

## Chapter 16

### THE SERENADE.

From the Louvre Chicot had not far to go to his home. He went to the bank of the Seine and got into a little boat which he had left there.

"It is strange," thought he, as he rowed and looked at the still-lighted window of the king's room, "that after so many years, Henri is still the same. Others have risen or fallen, while he has gained some wrinkles, and that is all. He has the same weak, yet elevated mind--still fantastical and poetical--still the same egotistical being, always asking for more than one has to give him, friendship from the indifferent, love from the friendly, devotion from the loving, and more sad than any one in his kingdom. By-the-by, he did not speak of giving me any money for my journey; that proves at least that he thinks me a friend." And he laughed quietly.

He soon arrived at the opposite bank, where he fastened his boat. On entering the Rue des Augustins, he was struck by the sound of instruments and voices in the street at that late hour.

"Is there a wedding here?" thought he, "I have not long to sleep, and now this will keep me awake."

As he advanced, he saw a dozen flambeaux carried by pages, while thirty

musicians were playing on different instruments. The band was stationed before a house, that Chicot, with surprise, recognized as his own. He remained for an instant stupefied, and then said to himself, "There must be some mistake; all this noise cannot be for me. Unless, indeed, some unknown princess has suddenly fallen in love with me."

This supposition, flattering as it was, did not appear to convince Chicot, and he turned toward the house facing his, but it showed no signs of life.

"They must sleep soundly, there," said he; "such a noise is enough to wake the dead."

"Pardon me, my friend," said he, addressing himself to a torch-bearer, "but can you tell me, if you please, who all this music is for?"

"For the bourgeois who lives there." replied he, pointing out to Chicot his own house.

"Decidedly it is for me!" thought he. "Whom do you belong to?" he asked.

"To the bourgeois who lives there."

"Ah! they not only come for me, but they belong to me--still better.

Well! we shall see," and piercing through the crowd, he opened his door, went upstairs, and appeared at his balcony, in which he placed a chair and sat down.

"Gentlemen," said he, "are you sure there is no mistake? is all this really for me?"

"Are you M. Robert Briquet?"

"Himself."

"Then we are at your service, monsieur," said the leader of the band, giving the sign to recommence.

"Certainly it is unintelligible," thought Chicot. He looked around; all the inhabitants of the street were at their windows, excepting those of the opposite house, which, as we have said, remained dark and quiet. But on glancing downward, he saw a man wrapped in a dark cloak, and who wore a black hat with a red feather, leaning against the portico of his own door, and looking earnestly at the opposite house.

The leader of the band just then quitted his post and spoke softly to this man, and Chicot instantly guessed that here lay all the interest of the scene. Soon after, a gentleman on horseback, followed by two squires, appeared at the corner of the street, and pushed his way through the crowd, while the music stopped.

"M. de Joyeuse," murmured Chicot, who recognized him at once.

The cavalier approached the gentleman under the balcony.

"Well! Henri," said he, "what news?"

"Nothing, brother."--"Nothing?"

"No; she has not even appeared."

"They have not made noise enough."

"They have roused all the neighborhood."

"They did not cry as I told them, that it was all in honor of this bourgeois."

"They cried it so loud, that there he is, sitting in his balcony, listening."

"And she has not appeared?"

"Neither she, nor any one."

"The idea was ingenious, however, for she might, like the rest of the people, have profited by the music given to her neighbor."

"Ah! you do not know her, brother."

"Yes, I do; or at all events I know women, and as she is but a woman, we will not despair."

"Ah! you say that in a discouraged tone, brother."

"Not at all; only give the bourgeois his serenade every night."

"But she will go away."

"Not if you do not speak to her, or seem to be doing it on her account, and remain concealed. Has the bourgeois spoken?"

"Yes, and he is now speaking again."

"Hold your tongue up there and go in," cried Joyeuse, out of humor.

"Diable! you have had your serenade, so keep quiet."

"My serenade! that is just what I want to know the meaning of; to whom is it addressed?"

"To your daughter."

"I have none."--"To your wife, then."

"Thank God, I am not married."

"Then to yourself, and if you do not go in--" cried Joyeuse, advancing

with a menacing air.

"Ventre de biche! but if the music be for me--"

"Old fool!" growled Joyeuse. "If you do not go in and hide your ugly face they shall break their instruments over your head."

"Let the man alone, brother," said Henri, "the fact is, he must be very much astonished."

"Oh! but if we get up a quarrel, perhaps she will look to see what is the matter; we will burn his house down, if necessary."

"No, for pity's sake, brother, do not let us force her attention; we are beaten, and must submit."

Chicot, who heard all, was mentally preparing the means of defense, but Joyeuse yielded to his brother's request, and dismissed the pages and musicians.

Then he said to his brother, "I am in despair; all conspires against us."

"What do you mean?"

"I have no longer time to aid you."

"I see now that you are in traveling dress; I did not remark it before."

"I set off to-night for Antwerp, by desire of the king."

"When did he give you the order?"

"This evening."

"Mon Dieu!"

"Come with me, I entreat."

"Do you order me, brother?" said Henri, turning pale at the thought.

"No; I only beg you."

"Thank you, brother. If I were forced to give up passing my nights under this window."

"Well?"

"I should die."

"You are mad."

"My heart is here, brother; my life is here."

Joyeuse crossed his arms with a mixture of anger and pity. "If our father," he said, "begged you to let yourself be attended by Miron, who is at once a philosopher and a doctor?"

"I should reply to my father that I am well and that my brain is sound, and that Miron cannot cure love sickness."

"Well, then, Henri, I must make the best of it. She is but a woman, and at my return I hope to see you more joyous than myself."

"Yes, yes, my good brother, I shall be cured--I shall be happy, thanks to your friendship, which is my most precious possession."

"After your love."

"Before my life."

Joyeuse, much touched, interrupted him.

"Let us go, brother," said he.

"Yes, brother, I follow you," said Du Bouchage, sighing.

"Yes, I understand; the last adieux to the window; but you have also one for me, brother."

Henri passed his arms round the neck of his brother, who leaned down to



embrace him.

"No!" cried he. "I will accompany you to the gates," and with a last look toward the window, he followed his brother.

Chicot continued to watch. Gradually every one disappeared, and the street was deserted. Then one of the windows of the opposite house was opened, and a man looked out.

"There is no longer any one, madame," said he; "you may leave your hiding-place and go down to your own room," and lighting a lamp, he gave it into a hand stretched out to receive it.

Chicot looked earnestly, but as he caught sight of her pale but sublime face, he shuddered and sat down, entirely subjugated, in his turn, by the melancholy influence of the house.