duèze was capable.

A few months after the death of Charles II he had been sent on a mission to the Papal Court, at a time when the bishopric of Avignon – the most important in Christendom because it was the seat of the Holy See – happened to be vacant. Still Chancellor, and therefore the repository of the seals, he disingenuously wrote a letter in which the new King of Naples, Robert, asked for the episcopate of Avignon for Jacques Duèze. This he did in 1310. Clement V, anxious to acquire the support of Naples at a time when his relations with Philip the Fair were somewhat uneasy, had immediately acceded to the request. The fraud was discovered only when Pope Clement and King Robert met with mutual surprise, the first because he had received no thanks for so great a favour, the second because he considered the unexpected appointment, which deprived him of his Chancellor, somewhat cavalier. But it was too late. Rather than create useless scandal, King Robert turned a blind eye, preferring to keep a hold over a man who was to occupy one of the highest of ecclesiastical positions. Each had done well out of it. And now Duèze was Cardinal in Curia, and his works were studied in every university.

Yet, however astonishing his career might be, it appeared so only to those who looked on it from the outside. Days lived, whether full or empty, whether busy or serene, are but days gone by, and the ashes of the past weigh the same in every hand.

Had so much activity, ambition and expended energy any meaning, when it must all inevitably end in that Beyond of which the greatest intellects and the most abstruse of human sciences could glimpse no more than indecipherable fragments? Why should he wish to become Pope? Would it not have been wiser to retire to a cloister in detachment from the world; lay aside the pride of knowledge and the vanity of power; and acquire the humility of simple faith in order to prepare himself for death? But even meditating thus, Cardinal Duèze turned perforce to abstract speculation; and his concern with death became transformed into a juridical argument with the Deity.

‘The doctors assure us,’ he thought that morning, ‘that the souls of the just, immediately after death, enjoy the beatific vision of God, which is their recompense. So be it, so be it. But after the end of the world, when the bodies of the dead have risen again to rejoin their souls, we are to be judged at the Last Judgment. Yet God, who is perfect, cannot sit in appeal on His own judgments. God cannot commit a mistake and be thereby compelled to cast out of Paradise the elect He has admitted already. Moreover, would it not be proper for the soul to enter into possession of the joy of the Lord only at the

moment when, reunited with its body, it is itself in its nature perfect? Therefore the doctors must be wrong. Therefore there cannot be either beatitude, as such, nor the beatific vision before the end of time, and God will permit Himself to be looked on only after the Last Judgment. But, till then, where are the souls of the dead? Do we wait perhaps *sub altare Dei*, beneath that altar of God of which Saint John the Divine speaks in his Apocalypse?’

The noise of horses’ hooves, a most unusual sound at that hour, echoed along the abbey walls and across the little round cobbles with which the best streets in Lyons were paved. The Cardinal listened for a moment, then relapsed into the reasoning whose consequences were indeed surprising.

‘For if Paradise is empty,’ he said to himself, ‘it creates a singular modification in the condition of those whom we decree to be saints or blessed. And what is true for the souls of the just must necessarily be true also for the souls of the unjust. God could not punish the wicked before He had recompensed the just. The labourer receives his hire at the end of the day; and it must be at the end of the world that the wheat will be separated finally from the tares. There can be no soul at this moment living in Hell, since sentence has not yet been pronounced. And that is as much as to say that Hell, till then, does not exist.’

This proposition was peculiarly reassuring to someone thinking of death; it postponed the date of the supreme trial without destroying the prospect of eternal life, and was more or less in keeping with the intuition, common to the greater part of men, that death is a falling into a dark and immense silence, into an indefinite unconsciousness.

Clearly such a doctrine, if it were to be openly professed, could not fail to arouse violent attack both among the doctors of the Church and among the pious populace, and the moment was ill-chosen for a candidate to the Holy See to preach the inexistence of both Heaven and Hell, or their emptiness.³

‘We shall have to await the end of the Conclave,’ the Cardinal thought. He was interrupted by a monk in attendance who knocked on his door and announced the arrival of a courier from Paris.

‘Whom does he come from?’ asked the Cardinal.

Duèze had a smothered, strangled, utterly toneless voice, though it was perfectly distinct.

‘From the Count de Bouville,’ replied the monk. ‘He must have ridden fast, for he looks very tired when I went to open to him, I found him half-asleep, his forehead against the door.’

‘Bring him to me at once.’

And the Cardinal, who had been meditating a few minutes before on the vanity of the ambitions of this world, immediately thought: ‘Can it be on the subject of the election? Is the Court of France openly supporting my candidature? Is someone going to offer me a bargain?’

He felt excited, full of hope and curiosity; he walked up and down the room with little, rapid steps. Duèze was no taller than a boy of fifteen, and had a mouse-like face beneath thick white eyebrows and fragile bones.

Beyond the windows the sky was beginning to turn pink; it was already dawn but not yet light enough to snuff the candles. His bad hour was over.

The courier entered; at first glance, the Cardinal knew that this was no usual courier. In the first place, a professional would immediately have gone down on his knee and handed over his message box, instead of remaining on his feet, bowing and saying, ‘Monseigneur ...’ Besides, the Court of France sent its messages by strong, solidly built horsemen, well inured to hardship, such as big Robi Cuisse-Maria, who often made the journey between Paris and Avignon, and not a stripling with a pointed nose, who seemed hardly able to keep his eyes open and reeled in his boots from fatigue.

‘It looks very like a disguise,’ Duèze thought. ‘And what’s more, I’ve seen that face somewhere before.’

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