

## Chapter 38

### CASTOR AND POLLUX.

The king dismissed all his favorites, and remained with his brother. The duke, who had managed to preserve a tolerably composed countenance throughout, believed himself unsuspected, and remained without fear.

"My brother," said Henri, after assuring himself that, with the exception of Chicot, no one remained in the room, "do you know that I am a very happy prince?"

"Sire, if your majesty be really happy, it is a recompense from Heaven for your merits."

"Yes, happy," continued the king, "for if great ideas do not come to me, they do to my subjects. It is a great idea which has occurred to my cousin Guise."

The duke made a sign of assent, and Chicot opened his eyes to watch the king's face.

"Indeed," continued Henri, "to unite under one banner all the Catholics, to arm all France on this pretext from Calais to Languedoc, from Bretagne to Burgundy, so that I shall always have an army ready to march against England, Holland, or Spain, without alarming any of them--do you know, François, it is a magnificent idea?"

"Is it not, sire?" said the duke, delighted.

"Yes, I confess I feel tempted to reward largely the author of this fine project."

Chicot opened his eyes, but he shut them again, for he had seen on the face of the king one of his almost imperceptible smiles, and he was satisfied.

"Yes," continued Henri, "I repeat such a project merits recompense, and I will do what I can for the author of this good work, for the work is begun--is it not, my brother?"

The duke confessed that it was.

"Better and better; my subjects not only conceive these good ideas, but, in their anxiety to be of use to me, hasten to put them in execution. But I ask you, my dear François, if it be really to the Duc de Guise that I am indebted for this royal thought?"

"No, sire, it occurred to the Cardinal de Lorraine twenty years ago, only the St. Bartholomew rendered it needless for the time."

"Ah! what a pity he is dead; but," continued Henri, with that air of frankness which made him the first comedian of the day, "his nephew has inherited it, and brought it to bear. What can I do for him?"

"Sire," said François, completely duped by his brother, "you exaggerate his merits. He has, as I say, but inherited the idea, and another man has given him great help in developing it."

"His brother the cardinal?"

"Doubtless he has been occupied with it, but I do not mean him."

"Mayenne, then?"

"Oh! sire, you do him too much honor."

"True, how could any good ideas come to such a butcher? But to whom, then, am I to be grateful for aid to my cousin Guise?"

"To me, sire."

"To you!" cried Henri, as if in astonishment. "How! when I saw all the world unchained against me, the preachers against my vices, the poets against my weaknesses, while my friends laughed at my powerlessness, and my situation was so harassing, that it gave me gray hairs every day: such an idea came to you, François--to you, whom I confess, for man is feeble and kings are blind, I did not always believe to be my friend! Ah! François, how guilty I have been." And Henri, moved even to tears, held out his hand to his brother.

Chicot opened his eyes again.

"Oh!" continued Henri, "the idea is triumphant. Not being able to raise troops without raising an outcry, scarcely to walk, sleep, or love, without exciting ridicule, this idea gives me at once an army, money, friends, and repose. But my cousin spake of a chief?"

"Yes, doubtless."

"This chief, you understand, François, cannot be one of my favorites; none of them has at once the head and the heart necessary for so important a post. Quelus is brave, but is occupied only by his amours. Maugiron is also brave, but he thinks only of his toilette. Schomberg also, but he is not clever. D'Epernon is a valiant man, but he is a hypocrite, whom I could not trust, although I am friendly to him. But you know, François, that one of the heaviest taxes on a king is the necessity of dissimulation; therefore, when I

can speak freely from my heart, as I do now, I breathe. Well, then, if my cousin Guise originated this idea, to the development of which you have assisted, the execution of it belongs to him."

"What do you say, sire?" said François, uneasily.

"I say, that to direct such a movement we must have a prince of high rank."

"Sire, take care."

"A good captain and a skilful negotiator."

"The last particularly."

"Well, is not M. de Guise all this?"

"My brother, he is very powerful already."

"Yes, doubtless; but his power makes my strength."

"He holds already the army and the bourgeois; the cardinal holds the Church, and Mayenne is their instrument; it is a great deal of power to be concentrated in one family."

"It is true, François; I had thought of that."

"If the Guises were French princes, their interest would be to aggrandize France."

"Yes, but they are Lorraines."

"Of a house always rival to yours."

"Yes, François; you have touched the sore. I did not think you so good a politician. Yes, there does not pass a day but one or other of these Guises, either by address or by force, carries away from me some particle of my power. Ah! François, if we had but had this explanation sooner, if I had been able to read your heart as I do now, certain of support in you, I might have resisted better, but now it is too late."

"Why so?"

"Because all combats fatigue me; therefore I must make him chief of the League."

"You will be wrong, brother."

"But who could I name, François? who would accept this perilous post? Yes, perilous; for do you not see that he intended me to appoint him chief, and that, should I name any one else to the post, he would treat him as an enemy?"

"Name some one so powerful that, supported by you, he need not fear all the three Lorraine princes together."

"Ah, my good brother, I know no such person."

"Look round you, brother."

"I know no one but you and Chicot who are really my friends."

"Well, brother."

Henri looked at the duke as if a veil had fallen from his eyes. "Surely you would never consent, brother! It is not you who could teach all these bourgeois their exercise, who could look over the discourses of the preachers, who, in case of battle, would play the butcher in the streets of Paris; for all this, one must be triple, like the duke, and have a right arm called Charles and a left called Louis. What! you would like all this? You, the first gentleman of our court! Mort de ma vie! how people change with the age!"

"Perhaps I would not do it for myself, brother, but I would do it for you."

"Excellent brother!" said Henri, wiping away a tear which never existed.

"Then," said the duke, "it would not displease you for me to assume this post?"

"Displease me! On the contrary, it would charm me."

François trembled with joy. "Oh! if your majesty thinks me worthy of this confidence."

"Confidence! When you are the chief, what have I to fear? The League itself? That cannot be dangerous can it, François?"

"Oh, sire?"

"No, for then you would not be chief, or at least, when you are chief, there will be no danger. But, François, the duke is doubtless certain of this appointment, and he will not lightly give way."

"Sire, you grant me the command?"

"Certainly."

"And you wish me to have it?"

"Particularly; but I dare not too much displease M. de Guise."

"Oh, make yourself easy, sire; if that be the only obstacle, I pledge myself to arrange it."

"When?"

"At once."

"Are you going to him? That will be doing him too much honor."

"No, sire; he is waiting for me."

"Where?"

"In my room."

"Your room! I heard the cries of the people as he left the Louvre."

"Yes; but after going out at the great door he came back by the postern. The king had the right to the first visit, but I to the second."

"Ah, brother, I thank you for keeping up our prerogative, which I had the weakness so often to abandon. Go, then, François, and do your best."

François bent down to kiss the king's hand, but he, opening his arms, gave him a warm embrace, and then the duke left the room to go to his interview with the Duc de Guise. The king, seeing his brother gone, gave an angry growl, and rapidly made his way through the secret corridor, until he reached a hiding-place whence he could distinctly hear the conversation between the two dukes.

"Ventre de biche!" cried Chicot, starting up, "how touching these family scenes are! For an instant I believed myself in Olympus, assisting at the reunion of Castor and Pollux after six months' separation."