

DUMAS
ALEXANDRE

MARGUERITE
DE VALOIS

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Marguerite de Valois

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Alexandre Dumas

Marguerite de Valois

CHAPTER I

MONSIEUR DE GUISE'S LATIN

On Monday, the 18th of August, 1572, there was a splendid festival at the Louvre.

The ordinarily gloomy windows of the ancient royal residence were brilliantly lighted, and the squares and streets adjacent, usually so solitary after Saint Germain l'Auxerrois had struck the hour of nine, were crowded with people, although it was past midnight.

The vast, threatening, eager, turbulent throng resembled, in the darkness, a black and tumbling sea, each billow of which makes a roaring breaker; this sea, flowing through the Rue des Fossés Saint Germain and the Rue de l'Astruce and covering the quay, surged against the base of the walls of the Louvre, and, in its reflux tide, against the Hôtel de Bourbon, which faced it on the other side.

In spite of the royal festival, and perhaps even because of the royal festival, there was something threatening in the appearance of the people, for no doubt was felt that this imposing ceremony which called them there as spectators, was only the prelude to another in which they would participate a week later as invited guests and amuse themselves with all their hearts.

The court was celebrating the marriage of Madame Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Henry II. and sister of King Charles IX., with Henry de Bourbon, King of Navarre. In truth, that very morning, on a stage erected at the entrance to Notre-Dame, the Cardinal de Bourbon had united the young couple with the usual ceremonial observed at the marriages of the royal daughters of France.

This marriage had astonished every one, and occasioned much surmise to certain persons who saw clearer than others. They found it difficult to understand the union of two parties who hated each other so thoroughly as did, at this moment, the Protestant party and the Catholic party; and they wondered how the young Prince de Condé could forgive the Duc d'Anjou, the King's brother, for the death of his father, assassinated at Jarnac by Montesquiou. They asked how the young Duc de Guise could pardon Admiral de Coligny for the death of his father, assassinated at Orléans by Poltrot de Méré.

Moreover, Jeanne de Navarre, the weak Antoine de Bourbon's courageous wife, who had conducted her son Henry to the royal marriage awaiting him, had died scarcely two months before, and singular reports had been spread abroad as to her sudden death. It was everywhere whispered, and in some places said aloud, that she had discovered some terrible secret; and that Catharine de Médicis, fearing its disclosure, had poisoned her with perfumed gloves, which had been made by a man named René, a Florentine deeply skilled in such matters. This report was the more widely spread and believed when, after this great queen's death, at her son's request, two celebrated physicians, one of whom was the famous Ambroise Paré, were instructed to open and examine the body, but not the skull. As Jeanne de Navarre had been poisoned by a perfume, only the brain could show any trace of the crime (the one part excluded from dissection). We say crime, for no one doubted that a crime had been committed.

This was not all. King Charles in particular had, with a persistency almost approaching obstinacy, urged this marriage, which not only reestablished peace in his kingdom, but also attracted to Paris the principal Huguenots of France. As the two betrothed belonged one to the Catholic religion and the other to the reformed religion, they had been obliged to obtain a dispensation from Gregory XIII., who then filled the papal chair. The dispensation was slow in coming, and the delay had caused

the late Queen of Navarre great uneasiness. She one day expressed to Charles IX. her fears lest the dispensation should not arrive; to which the King replied:

"Have no anxiety, my dear aunt. I honor you more than I do the Pope, and I love my sister more than I fear him. I am not a Huguenot, neither am I a blockhead; and if the Pope makes a fool of himself, I will myself take Margot by the hand, and have her married to your son in some Protestant meeting-house!"

This speech was soon spread from the Louvre through the city, and, while it greatly rejoiced the Huguenots, had given the Catholics something to think about; they asked one another, in a whisper, if the King was really betraying them or was only playing a comedy which some fine morning or evening might have an unexpected ending.

Charles IX.'s conduct toward Admiral de Coligny, who for five or six years had been so bitterly opposed to the King, appeared particularly inexplicable; after having put on his head a price of a hundred and fifty thousand golden crowns, the King now swore by him, called him his father, and declared openly that he should in future confide the conduct of the war to him alone. To such a pitch was this carried that Catharine de Médicis herself, who until then had controlled the young prince's actions, will, and even desires, seemed to be growing really uneasy, and not without reason; for, in a moment of confidence, Charles IX. had said to the admiral, in reference to the war in Flanders,

"My father, there is one other thing against which we must be on our guard – that is, that the queen, my mother, who likes to poke her nose everywhere, as you well know, shall learn nothing of this undertaking; we must keep it so quiet that she will not have a suspicion of it, or being such a mischief-maker as I know she is, she would spoil all."

Now, wise and experienced as he was, Coligny had not been able to keep such an absolute secret; and, though he had come to Paris with great suspicions, and albeit at his departure from Chatillon a peasant woman had thrown herself at his feet, crying, "Ah! sir, our good master, do not go to Paris, for if you do, you will die – you and all who are with you!" – these suspicions were gradually lulled in his heart, and so it was with Téliigny, his son-in-law, to whom the King was especially kind and attentive, calling him his brother, as he called the admiral his father, and addressing him with the familiar "thou," as he did his best friends.

The Huguenots, excepting some few morose and suspicious spirits, were therefore completely reassured. The death of the Queen of Navarre passed as having been caused by pleurisy, and the spacious apartments of the Louvre were filled with all those gallant Protestants to whom the marriage of their young chief, Henry, promised an unexpected return of good fortune. Admiral Coligny, La Rochefoucault, the young Prince de Condé, Téliigny, – in short, all the leaders of the party, – were triumphant when they saw so powerful at the Louvre and so welcome in Paris those whom, three months before, King Charles and Queen Catharine would have hanged on gibbets higher than those of assassins.

The Maréchal de Montmorency was the only one who was missing among all his brothers, for no promise could move him, no specious appearances deceive him, and he remained secluded in his château de l'Isle Adam, offering as his excuse for not appearing the grief which he still felt for his father, the Constable Anne de Montmorency, who had been killed at the battle of Saint Denis by a pistol-shot fired by Robert Stuart. But as this had taken place more than three years before, and as sensitiveness was a virtue little practised at that time, this unduly protracted mourning was interpreted just as people cared to interpret it.

However, everything seemed to show that the Maréchal de Montmorency was mistaken. The King, the Queen, the Duc d'Anjou, and the Duc d'Alençon did the honors of the royal festival with all courtesy and kindness.

The Duc d'Anjou received from the Huguenots themselves well-deserved compliments on the two battles of Jarnac and Montcontour, which he had gained before he was eighteen years of age, more precocious in that than either Cæsar or Alexander, to whom they compared him, of course

placing the conquerors of Pharsalia and the Issus as inferior to the living prince. The Duc d'Alençon looked on, with his bland, false smile, while Queen Catharine, radiant with joy and overflowing with honeyed phrases, congratulated Prince Henry de Condé on his recent marriage with Marie de Clèves; even the Messieurs de Guise themselves smiled on the formidable enemies of their house, and the Duc de Mayenne discoursed with M. de Tavannes and the admiral on the impending war, which was now more than ever threatened against Philippe II.

In the midst of these groups a young man of about nineteen years of age was walking to and fro, his head a little on one side, his ear open to all that was said. He had a keen eye, black hair cut very close, thick eyebrows, a nose hooked like an eagle's, a sneering smile, and a growing mustache and beard. This young man, who by his reckless daring had first attracted attention at the battle of Arnay-le-Duc and was the recipient of numberless compliments, was the dearly beloved pupil of Coligny and the hero of the day. Three months before – that is to say, when his mother was still living – he was called the Prince de Béarn, now he was called the King of Navarre, afterwards he was known as Henry IV.

From time to time a swift and gloomy cloud passed over his brow; unquestionably it was at the thought that scarce had two months elapsed since his mother's death, and he, less than any one, doubted that she had been poisoned. But the cloud was transitory, and disappeared like a fleeting shadow, for they who spoke to him, they who congratulated him, they who elbowed him, were the very ones who had assassinated the brave Jeanne d'Albret.

Some paces distant from the King of Navarre, almost as pensive, almost as gloomy as the king pretended to be joyous and open-hearted, was the young Duc de Guise, conversing with Téliigny. More fortunate than the Béarnais, at two-and-twenty he had almost attained the reputation of his father, François, the great Duc de Guise. He was an elegant gentleman, very tall, with a noble and haughty look, and gifted with that natural majesty which caused it to be said that in comparison with him other princes seemed to belong to the people. Young as he was, the Catholics looked up to him as the chief of their party, as the Huguenots saw theirs in Henry of Navarre, whose portrait we have just drawn. At first he had borne the title of Prince de Joinville, and at the siege of Orléans had fought his first battle under his father, who died in his arms, denouncing Admiral Coligny as his assassin. The young duke then, like Hannibal, took a solemn oath to avenge his father's death on the admiral and his family, and to pursue the foes to his religion without truce or respite, promising God to be his destroying angel on earth until the last heretic should be exterminated. So with deep astonishment the people saw this prince, usually so faithful to his word, offering his hand to those whom he had sworn to hold as his eternal enemies, and talking familiarly with the son-in-law of the man whose death he had promised to his dying father.

But as we have said, this was an evening of astonishments.

Indeed, an observer privileged to be present at this festival, endowed with the knowledge of the future which is fortunately hidden from men, and with that power of reading men's hearts which unfortunately belongs only to God, would have certainly enjoyed the strangest spectacle to be found in all the annals of the melancholy human comedy.

But this observer who was absent from the inner courts of the Louvre was to be found in the streets gazing with flashing eyes and breaking out into loud threats; this observer was the people, who, with its marvellous instinct made keener by hatred, watched from afar the shadows of its implacable enemies and translated the impressions they made with as great clearness as an inquisitive person can do before the windows of a hermetically sealed ball-room. The music intoxicates and governs the dancers, but the inquisitive person sees only the movement and laughs at the puppet jumping about without reason, because the inquisitive person hears no music.

The music that intoxicated the Huguenots was the voice of their pride.

The gleams which caught the eyes of the Parisians that midnight were the lightning flashes of their hatred illuminating the future.

And meantime everything was still festive within, and a murmur softer and more flattering than ever was at this moment pervading the Louvre, for the youthful bride, having laid aside her toilet of ceremony, her long mantle and flowing veil, had just returned to the ball-room, accompanied by the lovely Duchesse de Nevers, her most intimate friend, and led by her brother, Charles IX., who presented her to the principal guests.

The bride was the daughter of Henry II., was the pearl of the crown of France, was Marguerite de Valois, whom in his familiar tenderness for her King Charles IX. always called "*ma sœur Margot*," "my sister Margot."

Assuredly never was any welcome, however flattering, more richly deserved than that which the new Queen of Navarre was at this moment receiving. Marguerite at this period was scarcely twenty, and she was already the object of all the poets' eulogies, some of whom compared her to Aurora, others to Cytherea; she was, in truth, a beauty without rival in that court in which Catharine de Médicis had assembled the loveliest women she could find, to make of them her sirens.

Marguerite had black hair and a brilliant complexion; a voluptuous eye, veiled by long lashes; delicate coral lips; a slender neck; a graceful, opulent figure, and concealed in a satin slipper a tiny foot. The French, who possessed her, were proud to see such a lovely flower flourishing in their soil, and foreigners who passed through France returned home dazzled with her beauty if they had but seen her, and amazed at her knowledge if they had discoursed with her; for Marguerite was not only the loveliest, she was also the most erudite woman of her time, and every one was quoting the remark of an Italian scholar who had been presented to her, and who, after having conversed with her for an hour in Italian, Spanish, Latin, and Greek, had gone away saying:

"To see the court without seeing Marguerite de Valois is to see neither France nor the court."

Thus addresses to King Charles IX. and the Queen of Navarre were not wanting. It is well known that the Huguenots were great hands at addresses. Many allusions to the past, many hints as to the future, were adroitly slipped into these harangues; but to all such allusions and speeches the King replied, with his pale lips and artificial smiles:

"In giving my sister Margot to Henry of Navarre, I give my sister to all the Protestants of the kingdom."

This phrase assured some and made others smile, for it had really a double sense: the one paternal, with which Charles IX. would not load his mind; the other insulting to the bride, to her husband, and also to him who said it, for it recalled some scandalous rumors with which the chroniclers of the court had already found means to smirch the nuptial robe of Marguerite de Valois.

However, M. de Guise was conversing, as we have said, with Téligny; but he did not pay to the conversation such sustained attention but that he turned away somewhat, from time to time, to cast a glance at the group of ladies, in the centre of whom glittered the Queen of Navarre. When the princess's eye thus met that of the young duke, a cloud seemed to over-spread that lovely brow, around which stars of diamonds formed a tremulous halo, and some agitating thought might be divined in her restless and impatient manner.

The Princess Claude, Marguerite's eldest sister, who had been for some years married to the Duc de Lorraine, had observed this uneasiness, and was going up to her to inquire the cause, when all stood aside at the approach of the queen mother, who came forward, leaning on the arm of the young Prince de Condé, and the princess was thus suddenly separated from her sister. There was a general movement, by which the Duc de Guise profited to approach Madame de Nevers, his sister-in-law, and Marguerite.

Madame de Lorraine, who had not lost sight of her sister, then remarked, instead of the cloud which she had before observed on her forehead, a burning blush come into her cheeks. The duke approached still nearer, and when he was within two steps of Marguerite, she appeared rather to feel than see his presence, and turned round, making a violent effort over herself in order to give her

features an appearance of calmness and indifference. The duke, then respectfully bowing, murmured in a low tone,

"Ipse attuli."

That meant: "I have brought it, or brought it myself."

Marguerite returned the young duke's bow, and as she straightened herself, replied, in the same tone,

"Noctu pro more."

That meant: "To-night, as usual."

These soft words, absorbed by the enormous collar which the princess wore, as in the bell of a speaking-trumpet, were heard only by the person to whom they were addressed; but brief as had been the conference, it doubtless composed all the young couple had to say, for after this exchange of two words for three, they separated, Marguerite more thoughtful and the duke with his brow less clouded than when they met. This little scene took place without the person most interested appearing to remark it, for the King of Navarre had eyes but for one lady, and she had around her a suite almost as numerous as that which followed Marguerite de Valois. This was the beautiful Madame de Sauve.

Charlotte de Beaune Semblançay, granddaughter of the unfortunate Semblançay, and wife of Simon de Fizes, Baron de Sauve, was one of the ladies-in-waiting to Catharine de Médicis, and one of the most redoubtable auxiliaries of this queen, who poured forth to her enemies love-philtres when she dared not pour out Florentine poison. Delicately fair, and by turns sparkling with vivacity or languishing in melancholy, always ready for love and intrigue, the two great occupations which for fifty years employed the court of the three succeeding kings, – a woman in every acceptation of the word and in all the charm of the idea, from the blue eye languishing or flashing with fire to the small rebellious feet arched in their velvet slippers, Madame de Sauve had already for some months taken complete possession of every faculty of the King of Navarre, then beginning his career as a lover as well as a politician; thus it was that Marguerite de Valois, a magnificent and royal beauty, had not even excited admiration in her husband's heart; and what was more strange, and astonished all the world, even from a soul so full of darkness and mystery, Catharine de Médicis, while she prosecuted her project of union between her daughter and the King of Navarre, had not ceased to favor almost openly his amour with Madame de Sauve. But despite this powerful aid, and despite the easy manners of the age, the lovely Charlotte had hitherto resisted; and this resistance, unheard of, incredible, unprecedented, even more than the beauty and wit of her who resisted, had excited in the heart of the Béarnais a passion which, unable to satisfy itself, had destroyed in the young king's heart all timidity, pride, and even that carelessness, half philosophic, half indolent, which formed the basis of his character.

Madame de Sauve had been only a few minutes in the ballroom; from spite or grief she had at first resolved on not being present at her rival's triumph, and under the pretext of an indisposition had allowed her husband, who had been for five years secretary of state, to go alone to the Louvre; but when Catharine de Médicis saw the baron without his wife, she asked the cause that kept her dear Charlotte away, and when she found that the indisposition was but slight, she wrote a few words to her, which the lady hastened to obey. Henry, sad as he had at first been at her absence, had yet breathed more freely when he saw M. de Sauve enter alone; but just as he was about to pay some court to the charming creature whom he was condemned, if not to love, at least to treat as his wife, he unexpectedly saw Madame de Sauve arise from the farther end of the gallery. He remained stationary on the spot, his eyes fastened on the Circe who enthralled him as if by magic chains, and instead of proceeding towards his wife, by a movement of hesitation which betrayed more astonishment than alarm he advanced to meet Madame de Sauve.

The courtiers, seeing the King of Navarre, whose inflammable heart they knew, approach the beautiful Charlotte, had not the courage to prevent their meeting, but drew aside complaisantly; so that at the very moment when Marguerite de Valois and Monsieur de Guise exchanged the few

words in Latin which we have noted above, Henry, having approached Madame de Sauve, began, in very intelligible French, although with somewhat of a Gascon accent, a conversation by no means so mysterious.

"Ah, *ma mie!*" he said, "you have, then, come at the very moment when they assured me that you were ill, and I had lost all hope of seeing you."

"Would your majesty perhaps wish me to believe that it had cost you something to lose this hope?" replied Madame de Sauve.

"By Heaven! I believe it!" replied the Béarnais; "know you not that you are my sun by day and my star by night? By my faith, I was in deepest darkness till you appeared and suddenly illumined all."

"Then, monseigneur, I serve you a very ill turn."

"What do you mean, *ma mie?*" inquired Henry.

"I mean that he who is master of the handsomest woman in France should only have one desire – that the light should disappear and give way to darkness, for happiness awaits you in the darkness."

"You know, cruel one, that my happiness is in the hands of one woman only, and that she laughs at poor Henry."

"Oh!" replied the baroness, "I believed, on the contrary, that it was this person who was the sport and jest of the King of Navarre." Henry was alarmed at this hostile attitude, and yet he bethought him that it betrayed jealous spite, and that jealous spite is only the mask of love.

"Indeed, dear Charlotte, you reproach me very unjustly, and I do not comprehend how so lovely a mouth can be so cruel. Do you suppose for a moment that it is I who give myself in marriage? No, *ventre saint gris*, it is not I!"

"It is I, perhaps," said the baroness, sharply, – if ever the voice of the woman who loves us and reproaches us for not loving her can seem sharp.

"With your lovely eyes have you not seen farther, baroness? No, no; Henry of Navarre is not marrying Marguerite de Valois."

"And who, pray, is?"

"Why, by Heaven! it is the reformed religion marrying the pope – that's all."

"No, no, I cannot be deceived by your jests. Monseigneur loves Madame Marguerite. And can I blame you? Heaven forbid! She is beautiful enough to be adored."

Henry reflected for a moment, and, as he reflected, a meaning smile curled the corner of his lips.

"Baroness," said he, "you seem to be seeking a quarrel with me, but you have no right to do so. What have you done to prevent me from marrying Madame Marguerite? Nothing. On the contrary, you have always driven me to despair."

"And well for me that I have, monseigneur," replied Madame de Sauve.

"How so?"

"Why, of course, because you are marrying another woman!"

"I marry her because you love me not."

"If I had loved you, sire, I must have died in an hour."

"In an hour? What do you mean? And of what death would you have died?"

"Of jealousy! – for in an hour the Queen of Navarre will send away her women, and your majesty your gentlemen."

"Is that really the thought that is uppermost in your mind, *ma mie?*"

"I did not say so. I only say, that if I loved you it would be uppermost in my mind most tormentingly."

"Very well," said Henry, at the height of joy on hearing this confession, the first which she had made to him, "suppose the King of Navarre should not send away his gentlemen this evening?"

"Sire," replied Madame de Sauve, looking at the king with astonishment for once unfeigned, "you say things impossible and incredible."

"What must I do to make you believe them?"

"Give me a proof – and that proof you cannot give me."

"Yes, baroness, yes! By Saint Henry, I will give it you!" exclaimed the king, gazing at the young woman with eyes hot with love.

"Oh, your majesty!" exclaimed the lovely Charlotte in an undertone and with downcast eyes, "I do not understand – No! no, it is impossible for you to turn your back on the happiness awaiting you."

"There are four Henrys in this room, my adorable!" replied the king, "Henry de France, Henry de Condé, Henry de Guise, but there is only one Henry of Navarre."

"Well?"

"Well; if this Henry of Navarre is with you all night" —

"All night!"

"Yes; will that be a certain proof to you that he is not with any other?"

"Ah! if you do that, sire," cried Madame Sauve.

"On the honor of a gentleman I will do it!"

Madame de Sauve raised her great eyes dewy with voluptuous promises and looked at the king, whose heart was filled with an intoxicating joy.

"And then," said Henry, "what will you say?"

"I will say," replied Charlotte, "that your majesty really loves me."

"*Ventre saint gris!* then you shall say it, baroness, for it is true."

"But how can you manage it?" murmured Madame de Sauve.

"Oh! by Heaven! baroness, have you not about you some waiting-woman, some girl whom you can trust?"

"Yes, Dariole is so devoted to me that she would let herself be cut in pieces for me; she is a real treasure."

"By Heaven! then say to her that I will make her fortune when I am King of France, as the astrologers prophesy."

Charlotte smiled, for even at this period the Gascon reputation of the Béarnais was already established with respect to his promises.

"Well, then, what do you want Dariole to do?"

"Little for her, a great deal for me. Your apartment is over mine?"

"Yes."

"Let her wait behind the door. I will knock gently three times; she will open the door, and you will have the proof that I have promised you."

Madame de Sauve kept silence for several seconds, and then, as if she had looked around her to observe if she were overheard, she fastened her gaze for a moment on the group clustering around the queen mother; brief as the moment was, it was sufficient for Catharine and her lady-in-waiting to exchange a look.

"Oh, if I were inclined," said Madame de Sauve, with a siren's accent that would have melted the wax in Ulysses' ears, "if I were inclined to make your majesty tell a falsehood" —

"*Ma mie*, try" —

"Ah, *ma foi!* I confess I am tempted to do so."

"Give in! Women are never so strong as after they are defeated."

"Sire, I hold you to your promise for Dariole when you shall be King of France."

Henry uttered an exclamation of joy.

At the precise moment when this cry escaped the lips of the Béarnais, the Queen of Navarre was replying to the Duc de Guise:

"*Noctu pro more*— to-night as usual."

Then Henry turned away from Madame de Sauve as happy as the Duc de Guise had been when he left Marguerite de Valois.

An hour after the double scene we have just related, King Charles and the queen mother retired to their apartments. Almost immediately the rooms began to empty; the galleries exhibited the bases of their marble columns. The admiral and the Prince de Condé were escorted home by four hundred Huguenot gentlemen through the middle of the crowd, which hooted as they passed. Then Henry de Guise, with the Lorraine gentlemen and the Catholics, left in their turn, greeted by cries of joy and plaudits of the people.

But Marguerite de Valois, Henry de Navarre, and Madame de Sauve lived in the Louvre.

CHAPTER II

THE QUEEN OF NAVARRE'S BEDCHAMBER

The Duc de Guise escorted his sister-in-law, the Duchess de Nevers, to her hôtel in the Rue du Chaume, facing the Rue de Brac, and after he had put her into the hands of her women, he went to his own apartment to change his dress, put on a night cloak, and armed himself with one of those short, keen poniards which are called "*foi de gentilhomme*," and were worn without swords; but as he took it off the table on which it lay, he perceived a small billet between the blade and the scabbard.

He opened it, and read as follows:

"I hope M. de Guise will not return to the Louvre to-night; or if he does, that he will at least take the precaution to arm himself with a good coat of mail and a proved sword."

"Aha!" said the duke, addressing his valet, "this is a singular warning, Maître Robin. Now be kind enough to tell me who has been here during my absence."

"Only one person, monseigneur."

"Who?"

"Monsieur du Gast."

"Aha! In fact, methinks I recognize the handwriting. And you are sure that Du Gast came? You saw him?"

"More than that, monseigneur; I spoke with him."

"Very good; then I will follow his advice – my steel jacket and my sword."

The valet, accustomed to these changes of costume, brought both. The duke put on his jacket, which was made of rings of steel so fine that it was scarcely thicker than velvet; he then drew on over his coat of mail his small clothes and a doublet of gray and silver, his favorite colors, put on a pair of long boots which reached to the middle of his thighs, covered his head with a velvet toque unadorned with feathers or precious stones, threw over his shoulders a dark-colored cloak, hung a dagger by his side, handed his sword to a page, the only attendant he allowed to accompany him, and took the way to the Louvre.

As he went down the steps of the hôtel, the watchman of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois had just announced one o'clock in the morning.

Though the night was far gone and the streets at this time were very far from safe, no accident befell the adventurous prince on the way, and safe and sound he approached the colossal mass of the ancient Louvre, all the lights of which had been extinguished one after the other, so that it rose portentous in its silence and darkness.

In front of the royal château was a deep fosse, looking into which were the chambers of most of the princes who inhabited the palace. Marguerite's apartment was on the first floor. But this first floor, easily accessible but for the fosse, was, in consequence of the depth to which that was cut, thirty feet from the bottom of the wall, and consequently out of the reach of robbers or lovers; nevertheless the Duc de Guise approached it without hesitation.

At the same moment was heard the noise of a window which opened on the ground floor. This window was grated, but a hand appeared, lifted out one of the bars which had been loosened, and dropped from it a silken lace.

"Is that you, Gillonne?" said the duke, in a low voice.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied a woman's voice, in a still lower tone.

"And Marguerite?"

"Is waiting for you."

"'T is well."

Hereupon the duke made a signal to his page, who, opening his cloak, took out a small rope ladder. The prince fastened one end to the silk lace, and Gillonne, drawing it up, tied it securely. Then the prince, after having buckled his sword to his belt, ascended without accident. When he had entered, the bar was replaced and the window closed, while the page, having seen his master quietly enter the Louvre, to the windows of which he had accompanied him twenty times in the same way, laid himself down in his cloak on the grass of the fosse, beneath the shadow of the wall.

The night was extremely dark, and large drops of warm rain were falling from the heavy clouds charged with electric fluid.

The Duc de Guise followed his guide, who was no other than the daughter of Jacques de Matignon, maréchal of France. She was the especial confidante of Marguerite, who kept no secret from her; and it was said that among the number of mysteries entrusted to her incorruptible fidelity, there were some so terrible as to compel her to keep the rest.

There was no light left either in the low rooms or in the corridors, only from time to time a livid glare illuminated the dark apartments with a vivid flash, which as instantly disappeared.

The duke, still guided by his conductress, who held his hand, reached a staircase built in the thick wall, and opening by a secret and invisible door into the antechamber of Marguerite's apartment.

In this antechamber, which like all the other lower rooms was perfectly dark, Gillonne stopped.

"Have you brought what the queen requested?" she inquired, in a low voice.

"Yes," replied the Duc de Guise; "but I will give it only to her majesty in person."

"Come, then, and do not lose an instant!" said a voice from the darkness, which made the duke start, for he recognized it as Marguerite's.

At the same moment a curtain of violet velvet covered with golden fleurs-de-lis was raised, and the duke made out the form of the queen, who in her impatience had come to meet him.

"I am here, madame," he then said; and he passed the curtain, which fell behind him. So Marguerite de Valois herself now became the prince's guide, leading him into the room which, however, he knew already, while Gillonne, standing at the door, had raised her finger to her lips and reassured her royal mistress.

As if she understood the duke's jealous apprehensions, Marguerite led him to the bedchamber, and there paused.

"Well," she said, "are you satisfied, duke?"

"Satisfied, madame?" was the reply, "and with what?"

"Of the proof I give you," retorted Marguerite, with a slight tone of vexation in her voice, "that I belong to a man who, on the very night of his marriage, makes me of such small importance that he does not even come to thank me for the honor I have done him, not in selecting, but in accepting him for my husband."

"Oh! madame," said the duke, sorrowfully, "be assured he will come if you desire it."

"And do you say that, Henry?" cried Marguerite; "you, who better than any know the contrary of what you say? If I had that desire, should I have asked you to come to the Louvre?"

"You have asked me to come to the Louvre, Marguerite, because you are anxious to destroy every vestige of our past, and because that past lives not only in my memory, but in this silver casket which I bring to you."

"Henry, shall I say one thing to you?" replied Marguerite, gazing earnestly at the duke; "it is that you are more like a schoolboy than a prince. I deny that I have loved you! I desire to quench a flame which will die, perhaps, but the reflection of which will never die! For the loves of persons of my rank illumine and frequently devour the whole epoch contemporary with them. No, no, duke; you may keep the letters of your Marguerite, and the casket she has given you. She asks but one of these letters, and that only because it is as dangerous for you as for herself."

"It is all yours," said the duke. "Take the one that you wish to destroy."

Marguerite searched anxiously in the open casket, and with a tremulous hand took, one after the other, a dozen letters, only the addresses of which she examined, as if by merely glancing at these she could recall to her memory what the letters themselves contained; but after a close scrutiny she looked at the duke, pale and agitated.

"Sir," she said, "what I seek is not here. Can you have lost it, by any accident? for if it should fall into the hands of" —

"What letter do you seek, madame?"

"That in which I told you to marry without delay."

"As an excuse for your infidelity?"

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders.

"No; but to save your life. The one in which I told you that the king, seeing our love and my exertions to break off your proposed marriage with the Infanta of Portugal, had sent for his brother, the Bastard of Angoulême, and said to him, pointing to two swords, '*With this slay Henry de Guise this night, or with the other I will slay thee in the morning.*' Where is that letter?"

"Here," said the duke, drawing it from his breast.

Marguerite almost snatched it from his hands, opened it anxiously, assured herself that it was really the one she desired, uttered an exclamation of joy, and applying the lighted candle to it, the flames instantly consumed the paper; then, as if Marguerite feared that her imprudent words might be read in the very ashes, she trampled them under foot.

During all this the Duc de Guise had watched his mistress attentively.

"Well, Marguerite," he said, when she had finished, "are you satisfied now?"

"Yes, for now that you have wedded the Princesse de Porcian, my brother will forgive me your love; while he would never have pardoned me for revealing a secret such as that which in my weakness for you I had not the strength to conceal from you."

"True," replied De Guise, "then you loved me."

"And I love you still, Henry, as much — more than ever!"

"You" —

"I do; for never more than at this moment did I need a sincere and devoted friend. Queen, I have no throne; wife, I have no husband!"

The young prince shook his head sorrowfully.

"I tell you, I repeat to you, Henri, that my husband not only does not love me, but hates — despises me; indeed, it seems to me that your presence in the chamber in which he ought to be is proof of this hatred, this contempt."

"It is not yet late, Madame, and the King of Navarre requires time to dismiss his gentlemen; if he has not already come, he will come soon."

"And I tell you," cried Marguerite, with increasing vexation, — "I tell you that he will not come!"

"Madame!" exclaimed Gillonne, suddenly entering, "the King of Navarre is just leaving his apartments!"

"Oh, I knew he would come!" exclaimed the Duc de Guise.

"Henri," said Marguerite, in a quick tone, and seizing the duke's hand, — "Henri, you shall see if I am a woman of my word, and if I may be relied on. Henri, enter that closet."

"Madame, allow me to go while there is yet time, for reflect that the first mark of love you bestow on him, I shall quit the cabinet, and then woe to him!"

"Are you mad? Go in — go in, I say, and I will be responsible for all;" and she pushed the duke into the closet.

It was time. The door was scarcely closed behind the prince when the King of Navarre, escorted by two pages, who carried eight torches of yellow wax in two candelabra, appeared, smiling, on the threshold of the chamber. Marguerite concealed her trouble, and made a low bow.

"You are not yet in bed, Madame," observed the Béarnais, with his frank and joyous look. "Were you by chance waiting for me?"

"No, Monsieur," replied Marguerite; "for yesterday you repeated to me that our marriage was a political alliance, and that you would never thwart my wishes."

"Assuredly; but that is no reason why we should not confer a little together. Gillonne, close the door, and leave us."

Marguerite, who was sitting, then rose and extended her hand, as if to desire the pages to remain.

"Must I call your women?" inquired the king. "I will do so if such be your desire, although I confess that for what I have to say to you I should prefer our being alone;" and the King of Navarre advanced towards the closet.

"No!" exclaimed Marguerite, hastily going before him, – "no! there is no occasion for that; I am ready to hear you."

The Béarnais had learned what he desired to know; he threw a rapid and penetrating glance towards the cabinet, as if in spite of the thick curtain which hung before it, he would dive into its obscurity, and then, turning his looks to his lovely wife, pale with terror, he said with the utmost composure, "In that case, Madame, let us confer for a few moments."

"As your Majesty pleases," said the young wife, falling into, rather than sitting upon the seat which her husband pointed out to her.

The Béarnais placed himself beside her. "Madame," he continued, "whatever many persons may have said, I think our marriage is a good marriage. I stand well with you; you stand well with me."

"But – " said Marguerite, alarmed.

"Consequently, we ought," observed the King of Navarre, without seeming to notice Marguerite's hesitation, "to act towards each other like good allies, since we have to-day sworn alliance in the presence of God. Don't you think so?"

"Unquestionably, Monsieur."

"I know, Madame, how great your penetration is; I know how the ground at court is intersected with dangerous abysses. Now, I am young, and although I never injured any one, I have a great many enemies. In which camp, Madame, ought I to range her who bears my name, and who has vowed her affection to me at the foot of the altar?"

"Monsieur, could you think – "

"I think nothing, Madame; I hope, and I am anxious to know that my hope is well founded. It is quite certain that our marriage is merely a pretext or a snare."

Marguerite started, for perhaps the same thought had occurred to her own mind.

"Now, then, which of the two?" continued Henri de Navarre. "The king hates me; the Duc d'Anjou hates me; the Duc d'Alençon hates me; Catherine de Médicis hated my mother too much not to hate me."

"Oh, Monsieur, what are you saying?"

"The truth, madame," replied the king; "and in order that it may not be supposed that I am deceived as to Monsieur de Mouy's assassination and the poisoning of my mother, I wish that some one were here who could hear me."

"Oh, sire," replied Marguerite, with an air as calm and smiling as she could assume, "you know very well that there is no person here but you and myself."

"It is for that very reason that I thus give vent to my thoughts; this it is that emboldens me to declare that I am not deceived by the caresses showered on me by the House of France or the House of Lorraine."

"Sire, sire!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Well, what is it, *ma mie*?" inquired Henry, smiling in his turn.

"Why, sire, such remarks are very dangerous."

"Not when we are alone," observed the king. "I was saying" —

Marguerite was evidently distressed; she desired to stop every word the king uttered, but he continued, with his apparent good nature:

"I was telling you that I was threatened on all sides: threatened by the King, threatened by the Duc d'Alençon, threatened by the Duc d'Anjou, threatened by the queen mother, threatened by the Duc de Guise, by the Duc de Mayenne, by the Cardinal de Lorraine – threatened, in fact, by every one. One feels that instinctively, as you know, madame. Well, against all these threats, which must soon become attacks, I can defend myself by your aid, for you are beloved by all the persons who detest me."

"I?" said Marguerite.

"Yes, you," replied Henry, with the utmost ease of manner; "yes, you are beloved by King Charles, you are beloved" (he laid strong emphasis on the word) "by the Duc d'Alençon, you are beloved by Queen Catharine, and you are beloved by the Duc de Guise."

"Sire!" murmured Marguerite.

"Yes; and what is there astonishing in the fact that every one loves you? All I have mentioned are your brothers or relatives. To love one's brothers and relatives is to live according to God's heart."

"But what, then," asked Marguerite, greatly overcome, "what do you mean?"

"What I have just said, that if you will be – I do not mean my love – but my ally, I can brave everything; while, on the other hand, if you become my enemy, I am lost."

"Oh, your enemy! – never, sir!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"And my love – never either?"

"Perhaps" —

"And my ally?"

"Most decidedly."

And Marguerite turned round and offered her hand to the king.

Henry took it, kissed it gallantly, and retaining it in his own, more from a desire of investigation than from any sentiment of tenderness, said:

"Very well, I believe you, madame, and accept the alliance. They married us without our knowing each other – without our loving each other; they married us without consulting us – us whom they united. We therefore owe nothing to each other as man and wife; you see that I even go beyond your wishes and confirm this evening what I said to you yesterday; but we ally ourselves freely and without any compulsion. We ally ourselves, as two loyal hearts who owe each other mutual protection should ally themselves; 't is as such you understand it?"

"Yes, sir," said Marguerite, endeavoring to withdraw her hand.

"Well, then," continued the Béarnais, with his eyes fastened on the door of the cabinet, "as the first proof of a frank alliance is the most perfect confidence, I will now relate to you, madame, in all its details, the plan I have formed in order that we may victoriously meet and overcome all these enmities."

"Sire" – said Marguerite, in spite of herself turning her eyes toward the closet, whilst the Béarnais, seeing his trick succeed, laughed in his sleeve.

"This is what I mean to do," he continued, without appearing to remark his young wife's nervousness, "I intend" —

"Sire," said Marguerite, rising hastily, and seizing the king's arm, "allow me a little breath; my emotion – the heat – overpowers me."

And, in truth, Marguerite was as pale and trembling as if she was about to fall on the carpet.

Henry went straight to a window some distance off, and opened it. This window looked out on the river.

Marguerite followed him.

"Silence, sire, – silence, for your own sake!" she murmured.

"What, madame," said the Béarnais, with his peculiar smile, "did you not tell me we were alone?"

"Yes, sire; but did you not hear me say that by the aid of a tube introduced into the ceiling or the wall everything could be heard?"

"Well, madame, well," said the Béarnais, earnestly and in a low voice, "it is true you do not love me, but you are, at least, honorable."

"What do you mean, sire?"

"I mean that if you were capable of betraying me, you would have allowed me to go on, as I was betraying myself. You stopped me – I now know that some one is concealed here – that you are an unfaithful wife, but a faithful ally; and just now, I confess, I have more need of fidelity in politics than in love."

"Sire!" replied Marguerite, confused.

"Good, good; we will talk of this hereafter," said Henry, "when we know each other better."

Then, raising his voice – "Well," he continued, "do you breathe more freely now, madame?"

"Yes, sire, – yes!"

"Well, then," said the Béarnais, "I will no longer intrude on you. I owed you my respects, and some advances toward better acquaintance; deign, then, to accept them, as they are offered, with all my heart. Good-night, and happy slumbers!"

Marguerite raised her eyes, shining with gratitude, and offered her husband her hand.

"It is agreed," she said.

"Political alliance, frank and loyal?" asked Henry.

"Frank and loyal," was the reply.

And the Béarnais went toward the door, followed by Marguerite's look as if she were fascinated. Then, when the curtain had fallen between them and the bedchamber:

"Thanks, Marguerite," he said, in a quick low tone, "thanks! You are a true daughter of France. I leave you quite tranquil: lacking your love, your friendship will not fail me. I rely on you, as you, on your side, may rely on me. Adieu, madame."

And Henry kissed his wife's hand, and pressed it gently. Then with a quick step he returned to his own apartment, saying to himself, in a low voice, in the corridor:

"Who the devil is with her? Is it the King, or the Duc d'Anjou, or the Duc d'Alençon, or the Duc de Guise? is it a brother or a lover? is it both? I' faith, I am almost sorry now I asked the baroness for this rendezvous; but, as my word is pledged, and Dariole is waiting for me – no matter. Yet, *ventre saint gris!* this Margot, as my brother-in-law, King Charles, calls her, is an adorable creature."

And with a step which betrayed a slight hesitation, Henry of Navarre ascended the staircase which led to Madame de Sauve's apartments.

Marguerite had followed him with her eyes until he disappeared. Then she returned to her chamber, and found the duke at the door of the cabinet. The sight of him almost touched her with remorse.

The duke was grave, and his knitted brow bespoke bitter reflection.

"Marguerite is neutral to-day," he said; "in a week Marguerite will be hostile."

"Ah! you have been listening?" said Marguerite.

"What else could I do in the cabinet?"

"And did you find that I behaved otherwise than the Queen of Navarre should behave?"

"No; but differently from the way in which the mistress of the Duc de Guise should behave."

"Sir," replied the queen, "I may not love my husband, but no one has the right to require me to betray him. Tell me honestly: would you reveal the secrets of the Princesse de Porcian, your wife?"

"Come, come, madame," answered the duke, shaking his head, "this is very well; I see that you do not love me as in those days when you disclosed to me the plot of the King against me and my party."

"The King was strong and you were weak; Henry is weak and you are strong. You see I always play a consistent part."

"Only you pass from one camp to another."

"That was a right I acquired, sir, in saving your life."

"Good, madame; and as when lovers separate, they return all the gifts that have passed between them, I will save your life, in my turn, if ever the need arises, and we shall be quits."

And the duke bowed and left the room, nor did Marguerite attempt to retain him.

In the antechamber he found Gillonne, who guided him to the window on the ground floor, and in the fosse he found his page, with whom he returned to the Hôtel de Guise.

Marguerite, in a dreamy mood, went to the opened window.

"What a marriage night!" she murmured to herself; "the husband flees from me – the lover forsakes me!"

At that moment, coming from the Tour de Bois, and going up toward the Moulin de la Monnaie, on the other side of the fosse passed a student, his hand on his hip, and singing:

"SONG

"Tell me why, O maiden fair,
When I burn to bite thy hair,
And to kiss thy rosy lips,
And to touch thy lovely breast,
Like a nun thou feign'st thee blest
In the cloister's sad eclipse?
"Who will win the precious prize

Of thy brow, thy mouth, thine eyes —
Of thy bosom sweet – what lover?
Wilt thou all thy charms devote
To grim Pluton when the boat
Charon rows shall take thee over?

"After thou hast sailed across,
Loveliest, then wilt find but loss —
All thy beauty will decay.
When I die and meet thee there
In the shades I'll never swear
Thou wert once my mistress gay!

"Therefore, darling, while we live,
Change thy mind and tokens give —
Kisses from thy honey mouth!
Else when thou art like to die
Thou 'lt repent thy cruelty,
Filling all my life with drouth!"

Marguerite listened with a melancholy smile; then when the student's voice was lost in the distance, she shut the window, and called Gillonne to help her to prepare for bed.

CHAPTER III

THE POET-KING

The next day and those that followed were devoted to festivals, balls, and tournaments.

The same amalgamation continued to take place between the two parties. The caresses and compliments lavished were enough to turn the heads of the most bigoted Huguenots. Père Cotton was to be seen dining and carousing with the Baron de Courtaumer; the Duc de Guise went boating on the Seine with the Prince de Condé. King Charles seemed to have laid aside his usual melancholy, and could not get enough of the society of his new brother-in-law, Henry. Moreover, the queen mother was so gay, and so occupied with embroidery, ornaments, and plumes, that she could not sleep.

The Huguenots, to some degree contaminated by this new Capua, began to assume silken pourpoints, wear devices, and parade before certain balconies, as if they were Catholics.

On every side there was such a reaction in favor of the Protestants that it seemed as if the whole court was about to become Protestant; even the admiral, in spite of his experience, was deceived, and was so carried away that one evening he forgot for two whole hours to chew on his toothpick, which he always used from two o'clock, at which time he finished his dinner, until eight o'clock at night, when he sat down to supper.

The evening on which the admiral thus unaccountably deviated from his usual habit, King Charles IX. had invited Henry of Navarre and the Duc de Guise to sup with him. After the repast he took them into his chamber, and was busily explaining to them the ingenious mechanism of a wolf-trap he had invented, when, interrupting himself, —

"Isn't the admiral coming to-night?" he asked. "Who has seen him to-day and can tell me anything about him?"

"I have," said the King of Navarre; "and if your Majesty is anxious about his health, I can reassure you, for I saw him this morning at six, and this evening at seven o'clock."

"Aha!" replied the King, whose eyes were instantly fixed with a searching expression on his brother-in-law; "for a new-married man, Harry, you are very early."

"Yes, sire," answered the King of Navarre, "I wished to inquire of the admiral, who knows everything, whether some gentlemen I am expecting are on their way hither."

"More gentlemen! why, you had eight hundred on the day of your wedding, and fresh ones join you every day. You are surely not going to invade us?" said Charles IX., smiling.

The Duc de Guise frowned.

"Sire," returned the Béarnais, "a war with Flanders is spoken of, and I am collecting round me all those gentlemen of my country and its neighborhood whom I think can be useful to your Majesty."

The duke, calling to mind the pretended project Henry had mentioned to Marguerite the day of their marriage, listened still more attentively.

"Well, well," replied the King, with his sinister smile, "the more the better; let them all come, Henry. But who are these gentlemen? — brave ones, I trust."

"I know not, sire, if my gentlemen will ever equal those of your Majesty, or the Duc d'Anjou's, or the Duc de Guise's, but I know that they will do their best."

"Do you expect many?"

"Ten or a dozen more."

"What are their names?"

"Sire, their names escape me, and with the exception of one, whom Téligny recommended to me as a most accomplished gentleman, and whose name is De la Mole, I cannot tell."

"De la Mole!" exclaimed the King, who was deeply skilled in the science of genealogy; "is he not a Lerac de la Mole, a Provençal?"

"Exactly so, sire; you see I recruit even in Provence."

"And I," added the Duc de Guise, with a sarcastic smile, "go even further than his majesty the King of Navarre, for I seek even in Piedmont all the trusty Catholics I can find."

"Catholic or Huguenot," interrupted the King, "it little matters to me, so they are brave."

The King's face while he uttered these words, which thus united Catholics and Huguenots in his thoughts, bore such an expression of indifference that the duke himself was surprised.

"Your Majesty is occupied with the Flemings," said the admiral, to whom Charles had some days previously accorded the favor of entering without being announced, and who had overheard the King's last words.

"Ah! here is my father the admiral!" cried Charles, opening his arms. "We were speaking of war, of gentlemen, of brave men – and *he* comes. It is like the lodestone which attracts the iron. My brother-in-law of Navarre and my cousin of Guise are expecting reinforcements for your army. That was what we were talking about."

"And these reinforcements are on their way," said the admiral.

"Have you had news of them?" asked the Béarnais.

"Yes, my son, and particularly of M. de la Mole; he was at Orléans yesterday, and will be in Paris to-morrow or the day after."

"The devil! You must be a sorcerer, admiral," said the Duc de Guise, "to know what is taking place at thirty or forty leagues' distance. I should like to know for a certainty what happened or is happening before Orléans."

Coligny remained unmoved at this savage onslaught, which evidently alluded to the death of François de Guise, the duke's father, killed before Orléans by Poltrot de Méré, and not without a suspicion that the admiral had advised the crime.

"Sir," replied he, coldly and with dignity, "I am a sorcerer whenever I wish to know anything positively that concerns my own affairs or the King's. My courier arrived an hour ago from Orléans, having travelled, thanks to the post, thirty-two leagues in a day. As M. de la Mole has only his own horse, he rides but ten leagues a day, and will not arrive in Paris before the 24th. Here is all my magic."

"Bravo, my father, a clever answer!" cried Charles IX.; "teach these young men that wisdom as well as age has whitened your hair and beard; so now we will send them to talk of their tournaments and their love-affairs and you and I will stay and talk of our wars. Good councillors make good kings, my father. Leave us, gentlemen. I wish to talk with the admiral."

The two young men took their departure; the King of Navarre first, then the Duc de Guise; but outside the door they separated, after a formal salute.

Coligny followed them with his eyes, not without anxiety, for he never saw those two personified hatreds meet without a dread that some new lightning flash would leap forth. Charles IX. saw what was passing in his mind, and, going to him, laid his hand on his arm:

"Have no fear, my father; I am here to preserve peace and obedience. I am really a king, now that my mother is no longer queen, and she is no longer queen now that Coligny is my father."

"Oh, sire!" said the admiral, "Queen Catharine" —

"Is a marplot. Peace is impossible with her. These Italian Catholics are furious, and will hear of nothing but extermination; now, for my part, I not only wish to pacify, but I wish to put power into the hands of those that profess the reformed religion. The others are too dissolute, and scandalize me by their love affairs and their quarrels. Shall I speak frankly to you?" continued Charles, redoubling in energy. "I mistrust every one about me except my new friends. I suspect Tavannes's ambition. Vieilleville cares only for good wine, and would betray his king for a cask of Malvoisie; Montmorency thinks only of the chase, and spends all his time among his dogs and falcons; the Comte de Retz is a Spaniard; the De Guises are Lorraines. I think there are no true Frenchmen in France, except myself, my brother-in-law of Navarre, and you; but I am chained to the throne, and cannot command armies; it is as much as I can do to hunt at my ease at Saint Germain or Rambouillet. My brother-in-law of

Navarre is too young and too inexperienced; besides, he seems to me exactly like his father Antoine, ruined by women. There is but you, my father, who can be called, at the same time, as brave as Cæsar and as wise as Plato; so that I scarcely know what to do – keep you near me, as my adviser, or send you to the army, as its general. If you act as my counsellor, who will command? If you command, who will be my counsellor?"

"Sire," said Coligny, "we must conquer first, and then take counsel after the victory."

"That is your advice – so be it; Monday you shall leave for Flanders, and I for Amboise."

"Your Majesty leaves Paris, then?"

"Yes; I am weary of this confusion, and of these fêtes. I am not a man of action; I am a dreamer. I was not born to be a king; I was born to be a poet. You shall form a council which shall govern while you are at war, and provided my mother is not in it, all will go well. I have already sent word to Ronsard to join me; and yonder, we two together, far from all tumult, far from the world, far from evil men, under our mighty trees on the banks of the river, with the murmur of brooks in our ears, will talk about divine things, the only compensation which there is in the world for the affairs of men. Wait! Hear these lines in which I invite him to join me; I wrote them this morning."

Coligny smiled. Charles IX. rubbed his hand over his brow, yellow and shining like ivory, and repeated in a kind of sing-song the following couplets:

"Ronsard, I am full sure that if you see me not,
Your great King's voice by you will shortly be forgot.
But as a slight reminder – know I still persevere
In making skill of poesy my sole endeavor.
And that is why I send to you this warm appeal,
To fill your mind with new, enthusiastic zeal.

"No longer then amuse yourself with home distractions;
Past is the time for gardening and its attractions.
Come, follow with your King, who loves you most of all,
For that the sweet strong verses from your lips do fall.
And if Ardoise shall not behold you shortly present,
A mighty quarrel will break out and prove unpleasant!"

"Bravo! sire, bravo!" cried Coligny, "I am better versed in matters of war than in matters of poetry, but it seems to me that those lines are equal to the best, even written by Ronsard, or Dorat, or even Michel de l'Hôpital, Chancellor of France."

"Ah! my father!" exclaimed Charles IX.; "would what you said were true! For the title of poet, you see, is what I am ambitious, above all things, to gain; and as I said a few days ago to my master in poetry:

"The art of making verse, if one were criticised,
Should ever be above the art of reigning prized.
The crowns that you and I upon our brows are wearing,
I as the King receive, as poet you are sharing.
Your lofty soul, enkindled by celestial beams,
Flames of itself, while mine with borrowed glory gleams.
If 'mid the gods I ask which has the better showing,
Ronsard is their delight: I, but their image glowing.
Your lyre, which ravishes with sounds so sweet and bold,
Subdues men's minds, while I their bodies only hold!

It makes you master, lifts you into lofty regions,
Where even the haughty tyrant ne'er dared claim allegiance."

"Sire," said Coligny, "I was well aware that your Majesty conversed with the Muses, but I did not know that you were their chief counsellor."

"After you, my father, after you. And in order that I may not be disturbed in my relations with them, I wish to put you at the head of everything. So listen: I must now go and reply to a new madrigal my dear and illustrious poet has sent me. I cannot, therefore, give you the documents necessary to make you acquainted with the question now debating between Philip II. and myself. There is, besides, a plan of the campaign drawn up by my ministers. I will find it all for you, and give it to you tomorrow."

"At what time, sire?"

"At ten o'clock; and if by chance I am busy making verses, or in my cabinet writing, well – you will come in just the same, and take all the papers which you will find on the table in this red portfolio. The color is remarkable, and you cannot mistake it. I am now going to write to Ronsard."

"Adieu, sire!"

"Adieu, my father!"

"Your hand?"

"What, my hand? In my arms, in my heart, there is your place! Come, my old soldier, come!" And Charles IX., drawing Coligny toward him as he bowed, pressed his lips to his white hair. The admiral left the room, wiping away a tear.

Charles IX. followed him with his eyes as long as he could see, and listened as long as he could catch a sound; then, when he could no longer hear or see anything, he bent his head over toward his shoulder, as his custom was, and slowly entered his armory.

This armory was the king's favorite apartment; there he took his fencing-lessons with Pompée, and his poetry lessons with Ronsard. He had gathered there a great collection of the most costly weapons he had been able to find. The walls were hung with axes, shields, spears, halberds, pistols, and muskets, and that day a famous armorer had brought him a magnificent arquebuse, on the barrel of which were inlaid in silver these four lines, composed by the royal poet himself:

*"Pour maintenir la foy,
Je suis belle et fidèle.
Aux ennemis du Roi,
Je suis belle et cruelle."*¹

Charles, as we have said, entered this room, and after having shut the door by which he had entered, he raised the tapestry that masked a passage leading into a little chamber, where a woman kneeling before a *priedieu* was saying her prayers.

As this movement was executed noiselessly, and the footsteps of the king, deadened by the thick carpet, made no more noise than a phantom's, the kneeling woman heard no sound, and continued to pray. Charles stood for a moment pensively looking at her.

She was a woman of thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, whose vigorous beauty was set off by the costume of the peasants of Caux. She wore the high cap so much the fashion at the court of France during the time of Isabel of Bavaria, and her red bodice was embroidered with gold, like those of the *contadine* of Nettuno and Sora. The apartment which she had for nearly twenty years occupied was close to the King's bed-chamber and presented a singular mixture of elegance and rusticity. In

¹ "To uphold the faith I am beautiful and trusty. To the king's enemies I am beautiful and cruel."

equal measure the palace had encroached upon the cottage, and the cottage upon the palace, so that the room combined the simplicity of the peasant woman and the luxury of the court lady.

The *priedieu* on which she knelt was of oak, marvellously carved, covered with velvet and with gold fringes, while the Bible from which she was reading (for she was of the reformed religion) was very old and torn, like those found in the poorest cottages; now everything in the room was typified by the *priedieu* and the Bible.

"Eh, Madelon!" said the King.

The kneeling woman lifted her head smilingly at the well-known voice, and rising from her knees, —

"Ah! it is you, my son," said she.

"Yes, nurse; come here."

Charles IX. let fall the curtain, and sat down on the arm of an easy-chair. The nurse appeared.

"What do you want with me, Charlot?"

"Come near, and answer in a low tone."

The nurse approached him with a familiarity such as might come from that maternal affection felt by a woman for her nursling, but attributed by the pamphlets of the time to a source infinitely less pure.

"Here I am," said she; "speak!"

"Is the man I sent for come?"

"He has been here half an hour."

Charles rose, approached the window, looked to assure himself there were no eavesdroppers, went to the door and looked out there also, shook the dust from his trophies of arms, patted a large greyhound which followed him wherever he went, stopping when he stopped and moving when he moved, — then returning to his nurse:

"Very well, nurse, let him come in," said he.

The worthy woman disappeared by the same passage by which she had entered, while the king went and leaned against a table on which were scattered arms of every kind.

Scarcely had he done so when the portière was again lifted, and the person whom he expected entered.

He was a man of about forty, his eyes gray and false, his nose curved like the beak of a screech-owl, his cheek-bones prominent. His face tried to look respectful, but all that he could do was to wear a hypocritical smile on his lips blanched with fear.

Charles gently put his hand behind him, and grasped the butt of a pistol of a new construction, that was discharged, not by a match, as formerly, but by a flint brought in contact with a wheel of steel. He fixed his dull eyes steadily on the newcomer; meantime he whistled, with perfect precision and with remarkable sweetness, one of his favorite hunting-airs.

After a pause of some minutes, during which the expression of the stranger's face grew more and more discomposed,

"You are the person," said the King, "called François de Louvièrs Maurevel?"

"Yes, sire."

"Captain of petardeers?"

"Yes, sire."

"I wanted to see you."

Maurevel made a low bow.

"You know," continued Charles, laying a stress on each word, "that I love all my subjects equally?"

"I know," stammered Maurevel, "that your Majesty is the father of your people."

"And that the Huguenots and Catholics are equally my children?"

Maurevel remained silent, but his agitation was manifest to the King's piercing eyes, although the person whom he was addressing was almost concealed in the darkness.

"Does this displease you," said the King, "you who have waged such a bitter war on the Huguenots?"

Maurevel fell on his knees.

"Sire," stammered he, "believe that" —

"I believe," continued Charles, looking more and more keenly at Maurevel, while his eyes, which at first had seemed like glass, now became almost fiery, "I believe that you had a great desire at Moncontour to kill the admiral, who has just left me; I believe you missed your aim, and that then you entered the army of my brother, the Duc d'Anjou; I believe that then you went for a second time over to the prince's and there took service in the company of M. de Mouy de Saint Phale" —

"Oh, sire!"

"A brave gentleman from Picardy" —

"Sire, sire!" cried Maurevel, "do not overwhelm me."

"He was a brave officer," continued Charles, whose features assumed an aspect of almost ferocious cruelty, "who received you as if you had been his son; fed you, lodged you, and clothed you."

Maurevel uttered a despairing sigh.

"You called him your father, I believe," continued the King, pitilessly, "and a tender friendship existed between you and the young De Mouy, his son."

Maurevel, still on his knees, bowed low, more and more crushed under the indignation of the King, who stood immovable, like a statue whose lips only are endowed with vitality.

"By the way," continued the King, "M. de Guise was to give you ten thousand crowns if you killed the admiral — was he not?"

The assassin in consternation struck his forehead against the floor.

"As regards your worthy father, the Sieur de Mouy, you were one day acting as his escort in a reconnaissance toward Chevreux. He dropped his whip and dismounted to pick it up. You were alone with him; you took a pistol from your holster, and while he was bending over, you shot him in the back; then seeing he was dead — for you killed him on the spot — you escaped on the horse he had given you. This is your history, I believe?"

And as Maurevel remained mute under this accusation, every circumstance of which was true, Charles IX. began to whistle again, with the same precision and melody, the same hunting-air.

"Now, then, murderer!" said he after a little, "do you know I have a great mind to have you hanged?"

"Oh, your Majesty!" cried Maurevel.

"Young De Mouy entreated me to do so only yesterday, and I scarcely knew what answer to make him, for his demand was perfectly just."

Maurevel clasped his hands.

"All the more just, because I am, as you say, the father of my people; and because, as I answered you, now that I am reconciled to the Huguenots, they are as much my children as the Catholics."

"Sire," said Maurevel, in despair, "my life is in your hands; do with it what you will."

"You are quite right, and I would not give a groat for it."

"But, sire," asked the assassin, "is there no means of redeeming my crime?"

"None that I know of; only if I were in your place — but thank God I am not" —

"Well, sire, if you were in my place?" murmured Maurevel, his eyes fixed on the King's lips.

"I think I could extricate myself," said the King.

Maurevel raised himself on one knee and one hand, fixing his eyes upon Charles to make certain that he was not jesting.

"I am very fond of young De Mouy," said the King; "but I am equally fond of my cousin De Guise; and if my cousin asked me to spare a man that the other wanted me to hang, I confess I should

be embarrassed; but for policy as well as religion's sake I should comply with my cousin De Guise's request, for De Mouy, brave captain though he be, is but a petty personage compared with a prince of Lorraine."

During these words, Maurevel slowly rose, like a man whose life is saved.

"In your critical situation it would be a very important thing to gain my cousin De Guise's favor. So I am going to tell you what he said to me last night."

Maurevel drew nearer.

"'Imagine, sire,' said he to me, 'that every morning, at ten o'clock, my deadliest enemy passes down the Rue Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, on his return from the Louvre. I see him from a barred window in the room of my old preceptor, the Canon Pierre Piles, and I pray the devil to open the earth and swallow him in its abysses.' Now, Maître Maurevel," continued the King, "perhaps if you were the devil, or if for an instant you should take his place, that would perhaps please my cousin De Guise."

Maurevel's infernal smile came back to his lips, though they were still bloodless with terror, and he stammered out these words:

"But, sire, I cannot make the earth open."

"Yet you made it open wide enough for the worthy De Mouy, if I remember correctly. After this you will tell me how with a pistol – have you not that pistol still?"

"Forgive me, sire, I am a still better marksman with an arquebuse than a pistol," replied Maurevel, now quite reassured.

"Pistol or arquebuse makes no difference," said the King; "I am sure my cousin De Guise will not cavil over the choice of methods."

"But," said Maurevel, "I must have a weapon I can rely on, as, perhaps, I shall have to fire from a long distance."

"I have ten arquebuses in this room," replied Charles IX., "with which I can hit a crown-piece at a hundred and fifty paces – will you try one?"

"Most willingly, sire!" cried Maurevel, with the greatest joy, going in the direction of one which was standing in a corner of the room. It was the one which that day had been brought to the King.

"No, not that one," said the King, "not that one; I reserve that for myself. Some day I am going to have a grand hunt and then I hope to use it. Take any other you like."

Maurevel took one down from a trophy.

"And who is this enemy, sire?" asked the assassin.

"How should I know," replied Charles, withering the wretch with his contemptuous look.

"I must ask M. de Guise, then," faltered Maurevel.

The King shrugged his shoulders.

"Do not ask," said he; "for M. de Guise will not answer. Do people generally answer such questions? Those that do not wish to be hanged must guess them."

"But how shall I know him?"

"I tell you he passes the Canon's house every morning at ten o'clock."

"But many pass that house. Would your Majesty deign to give me any certain sign?"

"Oh, that is easy enough; to-morrow, for example, he will carry a red morocco portfolio under his arm."

"That is sufficient, sire."

"You still have the fast horse M. de Mouy gave you?"

"Sire, I have one of the fleetest of horses."

"Oh, I am not in the least anxious about you; only it is as well to let you know the monastery has a back door."

"Thanks, sire; pray Heaven for me!"

"Oh, a thousand devils! pray to Satan rather; for only by his aid can you escape a halter."

"Adieu, sire."

"Adieu! By the way, M. de Maurevel, remember that if you are heard of before ten to-morrow, or are *not* heard of afterward, there is a dungeon at the Louvre."

And Charles IX. calmly began to whistle, with more than usual precision, his favorite air.

CHAPTER IV

THE EVENING OF THE 24TH OF AUGUST, 1572

Our readers have not forgotten that in the previous chapter we mentioned a gentleman named De la Mole whom Henry of Navarre was anxiously expecting.

This young gentleman, as the admiral had announced, entered Paris by the gate of Saint Marcel the evening of the 24th of August, 1572; and bestowing a contemptuous glance on the numerous hostelries that displayed their picturesque signs on either side of him, he spurred his steaming horse on into the heart of the city, and after having crossed the Place Maubert, Le Petit Pont, the Pont Notre-Dame, and skirted the quays, he stopped at the end of the Rue de Bresec, which we have since corrupted into the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, and for the greater convenience of our readers we will call by its modern name.

The name pleased him, no doubt, for he entered the street, and finding on his left a large sheet-iron plate swinging, creaking on its hinges, with an accompaniment of little bells, he stopped and read these words, "*La Belle Étoile*," written on a scroll beneath the sign, which was a most attractive one for a famished traveller, as it represented a fowl roasting in the midst of a black sky, while a man in a red cloak held out his hands and his purse toward this new-fangled constellation.

"Here," said the gentleman to himself, "is an inn that promises well, and the landlord must be a most ingenious fellow. I have always heard that the Rue de l'Arbre Sec was near the Louvre; and, provided that the interior answers to the exterior, I shall be admirably lodged."

While the newcomer was thus indulging in this monologue another horseman who had entered the street at the other end, that is to say, by the Rue Saint-Honoré, stopped also to admire the sign of *La Belle Étoile*.

The gentleman whom we already know, at least by name, rode a white steed of Spanish lineage and wore a black doublet ornamented with jet; his cloak was of dark violet velvet; his boots were of black leather, and he had a sword and poniard with hilts of chased steel.

Now if we pass from his costume to his features we shall conclude that he was twenty-four or twenty-five years of age. His complexion was dark; his eyes were blue; he had a delicate mustache and brilliant teeth which seemed to light up his whole face when his exquisitely modelled lips parted in a sweet and melancholy smile.

The contrast between him and the second traveller was very striking. Beneath his cocked hat escaped a profusion of frizzled hair, red rather than brown; beneath this mop of hair sparkled a pair of gray eyes which at the slightest opposition grew so fierce that they seemed black; a fair complexion, thin lips, a tawny mustache, and admirable teeth completed the description of his face. Taken all in all, with his white skin, lofty stature, and broad shoulders, he was indeed a *beau cavalier* in the ordinary acceptation of the term, and during the last hour which he had employed in staring up at all the windows, under the pretext of looking for signs, he had attracted the general attention of women, while the men, though they may have felt inclined to laugh at his scanty cloak, his tight-fitting small-clothes, and his old-fashioned boots, checked their rising mirth with a most cordial *Dieu vous garde*, after they had more attentively studied his face, which every moment assumed a dozen different expressions, but never that good-natured one characteristic of a bewildered provincial.

He it was who first addressed the other gentleman who, as I have said, was gazing at the hostelry of *La Belle Étoile*.

"By Heaven! monsieur," said he, with that horrible mountain accent which would instantly distinguish a native of Piedmont among a hundred strangers, "we are close to the Louvre, are we not? At all events, I think your choice is the same as mine, and I am highly flattered by it."

"Monsieur," replied the other, with a Provençal accent which rivalled that of his companion, "I believe this inn is near the Louvre. However, I am still deliberating whether or not I shall have the honor of sharing your opinion. I am in a quandary."

"You have not yet decided, sir? Nevertheless, the house is attractive. But perhaps, after all, I have been won over to it by your presence. Yet you will grant that is a pretty painting?"

"Very! and it is for that very reason I mistrust it. Paris, I am told, is full of sharpers, and you may be just as well tricked by a sign as by anything else."

"By Heaven!" replied the Piedmontese, "I don't care a fig for their tricks; and if the host does not serve me a chicken as well roasted as the one on his sign, I will put him on the spit, nor will I let him off till I have done him to a turn. Come, let us go in."

"You have decided me," said the Provençal, laughing; "precede me, I beg."

"Oh, sir, on my soul I could not think of it, for I am only your most obedient servant, the Comte Annibal de Coconnas."

"And I, monsieur, but the Comte Joseph Hyacinthe Boniface de Lerac de la Mole, equally at your service."

"Since that is the case, let us go in together, arm in arm."

The result of this conciliatory proposition was that the two young men got off their horses, threw the bridles to the ostler, linked arms, adjusted their swords, and approached the door of the inn, where the landlord was standing. But contrary to the custom of men of his profession, the worthy proprietor seemed not to notice them, so busy was he talking with a tall, sallow man, wrapped in a drab-colored cloak like an owl buried in his feathers.

The two gentlemen were so near the landlord and his friend in the drab-colored cloak that Coconnas, indignant that he and his companion should be treated with such lack of consideration, touched the landlord's sleeve.

He appeared suddenly to perceive them, and dismissed his friend with an "*Au revoir!* come soon and let me know the hour appointed."

"Well, *monsieur le drole*," said Coconnas, "do not you see we have business with you?"

"I beg pardon, gentlemen," said the host; "I did not see you."

"Eh, by Heaven! then you ought to have seen us; and now that you do see us, say, 'Monsieur le Comte,' and not merely 'Monsieur,' if you please."

La Mole stood by, leaving Coconnas, who seemed to have undertaken the affair, to speak; but by the scowling on his face it was evident that he was ready to come to his assistance when the moment of action should present itself.

"Well, what is your pleasure, Monsieur le Comte?" asked the landlord, in a quiet tone.

"Ah, that's better; is it not?" said Coconnas, turning to La Mole, who nodded affirmatively. "Monsieur le Comte and myself, attracted by the sign of your establishment, wish to sup and sleep here to-night."

"Gentlemen," said the host, "I am very sorry, but I have only one chamber, and I am afraid that would not suit you."

"So much the better," said La Mole; "we will go and lodge somewhere else."

"By no means," said Coconnas, "I shall stay here; my horse is tired. I will have the room, since you will not."

"Ah! that is quite different," replied the host, with the same cool tone of impertinence. "If there is only one of you I cannot lodge you at all, then."

"By Heaven!" cried Coconnas, "here's a witty animal! Just now you could not lodge us because we were two, and now you have not room for one. You will not lodge us at all, then?"

"Since you take this high tone, gentlemen, I will answer you frankly."

"Answer, then; only answer quickly."

"Well, then, I should prefer not to have the honor of lodging you at all."

"For what reason?" asked Coconnas, growing white with rage.

"Because you have no servants, and for one master's room full, I should have two servants' rooms empty; so that, if I let you have the master's room, I run the risk of not letting the others."

"Monsieur de la Mole," said Coconnas, "do you not think we ought to massacre this fellow?"

"Decidedly," said La Mole, preparing himself, together with Coconnas, to lay his whip over the landlord's back.

But the landlord contented himself with retreating a step or two, despite this two-fold demonstration, which was not particularly reassuring, considering that the two gentlemen appeared so full of determination.

"It is easy to see," said he, in a tone of raillery, "that these gentlemen are just from the provinces. At Paris it is no longer the fashion to massacre innkeepers who refuse to let them rooms – only great men are massacred nowadays and not the common people; and if you make any disturbance, I will call my neighbors, and you shall be beaten yourselves, and that would be an indignity for two such gentlemen."

"Why! he is laughing at us," cried Coconnas, in a rage.

"Grégoire, my arquebuse," said the host, with the same voice with which he would have said, "Give these gentleman a chair."

"*Trippe del papa!*" cried Coconnas, drawing his sword; "warm up, Monsieur de la Mole."

"No, no; for while we warm up, our supper will get cold."

"What, you think" – cried Coconnas.

"That Monsieur de la Belle Étoile is right; only he does not know how to treat his guests, especially when they are gentlemen, for instead of brutally saying, 'Gentlemen, I do not want you,' it would have been better if he had said, 'Enter, gentlemen' – at the same time reserving to himself the right to charge in his bill, master's room, so much; servants' room, so much."

With these words, La Mole gently pushed by the landlord, who was just on the point of taking his arquebuse, and entered with Coconnas.

"Well," said Coconnas, "I am sorry to sheathe my sword before I have ascertained that it is as sharp as that rascal's larding-needle."

"Patience, my dear friend, patience," said La Mole. "All the inns in Paris are full of gentlemen come to attend the King of Navarre's marriage or attracted by the approaching war with Flanders; we should not find another lodging; besides, perhaps it is the custom at Paris to receive strangers in this manner."

"By Heaven! how patient you are, Monsieur de la Mole!" muttered Coconnas, curling his red mustache with rage and hurling the lightning of his eyes on the landlord. "But let the scoundrel take care; for if his cooking be bad, if his bed be hard, his wine less than three years in bottle, and his waiter be not as pliant as a reed" —

"There! there! my dear gentleman!" said the landlord, whetting his knife on a strap, "you may make yourself easy; you are in the land of Cocagne."

Then in a low tone he added:

"These are some Huguenots; traitors have grown so insolent since the marriage of their Béarnais with Mademoiselle Margot!"

Then, with a smile that would have made his guests shudder had they seen it:

"How strange it would be if I were just to have two Huguenots come to my house, when" —

"Now, then," interrupted Coconnas, pointedly, "are we going to have any supper?"

"Yes, as soon as you please, monsieur," returned the landlord, softened, no doubt, by the last reflection.

"Well, then, the sooner the better," said Coconnas; and turning to La Mole:

"Pray, Monsieur le Comte, while they are putting our room in order, tell me, do you think Paris seems a gay city?"

"Faith! no," said La Mole. "All the faces I have seen looked scared or forbidding; perhaps the Parisians also are afraid of the storm; see how very black the sky is, and the air feels heavy."

"Tell me, count, are you not bound for the Louvre?"

"Yes! and you also, Monsieur de Coconnas."

"Well, let us go together."

"It is rather late to go out, is it not?" said La Mole.

"Early or late, I must go; my orders are peremptory – 'Come instantly to Paris, and report to the Duc de Guise without delay.'"

At the Duc de Guise's name the landlord drew nearer.

"I think the rascal is listening to us," said Coconnas, who, as a true son of Piedmont, was very truculent, and could not forgive the proprietor of *La Belle Étoile* his rude reception of them.

"I am listening, gentlemen," replied he, taking off his cap; "but it is to serve you. I heard the great duke's name mentioned, and I came immediately. What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"Aha! that name is magical, since it renders you so polite. Tell me, maître, – what's your name?"

"Maître la Hurière," replied the host, bowing.

"Well, Maître la Hurière, do you think my arm is lighter than the Duc de Guise's, who makes you so civil?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte, but it is not so long," replied La Hurière; "besides," he added, "I must tell you that the great Henry is the idol of us Parisians."

"Which Henry?" asked La Mole.

"It seems to me there is only one," replied the landlord.

"You are mistaken; there is another, whom I desire you do not speak ill of, and that is Henry of Navarre; and then there is Henry de Condé, who has his share of merit."

"I do not know them," said the landlord.

"But I do; and as I am on my way to the King of Navarre, I desire you not to speak slightly of him before me."

The landlord replied by merely touching his cap, and continued to lavish his assiduities on Coconnas:

"So monsieur is going to see the great Duc de Guise? Monsieur is a very fortunate gentleman; he has come, no doubt, for" —

"What?" asked Coconnas.

"For the festivity," replied the host, with a singular smile.

"You should say for the festivities," replied Coconnas; "for Paris, I hear, runs riot with festivals; at least there is nothing talked about but balls, festivals, and orgies. Does not every one find plenty of amusement?"

"A moderate amount, but they will have more soon, I hope."

"But the marriage of his majesty the King of Navarre has brought a great many people to Paris, has it not?" said La Mole.

"A great many Huguenots – yes," replied La Hurière, but suddenly changing his tone:

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said he, "perhaps you are of that religion?"

"I," cried Coconnas, "I am as good a Catholic as the pope himself."

La Hurière looked at La Mole, but La Mole did not or would not comprehend him.

"If you do not know the King of Navarre, Maître La Hurière," said La Mole, "perhaps you know the admiral. I have heard he has some influence at court, and as I have letters for him, perhaps you will tell me where he lives, if his name does not take the skin off your lips."

"He *did* live in the Rue de Béthizy down here at the right," replied the landlord, with an inward satisfaction he could not conceal.

"He *did* live?" exclaimed La Mole. "Has he changed his residence?"

"Yes – from this world, perhaps."

"What do you mean?" cried both the gentlemen together, "the admiral removed from this world?"

"What, Monsieur de Coconnas," pursued the landlord, with a shrewd smile, "are you a friend of the Duc de Guise, and do not know *that*?"

"Know what?"

"That the day before yesterday, as the admiral was passing along the place Saint Germain l'Auxerrois before the house of the Canon Pierre Piles, he was fired at" —

"And killed?" said La Mole.

"No; he had his arm broken and two fingers taken off; but it is hoped the balls were poisoned."

"How, wretch!" cried La Mole; "hoped?"

"Believed, I mean," said the landlord, winking at Coconnas; "do not take a word too seriously, it was a slip of the tongue."

And Maître La Hurière, turning his back on La Mole, poked out his tongue at Coconnas in the most insulting way, accompanying this action with a meaning wink.

"Really!" said Coconnas, joyfully.

"Really!" said La Mole, with sorrowful stupefaction.

"It is just as I have the honor of telling you, gentlemen," said the landlord.

"In that case," said La Mole, "I must go instantly to the Louvre. Shall I find the King of Navarre there?"

"Most likely, since he lives there."

"And I," said Coconnas, "must also go to the Louvre. Shall I find the Duc de Guise there?"

"Most likely; for only a moment ago I saw him pass with two hundred gentlemen."

"Come, then, Monsieur de Coconnas," said La Mole.

"I will follow you, sir," replied Coconnas.

"But your supper, gentlemen!" cried La Hurière.

"Ah," said La Mole, "I shall most likely sup with the King of Navarre."

"And I," said Coconnas, "with the Duc de Guise."

"And I," said the landlord, after having watched the two gentlemen on their way to the Louvre, "I will go and burnish my sallet, put a match to my arquebuse, and sharpen my partisan, for no one knows what may happen."

CHAPTER V OF THE LOUVRE IN PARTICULAR, AND OF VIRTUE IN GENERAL

The two young men, directed by the first person they met, went down the Rue d'Averon, the Rue Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, and soon found themselves before the Louvre, the towers of which were beginning to be lost in the early shades of the gloaming.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Coconnas of La Mole, who, as they came in sight of the old château, stopped and gazed, not without awe, on the drawbridges, the narrow windows, and the pointed belfries, which suddenly rose before his vision.

"I scarcely know," said La Mole; "my heart beats strangely. I am not timid, but somehow this old palace seems so gloomy and terrible."

"Well, as for me, I don't know any reason for it," replied Coconnas, "but I feel in excellent spirits. My dress is somewhat disordered," he went on to say, glancing at his travelling costume, "but never mind, it looks as if I had been riding. Besides, my instructions commanded promptness and I shall be welcome because I shall have obeyed punctually."

The two young men continued their way, each under the influence of the feelings he had expressed.

There was a strong guard at the Louvre and the sentinels were doubled. Our two cavaliers were somewhat embarrassed, therefore, but Coconnas, who had noticed that the Duc de Guise's name acted like a talisman on the Parisians, approached a sentinel, and making use of the all-powerful name, asked if by means of it he might not be allowed to enter.

The name seemed to produce its ordinary effect upon the soldier; nevertheless he asked Coconnas if he had the countersign.

Coconnas was forced to confess he had not.

"Stand back, then," said the soldier.

At this moment a person who was talking with the officer of the guard and who had overheard Coconnas ask leave to enter, broke off his conversation and came to him.

"Vat do you vant with Monsieur dee Gouise?" asked he.

"I wish to see him," said Coconnas, smiling.

"Imbossible! the duke is mit the King."

"But I have a letter for him."

"Ah, you haf a ledder for him?"

"Yes, and I have come a long distance."

"Ah! you haf come a long tistance?"

"I have come from Piedmont."

"Vell, vell! dat iss anodder ting. And vat iss your name?"

"The Comte Annibal de Coconnas."

"Goot! goot! kif me the ledder, Monsieur Annibal, kif it to me!"

"On my word," said La Mole to himself, "a very civil man. I hope I may find one like him to conduct me to the King of Navarre."

"But kif me the ledder," said the German gentleman, holding out his hand toward Coconnas, who hesitated.

"By Heaven!" replied the Piedmontese, distrustful like a half-Italian, "I scarcely know whether I ought, as I have not the honor of knowing you."

"I am Pesme; I'm addached to Monsir le Douque de Gouise."

"Pesme," murmured Coconnas; "I am not acquainted with that name."

"It is Monsieur de Besme, my dear sir," said the sentinel. "His pronunciation misled you, that is all; you may safely give him your letter, I'll answer for it."

"Ah! Monsieur de Besme!" cried Coconnas; "of course I know you! with the greatest pleasure. Here is the letter. Pardon my hesitation; but fidelity requires one to be careful."

"Goot, goot! dere iss no need of any egscuse," said Besme.

"Perhaps, sir," said La Mole, "you will be so kind as to the same for my letter that you have done for my friend?"

"And vat iss your name, monsir?"

"The Comte Lerac de la Mole."

"Gount Lerag dee la Mole?"

"Yes."

"I don't know de name."

"It is not strange that I have not the honor of being known to you, sir, for like the Comte de Coconnas I am only just arrived in Paris."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Provence."

"Vit a ledder?"

"Yes."

"For Monsir dee Gouise?"

"No; for his majesty the King of Navarre."

"I do not belong to de King of Navarre," said De Besme coldly, "and derefore I gannot dake your ledder."

And turning on his heel, he entered the Louvre, bidding Coconnas follow him.

La Mole was left alone.

At this moment a troop of cavaliers, about a hundred in number, came out from the Louvre by a gate alongside that of which Besme and Coconnas had entered.

"Aha!" said the sentinel to his comrade, "there are De Mouy and his Huguenots! See how joyous they all are! The King has probably promised them to put to death the assassin of the admiral; and as it was he who murdered De Mouy's father, the son will kill two birds with one stone."

"Excuse me, my good fellow," interrupted La Mole, "did you not say that officer is M. de Mouy?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that those with him are" —

"Are heretics — I said so."

"Thank you," said La Mole, affecting not to notice the scornful word *parpaillots*, employed by the sentinel. "That was all I wished to know;" and advancing to the chief of the cavaliers:

"Sir," said he, "I am told you are M. de Mouy."

"Yes, sir," returned the officer, courteously.

"Your name, well known among those of our faith, emboldens me to address you, sir, to ask a special favor."

"What may that be, sir, — but first whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"The Comte Lerac de la Mole."

The young men bowed to each other.

"What can I do for you, sir?" asked De Mouy.

"Sir, I am just arrived from Aix, and bring a letter from M. d'Auriac, Governor of Provence. This letter is directed to the King of Navarre and contains important and pressing news. How can I give it to him? How can I enter the Louvre?"

"Nothing is easier than to enter the Louvre, sir," replied De Mouy; "but I fear the King of Navarre will be too busy to see you at this hour. However, if you please, I will take you to his apartments, and then you must manage for yourself."

"A thousand thanks!"

"Come, then," said De Mouy.

De Mouy dismounted, threw the reins to his lackey, stepped toward the wicket, passed the sentinel, conducted La Mole into the château, and, opening the door leading to the king's apartments:

"Enter, and inquire for yourself, sir," said he.

And saluting La Mole, he retired.

La Mole, left alone, looked round.

The ante-room was vacant. One of the inner doors was open. He advanced a few paces and found himself in a passage.

He knocked and spoke, but no one answered. The profoundest silence reigned in this part of the Louvre.

"What was told me about the stern etiquette of this place?" said he to himself. "One may come and go in this palace as if it were a public place."

Then he called again, but without obtaining any better result than before.

"Well, let us walk straight on," thought he, "I must meet some one," and he proceeded down the corridor, which grew darker and darker.

Suddenly the door opposite that by which he had entered opened, and two pages appeared, lighting a lady of noble bearing and exquisite beauty.

The glare of the torches fell full on La Mole, who stood motionless.

The lady stopped also.

"What do you want, sir?" said she, in a voice which fell upon his ears like exquisite music.

"Oh, madame," said La Mole, casting down his eyes, "pardon me; I have just parted from M. de Mouy, who was so good as to conduct me here, and I wish to see the King of Navarre."

"His majesty is not here, sir; he is with his brother-in-law. But, in his absence, could you not say to the queen" —

"Oh, yes, madame," returned La Mole, "if I could obtain audience of her."

"You have it already, sir."

"What?" cried La Mole.

"I am the Queen of Navarre."

La Mole made such a hasty movement of surprise and alarm that it caused the queen to smile.

"Speak, sir," said Marguerite, "but speak quickly, for the queen mother is waiting for me."

"Oh, madame, if the queen mother is waiting for you," said La Mole, "suffer me to leave you, for just now it would be impossible for me to speak to you. I am incapable of collecting my ideas. The sight of you has dazzled me. I no longer think, I can only admire."

Marguerite advanced graciously toward the handsome young man, who, without knowing it, was acting like a finished courtier.

"Recover yourself, sir," said she; "I will wait and they will wait for me."

"Pardon me, madame," said La Mole, "if I did not salute your majesty at first with all the respect which you have a right to expect from one of your humblest servants, but" —

"You took me for one of my ladies?" said Marguerite.

"No, madame; but for the shade of the beautiful Diane de Poitiers, who is said to haunt the Louvre."

"Come, sir," said Marguerite, "I see you will make your fortune at court; you said you had a letter for the king, it was not needed, but no matter! Where is it? I will give it to him — only make haste, I beg of you."

In a twinkling La Mole threw open his doublet, and drew from his breast a letter enveloped in silk.

Marguerite took the letter, and glanced at the writing.

"Are you not Monsieur de la Mole?" asked she.

"Yes, madame. Oh, *mon Dieu!* Can I hope my name is known to your majesty?"

"I have heard the king, my husband, and the Duc d'Alençon, my brother, speak of you. I know they expect you."

And in her corsage, glittering with embroidery and diamonds, she slipped the letter which had just come from the young man's doublet and was still warm from the vital heat of his body. La Mole eagerly watched Marguerite's every movement.

"Now, sir," said she, "descend to the gallery below, and wait until some one comes to you from the King of Navarre or the Duc d'Alençon. One of my pages will show you the way."

And Marguerite, as she said these words, went on her way. La Mole drew himself up close to the wall. But the passage was so narrow and the Queen of Navarre's farthingale was so voluminous that her silken gown brushed against the young man's clothes, while a penetrating perfume hovered where she passed.

La Mole trembled all over and, feeling that he was in danger of falling, he tried to find a support against the wall.

Marguerite disappeared like a vision.

"Are you coming, sir?" asked the page who was to conduct La Mole to the lower gallery.

"Oh, yes – yes!" cried La Mole, joyfully; for as the page led him the same way by which Marguerite had gone, he hoped that by making haste he might see her again.

And in truth, as he reached the top of the staircase, he perceived her below; and whether she heard his step or looked round by chance, Marguerite raised her head, and La Mole saw her a second time.

"Oh," said he, as he followed the page, "she is not a mortal – she is a goddess, and as Vergilius Maro says: '*Et vera incessu patuit dea.*'"

"Well?" asked the page.

"Here I am," replied La Mole, "excuse me, here I am."

The page, preceding La Mole, descended a story lower, opened one door, then another, and stopping,

"You are to wait here," said he.

La Mole entered the gallery, the door of which closed after him.

The gallery was vacant except for one gentleman, who was sauntering up and down, and seemed also waiting for some one.

The evening was by this time beginning to scatter monstrous shadows from the depths of the vaulted ceiling, and though the two gentlemen were not twenty paces apart, it was impossible for either to recognize the other's face.

La Mole drew nearer.

"By Heaven!" muttered he as soon as he was within a few feet of the other, "here is Monsieur le Comte de Coconnas again!"

At the sound of footsteps Coconnas had already turned, and was staring at La Mole with no less astonishment than the other showed.

"By Heaven!" cried he. "The devil take me but here is Monsieur de la Mole! What am I doing? Swearing in the King's palace? Well, never mind; it seems the King swears in a different way from mine, and even in churches. Here we are at last, then, in the Louvre!"

"Yes; I suppose Monsieur de Besme introduced you?"

"Oh, he is a charming German. Who brought you in?"

"M. de Mouy – I told you the Huguenots had some interest at court. Have you seen Monsieur de Guise?"

"No, not yet. Have you obtained your audience with the King of Navarre?"

"No, but I soon shall. I was brought here and told to wait."

"Ah, you will see there is some great supper under way and we shall be placed side by side. What a strange chance! For two hours fortune has joined us! But what is the matter? You seem ill at ease."

"I?" exclaimed La Mole, shivering, for in truth he was still dazzled by the vision which had been vouchsafed him. "Oh, no, but the place in which we are brings into my mind a throng of reflections."

"Philosophical ones, I suppose. Just the same as it is with me. When you came in I was just going over in my mind all my tutor's recommendations. Monsieur le Comte, are you acquainted with Plutarch?"

"Certainly I am!" exclaimed La Mole, smiling, "he is one of my favorite authors."

"Very well," Coconnas went on gravely, "this great man does not seem to me so far wrong when he compares the gifts of nature to brilliant but ephemeral flowers, while he regards virtue as a balsamic plant of imperishable perfume and sovereign efficacy for the healing of wounds."

"Do you know Greek, Monsieur de Coconnas?" said La Mole, gazing keenly at his companion.

"No, I do not; but my tutor did, and he strongly advised me when I should be at court to talk about virtue. 'That looks well,' he said. So I assure you I am well fortified with it. By the way, are you hungry?"

"No."

"And yet you seemed anxious to taste the broiled fowl of *La Belle Étoile*. As for me, I am dying of starvation!"

"Well, Monsieur de Coconnas, here is a fine chance for you to make use of your arguments on virtue and to put your admiration for Plutarch to the proof, for that great writer says somewhere: 'It is good to accustom the soul to pain and the stomach to hunger' – '*Prepon esti tèn men psychên odunê, ton de gastéra semó askeîn.*'"

"Ah, indeed! So you know Greek?" exclaimed Coconnas in surprise.

"Faith, yes," replied La Mole, "my tutor taught me."

"By Heaven! count, your fortune is made if that is so; you will compose poetry with Charles IX. and you will talk Greek with Queen Marguerite!"

"Not to reckon that I can still talk Gascon with the King of Navarre!" added La Mole, laughing.

At this moment the door communicating with the King's apartment opened, a step was heard, and a shade was seen approaching in the darkness. This shade materialized into a body. This body belonged to Monsieur de Besme.

He scrutinized both gentlemen, so as to pick out the one he wanted, and then motioned Coconnas to follow him.

Coconnas waved his hand to La Mole.

De Besme conducted Coconnas to the end of the gallery, opened a door, and stood at the head of a staircase.

He looked cautiously round, then up and down.

"Monsir de Gogonnas," said he, "vere are you staying?"

"At *La Belle Étoile*, Rue de l'Arbre Sec."

"Goot, goot! dat is glose by. Go pack to your hodel gwick and to-nide" —

He looked around him again.

"Well, to-night?"

"Vell, gome here mit a vite gross in your hat. De bassvord is 'Gouise.' Hush! nod a vord."

"What time am I to come?"

"Ven you hear de dogsin."

"What's the dogsin?" asked Coconnas.

"Ja! de dogsin – pum! pum!"

"Oh! the tocsin!"

"Ja, vot elus tid I zay?"

"Good – I shall be here," said Coconnas.

And, saluting De Besme, he took his departure, asking himself:

"What the devil does he mean and why should the tocsin be rung? No matter! I persist in my opinion: Monsieur de Besme is a charming Tedesco – Why not wait for the Comte de la Mole? Ah faith, no! he will probably be invited to supper with the King of Navarre."

And Coconnas set forth for the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, where the sign of *La Belle Étoile* like a lodestone attracted him.

Meantime a gallery door which led to the King of Navarre's apartment opened, and a page approached Monsieur de la Mole.

"You are the Comte de la Mole?" said he.

"That is my name."

"Where do you lodge?"

"At *La Belle Étoile*, Rue de l'Arbre Sec."

"Good, that is close to the Louvre. Listen – his majesty the King of Navarre has desired me to inform you that he cannot at present receive you; perhaps he may send for you to-night; but if tomorrow morning you have received no word, come to the Louvre."

"But supposing the sentinel refuse me admission."

"True: the countersign is 'Navarre;' that word will open all doors to you."

"Thanks."

"Wait, my dear sir, I am ordered to escort you to the wicket gate for fear you should get lost in the Louvre."

"By the way, how about Coconnas?" said La Mole to himself as soon as he was fairly in the street. "Oh, he will remain to supper with the Duc de Guise."

But as soon as he entered Maître la Hurière's the first thing La Mole saw was Coconnas seated before a gigantic omelet.

"Oho!" cried Coconnas, laughing heartily, "I see you have no more dined with the King of Navarre than I have supped with the Duc de Guise."

"Faith, no."

"Are you hungry now?"

"I believe I am."

"In spite of Plutarch?"

"Count," said La Mole, laughing, "Plutarch says in another place: 'Let him that hath, share with him that hath not.' Are you willing for the love of Plutarch to share your omelet with me? Then while we eat we will converse on virtue!"

"Oh, faith, not on that subject," cried Coconnas. "It is all right when one is at the Louvre and there is danger of eavesdroppers and one's stomach is empty. Sit down and have something to eat with me."

"There, now I see that fate has decidedly made us inseparable. Are you going to sleep here?"

"I have not the least idea."

"Nor I either."

"At any rate, I know where I shall spend the night."

"Where?"

"Wherever you do: that is settled."

And both burst out laughing and then set to work to do honor to Maître la Hurière's omelet.

CHAPTER VI THE DEBT PAID

Now if the reader is curious to know why Monsieur de la Mole was not received by the King of Navarre, why Monsieur de Coconnas was not permitted to see Monsieur de Guise, and lastly, why instead of eating pheasants, partridges, and venison at the Louvre, both supped at the hotel of the *Belle Étoile* on an omelet, he must kindly accompany us to the old palace of kings, and follow the queen, Marguerite of Navarre, whom La Mole had lost from sight at the entrance of the grand gallery.

While Marguerite was descending the staircase, the duke, Henry de Guise, whom she had not seen since the night of her marriage, was in the King's closet. To this staircase which Marguerite was descending there was an outlet. To the closet in which Monsieur de Guise was there was a door, and this door and this outlet both led to a corridor, which corridor led to the apartments of the queen mother, Catharine de Médicis.

Catharine de Médicis was alone, seated near a table, with her elbow leaning on a prayer-book half open, and her head leaning on a hand still remarkably beautiful, – by reason of the cosmetics with which she was supplied by the Florentine René, who united the double duty of perfumer and poisoner to the queen mother.

The widow of Henry II. was clothed in mourning, which she had not thrown off since her husband's death. At this period she was about fifty-two or fifty-three years of age, and owing to her stoutness and fair complexion she preserved much of her early beauty.

Her rooms, like her dress, paraded her widowhood. Everything in them bore the impress of bereavement: hangings, walls, and furniture were all in mourning. Only above a kind of dais covering a throne, where at that moment lay sleeping the little greyhound presented to the queen mother by her son-in-law, Henry of Navarre, and bearing the mythological name of Phœbe, was a painted rainbow surrounded by that Greek motto which King François I. had given her: "*Phôs pherei ê de kai a'ithzên*;" which may be translated:

"He brings light and serenity."

Suddenly, and at a moment when the queen mother appeared deeply plunged in some thought which brought a half-hesitating smile to her carmen-painted lips, a man opened the door, raised the tapestry, and showed his pale face, saying:

"Everything is going badly."

Catharine raised her head and recognized the Duc de Guise.

"Why do you say 'Everything is going badly'?" she replied. "What do you mean, Henry?"

"I mean that the King is more than ever taken with the accursed Huguenots; and if we await his leave to execute the great enterprise, we shall wait a very long time, and perhaps forever."

"Tell me what has happened," said Catharine, still preserving the tranquillity of countenance habitual to her, yet to which, when occasion served, she could give such different expressions.

"Why, just now, for the twentieth time, I asked his Majesty whether he would still permit all those bravadoes which the gentlemen of the reformed religion indulge in, since their admiral was wounded."

"And what did my son reply?" asked Catharine.

"He replied, 'Monsieur le Duc, you must necessarily be suspected by the people as the author of the attempted assassination of my second father, the admiral; defend yourself from the imputation as best you may. As to me, I will defend myself properly, if I am insulted;' and then he turned away to feed his dogs."

"And you made no attempt to retain him?"

"Certainly I did; but he replied to me, in that tone which you so well know, and looking at me with the gaze peculiar to him, 'Monsieur le Duc, my dogs are hungry; and they are not men, whom I can keep waiting.' Whereupon I came straight to you."

"And you have done right," said the queen mother.

"But what is now to be done?"

"Try a last effort."

"And who will try it?"

"I will! Is the King alone?"

"No; M. de Tavannes is with him."

"Await me here; or, rather, follow me at a distance."

Catharine instantly rose and went to the chamber, where on Turkey carpets and velvet cushions were the King's favorite greyhounds. On perches ranged along the wall were two or three valuable falcons and a small shrike, with which Charles IX. amused himself in bringing down the little birds in the garden of the Louvre, and that of the Tuileries, which they had just begun building.

On her way the queen mother put on a pale and anguished expression, while down her cheeks rolled a last or rather a first tear.

She noiselessly approached Charles IX. as he was giving his dogs fragments of cakes cut into equal portions.

"My son," said the queen, with a trembling in her voice so cleverly affected that the King started.

"What is it, madame?" said Charles, turning round suddenly.

"My son," replied Catharine, "I would ask your leave to retire to one of your châteaux, no matter which, so that it be as distant as possible from Paris."

"And wherefore, madame?" inquired Charles IX., fixing on his mother that glassy eye which, on certain occasions, became so penetrating.

"Because every day I receive new insults from persons of the new faith; because to-day I hear that you have been threatened by the Protestants even in your own Louvre, and I do not desire to be present at such spectacles."

"But then, madame," replied Charles IX., with an expression full of conviction, "an attempt has been made to kill their admiral. An infamous murderer has already assassinated the brave M. de Mouy. *Mort de ma vie*, mother, there must be justice in a kingdom!"

"Oh, be easy on that head, my son," said Catharine; "they will not fail justice; for if you should refuse it, they will still have it in their own way: on M. de Guise to-day, on me to-morrow, and yourself later."

"Oh, madame!" said Charles, allowing a first accent of doubt to show in his voice, "do you think so?"

"Oh, my son," replied Catharine, giving way entirely to the violence of her thoughts, "do you not see that it is no longer a question of François de Guise's death or the admiral's, of the Protestant religion or the Catholic religion, but simply of the substitution of Antoine de Bourbon's son for the son of Henry the Second?"

"Come, come, mother, you are falling again into your usual exaggeration," said the King.

"What, then, have you in mind, my son?"

"To wait, mother, – to wait. All human wisdom is in this single word. The greatest, the strongest, the most skilful is he who knows how to wait."

"You may wait, then; I will not."

Catharine made a courtesy, and stepping towards the door, was about to return to her apartment. Charles IX. stopped her.

"Well, then, really, what is best to be done, mother?" he asked, "for above all I am just, and I would have every one satisfied with me."

Catharine turned toward him.

"Come, count," she said to Tavannes, who was caressing the King's shrike, "tell the King your opinion as to what should be done."

"Will your Majesty permit me?" inquired the count.

"Speak, Tavannes! – speak."

"What does your Majesty do when, in the chase, the wounded boar turns on you?"

"By Heaven! monsieur, I wait for him, with firm foot," replied Charles, "and stab him in the throat with my boar-spear."

"Simply that he may not hurt you," remarked Catharine.

"And to amuse myself," said the King, with a sigh which indicated courage easily aroused even to ferocity; "but I should not amuse myself killing my subjects; for, after all, the Huguenots are my subjects, as well as the Catholics."

"Then, sire," said Catharine, "your subjects, the Huguenots, will do like the wild boar who escapes the spear thrust into his throat: they will bring down the throne."

"Nonsense! Do you really think so, madame?" said Charles IX., with an air which denoted that he did not place great faith in his mother's predictions.

"But have you not seen M. de Mouy and his party to-day?"

"Yes; I have seen them, for I have just left them. But what does he ask for that is not just? He has requested that his father's murderer and the admiral's assassin be put to death. Did we not punish M. de Montgommery for the death of my father and your husband, although that death was a simple accident?"

"Very well, sire," said Catharine, piqued, "let us say no more. Your majesty is under the protection of that God who gives you strength, wisdom, and confidence. But I, a poor woman whom God abandons, no doubt on account of my sins, fear and yield."

And having said this, Catharine again courteseyed and left the room, making a sign to the Duc de Guise, who had at that moment entered, to remain in her place, and try a last effort.

Charles IX. followed his mother with his eye, but this time did not recall her. He then began to caress his dogs, whistling a hunting-air.

He suddenly paused.

"My mother," said he, "is a royal spirit, and has scruples! Really, now, it is a cool proposal, to kill off some dozens of Huguenots because they come to demand justice! Is it not their right?"

"Some dozens!" murmured the Duc de Guise.

"Ah! are you here, sir?" said the King, pretending to see him for the first time. "Yes, some dozens. A tolerable waste of life! Ah! if any one came to me and said; 'Sire, you shall be rid of all your enemies at once, and to-morrow there shall not remain one to reproach you with the death of the others,' why, then, I do not say" —

"Well, sire?"

"Tavannes," said the King, "you will tire Margot; put her back on her perch. It is no reason, because she bears the name of my sister, the Queen of Navarre, that every one should caress her."

Tavannes put the hawk on her perch, and amused himself by curling and uncurling a greyhound's ears.

"But, sire, if any one should say to your Majesty: 'Sire, your Majesty shall be delivered from all your enemies to-morrow?'"

"And by the intercession of what saint would this miracle be wrought?"

"Sire, to-day is the 24th of August, and therefore it would be by the interposition of Saint Bartholomew."

"A worthy saint," replied the King, "who allowed himself to be skinned alive!"

"So much the better; the more he suffered, the more he ought to have felt a desire for vengeance on his executioners."

"And will you, my cousin," said the King, "will you, with your pretty little gold-hilted sword, slay ten thousand Huguenots between now and to-morrow? Ha! ha! ha! *mort de ma vie!* you are very amusing, Monsieur de Guise!"

And the King burst into a loud laugh, but a laugh so forced that the room echoed with its sinister sound.

"Sire, one word – and one only," continued the duke, shuddering in spite of himself at the sound of that laugh, which had nothing human in it, – "one signal, and all is ready. I have the Swiss and eleven hundred gentlemen; I have the light horse and the citizens; your Majesty has your guards, your friends, the Catholic nobility. We are twenty to one."

"Well, then, cousin, since you are so strong, why the devil do you come to fill my ears with all this? Act without me – act" —

And the King turned again to his dogs.

Then the portière was raised, and Catharine reappeared.

"All goes well," she said to the duke; "urge him, and he will yield."

And the portière fell on Catharine, without Charles IX. seeing, or at least appearing to see her.

"But yet," continued De Guise, "I must know if, in acting as I desire, I shall act agreeably to your Majesty's views."

"Really, cousin Henry, you put the knife to my throat! But I shall live. By Heaven! am I not the king?"

"No, not yet, sire; but, if you will, you shall be so to-morrow."

"Ah – what!" continued Charles, "you would kill the King of Navarre, the Prince de Condé – in my Louvre – ah!"

Then he added, in a voice scarcely audible, – "Without the walls, I do not say" —

"Sire," cried the duke, "they are going out this evening to join in a revel with your brother, the Duc d'Alençon."

"Tavannes," said the King, with well-affected impatience, "do not you see that you are teasing the dog? Here, Actéon, – come!"

And Charles IX. went out without waiting to hear more, and Tavannes and the Duc de Guise were left almost as uncertain as before.

Meantime another scene was passing in Catharine's apartment. After she had given the Duc de Guise her counsel to remain firm, she returned to her rooms, where she found assembled the persons who were usually present when she went to bed.

Her face was now as full of joy as it had been downcast when she set out. With her most agreeable manner she dismissed her women one by one and her courtiers, and there remained only Madame Marguerite, who, seated on a coffer near the open window, was looking at the sky, absorbed in thought.

Two or three times, when she thus found herself alone with her daughter, the queen mother opened her mouth to speak, but each time a gloomy thought withheld the words ready to escape her lips.

Suddenly the portière was raised, and Henry of Navarre appeared.

The little greyhound, which was asleep on the throne, leaped up and bounded towards him.

"You here, my son!" said Catharine, starting. "Do you sup in the Louvre to-night?"

"No, madame," replied Henry, "we are going into the city to-night, with Messieurs d'Alençon and De Condé. I almost expected to find them here paying their court to you."

Catharine smiled.

"Go, gentlemen, go – men are so fortunate in being able to go about as they please! Are they not, my daughter?"

"Yes," replied Marguerite, "liberty is so glorious, so sweet a thing."

"Does that imply that I restrict yours, madame?" inquired Henry, bowing to his wife.

"No, sire; I do not complain for myself, but for women in general."

"Are you going to see the admiral, my son?" asked Catharine.

"Yes, possibly."

"Go, that will set a good example, and to-morrow you will give me news of him."

"Then, madame, I will go, since you approve of this step."

"Oh," said Catharine, "my approval is nothing – But who goes there? Send him away, send him away."

Henry started to go to the door to carry out Catharine's order; but at the same instant the portière was raised and Madame de Sauve showed her blond head.

"Madame," said she, "it is René, the perfumer, whom your majesty sent for."

Catharine cast a glance as quick as lightning at Henry of Navarre.

The young prince turned slightly red and then fearfully pale. Indeed, the name of his mother's assassin had been spoken; he felt that his face betrayed his emotion, and he went and leaned against the bar of the window.

The little greyhound growled.

At the same moment two persons entered – the one announced, and the other having no need to be so.

The first was René, the perfumer, who approached Catharine with all the servile obsequiousness of Florentine servants. He held in his hand a box, which he opened, and all the compartments were seen filled with powders and flasks.

The second was Madame de Lorraine, Marguerite's eldest sister. She entered by a small secret door, which led from the King's closet, and, all pale and trembling, and hoping not to be observed by Catharine, who was examining, with Madame de Sauve, the contents of the box brought by René, seated herself beside Marguerite, near whom the King of Navarre was standing, with his hand on his brow, like one who tries to rouse himself from some sudden shock.

At this instant Catharine turned round.

"Daughter," she said to Marguerite, "you may retire to your room. My son, you may go and amuse yourself in the city."

Marguerite rose, and Henry turned half round.

Madame de Lorraine seized Marguerite's hand.

"Sister," she whispered, with great quickness, "in the name of the Duc de Guise, who now saves you, as you saved him, do not go from here – do not go to your apartments."

"Eh! what say you, Claude?" inquired Catharine, turning round.

"Nothing, mother."

"You were whispering to Marguerite."

"Simply to wish her good-night, and convey a greeting to her from the Duchesse de Nevers."

"And where is that fair duchess?"

"At her brother-in-law's, M. de Guise's."

Catharine looked suspiciously at the women and frowning:

"Come here, Claude," said the queen mother.

Claude obeyed, and the queen seized her hand.

"What did you say to her, indiscreet girl that you are?" she murmured, squeezing her daughter's wrist until she nearly shrieked with pain.

"Madame," said Henry to his wife, having lost nothing of the movements of the queen, Claude, or Marguerite, – "madame, will you allow me the honor of kissing your hand?"

Marguerite extended her trembling hand.

"What did she say to you?" whispered Henry, as he stooped to imprint a kiss on her hand.

"Not to go out. In the name of Heaven, do not you go out either!"

This was like a flash; but by its light, swift as it was, Henry at once detected a complete plot.

"This is not all," added Marguerite; "here is a letter, which a country gentleman brought."

"Monsieur de la Mole?"

"Yes."

"Thank you," he said, taking the letter and putting it under his doublet; and, passing in front of his bewildered wife, he placed his hand on the shoulder of the Florentine.

"Well, Maître René!" he said, "and how go commercial affairs?"

"Pretty well, monseigneur, – pretty well," replied the poisoner, with his perfidious smile.

"I should think so," said Henry, "with men who, like you, supply all the crowned heads at home and abroad."

"Except the King of Navarre," replied the Florentine, impudently.

"*Ventre saint gris*, Maître René," replied the king, "you are right; and yet my poor mother, who also bought of you, recommended you to me with her dying breath. Come to me to-morrow, Maître René, or day after to-morrow, and bring your best perfumes."

"That would not be a bad notion," said Catharine, smiling; "for it is said" —

"That I need some perfumery," interrupted Henry, laughing; "who told you that, mother? Was it Margot?"

"No, my son," replied Catharine, "it was Madame de Sauve."

At this moment the Duchesse de Lorraine, who in spite of all her efforts could no longer contain herself, burst into loud sobs.

Henry did not even turn toward her.

"Sister, what is the matter?" cried Marguerite, darting toward Claude.

"Nothing," said Catharine, passing between the two young women, "nothing; she has those nervous attacks, for which Mazille prescribes aromatic preparations."

And again, and with still more force than before, she pressed her eldest daughter's arm; then, turning toward the youngest:

"There, Margot," she said, "did you not hear me request you to retire to your room? If that is not sufficient, I command you."

"Excuse me, madame," replied Marguerite, trembling and pale; "I wish your majesty good-night."

"I hope your wishes may be heard. Good-night – good-night!"

Marguerite withdrew, staggering, and in vain seeking to meet her husband's eyes, but he did not even turn toward her.

There was a moment's silence, during which Catharine remained with her eyes fastened on the Duchess of Lorraine, who, without speaking, looked at her mother with clasped hands.

Henry's back was still turned, but he was watching the scene in a mirror, while seeming to curl his mustache with a pomade which René had just given to him.

"And you, Henry," said Catharine, "are you still intending to go out?"

"Yes, that's true," exclaimed the king. "Faith, I was forgetting that the Duc d'Alençon and the Prince de Condé are waiting for me! These are admirable perfumes; they quite overpower one, and destroy one's memory. Good evening, madame."

"Good evening! To-morrow you will perhaps bring me tidings of the admiral."

"Without fail – Well, Phœbe, what is it?"

"Phœbe!" said the queen mother, impatiently.

"Call her, madame," said the Béarnais, "for she will not allow me to go out."

The queen mother rose, took the little greyhound by the collar, and held her while Henry left the apartment, with his features as calm and smiling as if he did not feel in his heart that his life was in imminent peril.

Behind him the little dog, set free by Catharine de Médicis, rushed to try and overtake him, but the door was closed, and Phœbe could only put her long nose under the tapestry and give a long and mournful howl.

"Now, Charlotte," said Catharine to Madame de Sauve, "go and find Messieurs de Guise and Tavannes, who are in my oratory, and return with them; then remain with the Duchess of Lorraine, who has the vapors."

CHAPTER VII

THE NIGHT OF THE 24TH OF AUGUST, 1572

When La Mole and Coconnas had finished their supper – and it was meagre enough, for the fowls of *La Belle Étoile* had their pin feathers singed only on the sign – Coconnas whirled his chair around on one leg, stretched out his feet, leaned one elbow on the table, and drinking a last glass of wine, said:

"Do you mean to go to bed instantly, Monsieur de la Mole?"

"*Ma foi!* I am very much inclined, for it is possible that I may be called up in the night."

"And I, too," said Coconnas; "but it appears to me that, under the circumstances, instead of going to bed and making those wait who are to come to us, we should do better to call for cards and play a game. They would then find us quite ready."

"I would willingly accept your proposal, sir, but I have very little money for play. I have scarce a hundred gold crowns in my valise, for my whole treasure. I rely on that with which to make my fortune!"

"A hundred gold crowns!" cried Coconnas, "and you complain? By Heaven! I have but six!"

"Why," replied La Mole, "I saw you draw from your pocket a purse which appeared not only full, but I should say bloated."

"Ah," said Coconnas, "that is to defray an old debt which I am compelled to pay to an old friend of my father, whom I suspect to be, like yourself, somewhat of a Huguenot. Yes, there are here a hundred rose nobles," he added, slapping his pocket, "but these hundred rose nobles belong to Maître Mercandon. My personal patrimony, as I tell you, is limited to six crowns."

"How, then, can you play?"

"Why, it is because of that I wished to play. Besides, an idea occurs to me."

"What is it?"

"We both came to Paris on the same errand."

"Yes."

"Each of us has a powerful protector."

"Yes."

"You rely on yours, as I rely on mine."

"Yes."

"Well, then, it occurred to me that we should play first for our money, and afterwards for the first favor which came to us, either from the court or from our mistress" —

"Really, a very ingenious idea," said La Mole, with a smile, "but I confess I am not such a gamester as to risk my whole life on a card or a turn of the dice; for the first favor which may come either to you or to me will, in all probability, involve our whole life."

"Well, let us drop out of account the first favor from the court and play for our mistress's first favor."

"I see only one objection to that," said La Mole.

"What objection?"

"I have no mistress!"

"Nor I either. But I expect to have one soon. Thank God! we are not cut out to want one long!"

"Undoubtedly, as you say, you will have your wish, Monsieur de Coconnas, but as I have not the same confidence in my love-star, I feel that it would be robbery, I to pit my fortune against yours. But, if you will, let us play until your six crowns be lost or doubled, and if lost, and you desire to continue the game, you are a gentleman, and your word is as good as gold."

"Well and good!" cried Coconnas, "that's the talk! You are right, sir, a gentleman's word is as good as gold, especially when he has credit at court. Thus, believe me, I did not risk too much when I proposed to play for the first favor we might receive."

"Doubtless, and you might lose it, but I could not gain it; for, as I am with the King of Navarre, I could not receive anything from the Duc de Guise."

"Ah, the heretic!" muttered the landlord as he was at work polishing up his old helmet, "I got on the right scent, did I?" And he stopped his work long enough to cross himself piously.

"Well, then," continued Coconnas, shuffling the cards which the waiter had just brought him, "you are of the" —

"Of the what?"

"Of the new religion."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Well, say that I am," said La Mole, with a smile, "have you anything against us?"

"Oh! thank God, no! It is all the same to me. I hate Huguenotry with all my heart, but I do not hate the Huguenots; besides, they are in fashion just now."

"Yes," replied La Mole, smiling; "to wit, the shooting at the admiral with an arquebuse; but supposing we have a game of arquebusades."

"Anything you please," said Coconnas, "provided I get to playing, it is all the same to me."

"Well, let us play, then," said La Mole, picking up his cards and arranging them in his hand.

"Yes, play ahead and with all confidence, for even if I were to lose a hundred crowns of gold against yours I shall have the wherewithal to pay you to-morrow morning."

"Then your fortune will come while you are asleep."

"No; I am going to find it."

"Where? Tell me and I'll go with you."

"At the Louvre."

"Are you going back there to-night?"

"Yes; to-night I have a private audience with the great Duc de Guise."

As soon as Coconnas began to speak about going to seek his fortune at the Louvre, La Hurière stopped polishing his sallet and went and stood behind La Mole's chair, so that Coconnas alone could see him, and made signs to him, which the Piedmontese, absorbed in his game and the conversation, did not notice.

"Well, it is miraculous," remarked La Mole; "and you were right when you said that we were born under the same star. I have also an appointment at the Louvre to-night, but not with the Duc de Guise; mine is with the King of Navarre."

"Have you a pass-word?"

"Yes."

"A rallying sign?"

"No."

"Well, I have one, and my pass-word is" —

As the Piedmontese was saying these words, La Hurière made such an expressive gesture that the indiscreet gentleman, who happened at that instant to raise his head, paused petrified more by the action than by the turn of the cards which had just caused him to lose three crowns.

La Mole looked around, but saw only his landlord standing behind him with folded arms and wearing on his head the sallet which he had seen him polishing the moment before.

"What is the matter, pray?" inquired La Mole of Coconnas.

Coconnas looked at the landlord and at his companion without answering, for he could make nothing out of Maître La Hurière's redoubled gestures.

La Hurière saw that he must go to his aid:

"It is only that I am very fond of cards myself," said he, speaking rapidly, "and I came closer to see the trick which made you gain, and the gentleman saw me with my war helmet on, and as I am only a poor bourgeois, it surprised him."

"You make a fine figure, indeed you do!" cried La Mole, with a burst of laughter.

"Oh, sir," replied La Hurière with admirably pretended good nature and a shrug of the shoulders expressive of his inferiority, "we poor fellows are not very valiant and our appearance is not elegant. It is all right for you fine gentlemen to wear glittering helmets and carry keen rapiers, and provided we mount guard strictly" —

"Aha!" said La Mole, taking his turn at shuffling the cards. "So you mount guard, do you?"

"*Eh, mon Dieu, oui, Monsieur le Comte!* I am sergeant in a company of citizen militia."

After having said this while La Mole was engaged in dealing the cards, La Hurière withdrew, putting his finger on his lips as a sign of discretion for Coconnas, who was more amazed than ever.

This signal for caution was doubtless the reason that he lost almost as rapidly the second time as the first.

"Well," observed La Mole, "this makes exactly your six crowns. Will you have your revenge on your future fortune?"

"Willingly," replied Coconnas.

"But before you begin, did you not say you had an appointment with the Duc de Guise?"

Coconnas looked toward the kitchen, and saw the great eyes of La Hurière, who was repeating his warning.

"Yes," he replied, "but it is not yet time. But now let us talk a little about yourself, Monsieur de la Mole."

"We should do better, I think, by talking of the game, my dear Monsieur de Coconnas; for unless I am very much mistaken, I am in a fair way of gaining six more crowns."

"By Heaven! that is true! I always heard that the Huguenots had good luck at cards. Devil take me if I haven't a good mind to turn Huguenot!"

La Hurière's eyes sparkled like two coals; but Coconnas, absorbed in his game, did not notice them. "Do so, count, do so," said La Mole, "and though the way in which the change came about is odd, you will be well received among us."

Coconnas scratched his ear.

"If I were sure that your good luck came from that," he said, "I would; for I really do not stickle so overwhelmingly for the mass, and as the King does not think so much of it either" —

"Then it is such a beautiful religion," said La Mole; "so simple, so pure" —

"And, moreover, it is in fashion," said Coconnas; "and, moreover, it brings good luck at cards; for the devil take me if you do not hold all the aces, and yet I have watched you closely, and you play very fairly; you do not cheat; it must be the religion" —

"You owe me six crowns more," said La Mole, quietly.

"Ah, how you tempt me!" said Coconnas; "and if I am not satisfied with Monsieur de Guise to-night" —

"Well?"

"Well, to-morrow I will ask you to present me to the King of Navarre and, be assured, if once I become a Huguenot, I will out-Huguenot Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, and all the reformers on earth!"

"Hush!" said La Mole, "you will get into a quarrel with our host."

"Ah, that is true," said Coconnas, looking toward the kitchen; "but — no, he is not listening; he is too much occupied at this moment."

"What is he doing, pray?" inquired La Mole, who could not see him from where he was.

"He is talking with — devil take me! it is he!"

"Who?"

"Why, that night-bird with whom he was discoursing when we arrived. The man in the yellow doublet and drab-colored cloak. By Heaven! how earnestly he talks. Say, Maître La Hurière, are you engaged in politics?"

But this time Maître La Hurière's answer was a gesture so energetic and imperious that in spite of his love for the picture card Coconnas got up and went to him.

"What is the matter with you?" asked La Mole.

"You wish wine, sir?" said La Hurière, seizing Coconnas' hand eagerly. "You shall have it. Grégoire, wine for these gentlemen!"

Then he whispered in his ear:

"Silence, if you value your life, silence! And get rid of your companion."

La Hurière was so pale, the sallow man so lugubrious, that Coconnas felt a shiver run over him, and turning to La Mole said:

"My dear sir, I must beg you to excuse me. I have lost fifty crowns in the turn of a hand. I am in bad luck to-night, and I fear I may get into difficulties."

"Well, sir, as you please," replied La Mole; "besides, I shall not be sorry to lie down for a time. Maître la Hurière!"

"Monsieur le Comte?"

"If any one comes for me from the King of Navarre, wake me; I shall be dressed, and consequently ready."

"So shall I," said Coconnas; "and that I may not keep his highness waiting, I will prepare the sign. Maître la Hurière, some white paper and scissors!"

"Grégoire!" cried La Hurière, "white paper to write a letter on and scissors to cut the envelope with."

"Ah!" said the Piedmontese to himself. "Something extraordinary is going on here!"

"Good-night, Monsieur de Coconnas," said La Mole; "and you, landlord, be so good as to light me to my room. Good luck, my friend!" and La Mole disappeared up the winding staircase, followed by La Hurière.

Then the mysterious man, taking Coconnas by the arm, said to him, speaking very rapidly:

"Sir, you have very nearly betrayed a secret on which depends the fate of a kingdom. God saw fit to have you close your mouth in time. One word more, and I should have brought you down with my arquebuse. Now we are alone, fortunately; listen!"

"But who are you that you address me with this tone of authority?"

"Did you ever hear talk of the Sire de Maurevel?"

"The assassin of the admiral?"

"And of Captain de Mouy."

"Yes."

"Well, I am the Sire de Maurevel."

"Oho!" said Coconnas.

"Now listen to me!"

"By Heaven! I assure you I will listen!"

"Hush!" said Maurevel, putting his finger on his mouth.

Coconnas listened.

At that moment he heard the landlord close the door of a chamber, then the door of a corridor, and bolt it. Then he rushed down the stairs to join the two speakers.

He offered a chair to Coconnas, a chair to Maurevel, and took one for himself.

"All is safe now, Monsieur de Maurevel," said he; "you may speak."

It was striking eleven o'clock at Saint Germain l'Auxerrois. Maurevel counted each of the hammer-strokes as they sounded clear and melancholy through the night, and when the last echo had

died away in space he turned to Coconnas, who was greatly mystified at seeing the precautions taken by the two men. "Sir," he asked, "are you a good Catholic?"

"Why, I think I am," replied Coconnas.

"Sir," continued Maurevel, "are you devoted to the King?"

"Heart and soul! I even feel that you insult me, sir, in asking such a question."

"We will not quarrel over that; only you are going to follow us."

"Whither?"

"That is of little consequence – put yourself in our hands; your fortune, and perhaps your life, is at stake."

"I tell you, sir, that at midnight I have an appointment at the Louvre."

"That is where we are going."

"Monsieur de Guise is expecting me there."

"And us also."

"But I have a private pass-word," continued Coconnas, somewhat mortified at sharing with the Sire de Maurevel and Maître La Hurière the honor of his audience.

"So have we."

"But I have a sign of recognition."

Maurevel smiled.

Then he drew from beneath his doublet a handful of crosses in white stuff, gave one to La Hurière, one to Coconnas, and took another for himself. La Hurière fastened his to his helmet. Maurevel attached his to the side of his hat.

"Ah," said Coconnas, amazed, "the appointment and the rallying pass-word were for every one?"

"Yes, sir, – that is to say, for all good Catholics."

"Then there is a festival at the Louvre – some royal banquet, is there not?" said Coconnas; "and it is desired to exclude those hounds of Huguenots, – good, capital, excellent! They have been showing off too long."

"Yes, there is to be a festival at the Louvre – a royal banquet; and the Huguenots are invited; and moreover, they will be the heroes of the festival, and will pay for the banquet, and if you will be one of us, we will begin by going to invite their principal champion – their Gideon, as they call him."

"The admiral!" cried Coconnas.

"Yes, the old Gaspard, whom I missed, like a fool, though I aimed at him with the King's arquebuse."

"And this, my gentleman, is why I was polishing my sallet, sharpening my sword, and putting an edge on my knives," said La Hurière, in a harsh voice consonant with war.

At these words Coconnas shuddered and turned very pale, for he began to understand.

"What, really," he exclaimed, "this festival – this banquet is a – you are going" —

"You have been a long time guessing, sir," said Maurevel, "and it is easy to see that you are not so weary of these insolent heretics as we are."

"And you take on yourself," he said, "to go to the admiral's and to" —

Maurevel smiled, and drawing Coconnas to the window he said:

"Look there! – do you see, in the small square at the end of the street, behind the church, a troop drawn up noiselessly in the shadow?"

"Yes."

"The men forming that troop have, like Maître la Hurière, and myself, and yourself, a cross in their hats."

"Well?"

"Well, these men are a company of Swiss, from the smaller cantons, commanded by Toquenot, – you know the men from the smaller cantons are the King's cronies."

"Oho!" said Coconnas.

"Now look at that troop of horse passing along the Quay – do you recognize their leader?"

"How can I recognize him?" asked Coconnas, with a shudder; "I reached Paris only this evening."

"Well, then, he is the one with whom you have a rendezvous at the Louvre at midnight. See, he is going to wait for you!"

"The Duc de Guise?"

"Himself! His escorts are Marcel, the ex-provost of the tradesmen, and Jean Choron, the present provost. These two are going to summon their companies, and here, down this street comes the captain of the quarter. See what he will do!"

"He knocks at each door; but what is there on the doors at which he knocks?"

"A white cross, young man, such as that which we have in our hats. In days gone by they let God bear the burden of distinguishing his own; now we have grown more civilized and we save him the bother."

"But at each house at which he knocks the door opens and from each house armed citizens come out."

"He will knock here in turn, and we shall in turn go out."

"What," said Coconnas, "every one called out to go and kill one old Huguenot? By Heaven! it is shameful! It is an affair of cut-throats, and not of soldiers."

"Young man," replied Maurevel, "if the old are objectionable to you, you may choose young ones – you will find plenty for all tastes. If you despise daggers, use your sword, for the Huguenots are not the men to allow their throats to be cut without defending themselves, and you know that Huguenots, young or old, are tough."

"But are they all going to be killed, then?" cried Coconnas.

"All!"

"By the King's order?"

"By order of the King and Monsieur de Guise."

"And when?"

"When you hear the bell of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois."

"Oh! so that was why that amiable German attached to the Duc de Guise – what is his name?"

"Monsieur de Besme."

"That is it. That is why Monsieur de Besme told me to hasten at the first sound of the tocsin."

"So then you have seen Monsieur de Besme?"

"I have seen him and spoken to him."

"Where?"

"At the Louvre. He admitted me, gave me the pass-word, gave me" —

"Look there!"

"By Heaven! – there he is himself."

"Would you speak with him?"

"Why, really, I should not object."

Maurevel carefully opened the window; Besme was passing at the moment with twenty soldiers.

"*Guise and Lorraine!*" said Maurevel.

Besme turned round, and perceiving that he himself was addressed, came under the window.

"Oh, is it you, Monsir de Maurefel?"

"Yes, 'tis I; what are you looking for?"

"I am looking for de hostelry of de *Belle Étoile*, to find a Monsir Gogonnas."

"Here I am, Monsieur de Besme," said the young man.

"Goot, goot; are you ready?"

"Yes – to do what?"

"Vatefer Monsieur de Maurefel may dell you, for he is a goot Gatolic."

"Do you hear?" inquired Maurevel.

"Yes," replied Coconnas, "but, Monsieur de Besme, where are you going?"

"I?" asked Monsieur de Besme, with a laugh.

"Yes, you."

"I am going to fire off a leedle wort at the admiral."

"Fire off two, if need be," said Maurevel, "and this time, if he gets up at the first, do not let him get up at the second."

"Haf no vear, Monsir de Maurefel, haf no vear, und meanvile get dis yoong mahn on de right drack."

"Don't worry about me: the Coconnas are regular bloodhounds, and I am a chip off the old block."²

"Atieu."

"Go on!"

"Unt you?"

"Begin the hunt; we shall be at the death."

De Besme went on, and Maurevel closed the window.

"Did you hear, young man?" said Maurevel; "if you have any private enemy, even if he is not altogether a Huguenot, you can put him on your list, and he will pass with the others."

Coconnas, more bewildered than ever with what he saw and heard, looked first at his landlord, who was assuming formidable attitudes, and then at Maurevel, who quietly drew a paper from his pocket.

"Here's my list," said he; "three hundred. Let each good Catholic do this night one-tenth part of the business I shall do, and to-morrow there will not remain one single heretic in the kingdom."

"Hush!" said La Hurière.

"What is it?" inquired Coconnas and Maurevel together.

They heard the first pulsation from the bell in Saint Germain l'Auxerrois.

"The signal!" exclaimed Maurevel. "The time is set forward! I was told it was appointed at midnight – so much the better. When it concerns the interest of God and the King, it is better for clocks to be fast than slow!"

In reality they heard the church bell mournfully tolling.

Then a shot was fired, and almost instantly the light of several torches blazed up like flashes of lightning in the Rue de l'Arbre Sec.

Coconnas passed his hand over his brow, which was damp with perspiration.

"It has begun!" cried Maurevel. "Now to work – away!"

"One moment, one moment!" said the landlord. "Before we begin, let us protect the camp, as we say in the army. I do not wish to have my wife and children's throats cut while I am out. There is a Huguenot here."

"Monsieur de la Mole!" said Coconnas, starting.

"Yes, the heretic has thrown himself into the wolf's throat."

"What!" said Coconnas, "would you attack your guest?"

"I gave an extra edge to my rapier for his special benefit."

"Oho!" said the Piedmontese, frowning.

"I never yet killed anything but my rabbits, ducks, and chickens," replied the worthy inn-keeper, "and I do not know very well how to go to work to kill a man; well, I will practise on him, and if I am clumsy, no one will be there to laugh at me."

² Bons chiens chassent de race.

"By Heaven! it is hard," said Coconnas. "Monsieur de la Mole is my companion; Monsieur de la Mole has supped with me; Monsieur de la Mole has played with me" —

"Yes; but Monsieur de la Mole is a heretic," said Maurevel. "Monsieur de la Mole is doomed; and if we do not kill him, others will."

"Not to say," added the host, "that he has won fifty crowns from you."

"True," said Coconnas; "but fairly, I am sure."

"Fairly or not, you must pay them, while, if I kill him, you are quits."

"Come, come!" cried Maurevel; "make haste, gentlemen, an arquebuse-shot, a rapier-thrust, a blow with a mallet, a stroke with any weapon you please; but get done with it if you wish to reach the admiral's in time to help Monsieur de Guise as we promised."

Coconnas sighed.

"I'll make haste!" cried La Hurière, "wait for me."

"By Heaven!" cried Coconnas, "he will put the poor fellow to great pain, and, perhaps, rob him. I must be present to finish him, if requisite, and to prevent any one from touching his money."

And impelled by this happy thought, Coconnas followed La Hurière upstairs, and soon overtook him, for according as the landlord went up, doubtless as the effect of reflection, he slackened his pace.

As he reached the door, Coconnas still following, many gunshots were discharged in the street. Instantly La Mole was heard to leap out of bed and the flooring creaked under his feet.

"*Diable!*" muttered La Hurière, somewhat disconcerted; "that has awakened him, I think."

"It looks like it," observed Coconnas.

"And he will defend himself."

"He is capable of it. Suppose, now, Maître la Hurière, he were to kill you; that would be droll!"

"Hum, hum!" responded the landlord, but knowing himself to be armed with a good arquebuse, he took courage and dashed the door in with a vigorous kick.

La Mole, without his hat, but dressed, was entrenched behind his bed, his sword between his teeth, and his pistols in his hands.

"Oho!" said Coconnas, his nostrils expanding as if he had been a wild beast smelling blood, "this grows interesting, Maître la Hurière. Forward!"

"Ah, you would assassinate me, it seems!" cried La Mole, with glaring eyes; "and it is you, wretch!"

Maître la Hurière's reply to this was to take aim at the young man with his arquebuse; but La Mole was on his guard, and as he fired, fell on his knees, and the ball flew over his head.

"Help!" cried La Mole; "help, Monsieur de Coconnas!"

"Help, Monsieur de Maurevel! — help!" cried La Hurière.

"*Ma foi!* Monsieur de la Mole," replied Coconnas, "all I can do in this affair is not to join the attack against you. It seems all the Huguenots are to be put to death to-night, in the King's name. Get out of it as well as you can."

"Ah, traitors! assassins! — is it so? Well, then, take this!" and La Mole, aiming in his turn, fired one of his pistols. La Hurière, who had kept his eye on him, dodged to one side; but Coconnas, not anticipating such a reply, stayed where he was, and the bullet grazed his shoulder.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth; "I have it. Well, then, let it be we two, since you will have it so!"

And drawing his rapier, he rushed on La Mole.

Had he been alone La Mole would, doubtless, have awaited his attack; but Coconnas had La Hurière to aid him, who was reloading his gun, and Maurevel, who, responding to the innkeeper's invitation, was rushing up-stairs four steps at a time.

La Mole, therefore, dashed into a small closet, which he bolted inside.

"Ah, coward!" cried Coconnas, furious, and striking at the door with the pommel of his sword; "wait! wait! and I will make as many holes in your body as you have gained crowns of me to-night."

I came up to prevent you from suffering! Oh, I came up to prevent you from being robbed and you pay me back by putting a bullet into my shoulder! Wait for me, coward, wait!"

While this was going on, Maître la Hurière came up and with one blow with the butt-end of his arquebuse smashed in the door.

Coconnas darted into the closet, but only bare walls met him. The closet was empty and the window was open.

"He must have jumped out," said the landlord, "and as we are on the fourth story, he is surely dead."

"Or he has escaped by the roof of the next house," said Coconnas, putting his leg on the window-sill and preparing to follow him over this narrow and slippery route; but Maurevel and La Hurière seized him and drew him back into the room.

"Are you mad?" they both exclaimed at once; "you will kill yourself!"

"Bah!" said Coconnas, "I am a mountaineer, and used to climbing glaciers; besides, when a man has once offended me, I would go up to heaven or descend to hell with him, by whatever route he pleases. Let me do as I wish."

"Well," said Maurevel, "he is either dead or a long way off by this time. Come with us; and if he escape you, you will find a thousand others to take his place."

"You are right," cried Coconnas. "Death to the Huguenots! I want revenge, and the sooner the better."

And the three rushed down the staircase, like an avalanche.

"To the admiral's!" shouted Maurevel.

"To the admiral's!" echoed La Hurière.

"To the admiral's, then, if it must be so!" cried Coconnas in his turn.

And all three, leaving the *Belle Étoile* in charge of Grégoire and the other waiters, hastened toward the admiral's hôtel in the Rue de Béthizy; a bright light and the report of fire-arms guided them in that direction.

"Ah, who comes here?" cried Coconnas. "A man without his doublet or scarf!"

"It is some one escaping," said Maurevel.

"Fire! fire!" said Coconnas; "you who have arquebuses."

"Faith, not I," replied Maurevel. "I keep my powder for better game."

"You, then, La Hurière!"

"Wait, wait!" said the innkeeper, taking aim.

"Oh, yes, wait," cried Coconnas, "and meantime he will escape."

And he rushed after the unhappy wretch, whom he soon overtook, as he was wounded; but at the moment when, in order that he might not strike him behind, he exclaimed, "Turn, will you! turn!" the report of an arquebuse was heard, a bullet whistled by Coconnas's ears, and the fugitive rolled over, like a hare in its swiftest flight struck by the shot of the sportsman.

A cry of triumph was heard behind Coconnas. The Piedmontese turned round and saw La Hurière brandishing his weapon.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "I have handselled this time at any rate."

"And only just missed making a hole quite through me."

"Be on your guard! – be on your guard!" cried La Hurière.

Coconnas sprung back. The wounded man had risen on his knee, and, eager for revenge, was just on the point of stabbing him with his poniard, when the landlord's warning put the Piedmontese on his guard.

"Ah, viper!" shouted Coconnas; and rushing at the wounded man, he thrust his sword through him three times up to the hilt.

"And now," cried he, leaving the Huguenot in the agonies of death, "to the admiral's! – to the admiral's!"

"Aha! my gentlemen," said Maurevel, "it seems to work."

"Faith! yes," replied Coconnas. "I do not know if it is the smell of gunpowder makes me drunk, or the sight of blood excites me, but by Heaven! I am thirsty for slaughter. It is like a battue of men. I have as yet only had battues of bears and wolves, and on my honor, a battue of men seems more amusing."

And the three went on their way.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MASSACRE

The hôtel occupied by the admiral, as we have said, was situated in the Rue de Béthizy. It was a great mansion at the rear of a court and had two wings giving on the street. A wall furnished with a large gate and two small grilled doors stretched from wing to wing.

When our three Guisards reached the end of the Rue de Béthizy, which is a continuation of the Rue des Fossés Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, they saw the hôtel surrounded by Swiss, by soldiers, and by armed citizens; every one had in his right hand either a sword or a pike or an arquebuse, and some held in their left hands torches, shedding over the scene a fitful and melancholy glare which, according as the throng moved, shifted along the street, climbed the walls; or spread over that living sea where every weapon cast its answering flash.

All around the hôtel and in the Rues Tirechappe, Étienne, and Bertin Poirée the terrible work was proceeding. Long shouts were heard, there was an incessant rattle of musketry, and from time to time some wretch, half naked, pale, and drenched in blood, leaped like a hunted stag into the circle of lugubrious light where a host of fiends seemed to be at work.

In an instant Coconnas, Maurevel, and La Hurière, accredited by their white crosses, and received with cries of welcome, were in the thickest of this struggling, panting mob. Doubtless they would not have been able to advance had not some of the throng recognized Maurevel and made way for him. Coconnas and La Hurière followed him closely and the three therefore contrived to get into the court-yard.

In the centre of this court-yard, the three doors of which had been burst open, a man, around whom the assassins formed a respectful circle, stood leaning on his drawn rapier, and eagerly looking up at a balcony about fifteen feet above him, and extending in front of the principal window of the hôtel.

This man stamped impatiently on the ground, and from time to time questioned those that were nearest to him.

"Nothing yet!" murmured he. "No one! – he must have been warned and has escaped. What do you think, Du Gast?"

"Impossible, monseigneur."

"Why? Did you not tell me that just before we arrived a man, bare-headed, a drawn sword in his hand, came running, as if pursued, knocked at the door, and was admitted?"

"Yes, monseigneur; but M. de Besme came up immediately, the gates were shattered, and the hôtel was surrounded."

"The man went in sure enough, but he has not gone out."

"Why," said Coconnas to La Hurière, "if my eyes do not deceive me, I see Monsieur de Guise."

"You do see him, sir. Yes; the great Henry de Guise is come in person to watch for the admiral and serve him as he served the duke's father. Every one has his day, and it is our turn now."

"Holà, Besme, holà!" cried the duke, in his powerful voice, "have you not finished yet?"

And he struck his sword so forcibly against the stones that sparks flew out.

At this instant shouts were heard in the hôtel – then several shots – then a great shuffling of feet and a clashing of swords, and then all was again silent.

The duke was about to rush into the house.

"Monseigneur, monseigneur!" said Du Gast, detaining him, "your dignity commands you to wait here."

"You are right, Du Gast. I must stay here; but I am dying with impatience and anxiety. If he were to escape me!"

Suddenly the noise of feet came nearer – the windows of the first floor were lighted up with what seemed the reflection of a conflagration.

The window, to which the duke's eyes had been so many times lifted, opened, or, rather, was shattered to pieces, and a man, his pale face and white neck stained with blood, appeared on the balcony.

"Ah! at last, Besme!" cried the duke; "speak! speak!"

"Louk! louk!" replied the German coldly, and stooping down he lifted up something which seemed like a heavy body.

"But where are the others?" asked the duke, impatiently, "where are the others?"

"De udders are vinishing de udders!"

"And what have you done?"

"Vait! You shall peholt! Shtant pack a liddle."

The duke fell back a step.

At that instant the object Besme was dragging toward him with such effort became visible.

It was the body of an old man.

He lifted it above the balcony, held it suspended an instant, and then flung it down at his master's feet.

The heavy thud, the billows of blood spurting from the body and spattering the pavement all around, filled even the duke himself with horror; but this feeling lasted only an instant, and curiosity caused every one to crowd forward, so that the glare of the torches flickered on the victim's body.

They could see a white beard, a venerable face, and limbs contracted by death.

"The admiral!" cried twenty voices, as instantaneously hushed.

"Yes, the admiral, here he is!" said the duke, approaching the corpse, and contemplating it with silent ecstasy.

"The admiral! the admiral!" repeated the witnesses of this terrible scene, crowding together and timidly approaching the old man, majestic even in death.

"Ah, at last, Gaspard!" said the Duke de Guise, triumphantly. "Murderer of my father! thus do I avenge him!"

And the duke dared to plant his foot on the breast of the Protestant hero.

But instantly the dying warrior opened his eyes, his bleeding and mutilated hand was clinched for the last time, and the admiral, though without stirring, said to the duke in a sepulchral voice:

"Henry de Guise, some day the assassin's foot shall be felt on your breast. I did not kill your father. A curse upon you."

The duke, pale, and trembling in spite of himself, felt a cold shudder come over him. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to dispel the fearful vision; when he dared again to glance at the admiral his eyes were closed, his hand unclined, and a stream of black blood was flowing from the mouth which had just pronounced such terrible words.

The duke raised his sword with a gesture of desperate resolution.

"Vell, monsir, are you gondent?"

"Yes, my worthy friend, yes, for you have revenged" —

"The Dugue François, haf I not?"

"Our religion," replied Henry, in a solemn voice. "And now," he went on, addressing the Swiss, the soldiers, and citizens who filled the court and street, "to work, my friends, to work!"

"Good evening, M. de Besme," said Coconnas with a sort of admiration, approaching the German, who still stood on the balcony, calmly wiping his sword.

"So you settled him, did you?" cried La Hurière; "how did you manage it?"

"Oh, zimbly, zimbly; he haf heerd de gommotion, he haf oben de door unt I joost brick my rabier troo his potty. But I tink dey am gilling Téligny now. I hear his gries!"

At that instant, in fact, several shrieks, apparently uttered by a woman in distress, were heard; the windows of the long gallery which formed a wing of the hotel were lighted up with a red glare; two men were seen fleeing, pursued by a long line of assassins. An arquebuse-shot killed one; the other, finding an open window directly in his way, without stopping to look at the distance from the ground, sprang boldly into the courtyard below, heeding not the enemies who awaited him there.

"Kill! kill!" cried the assassins, seeing their prey about to escape them.

The fugitive picked up his sword, which as he stumbled had fallen from his hand, dashed headlong through the soldiers, upset three or four, ran one through the body, and amid the pistol-shots and curses of the soldiers, rendered furious because they had missed him, darted like lightning in front of Coconnas, who was waiting for him at the gate with his poniard in his hand.

"Touched!" cried the Piedmontese, piercing his arm with his keen, delicate blade.

"Coward!" replied the fugitive, striking his enemy in the face with the flat of his weapon, for want of room to thrust at him with its point.

"A thousand devils!" cried Coconnas; "it's Monsieur de la Mole!"

"Monsieur de la Mole!" reëchoed La Hurière and Maurevel.

"He is the one who warned the admiral!" cried several soldiers.

"Kill him – kill him!" was shouted on all sides.

Coconnas, La Hurière, and a dozen soldiers rushed in pursuit of La Mole, who, covered with blood, and having attained that state of exaltation which is the last resource of human strength, dashed through the streets, with no other guide than instinct. Behind him, the footsteps and shouts of his enemies spurred him on and seemed to give him wings. Occasionally a bullet would whistle by his ears and suddenly add new swiftness to his flight just as it was beginning to slacken. He no longer breathed; it was not breath, but a dull rattle, a hoarse panting, that came from his chest. Perspiration and blood wet his locks and ran together down his face.

His doublet soon became too oppressive for the beating of his heart and he tore it off. Soon his sword became too heavy for his hand and he flung it far away. Sometimes it seemed to him that the footsteps of his pursuers were farther off and that he was about to escape them; but in response to their shouts, other murderers who were along his path and nearer to him left off their bloody occupations and started in pursuit of him.

Suddenly he caught sight of the river flowing silently at his left; it seemed to him that he should feel, like a stag at bay, an ineffable pleasure in plunging into it, and only the supreme power of reason could restrain him.

On his right was the Louvre, dark and motionless, but full of strange and ominous sounds; soldiers on the drawbridge came and went, and helmets and cuirasses glittered in the moonlight. La Mole thought of the King of Navarre, as he had before thought of Coligny; they were his only protectors. He collected all his strength, and inwardly vowing to abjure his faith should he escape the massacre, by making a detour of a score or two of yards he misled the mob pursuing him, darted straight for the Louvre, leaped upon the drawbridge among the soldiers, received another poniard stab which grazed his side, and despite the cries of "Kill – kill!" which resounded on all sides, and the opposing weapons of the sentinels, darted like an arrow through the court, into the vestibule, mounted the staircase, then up two stories higher, recognized a door, and leaning against it, struck it violently with his hands and feet.

"Who is there?" asked a woman's voice.

"Oh, my God!" murmured La Mole; "they are coming, I hear them; 'tis I – 'tis I!"

"Who are you?" said the voice.

La Mole recollected the pass-word.

"Navarre – Navarre!" cried he.

The door instantly opened. La Mole, without thanking, without even seeing Gillonne, dashed into the vestibule, then along a corridor, through two or three chambers, until at last he entered a room lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling.

Behind curtains of velvet with gold fleurs-de-lis, in a bed of carved oak, a lady, half naked, leaning on her arm, stared at him with eyes wide open with terror.

La Mole sprang toward her.

"Madame," cried he, "they are killing, they are butchering my brothers – they seek to kill me, to butcher me also! Ah! you are the queen – save me!"

And he threw himself at her feet, leaving on the carpet a large track of blood.

At the sight of a man pale, exhausted, and bleeding at her feet, the Queen of Navarre started up in terror, hid her face in her hands, and called for help.

"Madame," cried La Mole, endeavoring to rise, "in the name of Heaven do not call, for if you are heard I am lost! Assassins are in my track – they are rushing up the stairs behind me. I hear them – there they are! there they are!"

"Help!" cried the queen, beside herself, "help!"

"Ah!" said La Mole, despairingly, "you have killed me. To die by so sweet a voice, so fair a hand! I did not think it possible."

At the same time the door flew open, and a troop of men, their faces covered with blood and blackened with powder, their swords drawn, and their pikes and arquebuses levelled, rushed into the apartment.

Coconnas was at their head – his red hair bristling, his pale blue eyes extraordinarily dilated, his cheek cut open by La Mole's sword, which had ploughed its bloody furrow there. Thus disfigured, the Piedmontese was terrible to behold.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "there he is! there he is! Ah! this time we have him at last!"

La Mole looked round him for a weapon, but in vain; he glanced at the queen, and saw the deepest pity depicted in her face; then he felt that she alone could save him; he threw his arms round her.

Coconnas advanced, and with the point of his long rapier again wounded his enemy's shoulder, and the crimson drops of warm blood stained the white and perfumed sheets of Marguerite's couch.

Marguerite saw the blood flow; she felt the shudder that ran through La Mole's frame; she threw herself with him into the recess between the bed and the wall. It was time, for La Mole, whose strength was exhausted, was incapable of flight or resistance; he leaned his pallid head on Marguerite's shoulder, and his hand convulsively seized and tore the thin embroidered cambric which enveloped Marguerite's body in a billow of gauze.

"Oh, madame," murmured he, in a dying voice, "save me."

He could say no more. A mist like the darkness of death came over his eyes, his head sunk back, his arms fell at his side, his legs gave way, and he sank on the floor, bathed in his blood, and dragging the queen with him.

At this moment Coconnas, excited by the shouts, intoxicated by the sight of blood, and exasperated by the long chase, advanced toward the recess; in another instant his sword would have pierced La Mole's heart, and perhaps Marguerite's also.

At the sight of the bare steel, and even more moved at such brutal insolence, the daughter of kings drew herself up to her full stature and uttered such a shriek of terror, indignation, and rage that the Piedmontese stood petrified by an unknown feeling; and yet undoubtedly had this scene been prolonged and no other actor taken part in it, his feeling would have vanished like a morning snow under an April sun. But suddenly a secret door in the wall opened, and a pale young man of sixteen or seventeen, dressed in black and with his hair in disorder, rushed in.

"Wait, sister!" he cried; "here I am, here I am!"

"François! François!" cried Marguerite; "help! help!"

"The Duc d'Alençon!" murmured La Hurière, grounding his arquebuse.

"By Heaven! a son of France!" growled Coconnas, drawing back.

The duke glanced round him. He saw Marguerite, dishevelled, more lovely than ever, leaning against the wall, surrounded by men, fury in their eyes, sweat on their foreheads, and foam in their mouths.

"Wretches!" cried he.

"Save me, brother!" shrieked Marguerite. "They are going to kill me!"

A flame flashed across the duke's pallid face.

He was unarmed, but sustained, no doubt, by the consciousness of his rank, he advanced with clinched fists toward Coconnas and his companions, who retreated, terrified at the lightning darting from his eyes.

"Ha! and will you murder a son of France, too?" cried the duke. Then, as they recoiled, – "Ho, there! captain of the guard! Hang every one of these ruffians!"

More alarmed at the sight of this weaponless young man than he would have been at the aspect of a regiment of reiters or lansquenets, Coconnas had already reached the door. La Hurière was leaping downstairs like a deer, and the soldiers were jostling and pushing one another in the vestibule in their endeavors to escape, finding the door far too small for their great desire to be outside it. Meantime Marguerite had instinctively thrown the damask coverlid of her bed over La Mole, and withdrawn from him.

When the last murderer had departed the Duc d'Alençon came back:

"Sister," he cried, seeing Marguerite all dabbled with blood, "are you wounded?" And he sprang toward his sister with a solicitude which would have done credit to his affection if he had not been charged with harboring too deep an affection for a brother to entertain for a sister.

"No," said she; "I think not, or, if so, very slightly."

"But this blood," said the duke, running his trembling hands all over Marguerite's body. "Where does it come from?"

"I know not," replied she; "one of those wretches laid his hand on me, and perhaps he was wounded."

"What!" cried the duke, "he dared to touch my sister? Oh, if you had only pointed him out to me, if you had told me which one it was, if I knew where to find him" —

"Hush!" said Marguerite.

"And why?" asked François.

"Because if you were seen at this time of night in my room" —

"Can't a brother visit his sister, Marguerite?"

The queen gave the duke a look so keen and yet so threatening that the young man drew back.

"Yes, yes, Marguerite," said he, "you are right, I will go to my room; but you cannot remain alone this dreadful night. Shall I call Gillonne?"

"No, no! leave me, François – leave me. Go by the way you came!"

The young prince obeyed; and hardly had he disappeared when Marguerite, hearing a sigh from behind her bed, hurriedly bolted the door of the secret passage, and then hastening to the other entrance closed it in the same way, just as a troop of archers and soldiers like a hurricane dashed by in hot chase of some other Huguenot residents in the Louvre.

After glancing round to assure herself that she was really alone, she again went to the "ruelle" of her bed, lifted the damask covering which had concealed La Mole from the Duc d'Alençon, and drawing the apparently lifeless body, by great exertion, into the middle of the room, and finding that the victim still breathed, sat down, placed his head on her knees, and sprinkled his face with water.

Then as the water cleared away the mask of blood, dust, and gunpowder which had covered his face, Marguerite recognized the handsome cavalier who, full of life and hope, had three or four

hours before come to ask her to look out for his interests with her protection and that of the King of Navarre; and had gone away, dazzled by her beauty, leaving her also impressed by his.

Marguerite uttered a cry of terror, for now what she felt for the wounded man was more than mere pity – it was interest. He was no longer a mere stranger: he was almost an acquaintance. By her care La Mole's fine features soon reappeared, free from stain, but pale and distorted by pain. A shudder ran through her whole frame as she tremblingly placed her hand on his heart. It was still beating. Then she took a smelling-bottle from the table, and applied it to his nostrils.

La Mole opened his eyes.

"Oh! *mon Dieu!*" murmured he; "where am I?"

"Saved!" said Marguerite. "Reassure yourself – you are saved."

La Mole turned his eyes on the queen, gazed earnestly for a moment, and murmured,

"Oh, how beautiful you are!"

Then as if the vision were too much for him, he closed his lids and drew a sigh.

Marguerite started. He had become still paler than before, if that were possible, and for an instant that sigh was his last.

"Oh, my God! my God!" she ejaculated, "have pity on him!"

At this moment a violent knocking was heard at the door. Marguerite half raised herself, still supporting La Mole.

"Who is there?" she cried.

"Madame, it is I – it is I," replied a woman's voice, "the Duchesse de Nevers."

"Henriette!" cried Marguerite. "There is no danger; it is a friend of mine! Do you hear, sir?"

La Mole with some effort got up on one knee.

"Try to support yourself while I go and open the door," said the queen.

La Mole rested his hand on the floor and succeeded in holding himself upright.

Marguerite took one step toward the door, but suddenly stopped, shivering with terror.

"Ah, you are not alone!" she said, hearing the clash of arms outside.

"No, I have twelve guards which my brother-in-law, Monsieur de Guise, assigned me."

"Monsieur de Guise!" murmured La Mole. "The assassin – the assassin!"

"Silence!" said Marguerite. "Not a word!"

And she looked round to see where she could conceal the wounded man.

"A sword! a dagger!" muttered La Mole.

"To defend yourself – useless! Did you not hear? There are twelve of them, and you are alone."

"Not to defend myself, but that I may not fall alive into their hands."

"No, no!" said Marguerite. "No, I will save you. Ah! this cabinet! Come! come."

La Mole made an effort, and, supported by Marguerite, dragged himself to the cabinet. Marguerite locked the door upon him, and hid the key in her alms-purse.

"Not a cry, not a groan, not a sigh," whispered she, through the panelling, "and you are saved."

Then hastily throwing a night-robe over her shoulders, she opened the door for her friend, who tenderly embraced her.

"Ah!" cried Madame Nevers, "then nothing has happened to you, madame!"

"No, nothing at all," replied Marguerite, wrapping the mantle still more closely round her to conceal the spots of blood on her peignoir.

"'Tis well. However, as Monsieur de Guise has given me twelve of his guards to escort me to his hôtel, and as I do not need such a large company, I am going to leave six with your majesty. Six of the duke's guards are worth a regiment of the King's to-night."

Marguerite dared not refuse; she placed the soldiers in the corridor, and embraced the duchess, who then returned to the Hôtel de Guise, where she resided in her husband's absence.

CHAPTER IX

THE MURDERERS

Coconnas had not fled, he had retreated; La Hurière had not fled, he had flown. The one had disappeared like a tiger, the other like a wolf.

The consequence was that La Hurière had already reached the Place Saint Germain l'Auxerrois when Coconnas was only just leaving the Louvre.

La Hurière, finding himself alone with his arquebuse, while around him men were running, bullets were whistling, and bodies were falling from windows, – some whole, others dismembered, – began to be afraid and was prudently thinking of returning to his tavern, but as he turned into the Rue de l'Arbre Sec from the Rue d'Averon he fell in with a troop of Swiss and light cavalry: it was the one commanded by Maurevel.

"Well," cried Maurevel, who had christened himself with the nickname of King's Killer, "have you finished so soon? Are you going back to your tavern, worthy landlord? And what the devil have you done with our Piedmontese gentleman? No misfortune has happened to him? That would be a shame, for he started out well."

"No, I think not," replied La Hurière; "I hope he will rejoin us!"

"Where have you been?"

"At the Louvre, and I must say we were very rudely treated there."

"By whom?"

"Monsieur le Duc d'Alençon. Isn't he interested in this affair?"

"Monseigneur le Duc d'Alençon is not interested in anything which does not concern himself personally. Propose to treat his two older brothers as Huguenots and he would be in it – provided only that the work should be done without compromising him. But won't you go with these worthy fellows, Maître La Hurière?"

"And where are they going?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* Rue Montorguen; there is a Huguenot minister there whom I know; he has a wife and six children. These heretics are enormous breeders; it will be interesting."

"And where are you going?"

"Oh, I have a little private business."

"Say, there! don't go off without me," said a voice which made Maurevel start, "you know all the good places and I want to have my share."

"Ah! it is our Piedmontese," said Maurevel.

"Yes, it is Monsieur de Coconnas," said La Hurière; "I thought you were following me."

"Hang it! you made off too swiftly for that; and besides I turned a little to one side so as to fling into the river a frightful child who was screaming, 'Down with the Papists! Long live the admiral!' Unfortunately, I believe the little rascal knew how to swim. These miserable heretics must be flung into the water like cats before their eyes are opened if they are to be drowned at all."

"Ah! you say you are just from the Louvre; so your Huguenot took refuge there, did he?" asked Maurevel.

"*Mon Dieu!* yes."

"I gave him a pistol-shot at the moment when he was picking up his sword in the admiral's court-yard, but I somehow or other missed him."

"Well, I did not miss him," added Coconnas; "I gave him such a thrust in the back that my sword was wet five inches up the blade. Besides, I saw him fall into the arms of Madame Marguerite, a pretty woman, by Heaven! yet I confess I should not be sorry to hear he was really dead; the vagabond

is infernally spiteful, and capable of bearing me a grudge all his life. But didn't you say you were bound somewhere?"

"Why, do you mean to go with me?"

"I do not like standing still, by Heaven! I have killed only three or four as yet, and when I get cold my shoulder pains me. Forward! forward!"

"Captain," said Maurevel to the commander of the troop, "give me three men, and go and despatch your parson with the rest."

Three Swiss stepped forward and joined Maurevel. Nevertheless, the two companies proceeded side by side till they reached the top of the Rue Tirechappe; there the light horse and the Swiss took the Rue de la Tonnellerie, while Maurevel, Coconnas, La Hurière, and his three men were proceeding down the Rue Trousse Vache and entering the Rue Sainte Avoye. "Where the devil are you taking us?" asked Coconnas, who was beginning to be bored by this long march from which he could see no results.

"I am taking you on an expedition at once brilliant and useful. Next to the admiral, next to Téliigny, next to the Huguenot princes, I could offer you nothing better. So have patience, our business calls us to the Rue du Chaume, and we shall be there in a second."

"Tell me," said Coconnas, "is not the Rue du Chaume near the Temple?"

"Yes, why?"

"Because an old creditor of our family lives there, one Lambert Mercandon, to whom my father wished me to hand over a hundred rose nobles I have in my pocket for that purpose."

"Well," replied Maurevel, "this is a good opportunity for paying it. This is the day for settling old accounts. Is your Mercandon a Huguenot?"

"Oho, I understand!" said Coconnas; "he must be" —

"Hush! here we are."

"What is that large hôtel, with its entrance in the street?"

"The Hôtel de Guise."

"Truly," returned Coconnas, "I should not have failed to come here, as I am under the patronage of the great Henry. But, by Heaven! all is so very quiet in this quarter, we scarcely hear any firing, and we might fancy ourselves in the country. The devil fetch me but every one is asleep!"

And indeed the Hôtel de Guise seemed as quiet as in ordinary times. All the windows were closed, and a solitary light was burning behind the blind of the principal window over the entrance which had attracted Coconnas's attention as soon as they entered the street.

Just beyond the Hôtel de Guise, in other words, at the corner of the Rue du Petit Chantier and the Rue des Quatre Fils, Maurevel halted.

"Here is the house of the man we want," said he.

"Of the man you want — that is to say" — observed La Hurière.

"Since you are with me we want him."

"What! that house which seems so sound asleep" —

"Exactly! La Hurière, now go and make practical use of the plausible face which heaven, by some blunder, gave you, and knock at that house. Hand your arquebuse to M. de Coconnas, who has been ogling it this last half hour. If you are admitted, you must ask to speak to Seigneur de Mouy."

"Aha!" exclaimed Coconnas, "now I understand — you also have a creditor in the quarter of the Temple, it would seem."

"Exactly so!" responded Maurevel. "You will go up to him pretending to be a Huguenot, and inform De Mouy of all that has taken place; he is brave, and will come down."

"And once down?" asked La Hurière.

"Once down, I will beg of him to cross swords with me."

"On my soul, 'tis a fine gentleman's," said Coconnas, "and I propose to do exactly the same thing with Lambert Mercandon; and if he is too old to respond, I will try it with one of his sons or nephews."

La Hurière, without making any reply, went and knocked at the door, and the sounds echoing in the silence of the night caused the doors of the Hôtel de Guise to open, and several heads to make their appearance from out them; it was evident that the hôtel was quiet after the manner of citadels, that is to say, because it was filled with soldiers.

The heads were almost instantly withdrawn, as doubtless an inkling of the matter in hand was divined.

"Does your Monsieur de Mouy live here?" inquired Coconnas, pointing to the house at which La Hurière was still knocking.

"No, but his mistress does."

"By Heaven! how gallant you are, to give him an occasion to draw sword in the presence of his lady-love! We shall be the judges of the field. However, I should like very well to fight myself – my shoulder burns."

"And your face," added Maurevel, "is considerably damaged."

Coconnas uttered a kind of growl.

"By Heaven!" he said, "I hope he is dead; if I thought not, I would return to the Louvre and finish him."

La Hurière still kept knocking.

Soon the window on the first floor opened, and a man appeared in the balcony, in a nightcap and drawers, and unarmed.

"Who's there?" cried he.

Maurevel made a sign to the Swiss, who retreated into a corner, whilst Coconnas stood close against the wall.

"Ah! Monsieur de Mouy!" said the innkeeper, in his blandest tones, "is that you?"

"Yes; what then?"

"It is he!" said Maurevel, with a thrill of joy.

"Why, sir," continued La Hurière, "do you not know what is going on? They are murdering the admiral, and massacring all of our religion. Hasten to their assistance; come!"

"Ah!" exclaimed De Mouy, "I feared something was plotted for this night. I ought not to have deserted my worthy comrades. I will come, my friend, – wait for me."

And without closing the window, through which a frightened woman could be heard uttering lamentations and tender entreaties, Monsieur de Mouy got his doublet, his mantle, and his weapons.

"He is coming down! He is coming down!" muttered Maurevel, pale with joy. "Attention, the rest of you!" he whispered to the Swiss.

Then taking the arquebuse from Coconnas he blew on the tinder to make sure that it was still alight.

"Here, La Hurière," he added, addressing the innkeeper, who had rejoined the main body of the company, "here, take your arquebuse!"

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Coconnas, "the moon is coming out of the clouds to witness this beautiful fight. I would give a great deal if Lambert Mercandon were here, to serve as Monsieur de Mouy's second."

"Wait, wait!" said Maurevel; "Monsieur de Mouy alone is equal to a dozen men, and it is likely that we six shall have enough to do to despatch him. Forward, my men!" continued Maurevel, making a sign to the Swiss to stand by the door, in order to strike De Mouy as he came forth.

"Oho!" said Coconnas, as he watched these arrangements; "it appears that this will not come off quite as I expected."

Already the noise made by De Mouy in withdrawing the bar was heard. The Swiss had left their hiding-place to arrange themselves near the door, Maurevel and La Hurière were going forward on tiptoe, and Coconnas with a dying gleam of gentlemanly feeling was standing where he was, when the young woman who had been for the moment utterly forgotten suddenly appeared on the balcony and uttered a terrible shriek at the sight of the Swiss, Maurevel, and La Hurière.

De Mouy, who had already half opened the door, paused.

"Come back! come back!" cried the young woman. "I see swords glitter, and the match of an arquebuse – there is treachery!"

"Oho!" said the young man; "let us see, then, what all this means."

And he closed the door, replaced the bar, and went upstairs again.

Maurevel's order of battle was changed as soon as he saw that De Mouy was not going to come out. The Swiss went and posted themselves at the other corner of the street, and La Hurière, with his arquebuse in his hand, waited till the enemy reappeared at the window.

He did not wait long. De Mouy came forward holding before him two pistols of such respectable length that La Hurière, who was already aiming, suddenly reflected that the Huguenot's bullets had no farther to fly in reaching the street from the balcony than his had in reaching the balcony.

"Assuredly," said he to himself, "I may kill this gentleman, but likewise this gentleman may kill me in the same way."

Now as Maître La Hurière, an innkeeper by profession, was only accidentally a soldier, this reflection determined him to retreat and seek shelter in the corner of the Rue de Braque, far enough away to cause him some difficulty in finding with a certain certainty, especially at night, the line which a bullet from his arquebuse would take in reaching De Mouy.

De Mouy cast a glance around him, and advanced cautiously like a man preparing to fight a duel; but seeing nothing, he exclaimed:

"Why, it appears, my worthy informant, that you have forgotten your arquebuse at my door! Here I am. What do you want with me?"

"Aha!" said Coconnas to himself; "he is certainly a brave fellow!"

"Well," continued De Mouy, "friends or enemies, whichever you are, do you not see I am waiting?"

La Hurière kept silence, Maurevel made no reply, and the three Swiss remained in covert.

Coconnas waited an instant; then, seeing that no one took part in the conversation begun by La Hurière and continued by De Mouy, he left his station, and advancing into the middle of the street, took off his hat and said:

"Sir, we are not here for an assassination, as you seem to suppose, but for a duel. I am here with one of your enemies, who was desirous of meeting you to end gallantly an old controversy. Eh, by Heaven! come forward, Monsieur de Maurevel, instead of turning your back. The gentleman accepts."

"Maurevel!" cried De Mouy; "Maurevel, the assassin of my father! Maurevel, the king's assassin! Ah, by Heaven! Yes, I accept."

And taking aim at Maurevel, who was about to knock at the Hôtel de Guise to request a reinforcement, he sent a bullet through his hat.

At the noise of the report and Maurevel's shouts, the guard which had escorted the Duchesse de Nevers came out, accompanied by three or four gentlemen, followed by their pages, and approached the house of young De Mouy's mistress.

A second pistol-shot, fired into the midst of the troop, killed the soldier next to Maurevel; after which De Mouy, finding himself weaponless, or at least with useless weapons, for his pistols had been fired and his adversaries were beyond the reach of his sword, took shelter behind the balcony gallery.

Meantime here and there windows began to be thrown open in the neighborhood, and according to the pacific or bellicose dispositions of their inhabitants, were barricaded or bristled with muskets and arquebuses.

"Help! my worthy Mercandon," shouted De Mouy, beckoning to an elderly man who, from a window which had just been thrown open in front of the Hôtel de Guise, was trying to make out the cause of the confusion.

"Is it you who call, Sire de Mouy?" cried the old man: "are they attacking you?"

"Me – you – all the Protestants; and wait – there is the proof!"

That moment De Mouy had seen La Hurière aim his arquebuse at him; it was fired; but the young man had time to stoop, and the ball broke a window above his head.

"Mercandon!" exclaimed Coconnas, who, in his delight at sight of this fray, had forgotten his creditor, but was reminded of him by De Mouy's apostrophe; "Mercandon, Rue du Chaume – that is it! Ah, he lives there! Good! Each of us will settle accounts with our man."

And, while the people from the Hôtel de Guise were breaking in the doors of De Mouy's house, and Maurevel, with a torch in his hand, was trying to set it on fire – while now that the doors were once broken, there was a fearful struggle with a single antagonist who at each rapier-thrust brought down his foe – Coconnas tried, by the help of a paving-stone, to break in Mercandon's door, and the latter, unmoved by this solitary effort, was doing his best with his arquebuse out of his window.

And now all this dark and deserted quarter was lighted up, as if by open day, – peopled like the interior of an ant-hive; for from the Hôtel de Montmorency six or eight Huguenot gentlemen, with their servants and friends, had just made a furious charge, and, supported by the firing from the windows, were beginning to repulse Maurevel's and the De Guises' force, who at length were driven back to the place whence they had come.

Coconnas, who had not yet succeeded in smashing Mercandon's door, though he was working at it with all his might, was caught in this sudden retreat. Placing his back to the wall, and grasping his sword firmly, he began not only to defend himself, but to attack his assailants, with cries so terrible that they were heard above all the uproar. He struck right and left, hitting friends and enemies, until a wide space was cleared around him. As his rapier made a hole in some breast, and the warm blood spurted over his hands and face, he, with dilated eye, expanded nostrils, and clinched teeth, regained the ground lost, and again approached the beleaguered house.

De Mouy, after a terrible combat in the staircase and hall, had finally come out of the burning house like a true hero. In the midst of all the struggle he had not ceased to cry, "Here, Maurevel! – Maurevel, where are you?" insulting him by the most opprobrious epithets.

He at length appeared in the street, supporting on one arm his mistress, half naked and nearly fainting, and holding a poniard between his teeth. His sword, flaming by the sweeping action he gave it, traced circles of white or red, according as the moon glittered on the blade or a flambeau glared on its blood-stained brightness.

Maurevel had fled. La Hurière, driven back by De Mouy as far as Coconnas, who did not recognize him, and received him at sword's point, was begging for mercy on both sides. At this moment Mercandon perceived him, and knew him, by his white scarf, to be one of the murderers. He fired. La Hurière shrieked, threw up his arms, dropped his arquebuse, and, after having vainly attempted to reach the wall, in order to support himself, fell with his face flat on the earth.

De Mouy took advantage of this circumstance, turned down the Rue de Paradis, and disappeared.

Such had been the resistance of the Huguenots that the De Guise party, quite repulsed, had retired into their hôtel, fearing to be besieged and taken in their own habitation.

Coconnas who, intoxicated with blood and tumult, had reached that degree of excitement when, with the men of the south more especially, courage changes into madness, had not seen or heard anything, and noticed only that there was not such a roar in his ears, and that his hands and face were a little dryer than they had been. Dropping the point of his sword, he saw near him a man lying face downward in a red stream, and around him burning houses.

It was a very short truce, for just as he was approaching this man, whom he recognized as La Hurière, the door of the house he had in vain tried to burst in, opened, and old Mercandon, followed by his son and two nephews, rushed upon him.

"Here he is! here he is!" cried they all, with one voice.

Coconnas was in the middle of the street, and fearing to be surrounded by these four men who assailed him at once, sprang backward with the agility of one of the chamois which he had so often hunted in his native mountains, and in an instant found himself with his back against the wall of the Hôtel de Guise. Once at ease as to not being surprised from behind he put himself in a posture of defence, and said, jestingly:

"Aha, father Mercandon, don't you know me?"

"Wretch!" cried the old Huguenot, "I know you well; you are engaged against me – me, your father's friend and companion."

"And his creditor, are you not?"

"Yes; his creditor, as you say."

"Well, then," said Coconnas, "I have come to settle our accounts."

"Seize him, bind him!" said Mercandon to the young men who accompanied him, and who at his bidding rushed toward the Piedmontese.

"One moment! one moment!" said Coconnas, laughing, "to seize a man you must have a writ, and you have forgotten to secure one from the provost."

And with these words he crossed his sword with the young man nearest to him and at the first blow cut his wrist.

The wounded man retreated with a howl.

"That will do for one!" said Coconnas.

At the same moment the window under which Coconnas had sought shelter opened noisily. He sprang to one side, fearing an attack from behind; but instead of an enemy he saw a woman; instead of the enemy's weapon he was prepared to encounter, a nosegay fell at his feet.

"Ah!" he said, "a woman!"

He saluted the lady with his sword, and stooped to pick up the bouquet.

"Be on your guard, brave Catholic! – be on your guard!" cried the lady.

Coconnas rose, but not before the second nephew's dagger had pierced his cloak, and wounded his other shoulder.

The lady uttered a piercing shriek.

Coconnas thanked her, assured her by a gesture, and then made a pass, which the nephew parried; but at the second thrust, his foot slipped in the blood, and Coconnas, springing at him like a tiger-cat, drove his sword through his breast.

"Good! good! brave cavalier!" exclaimed the lady of the Hôtel de Guise, "good! I will send you succor."

"Do not give yourself any trouble about that, madame," was Coconnas's reply; "rather look on to the end, if it interests you, and see how the Comte Annibal de Coconnas settles the Huguenots."

At this moment old Mercandon's son aimed a pistol at close range to Coconnas, and fired. The count fell on his knee. The lady at the window shrieked again; but Coconnas rose instantly; he had knelt only to avoid the bullet, which struck the wall about two feet beneath where the lady was standing.

Almost at the same moment a cry of rage issued from the window of Mercandon's house, and an old woman, who recognized Coconnas as a Catholic, from his white scarf and cross, hurled a flower-pot at him, which struck him above the knee.

"Capital!" said Coconnas; "one throws flowers at me and at the other, flower-pots; if this goes on, they'll be tearing houses down!"

"Thanks, mother, thanks!" said the young man.

"Go on, wife, go on," said old Mercandon; "but take care of yourself."

"Wait, Monsieur de Coconnas, wait!" said the young woman of the Hôtel de Guise, "I will have them shoot at the windows!"

"Ah! So it is a hell of women, is it?" said Coconnas. "Some of them for me and the others against me! By Heaven! let us put an end to this!"

The scene in fact was much changed and was evidently approaching its climax. Coconnas, who was wounded to be sure, but who had all the vigor of his four and twenty years, was used to arms, and angered rather than weakened by the three or four scratches he had received, now faced only Mercandon and his son: Mercandon, an aged man between sixty and seventy; his son, a youth of sixteen or eighteen, pale, fair-haired and slender, had flung down his pistol which had been discharged and was therefore useless, and was feebly brandishing a sword half as long as the Piedmontese's. The father, armed only with an unloaded arquebuse and a poniard, was calling for assistance. An old woman – the young man's mother – in the opposite window held in her hand a piece of marble which she was preparing to hurl.

Coconnas, excited on the one hand by threats, and on the other by encouragements, proud of his two-fold victory, intoxicated with powder and blood, lighted by the reflection of a burning house, elated by the idea that he was fighting under the eyes of a woman whose beauty was as superior as he was sure her rank was high, – Coconnas, like the last of the Horatii, felt his strength redouble, and seeing the young man falter, rushed on him and crossed his small weapon with his terrible and bloody rapier. Two strokes sufficed to drive it out of its owner's hands. Then Mercandon tried to drive Coconnas back, so that the projectiles thrown from the window might be sure to strike him, but Coconnas, to paralyze the double attack of the old man, who tried to stab him with his dagger, and the mother of the young man, who was endeavoring to break his skull with a stone she was ready to throw, seized his adversary by the body, presenting him to all the blows, like a shield, and well-nigh strangling him in his Herculean grasp.

"Help! help!" cried the young man; "he is crushing my chest – help! help!"

And his voice grew faint in a low and choking groan.

Then Mercandon ceased to attack, and began to entreat.

"Mercy, mercy! Monsieur de Coconnas, have mercy! – he is my only child!"

"He is my son, my son!" cried the mother; "the hope of our old age! Do not kill him, sir, – do not kill him!"

"Really," cried Coconnas, bursting into laughter, "not kill him! What, pray, did he mean to do to me, with his sword and pistol?"

"Sir," said Mercandon, clasping his hands, "I have at home your father's note of hand, I will give it back to you – I have ten thousand crowns of gold, I will give them to you – I have our family jewels, they shall be yours; but do not kill him – do not kill him!"

"And I have my love," said the lady in the Hôtel de Guise, in a low tone, "and I promise it you."

Coconnas reflected a moment, and said suddenly:

"Are you a Huguenot?"

"Yes, I am," murmured the youth.

"Then you must die!" replied Coconnas, frowning and putting to his adversary's breast his keen and glittering dagger.

"Die!" cried the old man; "my poor child die!"

And the mother's shriek resounded so pitifully and loud that for a moment it shook the Piedmontese's firm resolution.

"Oh, Madame la Duchesse!" cried the father, turning toward the lady at the Hôtel de Guise, "intercede for us, and every morning and evening you shall be remembered in our prayers."

"Then let him be a convert," said the lady.

"I am a Protestant," said the boy.

"Then die!" exclaimed Coconnas, lifting his dagger; "die! since you will not accept the life which those lovely lips offer to you."

Mercandon and his wife saw the blade of that deadly weapon gleam like lightning above the head of their son.

"My son Olivier," shrieked his mother, "abjure, abjure!"

"Abjure, my dear boy!" cried Mercandon, going on his knees to Coconnas; "do not leave us alone on the earth!"

"Abjure all together," said Coconnas; "for one *Credo*, three souls and one life."

"I am willing," said the youth.

"We are willing!" cried Mercandon and his wife.

"On your knees, then," said Coconnas, "and let your son repeat after me, word for word, the prayer I shall say."

The father obeyed first.

"I am ready," said the son, also kneeling.

Coconnas then began to repeat in Latin the words of the *Credo*. But whether from chance or calculation, young Olivier knelt close to where his sword had fallen. Scarcely did he see this weapon within his reach than, not ceasing to repeat the words which Coconnas dictated, he stretched out his hand to take it up. Coconnas watched the movement, although he pretended not to see it; but at the moment when the young man touched the handle of the sword with his fingers he rushed on him, knocked him over, exclaiming, "Ah, traitor!" and plunged his dagger into his throat.

The youth uttered one cry, raised himself convulsively on his knee, and fell dead.

"Ah, ruffian!" shrieked Mercandon, "you slay us to rob us of the hundred rose nobles you owe us."

"Faith! no," said Coconnas, "and the proof," – and as he said these words he flung at the old man's feet the purse which his father had given him before his departure to pay his creditor, – "and the proof," he went on to say, "is this money which I give you!"

"And here's your death!" cried the old woman from the window.

"Take care, M. de Coconnas, take care!" called out the lady at the Hôtel de Guise.

But before Coconnas could turn his head to comply with this advice, or get out of the way of the threat, a heavy mass came hissing through the air, fell on the Piedmontese's hat, broke his sword, and prostrated him on the pavement; he was overcome, crushed, so that he did not hear the double cry of joy and distress which came from the right and left.

Mercandon instantly rushed, dagger in hand, on Coconnas, now bereft of his senses; but at this moment the door of the Hôtel de Guise opened, and the old man, seeing swords and partisans gleaming, fled, while the lady he had called "Madame la Duchesse," her beauty terrible in the light of the flames, dazzling with diamonds and other gems, leaned half out of the window, in order to direct the newcomers, pointing her arm toward Coconnas.

"There! there! in front of me – a gentleman in a red doublet. There! – that is he – yes, that is he."

CHAPTER X

DEATH, MASS, OR THE BASTILLE

Marguerite, as we have said, had shut the door and returned to her chamber. But as she entered, panting, she saw Gillonne, who, terror-struck, was leaning against the door of the closet, staring at the traces of blood on the bed, the furniture, and the carpet.

"Ah! madame!" she cried when she saw the queen. "Oh! madame! tell me, is he dead?"

"Silence!" said Marguerite in that tone of voice which gives some indication of the importance of the command.

Gillonne was silent.

Marguerite then took from her purse a tiny gilded key, opened the closet door, and showed the young man to the servant. La Mole had succeeded in getting to his feet and making his way to the window. A small poniard, such as women at that time were in the habit of carrying, was at hand, and when he heard the door opening he had seized it.

"Fear nothing, sir," said Marguerite; "for, on my soul, you are in safety!"

La Mole sank on his knees.

"Oh, madame," he cried, "you are more than a queen – you are a goddess!"

"Do not agitate yourself, sir," said Marguerite, "your blood is still flowing. Oh, look, Gillonne, how pale he is – let us see where you are wounded."

"Madame," said La Mole, trying to fix on certain parts of his body the pain which pervaded his whole frame, "I think I have a dagger-thrust in my shoulder, another in my chest, – the other wounds are not worth bothering about."

"We will see," said Marguerite. "Gillonne, bring me my balsam casket."

Gillonne obeyed, and returned holding in one hand a casket, and in the other a silver-gilt ewer and some fine Holland linen.

"Help me to lift him, Gillonne," said Queen Marguerite; "for in attempting to get up the poor gentleman has lost all his strength."

"But, madame," said La Mole, "I am wholly confused. Indeed, I cannot allow" —

"But, sir, you will let us do for you, I think," said Marguerite. "When we may save you, it would be a crime to let you die."

"Oh!" cried La Mole, "I would rather die than see you, the queen, stain your hands with blood as unworthy as mine. Oh, never, never!"

And he drew back respectfully.

"Your blood, sir," replied Gillonne, with a smile, "has already stained her majesty's bed and chamber."

Marguerite folded her mantle over her cambric peignoir, all bespattered with small red spots. This movement, so expressive of feminine modesty, caused La Mole to remember that he had held in his arms and pressed to his heart this beautiful, beloved queen, and at the recollection a fugitive glow of color came into his pallid cheeks.

"Madame," stammered La Mole, "can you not leave me to the care of the surgeon?"

"Of a Catholic surgeon, perhaps," said the queen, with an expression which La Mole understood and which made him shudder. "Do you not know," continued the queen in a voice and with a smile of incomparable sweetness, "that we daughters of France are trained to know the qualities of herbs and to make balsams? for our duty as women and as queens has always been to soften pain. Therefore we are equal to the best surgeons in the world; so our flatterers say! Has not my reputation in this regard come to your ears? Come, Gillonne, let us to work!"

La Mole again endeavored to resist; he repeated that he would rather die than occasion the queen labor which, though begun in pity, might end in disgust; but this exertion completely exhausted his strength, and falling back, he fainted a second time.

Marguerite, then seizing the poniard which he had dropped, quickly cut the lace of his doublet; while Gillonne, with another blade, ripped open the sleeves.

Next Gillonne, with a cloth dipped in fresh water, stanching the blood which escaped from his shoulder and breast, and Marguerite, with a silver needle with a round point, probed the wounds with all the delicacy and skill that Maître Ambroise Paré could have displayed in such a case.

"A dangerous but not mortal wound, *acerrimum humeri vulnus, non autem lethale*," murmured the lovely and learned lady-surgeon; "hand me the salve, Gillonne, and get the lint ready."

Meantime Gillonne, to whom the queen had just given this new order, had already dried and perfumed the young man's chest and arms, which were like an antique model, as well as his shoulders, which fell gracefully back; his neck shaded by thick, curling locks, and which seemed rather to belong to a statue of Parian marble than the mangled frame of a dying man.

"Poor young man!" whispered Gillonne, looking not so much at her work as at the object of it.

"Is he not handsome?" said Marguerite, with royal frankness.

"Yes, madame; but it seems to me that instead of leaving him lying there on the floor, we should lift him on this couch against which he is leaning."

"Yes," said Marguerite, "you are right."

And the two women, bending over, uniting their strength, raised La Mole, and laid him on a kind of great sofa in front of the window, which they opened in order to give them fresh air.

This movement aroused La Mole, who drew a long sigh, and opening his eyes, began to experience that indescribable sensation of well-being which comes to a wounded man when on his return to consciousness he finds coolness instead of burning heat, and the perfumes of balsams instead of the nauseating odor of blood.

He muttered some disconnected words, to which Marguerite replied with a smile, placing her finger on her lips.

At this moment several raps on the door were heard.

"Some one knocks at the secret passage," said Marguerite.

"Who can be coming, madame?" asked Gillonne, in a panic.

"I will go and see who it is," said Marguerite; "remain here, and do not leave him for a single instant."

Marguerite went into the chamber, and closing the closet door, opened that of the passage which led to the King's and queen mother's apartments.

"Madame de Sauve!" she exclaimed, suddenly drawing back with an expression which resembled hatred, if not terror, so true it is that a woman never forgives another for taking from her even a man whom she does not love, – "Madame de Sauve!"

"Yes, your majesty!" she replied, clasping her hands.

"You here, madame?" exclaimed Marguerite, more and more surprised, while at the same time her voice grew more and more imperative.

Charlotte fell on her knees.

"Madame," she said, "pardon me! I know how guilty I am toward you; but if you knew – the fault is not wholly mine; an express command of the queen mother" —

"Rise!" said Marguerite, "and as I do not suppose you have come with the intention of justifying yourself to me, tell me why you have come at all."

"I have come, madame," said Charlotte, still on her knees, and with a look of wild alarm, "I came to ask you if he were not here?"

"Here! who? – of whom are you speaking, madame? for I really do not understand."

"Of the king!"

"Of the king? What, do you follow him to my apartments? You know very well that he never comes here."

"Ah, madame!" continued the Baronne de Sauve, without replying to these attacks, or even seeming to comprehend them, "ah, would to Heaven he were here!"

"And why so?"

"Eh, *mon Dieu!* madame, because they are murdering the Huguenots, and the King of Navarre is the chief of the Huguenots."

"Oh!" cried Marguerite, seizing Madame de Sauve by the hand, and compelling her to rise; "ah! I had forgotten; besides, I did not think a king could run the same dangers as other men."

"More, madame, – a thousand times more!" cried Charlotte.

"In fact, Madame de Lorraine had warned me; I had begged him not to leave the Louvre. Has he done so?"

"No, no, madame, he is in the Louvre; but if he is not here" —

"He is not here!"

"Oh!" cried Madame de Sauve, with an outburst of agony, "then he is a dead man, for the queen mother has sworn his destruction!"

"His destruction! ah," said Marguerite, "you terrify me – impossible!"

"Madame," replied Madame de Sauve, with that energy which passion alone can give, "I tell you that no one knows where the King of Navarre is."

"And where is the queen mother?"

"The queen mother sent me to find Monsieur de Guise and Monsieur de Tavannes, who were in her oratory, and then dismissed me. Then – pardon me, madame – I went to my room and waited as usual."

"For my husband, I suppose."

"He did not come, madame. Then I sought for him everywhere and asked every one for him. One soldier told me he thought he had seen him in the midst of the guards who accompanied him, with his sword drawn in his hand, some time before the massacre began, and the massacre has begun an hour ago."

"Thanks, madame," said Marguerite; "and although perhaps the sentiment which impels you is an additional offence toward me, – yet, again, I thank you!"

"Oh, forgive me, madame!" she said, "and I will return to my apartments stronger for your pardon, for I dare not follow you, even at a distance."

Marguerite extended her hand to her.

"I will go to Queen Catharine," she said. "Return to your room. The King of Navarre is under my protection; I have promised him my alliance and I will be faithful to my promise."

"But suppose you cannot obtain access to the queen mother, madame?"

"Then I will go to my brother Charles, and I will speak to him."

"Go, madame, go," said Charlotte, leaving Marguerite room to pass, "and may God guide your majesty!"

Marguerite darted down the corridor, but when she reached the end of it she turned to make sure that Madame de Sauve was not lingering behind. Madame de Sauve was following her.

The Queen of Navarre saw her go upstairs to her own apartment, and then she herself went toward the queen's chamber.

All was changed here. Instead of the crowd of eager courtiers, who usually opened their ranks before the queen and respectfully saluted her, Marguerite met only guards with red partisans and garments stained with blood, or gentlemen in torn cloaks, – their faces blackened with powder, bearing orders and despatches, – some going in, others going out, and all this movement back and forth made a great and terrible confusion in the galleries.

Marguerite, however, went boldly on until she reached the queen mother's antechamber. But this room was guarded by a double file of soldiers, who allowed only those who had a certain countersign to enter. Marguerite in vain tried to pass this living barrier; several times she saw the door open and shut, and each time she saw Catharine, her youth restored by action, as alert as if she were only twenty years of age, writing, receiving letters, opening them, addressing a word to one, a smile to another; and those on whom she smiled most graciously were those who were the most covered with dust and blood.

Amid this vast tumult which reigned in the Louvre and filled it with frightful clamors, could be heard the rattling of musketry more and more insistently repeated.

"I shall never get to her," said Marguerite to herself after she had made three ineffectual attempts to pass the halberdiers. "Rather than waste my time here, I must go and find my brother."

At this moment M. de Guise passed; he had just informed the queen of the murder of the admiral, and was returning to the butchery.

"Oh, Henry!" cried Marguerite, "where is the King of Navarre?"

The duke looked at her with a smile of astonishment, bowed, and without any reply passed out with his guards.

Marguerite ran to a captain who was on the point of leaving the Louvre and was engaged in having his men's arquebuses loaded.

"The King of Navarre!" she exclaimed; "sir, where is the King of Navarre?"

"I do not know, madame," replied the captain, "I do not belong to his majesty's guards."

"Ah, my dear René," said the queen, recognizing Catharine's perfumer, "is that you? – you have just left my mother. Do you know what has become of my husband?"

"His majesty the King of Navarre is no friend of mine, madame, you ought to remember that. It is even said," he added, with a contraction of his features more like a grimace than a smile, "it is even said that he ventures to accuse me of having been the accomplice, with Madame Catharine, in poisoning his mother."

"No, no!" cried Marguerite, "my good René, do not believe that!"

"Oh, it is of little consequence, madame!" said the perfumer; "neither the King of Navarre nor his party is any longer to be feared!"

And he turned his back on Marguerite.

"Ah, Monsieur de Tavannes!" cried Marguerite, "one word, I beseech you!"

Tavannes, who was going by, stopped.

"Where is Henry of Navarre?"

"Faith," he replied, in a loud voice, "I believe he is somewhere in the city with the Messieurs d'Alençon and de Condé."

And then he added, in a tone so low that the queen alone could hear:

"Your majesty, if you would see him, – to be in whose place I would give my life, – go to the king's armory."

"Thanks, Tavannes, thanks!" said Marguerite, who, of all that Tavannes had said, had heard only the chief direction; "thank you, I will go there."

And she went on her way, murmuring:

"Oh, after all I promised him – after the way in which he behaved to me when that ingrate, Henry de Guise, was concealed in the closet – I cannot let him perish!"

And she knocked at the door of the King's apartments; but they were encompassed within by two companies of guards.

"No one is admitted to the King," said the officer, coming forward.

"But I" – said Marguerite.

"The order is general."

"I, the Queen of Navarre! – I, his sister!"

"My orders admit of no exception, madame; I pray you to pardon me."

And the officer closed the door.

"Oh, he is lost!" exclaimed Marguerite, alarmed at the sight of all those sinister faces, which even if they did not breathe vengeance, expressed sternness of purpose. "Yes, yes! I comprehend all. I have been used as a bait. I am the snare which has entrapped the Huguenots; but I will enter, if I am killed in the attempt!"

And Marguerite ran like a mad creature through the corridors and galleries, when suddenly, as she passed by a small door, she heard a sweet song, almost melancholy, so monotonous it was. It was a Calvinistic psalm, sung by a trembling voice in the next room.

"My brother the king's nurse – the good Madelon – she is there!" exclaimed Marguerite. "God of the Christians, aid me now!"

And, full of hope, Marguerite knocked at the little door.

Soon after the counsel which Marguerite had conveyed to him, after his conversation with René, and after leaving the queen mother's chamber, in spite of the efforts of the poor little Phœbe, – who like a good genius tried to detain him, – Henry of Navarre had met several Catholic gentlemen, who, under a pretext of doing him honor, had escorted him to his apartments, where a score of Huguenots awaited him, who had rallied round the young prince, and, having once rallied, would not leave him – so strongly, for some hours, had the presentiment of that fatal night weighed on the Louvre. They had remained there, without any one attempting to disturb them. At last, at the first stroke of the bell of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, which resounded through all hearts like a funeral knell, Tavannes entered, and, in the midst of a death-like silence, announced that King Charles IX. desired to speak to Henry.

It was useless to attempt resistance, and no one thought of it. They heard the ceilings, galleries, and corridors creaking beneath the feet of the assembled soldiers, who were in the court-yards, as well as in the apartments, to the number of two thousand. Henry, after having taken leave of his friends, whom he was never again to see, followed Tavannes, who led him to a small gallery next the King's apartments, where he left him alone, unarmed, and a prey to mistrust.

The King of Navarre counted here alone, minute by minute, two mortal hours; listening, with increasing alarm, to the sound of the tocsin and the discharge of fire-arms; seeing through a small window, by the light of the flames and flambeaux, the refugees and their assassins pass; understanding nothing of these shrieks of murder, these cries of distress, – not even suspecting, in spite of his knowledge of Charles IX., the queen mother, and the Duc de Guise, the horrible drama at this moment enacting.

Henry had not physical courage, but he had better than that – he had moral fortitude. Though he feared danger, yet he smiled at it and faced it; but it was danger in the field of battle – danger in the open air – danger in the eyes of all, and attended by the noisy harmony of trumpets and the loud and vibrating beat of drums; but now he was weaponless, alone, locked in, shut up in a semi-darkness where he could scarcely see the enemy that might glide toward him, and the weapon that might be raised to strike him.

These two hours were, perhaps, the most agonizing of his life.

In the hottest of the tumult, and as Henry was beginning to understand that, in all probability, this was some organized massacre, a captain came to him, and conducted the prince along a corridor to the King's rooms. As they approached, the door opened and closed behind them as if by magic. The captain then led Henry to the King, who was in his armory.

When they entered, the King was seated in a great arm-chair, his two hands placed on the two arms of the seat, and his head falling on his chest. At the noise made by their entrance Charles looked up, and Henry observed the perspiration dropping from his brow like large beads.

"Good evening, Harry," said the young King, roughly. "La Chastre, leave us."

The captain obeyed.

A gloomy silence ensued. Henry looked around him with uneasiness, and saw that he was alone with the King.

Charles IX. suddenly arose.

"*Par la mordieu!*" said he, passing his hands through his light brown hair, and wiping his brow at the same time, "you are glad to be with me, are you not, Harry?"

"Certainly, sire," replied the King of Navarre, "I am always happy to be with your Majesty."

"Happier than if you were down there, eh?" continued Charles, following his own thoughts rather than replying to Henry's compliment.

"I do not understand, sire," replied Henry.

"Look out, then, and you will soon understand."

And with a quick movement Charles stepped or rather sprang to the window, and drawing with him his brother-in-law, who became more and more terror-stricken, he pointed to him the horrible outlines of the assassins, who, on the deck of a boat, were cutting the throats or drowning the victims brought them at every moment.

"In the name of Heaven," cried Henry; "what is going on to-night?"

"To-night, sir," replied Charles IX., "they are ridding me of all the Huguenots. Look yonder, over the Hôtel de Bourbon, at the smoke and flames: they are the smoke and flames of the admiral's house, which is on fire. Do you see that body, which these good Catholics are drawing on a torn mattress? It is the corpse of the admiral's son-in-law – the carcass of your friend, Téligny."

"What means this?" cried the King of Navarre, seeking vainly by his side for the hilt of his dagger, and trembling equally with shame and anger; for he felt that he was at the same time laughed at and threatened.

"It means," cried Charles IX., becoming suddenly furious, and turning frightfully pale, "it means that I will no longer have any Huguenots about me. Do you hear me, Henry? – Am I King? Am I master?"

"But, your Majesty" —

"My Majesty kills and massacres at this moment all that is not Catholic; it is my pleasure. Are you a Catholic?" exclaimed Charles, whose anger was rising higher and higher, like an awful tide.

"Sire," replied Henry, "do you remember your own words, 'What matters the religion of those who serve me well?'"

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Charles, bursting into a ferocious laugh; "you ask me if I remember my words, Henry! '*Verba volant,*' as my sister Margot says; and had not all those" – and he pointed to the city with his finger – "served me well, also? Were they not brave in battle, wise in council, deeply devoted? They were all useful subjects – but they were Huguenots, and I want none but Catholics."

Henry remained silent.

"Do you understand me now, Harry?" asked Charles.

"I understand, sire."

"Well?"

"Well, sire, I do not see why the King of Navarre should not do what so many gentlemen and poor folk have done. For if they all die, poor unfortunates, it is because the same terms have been proposed to them which your Majesty proposes to me, and they have refused, as I refuse."

Charles seized the young prince's arm, and fixed on him a look the vacancy of which suddenly changed into a fierce and savage scowl.

"What!" he said, "do you believe that I have taken the trouble to offer the mass to those whose throats we are cutting yonder?"

"Sire," said Henry, disengaging his arm, "will you not die in the religion of your fathers?"

"Yes, *par la mordieu!* and you?"

"Well, sire, I will do the same!" replied Henry.

Charles uttered a roar of rage and, with trembling hand, seized his arquebuse, which lay on the table.

Henry, who stood leaning against the tapestry, with the perspiration on his brow, and nevertheless, owing to his presence of mind, calm to all appearance, followed every movement of the terrible king with the greedy stupefaction of a bird fascinated by a serpent.

Charles cocked his arquebuse, and stamping with blind rage cried, as he dazzled Henry's eyes with the polished barrel of the deadly gun:

"Will you accept the mass?"

Henry remained mute.

Charles IX. shook the vaults of the Louvre with the most terrible oath that ever issued from the lips of man, and grew even more livid than before.

"Death, mass, or the Bastille!" he cried, taking aim at the King of Navarre.

"Oh, sire!" exclaimed Henry, "will you kill me – me, your brother?"

Henry thus, by his incomparable cleverness, which was one of the strongest faculties of his organization, evaded the answer which Charles IX. expected, for undoubtedly had his reply been in the negative Henry had been a dead man.

As immediately after the climax of rage, reaction begins, Charles IX. did not repeat the question he had addressed to the Prince of Navarre; and after a moment's hesitation, during which he uttered a hoarse kind of growl, he went back to the open window, and aimed at a man who was running along the quay in front.

"I must kill some one!" cried Charles IX., ghastly as a corpse, his eyes suffused with blood; and firing as he spoke, he struck the man who was running.

Henry uttered a groan.

Then, animated by a frightful ardor, Charles loaded and fired his arquebuse without cessation, uttering cries of joy every time his aim was successful.

"It is all over with me!" said the King of Navarre to himself; "when he sees no one else to kill, he will kill me!"

"Well," said a voice behind the princes, suddenly, "is it done?"

It was Catharine de Médicis, who had entered unobserved just as the King was firing his last shot.

"No, thousand thunders of hell!" said the King, throwing his arquebuse across the room. "No, the obstinate blockhead – he will not consent!"

Catharine made no reply. She turned her eyes slowly where Henry stood as motionless as one of the figures of the tapestry against which he was leaning. She then gave a glance at the King, which seemed to say:

"Then why he is alive?"

"He is alive, he is alive!" murmured Charles IX., who perfectly understood the glance, and replied to it without hesitation, – "he is alive – because he is my relative."

Catharine smiled.

Henry saw the smile, and realized that his struggle was to be with Catharine.

"Madame," he said to her, "the whole thing comes from you, I see very well, and my brother-in-law Charles is not to blame. You laid the plan for drawing me into a snare. You made your daughter the bait which was to destroy us all. You separated me from my wife that she might not see me killed before her eyes" —

"Yes, but that shall not be!" cried another voice, breathless and impassioned, which Henry instantly recognized and which made Charles start with surprise and Catharine with rage.

"Marguerite!" exclaimed Henry.

"Margot!" said Charles IX.

"My daughter!" muttered Catharine.

"Sire," said Marguerite to Henry, "your last words were an accusation against me, and you were both right and wrong, – right, for I am the means by which they attempted to destroy you; wrong, for I did not know that you were going to your destruction. I, sire, owe my own life to chance – to my mother's forgetfulness, perhaps; but as soon as I learned your danger I remembered my duty, and a wife's duty is to share her husband's fortunes. If you are exiled, sire, I will follow you into exile; if you are put into prison I will be your fellow-captive; if they kill you, I will also die."

And she offered her husband her hand, which he eagerly seized, if not with love, at least with gratitude.

"Oh, my poor Margot!" said Charles, "you had much better bid him become a Catholic!"

"Sire," replied Marguerite, with that lofty dignity which was so natural to her, "for your own sake do not ask any prince of your house to commit a cowardly act."

Catharine darted a significant glance at Charles.

"Brother," cried Marguerite, who equally well with Charles IX. understood Catharine's ominous pantomime, "my brother, remember! you made him my husband!"

Charles IX., at bay between Catharine's commanding eyes and Marguerite's supplicating look, as if between the two opposing principles of good and evil, stood for an instant undecided; at last Ormazd won the day.

"In truth," said he, whispering in Catharine's ear, "Margot is right, and Harry is my brother-in-law."

"Yes," replied Catharine in a similar whisper in her son's ear, "yes – but supposing he were not?"

CHAPTER XI

THE HAWTHORN OF THE CEMETERY OF THE INNOCENTS

As soon as Marguerite reached her own apartments she tried in vain to divine the words which Catharine de Médicis had whispered to Charles IX., and which had cut short the terrible council of life and death which was taking place.

She spent a part of the morning in attending to La Mole, and the rest in trying to guess the enigma, which her mind could not discover.

The King of Navarre remained a prisoner in the Louvre, the persecution of the Huguenots went on hotter than ever. The terrible night was followed by a day of massacre still more horrible. No longer the bells rang the tocsin, but *Te Deums*, and the echoes of these joyous notes, resounding amid fire and slaughter, were perhaps even more lugubrious in sunlight than had been the last night's knell sounding in darkness. This was not all. A strange thing had happened: a hawthorn-tree, which had blossomed in the spring, and which, as usual, had lost its odorous flowers in the month of June, had blossomed again during the night, and the Catholics, who saw a miracle in this event, spread the report of the miracle far and wide, thus making God their accomplice; and with cross and banners they marched in a procession to the Cemetery of the Innocents, where this hawthorn-tree was blooming.

This method of acquiescence which Heaven seemed to show in the massacres redoubled the ardor of the assassins, and while every street, every square, every alley-way of the city continued to present a scene of desolation, the Louvre had become the common tomb for all Protestants who had been shut up there when the signal was given. The King of Navarre, the Prince de Condé, and La Mole were the only survivors.

Assured as to La Mole, whose wounds, as she had declared the evening before, were severe but not dangerous, Marguerite's mind was now occupied with one single idea: that was to save her husband's life, which was still threatened. No doubt the first sentiment which actuated the wife was one of generous pity for a man for whom, as the Béarnais himself had said, she had sworn, if not love, at least alliance; but there was, beside, another sentiment not so pure, which had penetrated the queen's heart.

Marguerite was ambitious, and had foreseen almost the certainty of royalty in her marriage with Henry de Bourbon. Navarre, though beset on one side by the kings of France and on the other by the kings of Spain, who strip by strip had absorbed half of its territory, might become a real kingdom with the French Huguenots for subjects, if only Henry de Bourbon should fulfil the hopes which the courage shown by him on the infrequent occasions vouchsafed him of drawing his sword had aroused.

Marguerite, with her keen, lofty intellect, foresaw and reckoned on all this. So if she lost Henry she lost not only a husband, but a throne.

As she was absorbed in these reflections she heard some one knocking at the door of the secret corridor. She started, for only three persons came by that door, – the King, the queen mother, and the Duc d'Alençon. She opened the closet door, made a gesture of silence to Gillonne and La Mole, and then went to let her visitor in.

It was the Duc d'Alençon.

The young prince had not been seen since the night before. For a moment, Marguerite had conceived the idea of asking his intercession for the King of Navarre, but a terrible idea restrained her. The marriage had taken place against his wishes. François detested Henry, and had evinced his neutrality toward the Béarnais only because he was convinced that Henry and his wife had remained strangers to each other. A mark of interest shown by Marguerite in her husband might thrust one of the three threatening poniards into his heart instead of turning it aside. Marguerite, therefore, on

perceiving the young prince, shuddered more than she had shuddered at seeing the King or even the queen mother. Nevertheless no one could have told by his appearance that anything unusual was taking place either in the city or at the Louvre. He was dressed with his usual elegance. His clothes and linen breathed of those perfumes which Charles IX. despised, but of which the Duc d'Anjou and he made continual use.

A practised eye like Marguerite's, however, could detect the fact that in spite of his rather unusual pallor and in spite of a slight trembling in his hands – delicate hands, as carefully treated as a lady's – he felt a deep sense of joy in the bottom of his heart. His entrance was in no wise different from usual. He went to his sister to kiss her, but Marguerite, instead of offering him her cheek, as she would have done had it been King Charles or the Duc d'Anjou, made a courtesy and allowed him to kiss her forehead.

The Duc d'Alençon sighed and touched his bloodless lips to her brow.

Then taking a seat he began to tell his sister the sanguinary news of the night, the admiral's lingering and terrible death, Téligny's instantaneous death caused by a bullet. He took his time and emphasized all the bloody details of that night, with that love of blood characteristic of himself and his two brothers; Marguerite allowed him to tell his story.

"You did not come to tell me this only, brother?" she then asked.

The Duc d'Alençon smiled.

"You have something else to say to me?"

"No," replied the duke; "I am waiting."

"Waiting! for what?"

"Have you not told me, dearest Marguerite," said the duke, drawing his armchair close up to his sister's, "that your marriage with the King of Navarre was contracted against your wishes?"

"Yes, no doubt. I did not know the Prince of Béarn when he was proposed to me as a husband."

"And after you came to know him, did you not tell me that you felt no love for him?"

"I told you so; it is true."

"Was it not your opinion that this marriage would make you unhappy?"

"My dear François," said Marguerite, "when a marriage is not the height of happiness it is almost always the depth of wretchedness."

"Well, then, my dear Marguerite, as I said to you, – I am waiting."

"But what are you waiting for?"

"For you to display your joy!"

"What have I to be joyful for?"

"The unexpected chance which offers itself for you to resume your liberty."

"My liberty?" replied Marguerite, who was determined to compel the prince to express his whole thought.

"Yes; your liberty! You will now be separated from the King of Navarre."

"Separated!" said Marguerite, fastening her eyes on the young prince.

The Duc d'Alençon tried to endure his sister's look, but his eyes soon avoided hers with embarrassment.

"Separated!" repeated Marguerite; "let us talk this over, brother, for I should like to understand all you mean, and how you propose to separate us."

"Why," murmured the duke, "Henry is a Huguenot."

"No doubt; but he made no secret of his religion, and that was known when we were married."

"Yes; but since your marriage, sister," asked the duke, involuntarily allowing a ray of joy to shine upon his face, "what has Henry been doing?"

"Why, you know better than any one, François, for he has spent his days almost constantly in your society, either hunting or playing mall or tennis."

"Yes, his days, no doubt," replied the duke; "his days – but his nights?"

Marguerite was silent; it was now her turn to cast down her eyes.

"His nights," persisted the Duc d'Alençon, "his nights?"

"Well?" inquired Marguerite, feeling that it was requisite that she should say something in reply.

"Well, he has been spending them with Madame de Sauve!"

"How do you know that?" exclaimed Marguerite.

"I know it because I have an interest in knowing it," replied the young prince, growing pale and picking the embroidery of his sleeves.

Marguerite began to understand what Catharine had whispered to Charles, but pretended to remain in ignorance.

"Why do you tell me this, brother?" she replied, with a well-affected air of melancholy; "was it to remind me that no one here loves me or takes my part, neither those whom nature gave me as protectors nor the man whom the Church gave me as my husband?"

"You are unjust," said the Duc d'Alençon, drawing his armchair still nearer to his sister, "I love you and protect you!"

"Brother," said Marguerite, looking at him sharply, "have you anything to say to me from the queen mother?"

"I! you mistake, sister. I swear to you – what can make you think that?"

"What can make me think that? – why, because you are breaking off the intimacy that binds you to my husband, because you are abandoning the cause of the King of Navarre."

"The cause of the King of Navarre!" replied the Duc d'Alençon, wholly at his wits' end.

"Yes, certainly. Now look here, François; let us speak frankly. You have come to an agreement a score of times; you cannot raise yourself or even hold your own except by mutual help. This alliance"

—
"Has now become impossible, sister," interrupted the Duc d'Alençon.

"And why so?"

"Because the King has designs on your husband! Pardon me, when I said *your husband*, I erred; I meant Henry of Navarre. Our mother has seen through the whole thing. I entered into an alliance with the Huguenots because I believed the Huguenots were in favor; but now they are killing the Huguenots, and in another week there will not remain fifty in the whole kingdom. I gave my hand to the King of Navarre because he was – your husband; but now he is not your husband. What can you say to that – you who are not only the loveliest woman in France, but have the clearest head in the kingdom?"

"Why, I have this to say," replied Marguerite, "I know our brother Charles; I saw him yesterday in one of those fits of frenzy, every one of which shortens his life ten years. I have to say that unfortunately these attacks are very frequent, and that thus, in all probability, our brother Charles has not very long to live; and, finally, I have to say that the King of Poland has just died, and the question of electing a prince of the house of France in his stead is much discussed; and when circumstances are thus, it is not the moment to abandon allies who, in the moment of struggle, might support us with the strength of a nation and the power of a kingdom."

"And you!" exclaimed the duke, "do you not act much more treasonably to me in preferring a foreigner to your own brother?"

"Explain yourself, François! In what have I acted treasonably to you?"

"You yesterday begged the life of the King of Navarre from King Charles."

"Well?" said Marguerite, with pretended innocence.

The duke rose hastily, paced round the chamber twice or thrice with a bewildered air, then came back and took Marguerite's hand.

It was cold and unresponsive.

"Good-by, sister!" he said at last. "You will not understand me; do not, therefore, complain of whatever misfortunes may happen to you."

Marguerite grew pale, but remained motionless in her place. She saw the Duc d'Alençon go away, without making any attempt to detain him; but he had scarcely more than disappeared down the corridor when he returned.

"Listen, Marguerite," he said, "I had forgotten to tell you one thing; that is, that by this time to-morrow the King of Navarre will be dead."

Marguerite uttered a cry, for the idea that she was the instrument of assassination caused in her a terror she could not subdue.

"And you will not prevent his death?" she said; "you will not save your best and most faithful ally?"

"Since yesterday the King of Navarre is no longer my ally."

"Who is, pray?"

"Monsieur de Guise. By destroying the Huguenots, Monsieur de Guise has become the king of the Catholics."

"And does a son of Henry II. recognize a duke of Lorraine as his king?"

"You are in a bad frame of mind, Marguerite, and you do not understand anything."

"I confess that I try in vain to read your thoughts."

"Sister, you are of as good a house as the Princesse de Porcian; De Guise is no more immortal than the King of Navarre. Now, then, Marguerite, suppose three things, three possibilities: first, suppose monsieur is chosen King of Poland; the second, that you loved me as I love you; well, I am King of France, and you are – queen of the Catholics."

Marguerite hid her face in her hands, overwhelmed at the depth of the views of this youth, whom no one at court thought possessed of even common understanding.

"But," she asked after a moment's silence, "I hope you are not jealous of Monsieur le Duc de Guise as you were of the King of Navarre!"

"What is done is done," said the Duc d'Alençon, in a muffled voice, "and if I had to be jealous of the Duc de Guise, well, then, I was!"

"There is only one thing that can prevent this capital plan from succeeding, brother."

"And what is that?"

"That I no longer love the Duc de Guise."

"And whom, pray, do you love?"

"No one."

The Duc d'Alençon looked at Marguerite with the astonishment of a man who takes his turn in failing to understand, and left the room, pressing his icy hand on his forehead, which ached to bursting.

Marguerite remained alone and thoughtful; the situation was beginning to take a clear and definite shape before her eyes; the King had permitted Saint Bartholomew's, Queen Catharine and the Duc de Guise had put it into execution. The Duc de Guise and the Duc d'Alençon were about to join partnership so as to get the greatest possible advantage. The death of the King of Navarre would be a natural result of this great catastrophe. With the King of Navarre out of the way, his kingdom would be seized upon, Marguerite would be left a throneless, impotent widow with no other prospect before her than a nunnery, where she would not even have the sad consolation of weeping for a consort who had never been her husband.

She was still in the same position when Queen Catharine sent to ask if she would not like to go with her and the whole court on a pious visitation to the hawthorn of the Cemetery of the Innocents. Marguerite's first impulse was to refuse to take part in this cavalcade. But the thought that this excursion might possibly give her a chance to learn something new about the King of Navarre's fate decided her to go. So she sent word that if they would have a palfrey ready for her she would willingly go with their majesties.

Five minutes later a page came to ask if she was ready to go down, for the procession was preparing to start.

Marguerite warned Gillonne by a gesture to look after the wounded man and so went downstairs.

The King, the queen mother, Tavannes, and the principal Catholics were already mounted. Marguerite cast a rapid glance over the group, which was composed of about a score of persons; the King of Navarre was not of the party.

Madame de Sauve was there. Marguerite exchanged a glance with her, and was convinced that her husband's mistress had something to tell her.

They rode down the Rue de l'Astruce and entered into the Rue Saint Honoré. As the populace caught sight of the King, Queen Catharine, and the principal Catholics they flocked together and followed the procession like a rising tide, and shouts rent the air.

"*Vive le Roi!*"

"*Vive la Messe.*"

"Death to the Huguenots!"

These acclamations were accompanied by the waving of ensanguined swords and smoking arquebuses, which showed the part each had taken in the awful work just accomplished.

When they reached the top of the Rue des Prouvelles they met some men who were dragging a headless carcass. It was the admiral's. The men were going to hang it by the feet at Montfaucon.

They entered the Cemetery des Saints Innocents by the gate facing the Rue des Chaps, now known as the Rue des Déchargeurs; the clergy, notified in advance of the visit of the King and the queen mother, were waiting for their majesties to make them speeches.

Madame de Sauve took advantage of a moment when Catharine was listening to one of the discourses to approach the Queen of Navarre, and beg leave to kiss her hand. Marguerite extended her arm toward her, and Madame de Sauve, as she kissed the queen's hand, slipped a tiny roll of paper up her sleeve.

Madame de Sauve drew back quickly and with clever dissimulation; yet Catharine perceived it, and turned round just as the maid of honor was kissing Marguerite's hand.

The two women saw her glance, which penetrated them like a flash of lightning, but both remained unmoved; only Madame de Sauve left Marguerite and resumed her place near Catharine.

When Catharine had finished replying to the address which had just been made to her she smiled and beckoned the Queen of Navarre to go to her.

"Eh, my daughter," said the queen mother, in her Italian patois, "so you are on intimate terms with Madame de Sauve, are you?"

Marguerite smiled in turn, and gave to her lovely countenance the bitterest expression she could, and replied:

"Yes, mother; the serpent came to bite my hand!"

"Aha!" replied Catharine, with a smile; "you are jealous, I think!"

"You are mistaken, madame," replied Marguerite; "I am no more jealous of the King of Navarre than the King of Navarre is in love with me, but I know how to distinguish my friends from my enemies. I like those that like me, and detest those that hate me. Otherwise, madame, should I be your daughter?"

Catharine smiled so as to make Marguerite understand that if she had had any suspicion it had vanished.

Moreover, at that instant the arrival of other pilgrims attracted the attention of the august throng.

The Duc de Guise came with a troop of gentlemen all warm still from recent carnage. They escorted a richly decorated litter, which stopped in front of the King.

"The Duchesse de Nevers!" cried Charles IX., "Ah! let that lovely robust Catholic come and receive our compliments. Why, they tell me, cousin, that from your own window you have been hunting Huguenots, and that you killed one with a stone."

The Duchesse de Nevers blushed exceedingly red.

"Sire," she said in a low tone, and kneeling before the King, "on the contrary, it was a wounded Catholic whom I had the good fortune to rescue."

"Good – good, my cousin! there are two ways of serving me: one is by exterminating my enemies, the other is by rescuing my friends. One does what one can, and I am certain that if you could have done more you would!"

While this was going on, the populace, seeing the harmony existing between the house of Lorraine and Charles IX., shouted exultantly:

"Vive le Roi!"

"Vive le Duc de Guise!"

"Vive la Messe!"

"Do you return to the Louvre with us, Henriette?" inquired the queen mother of the lovely duchess.

Marguerite touched her friend on the elbow, and she, understanding the sign, replied:

"No, madame, unless your majesty desire it; for I have business in the city with her majesty the Queen of Navarre."

"And what are you going to do together?" inquired Catharine.

"To see some very rare and curious Greek books found at an old Protestant pastor's, and which have been taken to the Tower of Saint Jacques la Boucherie," replied Marguerite.

"You would do much better to see the last Huguenots flung into the Seine from the top of the Pont des Meuniers," said Charles IX.; "that is the place for all good Frenchmen."

"We will go, if it be your Majesty's desire," replied the Duchesse de Nevers.

Catharine cast a look of distrust on the two young women. Marguerite, on the watch, remarked it, and turning round uneasily, looked about her.

This assumed or real anxiety did not escape Catharine.

"What are you looking for?"

"I am seeking – I do not see" – she replied.

"Whom are you seeking? Who is it you fail to see?"

"La Sauve," said Marguerite; "can she have returned to the Louvre?"

"Did I not say you were jealous?" said Catharine, in her daughter's ear. "Oh, *bestia!* Come, come, Henriette," she added, shrugging her shoulders, "begone, and take the Queen of Navarre with you."

Marguerite pretended to be still looking about her; then, turning to her friend, she said in a whisper:

"Take me away quickly; I have something of the greatest importance to say to you."

The duchess courtesied to the King and queen mother, and then, bowing low before the Queen of Navarre:

"Will your majesty deign to come into my litter?"

"Willingly, only you will have to take me back to the Louvre."

"My litter, like my servants and myself, are at your majesty's orders."

Queen Marguerite entered the litter, while Catharine and her gentlemen returned to the Louvre just as they had come. But during the route it was observed that the queen mother kept talking to the King, pointing several times to Madame de Sauve, and at each time the King laughed – as Charles IX. laughed; that is, with a laugh more sinister than a threat.

As soon as Marguerite felt the litter in motion, and had no longer to fear Catharine's searching eyes, she quickly drew from her sleeve Madame de Sauve's note and read as follows:

"I have received orders to send to-night to the King of Navarre two keys; one is that of the room in which he is shut up, and the other is the key of my chamber; when once he has reached my apartment, I am enjoined to keep him there until six o'clock in the morning.

"Let your majesty reflect – let your majesty decide. Let your majesty esteem my life as nothing."

"There is now no doubt," murmured Marguerite, "and the poor woman is the tool of which they wish to make use to destroy us all. But we will see if the Queen Margot, as my brother Charles calls me, is so easily to be made a nun of."

"Tell me, whom is the letter from?" asked the Duchesse de Nevers.

"Ah, duchess, I have so many things to say to you!" replied Marguerite, tearing the note into a thousand bits.

CHAPTER XII

MUTUAL CONFIDENCES

"And, first, where are we going?" asked Marguerite; "not to the Pont des Meuniers, I suppose, – I have seen enough slaughter since yesterday, my poor Henriette."

"I have taken the liberty to conduct your majesty" —

"First and foremost, my majesty requests you to forget my majesty – you were taking me" —

"To the Hôtel de Guise, unless you decide otherwise."

"No, no, let us go there, Henriette; the Duc de Guise is not there, your husband is not there."

"Oh, no," cried the duchess, her bright emerald eyes sparkling with joy; "no, neither my husband, nor my brother-in-law, nor any one else. I am free – free as air, free as a bird, – free, my queen! Do you understand the happiness there is in that word? I go, I come, I command. Ah, poor queen, you are not free – and so you sigh."

"You go, you come, you command. Is that all? Is that all the use of liberty? You are happy with only freedom as an excuse!"

"Your majesty promised to tell me a secret."

"Again 'your majesty'! I shall be angry soon, Henriette. Have you forgotten our agreement?"

"No; your respectful servant in public – in private, your madcap confidante, is it not so, madame? Is it not so, Marguerite?"

"Yes, yes," said the queen, smiling.

"No family rivalry, no treachery in love; everything fair, open, and aboveboard! An offensive and defensive alliance, for the sole purpose of finding and, if we can, catching on the fly, that ephemeral thing called happiness."

"Just so, duchess. Let us again seal the compact with a kiss."

And the two beautiful women, the one so pale, so full of melancholy, the other so roseate, so fair, so animated, joined their lips as they had united their thoughts.

"Tell me, what is there new?" asked the duchess, giving Marguerite an eager, inquisitive look.

"Isn't everything new since day before yesterday?"

"Oh, I am speaking of love, not of politics. When we are as old as dame Catharine we will take part in politics; but we are only twenty, my pretty queen, and so let us talk about something else. Let me see! can it be that you are really married?"

"To whom?" asked Marguerite, laughing.

"Ah! you reassure me, truly!"

"Well, Henriette, that which reassures you, alarms me. Duchess, I must be married."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Oh, poor little friend! and is it necessary?"

"Absolutely."

"*Mordi!* as an acquaintance of mine says, this is very sad."

"And so you know some one who says *mordi?*" asked Marguerite, with a smile.

"Yes."

"And who is this some one?"

"You keep asking me questions when I am talking to you. Finish and I will begin."

"In two words, it is this: The King of Navarre is in love, and not with me; I am not in love, but I do not want him, yet we must both of us change, or seem to change, between now and to-morrow."

"Well, then, you change, and be very sure he will do the same."

"That is quite impossible, for I am less than ever inclined to change."

"Only with respect to your husband, I hope."

"Henriette, I have a scruple."

"A scruple! about what?"

"A religious one. Do you make any difference between Huguenots and Catholics?"

"In politics?"

"Yes."

"Of course."

"And in love?"

"My dear girl, we women are such heathens that we admit every kind of sect, and recognize many gods."

"In one, eh?"

"Yes," replied the duchess, her eyes sparkling; "he who is called *Eros, Cupido, Amor*. He who has a quiver on his back, wings on his shoulders, and a fillet over his eyes. *Mordi, vive la dévotion!*"

"You have a peculiar method of praying; you throw stones on the heads of Huguenots."

"Let us do our duty and let people talk. Ah, Marguerite! how the finest ideas, the noblest actions, are spoilt in passing through the mouths of the vulgar!"

"The vulgar! – why, it was my brother Charles who congratulated you on your exploits, wasn't it?"

"Your brother Charles is a mighty hunter blowing the horn all day, and that makes him very thin. I reject his compliments; besides, I gave him his answer – didn't you hear what I said?"

"No; you spoke so low."

"So much the better. I shall have more news to tell you. Now, then, finish your story, Marguerite."

"I was going to say – to say" —

"Well?"

"I was going to say," continued the queen, laughing, "if the stone my brother spoke of be a fact, I should resist."

"Ah!" cried Henriette, "so you have chosen a Huguenot, have you? Well, to reassure your conscience, I promise you that I will choose one myself on the first opportunity."

"Ah, so you have chosen a Catholic, have you?"

"*Mordi!*" replied the duchess.

"I see, I see."

"And what is this Huguenot of yours?"

"I did not choose him. The young man is nothing and probably never will be anything to me."

"But what sort is he? You can tell me that; you know how curious I am about these matters."

"A poor young fellow, beautiful as Benvenuto Cellini's Nisus, – and he came and took refuge in my room."

"Oho! – of course without any suggestion on your part?"

"Poor fellow! Do not laugh so, Henriette; at this very moment he is between life and death."

"He is ill, is he?"

"He is grievously wounded."

"A wounded Huguenot is very disagreeable, especially in these times; and what have you done with this wounded Huguenot, who is not and never will be anything to you?"

"He is in my closet; I am concealing him and I want to save him."

"He is handsome! he is young! he is wounded. You hide him in your closet; you want to save him. This Huguenot of yours will be very ungrateful if he is not too grateful."

"I am afraid he is already – much more so than I could wish."

"And this poor young man interests you?"

"From motives of humanity – that's all."

"Ah, humanity! my poor queen, that is the very virtue that is the ruin of all of us women."

"Yes; and you understand: as the King, the Duc d'Alençon, my mother, even my husband, may at any moment enter my room" —

"You want me to hide your little Huguenot as long as he is ill, on condition I send him back to you when he is cured?"

"Scoffer!" said Marguerite, "no! I do not lay my plans so far in advance; but if you could conceal the poor fellow, — if you could preserve the life I have saved, — I confess I should be most grateful. You are free at the Hôtel de Guise; you have neither brother-in-law nor husband to spy on you or constrain you; besides, behind your room there is a closet like mine into which no one is entitled to enter; so lend me your closet for my Huguenot, and when he is cured open the cage and let the bird fly away."

"There is only one difficulty, my dear queen: the cage is already occupied."

"What, have *you* also saved somebody?"

"That is exactly what I answered your brother with."

"Ah, I understand! that's why you spoke so low that I could not hear you."

"Listen, Marguerite: it is an admirable story — is no less poetical and romantic than yours. After I had left you six of my guards, I returned with the rest to the Hôtel de Guise, and I was watching them pillage and burn a house separated from my brother's palace only by the Rue des Quatre Fils, when I heard the voices of men swearing and of women crying. I went out on the balcony and the first thing I saw was a sword flashing so brilliantly that it seemed to light up the whole scene. I was filled with admiration for this fiery sword. I am fond of fine things, you know! Then naturally enough I tried to distinguish the arm wielding it and then the body to which the arm belonged. Amid sword-thrusts and shouts I at last made out the man and I saw — a hero, an Ajax Telamon. I heard a voice — the voice of a Stentor. My enthusiasm awoke — I stood there panting, trembling at every blow aimed at him, at every thrust he parried! That was a quarter hour of emotion such as I had never before experienced, my queen; and never believed was possible to experience. So there I was panting, holding my breath, trembling, and voiceless, when all of a sudden my hero disappeared."

"How?"

"Struck down by a stone an old woman threw at him. Then, like Cyrus, I found my voice, and screamed, 'Help! help!' my guards went out, lifted him up, and bore him to the room which you want for your *protégé*."

"Alas, my dear Henriette, I can better understand this story because it is so nearly my own."

"With this difference, queen, that as I am serving my King and my religion, I have no reason to send Monsieur Annibal de Coconnas away."

"His name is Annibal de Coconnas!" said Marguerite, laughing.

"A terrible name, is it not? Well, he who bears it is worthy of it. What a champion he is, by Heaven! and how he made the blood flow! Put on your mask, my queen, for we are now at the palace."

"Why put on my mask?"

"Because I wish to show you my hero."

"Is he handsome?"

"He seemed magnificent to me during the conflict. To be sure, it was at night and he was lighted up by the flames. This morning by daylight I confess he seemed to me to have lost a little."

"So then my *protégé* is rejected at the Hôtel de Guise. I am sorry for it, for that is the last place where they would look for a Huguenot."

"Oh, no, your Huguenot shall come; I will have him brought this evening: one shall sleep in the right-hand corner of the closet and the other in the left."

"But when they recognize each other as Protestant and Catholic they will fight."

"Oh, there is no danger. Monsieur de Coconnas has had a cut down the face that prevents him from seeing very well; your Huguenot is wounded in the chest so that he can't move; and, besides, you have only to tell him to be silent on the subject of religion, and all will go well."

"So be it."

"It's a bargain; and now let us go in."

"Thanks," said Marguerite, pressing her friend's hand.

"Here, madame," said the duchess, "you are again 'your majesty;' suffer me, then, to do the honors of the Hôtel de Guise fittingly for the Queen of Navarre."

And the duchess, alighting from the litter, almost knelt on the ground in helping Marguerite to step down; then pointing to the palace door guarded by two sentinels, arquebuse in hand, she followed the queen at a respectful distance, and this humble attitude she maintained as long as she was in sight.

As soon as she reached her room, the duchess closed the door, and, calling to her waiting-woman, a thorough Sicilian, said to her in Italian,

"Mica, how is Monsieur le Comte?"

"Better and better," replied she.

"What is he doing?"

"At this moment, madame, he is taking some refreshment."

"It is always a good sign," said Marguerite, "when the appetite returns."

"Ah, that is true. I forgot you were a pupil of Ambroise Paré. Leave us, Mica."

"Why do you send her away?"

"That she may be on the watch."

Mica left the room.

"Now," said the duchess, "will you go in to see him, or shall I send for him here?"

"Neither the one nor the other. I wish to see him without his seeing me."

"What matters it? You have your mask."

"He may recognize me by my hair, my hands, a jewel."

"How cautious she is since she has been married, my pretty queen!"

Marguerite smiled.

"Well," continued the duchess, "I see only one way."

"What is that?"

"To look through the keyhole."

"Very well! take me to the door."

The duchess took Marguerite by the hand and led her to a door covered with tapestry; then bending one knee, she applied her eye to the keyhole.

"'Tis all right; he is sitting at table, with his face turned toward us; come!"

The queen took her friend's place, and looked through the keyhole; Coconnas, as the duchess had said, was sitting at a well-served table, and, despite his wounds, was doing ample justice to the good things before him.

"Ah, great heavens!" cried Marguerite, starting back.

"What is the matter?" asked the duchess in amazement.

"Impossible! – no! – yes! – on my soul, 'tis the very man!"

"Who?"

"Hush," said Marguerite, getting to her feet and seizing the duchess's hand; "'tis the man who pursued my Huguenot into my room, and stabbed him in my arms! Oh, Henriette, how fortunate he did not see me!"

"Well, then, you have seen him fighting; was he not handsome?"

"I do not know," said Marguerite, "for I was looking at the man he was pursuing."

"What is his name?"

"You will not mention it before the count?"

"No, I give you my promise!"

"Lerac de la Mole."

"And what do you think of him now?"

"Of Monsieur de la Mole?"

"No, of Monsieur de Coconnas?"

"Faith!" said Marguerite, "I confess I think" —

She stopped.

"Come, come," said the duchess, "I see you are angry with him for having wounded your Huguenot."

"Why, so far," said Marguerite, laughing, "my Huguenot owes him nothing; the slash he gave him under his eye" —

"They are quits, then, and we can reconcile them. Send me your wounded man."

"Not now — by and by."

"When?"

"When you have found yours another room."

"Which?"

Marguerite looked meaningly at her friend, who, after a moment's silence, laughed.

"So be it," said the duchess; "alliance firmer than ever."

"Friendship ever sincere!"

"And the word, in case we need each other?"

"The triple name of your triple god, '*Eros, Cupido, Amor.*'"

And the two princesses separated after one more kiss, and pressing each other's hand for the twentieth time.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW THERE ARE KEYS WHICH OPEN DOORS THEY ARE NOT MEANT FOR

The Queen of Navarre on her return to the Louvre found Gillonne in great excitement. Madame de Sauve had been there in her absence. She had brought a key sent her by the queen mother. It was the key of the room in which Henry was confined. It was evident that the queen mother for some purpose of her own wished the Béarnais to spend that night in Madame de Sauve's apartment.

Marguerite took the key and turned it over and over; she made Gillonne repeat Madame de Sauve's every word, weighed them, letter by letter, in her mind, and at length thought she detected Catharine's plan.

She took pen and ink, and wrote:

"Instead of going to Madame de Sauve to-night, come to the Queen of Navarre."

"Marguerite."

She rolled up the paper, put it in the hollow of the key, and ordered Gillonne to slip the key under the king's door as soon as it was dark.

This first duty having been attended to, Marguerite thought of the wounded man, closed all the doors, entered the closet, and, to her great surprise, found La Mole dressed in all his clothes, torn and blood-stained as they were.

On seeing her he strove to rise, but, still dizzy, could not stand, and fell back upon the sofa which had served for his bed.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked Marguerite; "and why do you thus disobey your physician's orders? I recommended you rest, and instead of following my advice you do just the contrary."

"Oh, madame," said Gillonne, "it is not my fault; I have entreated Monsieur le Comte not to commit this folly, but he declares that nothing shall keep him any longer at the Louvre."

"Leave the Louvre!" said Marguerite, gazing with astonishment at the young man, who cast down his eyes. "Why, it is impossible – you cannot walk; you are pale and weak; your knees tremble. Only a few hours ago the wound in your shoulder was still bleeding."

"Madame," said the young man, "as earnestly as I thanked your majesty for having given me shelter, as earnestly do I pray you now to suffer me to depart."

"I scarcely know what to call such a resolution," said Marguerite; "it is worse than ingratitude."

"Oh," cried La Mole, clasping his hands, "think me not ungrateful; my gratitude will cease only with my life."

"It will not last long, then," said Marguerite, moved at these words, the sincerity of which it was impossible to doubt; "for your wounds will open, and you will die from loss of blood, or you will be recognized for a Huguenot and killed ere you have gone fifty yards in the street."

"Nevertheless I must leave the Louvre," murmured La Mole.

"Must," returned Marguerite, fixing her serene, inscrutable eyes upon him; then turning rather pale she added, "ah, yes; forgive me, sir, I understand; doubtless there is some one outside the Louvre who is anxiously waiting for you. You are right, Monsieur de la Mole; it is natural, and I understand it. Why didn't you say so at first? or rather, why didn't I think of it myself? It is duty in the exercise of hospitality to protect one's guest's affections as well as to cure his wounds, and to care for the spirit just as one cares for the body."

"Alas, madame," said La Mole, "you are laboring under a strange mistake. I am well nigh alone in the world, and altogether so in Paris, where no one knows me. My assassin is the first man I have spoken to in this city; your majesty the first woman who has spoken to me."

"Then," said Marguerite, "why would you go?"

"Because," replied La Mole, "last night you got no rest, and to-night" —
Marguerite blushed.

"Gillonne," said she, "it is already evening and time to deliver that key."
Gillonne smiled, and left the room.

"But," continued Marguerite, "if you are alone in Paris, without friends, what will you do?"

"Madame, I soon shall have friends enough, for while I was pursued I thought of my mother, who was a Catholic; methought I saw her with a cross in her hand gliding before me toward the Louvre, and I vowed that if God should save my life I would embrace my mother's religion. Madame, God did more than save my life, he sent me one of his angels to make me love life."

"But you cannot walk; before you have gone a hundred steps you will faint away."

"Madame, I have made the experiment in the closet, I walk slowly and painfully, it is true; but let me get as far as the Place du Louvre; once outside, let befall what will."

Marguerite leaned her head on her hand and sank into deep thought.

"And the King of Navarre," said she, significantly, "you no longer speak of him? In changing your religion, have you also changed your desire to enter his service?"

"Madame," replied La Mole, growing pale, "you have just hit upon the actual reason of my departure. I know that the King of Navarre is exposed to the greatest danger, and that all your majesty's influence as a daughter of France will barely suffice to save his life."

"What do you mean, sir," exclaimed Marguerite, "and what danger do you refer to?"

"Madame," replied La Mole, with some hesitation, "one can hear everything from the closet where I am."

"'Tis true," said Marguerite to herself; "Monsieur de Guise told me so before."

"Well," added she, aloud, "what did you hear?"

"In the first place, the conversation between your majesty and your brother."

"With François?" said Marguerite, changing color.

"Yes, madame, with the Duc d'Alençon; and then after you went out I heard what Gillonne and Madame de Sauve said."

"And these two conversations" —

"Yes, madame; married scarcely a week, you love your husband; your husband will come, in his turn, in the same way that the Duc d'Alençon and Madame de Sauve came. He will confide his secrets to you. Well, then, I must not overhear them; I should be indiscreet — I cannot — I must not — I will not be!"

By the tone in which La Mole uttered these last words, by the anxiety expressed in his voice, by the embarrassment shown in his eyes, Marguerite was enlightened as by a sudden revelation.

"Aha!" said she, "so you have heard everything that has been said in this room?"

"Yes, madame."

These words were uttered in a sigh.

"And you wish to depart to-night, this evening, to avoid hearing any more?"

"This moment, if it please your majesty to allow me to go."

"Poor fellow!" said Marguerite, with a strange accent of tender pity.

Astonished by such a gentle reply when he was expecting a rather forcible outburst, La Mole timidly raised his head; his eyes met Marguerite's and were riveted as by a magnetic power on their clear and limpid depths.

"So then you feel you cannot keep a secret, Monsieur de la Mole?" said Marguerite in a soft voice as she stood leaning on the back of her chair, half hidden in the shadow of a thick tapestry and enjoying the felicity of easily reading his frank and open soul while remaining impenetrable herself.

"Madame," said La Mole, "I have a miserable disposition: I distrust myself, and the happiness of another gives me pain."

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