

Chapter 6

THE BROTHERS.

MM. De Joyeuse had, as we have seen, left this scene, and were walking side by side in the streets generally so populous but now deserted, for every one was in the Place de Greve. Henri seemed preoccupied and sad, and Anne was unquiet on account of his brother. He was the first to speak.

"Well, Henri," said he, "where are you taking me?"

"I take you nowhere, brother; I was only walking before you. Do you wish to go anywhere?"

"Do you?"

"Oh! I do not care where I go."

"Yet you go somewhere every evening, for you always go out at the same hour and return late at night."

"Are you questioning me, brother?" said Henri, with gentleness.

"Certainly not; let each keep his own secrets if he wishes to do so."

"If you wish it, brother, I will have no secrets from you."

"Will you not, Henri?"

"No; are you not my elder brother and friend?"

"Oh! I thought you had secrets from me, who am only a poor layman. I thought you confessed to our learned brother, that pillar of theology, that light of the Church, who will be a cardinal some day, and that you obtained absolution from him, and perhaps, at the same time, advice."

Henri took his brother's hand affectionately. "You are more than a confessor to me, my dear Anne--more than a father; you are my friend."

"Then, my friend, why, from so gay as you used to be, have I seen you become sad? and why, instead of going out by day, do you only go out at night?"

"My brother, I am not sad."

"What, then?"

"In love."

"Good! And this preoccupation?"

"Is because I am always thinking of my love."

"And you sigh in saying that?"

"Yes."

"You sigh?--you, Henri, comte de Bouchage?--you, the brother of Joyeuse?--you, whom some people call the third king in France? You know M. de Guise is the second, if not the first; but you, rich and handsome, who will be peer and duke on the first occasion, are in love, and you sigh!--you, whose device is 'hilariter.'"

"My dear Anne, I have never reckoned the gifts of fortune, past and to come, as things to constitute happiness; I have no ambitions."

"That is to say, you have not at present."

"At all events, not for the things you speak of."

"Not just now, perhaps, but later you will return to them."

"Never, brother; I desire nothing--I want nothing."

"You are wrong. When one is called 'Joyeuse,' one of the best names in France, when one has a brother a king's favorite, one desires everything, and has everything."

Henri hung his blond head sadly.

"Come," continued Anne, "we are quite alone here; have you anything to tell me?"

"Nothing, but that I love."

"Diable! that is not a very serious affair; I also am in love."

"Not like me, brother."

"I, also, think sometimes of my mistress."

"Yes, but not always."

"I, also, have annoyances."

"Yes; but you also have joys, for you are loved."

"True; but I have obstacles. They exact from me so much mystery."

"They exact! If your mistress exacts, she loves you."

"Yes, she loves me and M. de Mayenne--or rather only me, for she would give up Mayenne at once if she was not afraid he would kill her; it is his habit to kill women, you know. I am obliged to be constantly on my guard, but I do not grow sad on that account; I continue to laugh--at least, sometimes. Tell me, Henri, is your lady beautiful?"

"Alas! she is not mine."

"Is she beautiful? Her name?"

"I do not know it."

"Come, now."

"On my honor."

"My friend, I begin to think it is more dangerous than I thought; it is not sadness, but madness."

"She never spoke but once before me, and since then I have not heard the sound of her voice."

"And you have not inquired about her?"

"Of whom?"

"Why, of the neighbors."

"She lives in her own house, and no one knows her."

"Ah! _ça!_ then she is a ghost!"

"She is a woman, tall and beautiful as a nymph, serious and grave as the angel Gabriel!"

"When did you meet her?"

"One day I followed a young girl to the church of La Gypecienne, and I entered a little garden close to it, where there is a stone seat under some trees. Do you know this garden, Anne?"

"No; but never mind--go on."

"It began to grow dark; I had lost sight of the young girl, and in seeking her I arrived at this seat. I saw a woman's dress, and held out my hands. 'Pardon, monsieur,' said the voice of a man whom I had not noticed, and he gently but firmly pushed me away."

"He dared to touch you, Henri?"

"Listen; he had his face hidden in a sort of frock, and I took him for a monk. Besides, he impressed me also by the polite manner of his warning; for, as he spoke, he pointed out to me the woman, whose white dress had attracted me, and who was kneeling before the seat as though it were an altar. It was toward the beginning of September that this happened; the air was warm, the flowers planted by friends around the tombs scattered their delicate perfume, and the moon, rising above the white clouds, began to shed her silver light over all. Whether it were the place, or her own dignity, I know not, but this woman seemed to me like a marble

statue, and impressed me with a strange respect. I looked at her earnestly. She bent over the seat, enveloping it in her arms, placed her lips to it, and soon I saw her shoulders heave with such sobs as you never heard, my brother. As she wept she kissed the stone with ardor; her tears had troubled me, but her kisses maddened me."

"But, by the pope, it is she who is mad, to kiss a stone and sob for nothing."

"Oh! it was a great grief that made her sob, a profound love which made her kiss the stone. Only whom did she love? whom did she weep for? whom did she pray for? I know not."

"Did you not question this man?"

"Yes."

"What did he reply?"

"That she had lost her husband."

"Bah! as if people weep like that for a husband. Were you content with such an answer?"

"I was obliged to be content, for he would give me no other."

"But the man--what is he?"

"A sort of servant who lives with her."--"His name?"

"He would not tell me."

"Young or old?"

"He might be about thirty."

"Well, afterward? She did not stop all night praying and weeping, did she?"

"No; when she had exhausted her tears she rose, and there was so much mystery and sadness about her that, instead of advancing to her as I might have done to another, I drew back; but she turned toward me, though she did not see me, and the moon shone on her face, which was calm and sad, and the traces of her tears were still on her cheeks; she moved slowly, and the servant went to support her. But, oh! my brother, what dreadful, what superhuman beauty. I have never seen anything like it on earth, only sometimes in my dreams."

"Well, Henri?" said Anne, interested, in spite of himself, at a recital at which he had determined to laugh.

"Oh! it is nearly finished, brother. Her servant whispered something to her, and she lowered her veil; doubtless he told her I was there, but she did not glance toward me. I saw her no more, and it seemed to me,

when the veil concealed her face, as if the sky had become suddenly overshadowed--that it was no longer a living thing, but a shade escaped from the tomb, which was gliding silently before me. She went out of the garden, and I followed her; from time to time the man turned and saw me, for I did not hide myself; I had still the old habits in my mind--the old leaven in my heart."

"What do you mean, Henri?"

The young man smiled. "I mean, brother," said he, "that I have often thought I loved before, and that all women, until now, have been for me--women to whom I might offer my love."

"Oh! and what is this one?" said Anne, trying to recover his gayety, which, in spite of himself, had been a little disturbed by his brother's confidence.

"My brother," said Henri, seizing his hand in a fervent grasp, "as truly as I live, I know not if she be a creature of this world or not."

"Holy Fathers! you would make me afraid, if a Joyeuse could know fear. However, as she walks, weeps, and gives kisses, it seems to me to augur well. But finish."

"There is little more. I followed her, and she did not try to escape or lead me astray; she never seemed to think of it."

"Well, and where does she live?"

"By the side of the Bastille, Rue de Lesdiguières. At the door, the servant turned and saw me."

"You asked to speak to him?"

"You will think it ridiculous, but I dared not."

"You entered the house, then?"

"No, brother."

"Really, Henri, I am tempted to disown you this evening. But you returned the next day?"

"Yes, but uselessly, and equally so to La Gypécienne."

"She had disappeared?"

"Like a shadow."

"But you inquired?"

"The street has few inhabitants, and no one knew her. I watched for the servant, but he also had disappeared; however, a light which shone every evening through the Venetian blinds consoled me by the knowledge that

she was still there. At last this disappeared; she had quitted the Rue de Lesdiguieres, and no one knew where she had gone."

"But you found her again?"

"Chance did it. Listen: it is really strange. I was going along the Rue de Bussy, a fortnight ago, about midnight; you know how strict the regulations are about fire; well, I saw, not only light in the windows of a house, but a real fire, which had broken out in the second story. I knocked at the door, and a man appeared at the window. 'You have fire in your house!' I cried. 'Silence! I beg; I am occupied in putting it out.' 'Shall I call the watch?' I asked. 'No! in Heaven's name, call no one!' 'But can I help you?' 'Will you? I shall be very grateful,' and he threw me the key out of the window.

"I mounted the stairs rapidly, and entered the room where the fire was burning; it was used as a chemist's laboratory, and in making I know not what experiments, an inflammable liquid had been spilled, which had ignited the floor. When I entered, the fire was almost got under. I looked at the man; a dreadful scar disfigured his cheek, and another his forehead; the rest of his face was hidden by a thick beard. 'I thank you, monsieur,' said he; 'but you see all is finished now; if you are as gallant a man as you seem, have the goodness to retire, for my mistress may return at any moment, and will be angry if she sees a stranger here.'

"The sound of his voice struck me instantly. I was about to cry, 'You

are the man of La Gypécienne--of the Rue de Lesdiguières!' for you remember that I had not seen his face before, but only heard his voice, when suddenly a door opened, and a woman entered. 'What is the matter, Remy, and why this noise?' she asked. Oh! my brother, it was she! more beautiful than ever, by the dying light of the fire. It was she!--the woman whose memory had ever lived in my heart. At the cry which I uttered the servant looked narrowly at me. 'Thanks, monsieur,' said he, again; 'you see the fire is out; go, I beg of you.'

"'My friend,' said I, 'you dismiss me very rudely.' 'Madame,' said he, 'it is he.' 'Who?' 'The young man we met in the garden, and who followed us home.' She turned toward me and said, 'Monsieur, I beg of you to go.' I hesitated; I wished to speak, but my words failed me. I remained motionless and mute, gazing at her. 'Take care, monsieur,' said the servant, sadly; 'you will force her to fly again.' 'Heaven forbid!' cried I; 'but how do I offend you, madame?' She did not reply; insensible, mute, and cold, as though she had not heard me, she turned, and I saw her disappear gradually in the shade."

"And is that all?"

"All; the servant led me to the door, saying, 'Forget, monsieur, I beg of you.' I fled, bewildered and half crazy, and since then I have gone every evening to this street, and, concealed in the angle of the opposite house, under the shade of a little balcony, I see, once in ten times, a light in her room: that is my life, my happiness."

"What happiness!"

"Alas! I should lose this, if I tried for more."

"But in acting thus, you lose all the amusements of the world."

"My brother," said Henri, with a sad smile, "I am happy thus."

"Not so, mordieu! One monk in a family is enough."

"No railleries, brother."

"But let me say one thing!"

"What is it?"

"That you have been taken in like a schoolboy."

"I am not taken in; I only gave way to a power stronger than mine. When a current carries you away, you cannot fight against it."

"But if it lead to an abyss?"

"You must be swallowed up!"

"Do you think so?"

"Yes!"

"I do not: and in your place--"

"What would you have done?"

"Enough, certainly, to have learned her name and--"

"Anne, you don't know her."

"No, but I know you, Henri. You had 50,000 crowns that I gave you out of the last 100,000 the king gave to me."

"They are still in my chest, Anne; I have not touched one of them."

"Mordieu! If they were not there, you would be in a different position."

"Oh! my brother!"

"Certainly. An ordinary servant may be bought for ten crowns, a good one for 100, an excellent one for 1,000, and a marvel for 3,000. Let us see, then. Suppose this man to be the phoenix of all servants--the beau ideal of fidelity, yet, by the pope! for 20,000 crowns you will buy him. There would then remain 30,000 crowns for the phoenix of women, and all would be settled."

"Anne!" sighed Henri, "there are people who cannot be bought; there are

hearts that the king is not rich enough to purchase."

"Well! perhaps so; but hearts are sometimes given. What have you done to win that of the beautiful statue?"

"I believe, Anne, that I have done all I could."

"Really, Comte du Bouchage, you are mad. You see a woman, sad, solitary, and melancholy, and you become more sad, more recluse, and more melancholy than she. She is alone--keep her company; she is sad--be gay; she regrets--console her, and replace him she regrets."

"Impossible! brother."

"Have you tried? Are you in love, or are you not?"

"I have no words to express how much!"

"Well! I see no reason to despair."

"I have no hope."

"At what time do you see her?"

"I have told you that I do not see her."--"Never?"--"Never!"

"Not even at her window?"

"Not even at her window!"

"We must put an end to that. Do you think she has a lover?"

"I have never seen any one enter her house, except the Remy of whom I spoke to you."

"Take the house opposite."

"It may not be to let."

"Bah! offer double the rent!"

"But if she sees me there, she will disappear as before."

"You shall see her this evening."

"I!"

"Yes! Be under her balcony at eight o'clock."

"I am always there."

"Well, give me the address."

"Between the Porte Bussy and the Hotel St. Denis, near the corner of the

Rue des Augustins, and a few steps from a large inn, having for a sign,
'The Sword of the Brave Chevalier.'

"Very well, then; this evening at eight o'clock."

"But what do you intend to do?"

"You shall see: meanwhile, go home; put on your richest dress, and use your finest perfume, and I hope that you will enter the house to-night."

"May you be a true prophet, brother!"

"Well! I leave you for the present, for my lady-love waits for me: and I confess, that after your account, I prefer her to yours. Adieu! Henri, till the evening."

The brothers then pressed each other's hands, and separated.