

## Chapter 55

### RED PLUME AND WHITE PLUME.

It was eight in the evening, and the house of Robert Briquet, solitary and sad-looking, formed a worthy companion to that mysterious house of which we have already spoken to our readers. One might have thought that these two houses were yawning in each other's face. Not far from there the noise of brass was heard, mingled with confused voices, vague murmurs, and squeaks.

It was probably this noise that attracted a young and handsome cavalier, with a violet cap, red plume, and gray mantle, who, after stopping for some minutes to hear this noise, went on slowly and pensively toward the house of Robert Briquet. Now this noise of brass was that of saucepans; these vague murmurs, those of pots boiling on fires and spits turned by dogs; those cries, those of M. Fournichon, host of the "Brave Chevalier," and of Madame Fournichon, who was preparing her rooms. When

the young man with the violet hat had well looked at the fire, inhaled the smell of the fowls, and peeped through the curtains, he went away, then returned to recommence his examinations. He continued to walk up and down, but never passed Robert Briquet's house, which seemed to be the limit of his walk. Each time that he arrived at this limit he found there, like a sentinel, a young man about his own age, with a black cap, a white plume, and a violet cloak, who, with frowning brow and his hand

on his sword, seemed to say, "Thou shalt go no further." But the other took twenty turns without observing this, so preoccupied was he. Certainly he saw a man walking up and down like himself: but, as he was too well dressed to be a robber, he never thought of disquieting himself about him. But the other, on the contrary, looked more and more black at each return of the red plume, till at last it attracted his attention, and he began to think that his presence there must be annoying to the other; and wondering for what reason, he looked first at Briquet's house, then at the one opposite, and seeing nothing, turned round and recommenced his walk from west to east. This continued for about five minutes, until, as they once again came face to face, the young man in the white plume walked straight up against the other, who, taken unawares, with difficulty saved himself from falling.

"Monsieur," cried he, "are you mad, or do you mean to insult me?"

"Monsieur, I wish to make you understand that you annoy me much. It seems to me that you might have seen that without my telling you."

"Not at all, monsieur; I never see what I do not wish to see."

"There are, however, certain things which would attract your attention, I hope, if they shone before your eyes;" and he drew his sword as he spoke, which glittered in the moonlight.

The red plume said quietly, "One would think, monsieur, that you had never drawn a sword before, you are in such a hurry to attack one who

does not attack you."

"But who will defend himself, I hope."

"Why so?" replied the other smiling. "And what right have you to prevent me from walking in the street?"

"Why do you walk in this street?"

"Parbleu! because it pleases me."

"Ah! it pleases you."

"Doubtless; are you not also walking here? Have you a license from the king to keep to yourself the Rue de Bussy?"

"What is that to you?"

"A great deal, for I am a faithful subject of the king's, and would not disobey him."

"Ah! you laugh!"

"And you threaten."

"Heaven and earth! I tell you, you annoy me, monsieur, and that if you do not go away willingly I will make you."

"Oh! oh! we shall see that."

"Yes, we shall see."

"Monsieur, I have particular business here. Now, if you will have it, I will cross swords with you, but I will not go away."

"Monsieur, I am Comte Henri du Bouchage, brother of the Duc de Joyeuse. Once more, will you yield me the place, and go away?"

"Monsieur," replied the other, "I am the Vicomte Ernanton de Carmainges. You do not annoy me at all, and I do not ask you to go away."

Du Bouchage reflected a moment, and then put his sword back in its sheath.

"Excuse me, monsieur," said he; "I am half mad, being in love."

"And I also am in love, but I do not think myself mad for that."

Henri grew pale.

"You are in love!" said he.

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you confess it?"

"Is it a crime?"

"But with some one in this street?"

"Yes, for the present."

"In Heaven's name tell me who it is!"

"Ah! M. du Bouchage, you have not reflected on what you are asking me; you know a gentleman cannot reveal a secret, of which only half belongs to him."

"It is true; pardon, M. de Carmainges; but, in truth, there is no one so unhappy as I am under heaven."

There was so much real grief and eloquent despair in these words, that Ernanton was profoundly touched.

"Oh! mon Dieu! I understand," said he; "you fear that we are rivals."

"I do."

"Well; monsieur, I will be frank."

Joyeuse grew pale again.

"I," continued Ernanton, "have a rendezvous."

"A rendezvous?"

"Yes."

"In this street?"

"Yes."

"Written?"

"Yes; in very good writing."

"A woman's?"

"No; a man's."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. I have an invitation to a rendezvous with a woman, written by a man; it seems she has a secretary."

"Ah! go on, monsieur."

"I cannot refuse you, monsieur. I will tell you the tenor of the note."

"I listen."

"You will see if it is like yours."

"Oh! monsieur, I have no rendezvous--no note."

Ernanton then drew out a little paper. "Here is the note, monsieur," said he; "it would be difficult to read it to you by this obscure light: but it is short, and I know it by heart, if you will trust to me."

"Oh! entirely."

"This is it, then: 'M. Ernanton, my secretary is charged by me to tell you that I have a great desire to talk with you for an hour; your merit has touched me.' I pass over another phrase still more flattering."

"Then you are waited for?"

"No; I wait, as you see."

"Are they to open the door to you?"

"No; to whistle three times from the window."

Henri, trembling all over, placed one hand on Ernanton's arm and with the other pointed to the opposite house.

"From there?" said he.

"Oh! no; from there," said Ernanton, pointing to the "Brave Chevalier."

Henri uttered a cry of joy. "Oh! a thousand thanks, monsieur," said he; "pardon my incivility--my folly. Alas! you know, for a man who really loves, there exists but one woman, and, seeing you always return to this house, I believed that it was here you were waited for."

"I have nothing to pardon, monsieur; for really I half-thought you had come on the same errand as myself."

"And you had the incredible patience to say nothing! Ah! you do not love, you do not love."

"Ma foi! I have no great rights as yet; and these great ladies are so capricious, and would, perhaps, enjoy playing me a trick."

"Oh! M. de Carmainges, you do not love as I do; and yet--"

"Yet what?"

"You are more happy."

"Ah! are they cruel in that house?"



"M. de Carmainges, for three months I have loved like a madman her who lives there, and I have not yet had the happiness of hearing the sound of her voice."

"Diable! you are not far advanced. But stay."

"What is it?"

"Did not some one whistle?"

"Indeed, I think I heard something."

A second whistle was now distinctly heard.

"M. le Comte," said Ernanton, "you will excuse me for taking leave, but I believe that is my signal."

A third whistle sounded.

"Go, monsieur," said Joyeuse; "and good luck to you."

Ernanton made off quickly, while Joyeuse began to walk back more gloomily than ever.

"Now for my accustomed task," said he; "let me knock as usual at this cursed door which never opens to me."

