

## Chapter 7

"THE SWORD OF THE BRAVE CHEVALIER."

During the conversation we have just related, night had begun to fall, enveloping the city with its damp mantle of fog.

Salcede dead, all the spectators were ready to leave the Place de Greve, and the streets were filled with people, hurrying toward their homes. Near the Porte Bussy, where we must now transport our readers, to follow some of their acquaintances, and to make new ones, a hum, like that in a bee-hive at sunset, was heard proceeding from a house tinted rose color, and ornamented with blue and white pointings, which was known by the sign of "The Sword of the Brave Chevalier," and which was an immense inn, recently built in this new quarter. This house was decorated to suit all tastes. On the entablature was painted a representation of a combat between an archangel and a dragon breathing flame and smoke, and in which the artist, animated by sentiments at once heroic and pious, had depicted in the hands of "the brave chevalier," not a sword, but an immense cross, with which he hacked in pieces the unlucky dragon, of which the bleeding pieces were seen lying on the ground. At the bottom of the picture crowds of spectators were represented raising their arms to heaven, while from above, angels were extending over the chevalier laurels and palms. Then, as if to prove that he could paint in every style, the artist had grouped around gourds, grapes, a snail on a rose, and two rabbits, one white and the other gray.

Assuredly the proprietor must have been difficult to please, if he were not satisfied, for the artist had filled every inch of space--there was scarcely room to have added a caterpillar. In spite, however, of this attractive exterior, the hotel did not prosper--it was never more than half full, though it was large and comfortable. Unfortunately, from its proximity to the Pre-aux-Clercs, it was frequented by so many persons either going or ready to fight, that those more peaceably disposed avoided it. Indeed, the cupids with which the interior was decorated had been ornamented with mustaches in charcoal by the habitues; and Dame Fournichon, the landlady, always affirmed that the sign had brought them ill-luck, and that had her wishes been attended to, and the painting represented more pleasing things, such as the rose-tree of love surrounded by flaming hearts, all tender couples would have flocked to them.

M. Fournichon, however, stuck to his sign, and replied that he preferred fighting men, and that one of them drank as much as six lovers.

About a month before the execution of Salcede, the host and hostess, all of whose rooms were then empty, were looking out of the window, sadly, and were watching the exercises of some soldiery on the Pre-aux-Clercs, when they saw an officer, followed by a single soldier, advancing toward their hotel. He was about to pass, when the host called out loudly--"Oh! wife, what a beautiful horse!"

Madame Fournichon replied in an equally audible voice, "And what a

handsome cavalier!"

The officer, who did not appear insensible to flattery, raised his head and looked first at the host and hostess and then at the hotel.

Fournichon ran rapidly downstairs and appeared at the door.

"Is the house empty?" asked the officer.

"Yes, monsieur; just at present," replied the host, humiliated; "but it is not usually so."

However, Dame Fournichon, like most women, was more clear-sighted than her husband, and called out, "If monsieur desires solitude, he will find it here."

"Yes, my good woman, that is what I desire, at present," said the officer, who dismounted, threw the bridle to the soldier, and entered the hotel.

He was a man of about thirty-five years of age, but he did not look more than twenty-eight, so carefully was he dressed. He was tall, with a fine countenance and a distinguished air.

"Ah! good!" said he, "a large room and not a single guest. But there must be something," he added, "either in your house or conduct that keeps people away."

"Neither, monsieur," replied Madame Fournichon; "only the place is new, and we choose our customers."

"Oh! very well."

"For example," continued she, "for a person like your lordship, we would send away a dozen."

"Thanks, my kind hostess."

"Will monsieur taste the wine?" asked M. Fournichon.

"Will monsieur visit the rooms?" added his wife.

"Both, if you please."

Fournichon descended to the cellar.

"How many people can you lodge here?" asked the captain of the hostess.

"Thirty."

"That is not enough."

"Why so, monsieur?"

"I had a project--but we will speak of it no more."

"Ah! monsieur, you will find nothing larger, except the Louvre itself."

"Well; you can lodge thirty people?"

"Yes, doubtless."

"But for a day?"

"Oh! for a day, forty, or even forty-five."

"Without making a commotion outside?"--"We have often eighty soldiers here, on Sundays."

"And no crowd before the house--no spying by the neighbors?"

"Mon Dieu! no! our nearest neighbors are a worthy bourgeois, who meddles with no one, and a lady who lives so retired, that although she has been here for three weeks, I have not seen her."

"That will do excellently."

"So much the better."

"And in a month from to-day--"

"That will be the 26th of October."

"Precisely. Well, on that day I hire your inn."--"The whole of it?"

"Yes, the whole. I wish to give a surprise to some countrymen, officers--or at least--soldiers: they will be told to come here."

"But if it be a surprise--"

"Oh! if you are curious, or indiscreet--"

"No, no, monsieur," cried she.

M. Fournichon, who had heard what had passed, added, "Monsieur, you shall be master here; and all your friends will be welcome."

"I did not say my friends, I said countrymen," replied the officer, haughtily.

"Yes, monsieur, it was my mistake."

"You will give them supper."

"Certainly."

"If necessary, they will sleep here."

"Yes, monsieur."

"In a word, give them all they want, and ask no questions."

"Very well, monsieur."

"Here are thirty livres in advance."

"Well, monsieur, these gentlemen shall be treated like princes; will you assure yourself by tasting the wine?"

"Thank you, I never drink."

"But, monsieur, how shall I know these gentlemen?"

"That is true; parfondious! I forgot. Give me paper, light, and wax."

When they were brought, the captain made a seal on the paper with a ring he had on his finger. "Do you see this figure?" said he.

"A beautiful woman."

"Yes; a Cleopatra. Well, each of these men will present a similar one, on which you will receive him. You will have further orders afterward."

The captain then descended the stall's and rode off, leaving the Fournichons delighted with their thirty livres in advance.

"Decidedly," said the host, "the sign has brought us good fortune."