

## Chapter 15

### THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING A GOOD AMBASSADOR.

Chicot was hidden in his great chair, and Joyeuse was half lying on the foot of the bed in which the king was bolstered up, when the conversation commenced.

"Well, Joyeuse," said Henri, "have you well wandered about the town?"

"Yes, sire," replied the duke, carelessly.

"How quickly you disappeared from the Place de Greve."

"Sire, to speak frankly, I do not like to see men suffer."

"Tender heart."

"No; egotistical heart, rather; then sufferings act on my nerves."

"You know what passed?"

"Ma foi! no."

"Salcede denied all."

"Ah!"

"You bear it very indifferently, Joyeuse."

"I confess I do not attach much importance to it; besides, I was certain he would deny everything."

"But since he confessed before the judges--"

"All the more reason that he should deny it afterward. The confession put the Guises on their guard, and they were at work while your majesty remained quiet."

"What! you foresee such things, and do not warn me?"

"I am not a minister, to talk politics."

"Well, Joyeuse, I want your brother."

"He, like myself, is at your majesty's service."

"Then I may count on him?"

"Doubtless."

"I wish to send him on a little mission."

"Out of Paris?"

"Yes."

"In that case, it is impossible."

"How so?"

"Du Bouchage cannot go away just now."

The king looked astonished. "What do you mean?" said he.

"Sire," said Joyeuse quietly, "it is the simplest thing possible. Du Bouchage is in love, but he had carried on his negotiations badly, and everything was going wrong; the poor boy was growing thinner and thinner."

"Indeed," said the king, "I have remarked it."

"And he had become sad, mordieu! as if he had lived in your majesty's court."

A kind of grunt, proceeding from the corner of the room interrupted Joyeuse, who looked round astonished.

"It is nothing, Joyeuse," said the king, laughing, "only a dog asleep on the footstool. You say, then, that Du Bouchage grew sad?--"

"Sad as death, sire. It seems he has met with some woman of an extraordinary disposition. However, one sometimes succeeds as well with this sort of women as with others, if you only set the right way to work."

"You would not have been embarrassed, libertine!"

"You understand, sire, that no sooner had he made me his confidant, than I undertook to save him."

"So that--"

"So that already the cure commences."

"What, is he less in love?"

"No; but he has more hope of making her so. For the future, instead of sighing with the lady, we mean to amuse her in every possible way. To-night I stationed thirty Italian musicians under her balcony."

"Ah! ma foi! music would not have amused me when I was in love with Madame de Conde."

"No; but you were in love, sire; and she is as cold as an icicle."

"And you think music will melt her?"

"Diable! I do not say that she will come at once and throw herself into the arms of Du Bouchage, but she will be pleased at all this being done for herself alone. If she do not care for this, we shall have plays, enchantments, poetry--in fact, all the pleasures of the earth, so that, even if we do not bring gayety back to her, I hope we shall to Du Bouchage."

"Well, I hope so; but since it would be so trying to him to leave Paris, I hope you are not also, like him, the slave of some passion?"

"I never was more free, sire."

"Oh! I thought you were in love with a beautiful lady?"

"Yes, sire, so I was; but imagine that this evening, after having given my lesson to Du Bouchage, I went to see her, with my head full of his love story, and, believing myself almost as much in love as he, I found a trembling frightened woman, and thinking I had disturbed her somehow, I tried to reassure her, but it was useless. I interrogated her, but she did not reply. I tried to embrace her, and she turned her head away. I grew angry, and we quarreled: and she told me she should never be at home to me any more."

"Poor Joyeuse; what did you do?"

"Pardieu, sire! I took my hat and cloak, bowed, and went out, without

once looking back."

"Bravo, Joyeuse; it was courageous."

"The more so, sire, that I thought I heard her sigh."

"But you will return?"

"No, I am proud."

"Well, my friend, this rupture is for your good."

"Perhaps so, sire; but I shall probably be horribly ennuyé for a week, having nothing to do. It may perhaps amuse me, however, as it is something new, and I think it distingué."

"Certainly it is, I have made it so," said the king. "However, I will occupy you with something."

"Something lazy, I hope?"

A second noise came from the chair; one might have thought the dog was laughing at the words of Joyeuse.

"What am I to do, sire?" continued Joyeuse.

"Get on your boots."

"Oh! that is against all my ideas."

"Get on horseback."

"On horseback! impossible."

"And why?"

"Because I am an admiral, and admirals have nothing to do with horses."

"Well, then, admiral, if it be not your place to mount a horse, it is so at all events to go on board ship. So you will start at once for Rouen, where you will find your admiral's ship, and make ready to sail immediately for Antwerp."

"For Antwerp!" cried Joyeuse, in a tone as despairing as though he had received an order for Canton or Valparaiso.

"I said so," replied the king, in a cold and haughty tone, "and there is no need to repeat it."

Joyeuse, without making the least further resistance, fastened his cloak and took his hat.

"What a trouble I have to make myself obeyed," continued Henri.

"Ventrebleu! if I forget sometimes that I am the master, others might

remember it."

Joyeuse bowed stiffly, and said, "Your orders, sire?"

The king began to melt. "Go," said he, "to Rouen, where I wish you to embark, unless you prefer going by land to Brussels."

Joyeuse did not answer, but only bowed.

"Do you prefer the land route, duke?" asked Henri.

"I have no preference when I have an order to execute, sire."

"There, now you are sulky. Ah! kings have no friends."

"Those who give orders can only expect to find servants."

"Monsieur," replied the king, angry again, "you will go then to Rouen; you will go on board your ship, and will take the garrisons of Caudebec, Harfleur, and Dieppe, which I will replace afterward. You will put them on board six transports, and place them at the service of my brother, who expects aid from me."

"My commission, if you please, sire."

"And since when have you been unable to act by virtue of your rank as admiral?"

"I only obey, sire; and, as much as possible, avoid responsibility."

"Well, then, M. le Duc, you will receive the commission at your hotel before you depart."

"And when will that be?"

"In an hour."

Joyeuse bowed and turned to the door. The king's heart misgave him.

"What!" cried he, "not even the courtesy of an adieu? You are not polite, but that is a common reproach to naval people."

"Pardon me, sire, but I am a still worse courtier than I am a seaman;" and shutting the door violently, he went out.

"See how those love me, for whom I have done so much," cried the king; "ungrateful Joyeuse!"

"Well, are you going to recall him?" said Chicot, advancing. "Because, for once in your life, you have been firm, you repent it."

"Ah! so you think it very agreeable to go to sea in the month of October? I should like to see you do it."

"You are quite welcome to do so; my greatest desire just now is to

travel."

"Then if I wish to send you somewhere you will not object to go?"

"Not only I do not object, but I request it."

"On a mission?"

"Yes."

"Will you go to Navarre?"

"I would go to the devil."

"You are joking."

"No; since my death I joke no more."

"But you refused just now to quit Paris."

"I was wrong, and I repent. I will go to Navarre, if you will send me."

"Doubtless; I wish it."

"I wait your orders, gracious prince," said Chicot, assuming the same attitude as Joyeuse.

"But you do not know if the mission will suit you. I have certain projects of embroiling Margot with her husband."

"Divide to reign was the A B C of politics one hundred years ago."

"Then you have no repugnance?"

"It does not concern me; do as you wish. I am ambassador, that is all; and as long as I am inviolable, that is all I care for."

"But now you must know what to say to my brother-in-law."

"I say anything! Certainly not."

"Not?"

"I will go where you like, but I will say nothing."

"Then you refuse?"

"I refuse to give a message, but I will take a letter."

"Well, I will give you a letter."

"Give it me, then."

"What! you do not think such a letter can be written at once. It must be

well weighed and considered."

"Well, then, think over it. I will come or send for it early to-morrow."

"Why not sleep here?"

"Here?"

"Yes, in your chair."

"I sleep no more at the Louvre."

"But you must know my intentions concerning Margot and her husband. My letter will make a noise, and they will question you; you must be able to reply."

"Mon Dieu!" said Chicot, shrugging his shoulders, "how obtuse you are, great king. Do you think I am going to carry a letter a hundred and fifty leagues without knowing what is in it? Be easy, the first halt I make I shall open your letter and read it. What! have you sent ambassadors for ten years to all parts of the world, and know no better than that? Come, rest in peace, and I will return to my solitude."

"Where is it?"

"In the cemetery of the Grands-Innocens, great prince."

Henri looked at him in astonishment again.

"Ah! you did not expect that," said Chicot. "Well, till to-morrow, when I or my messenger will come--"

"How shall I know your messenger when he arrives?"

"He will say he comes from the shade." And Chicot disappeared so rapidly as almost to reawaken the king's fears as to whether he were a shade or not.