The Brothers-in-arms

Honore de Balzac

At the commencement of the reign of King Henry, second of the name, who loved so well the fair Diana, there existed still a ceremony of which the usage has since become much weakened, and which has altogether disappeared, like an infinity of the good things of the olden times. This fine and noble custom was the choice which all knights made of a brother-in-arms. After having recognised each other as two loval and brave men, each one of this pretty couple was married for life to the other; both became brothers, the one had to defend the other in battling against the enemies who threatened him, and at Court against the friends who slandered him. In the absence of his companion the other was expected to say to one who should have accused his good brother of any disloyalty, wickedness or dark felony, "You have lied by your throat," and so go into the field instantly, so sure was the one of the honour of the other. There is no need to add, that the one was always the second of the other in all affairs, good or evil, and that they shared all good or evil fortune. They were better than the brothers who are only united by the hazard of nature, since they were fraternised by the bonds of an especial sentiment, involuntary and mutual, and thus the fraternity of arms has produced splendid characters, as brave as those of the ancient Greeks, Romans, or others.... But this is not my subject; the history of these things has been written by the historians of our country, and everyone knows them.

Now at this time two young gentlemen of Touraine, of whom one was the Cadet of Maille, and the other Sieur de Lavalliere, became brothers- in-arms on the day they gained their spurs. They were leaving the house of Monsieur de Montmorency, where they had been nourished with the good doctrines of this great Captain, and had shown how contagious is valour in such good company, for at the battle of Ravenna they merited the praises of the oldest knights. It was in the thick of this fierce fight that Maille, saved by the said Lavalliere, with whom he had had a quarrel or two, perceived that this gentleman had a noble heart. As they had each received slashes in the doublets, they baptised their fraternity with their blood, and were ministered to together in one and the same bed under the tent of Monsieur de Montmorency their master. It is necessary to inform you that, contrary to the custom of his family, which was always to have a pretty face, the Cadet of Maille was not of a pleasing physiognomy, and had scarcely any beauty but that of the devil. For the rest he was lithe as a greyhound, broad shouldered and strongly built as King Pepin, who was a terrible antagonist. On the other hand, the Sieur de Lavalliere was a dainty fellow, for whom seemed to have been invented rich laces, silken hose, and cancellated shoes. His long dark locks were pretty as a lady's ringlets, and he was, to be brief, a child with whom all the women would be glad to play. One day the Dauphine, niece of the Pope, said laughingly to the Queen of Navarre, who did not dislike these little jokes, "that this page was a plaster to cure every ache," which caused the pretty little Tourainian to blush, because, being only sixteen, he took this gallantry as a reproach.

Now on his return from Italy the Cadet of Maille found the slipper of marriage ready for his foot, which his mother had obtained for him in the person of Mademoiselle d'Annebaut, who was a graceful maiden of good appearance, and well furnished with everything, having a splendid hotel in the Rue Barbette, with handsome furniture and Italian paintings and many considerable lands to inherit. Some days after the death of King Francis--a

Livros Grátis

http://www.livrosgratis.com.br

Milhares de livros grátis para download.

circumstance which planted terror in the heart of everyone, because his said Majesty had died in consequence of an attack of the Neapolitan sickness, and that for the future there would be no security even with princesses of the highest birth--the above-named Maille was compelled to quit the Court in order to go and arrange certain affairs of great importance in Piedmont. You may be sure that he was very loath to leave his good wife, so young, so delicate, so sprightly, in the midst of the dangers, temptations, snares and pitfalls of this gallant assemblage, which comprised so many handsome fellows, bold as eagles, proud of mein, and as fond of women as the people are partial to Paschal hams. In this state of intense jealousy everything made him ill at ease; but by dint of much thinking, it occurred to him to make sure of his wife in the manner about to be related. He invited his good brother-in-arms to come at daybreak on the morning of his departure. Now directly he heard Lavalliere's horse in the courtyard, he leaped out of bed, leaving his sweet and fair betterhalf sleeping that gentle, dreamy, dozing sleep so beloved by dainty ladies and lazy people. Lavalliere came to him, and the two companions, hidden in the embrasure of the window, greeted each other with a loval clasp of the hand, and immediately Lavalliere said to Maille--

"I should have been here last night in answer to thy summons, but I had a love suit on with my lady, who had given me an assignation; I could in no way fail to keep it, but I quitted her at dawn. Shall I accompany thee? I have told her of thy departure, she has promised me to remain without any amour; we have made a compact. If she deceives me--well a friend is worth more than a mistress!"

"Oh! my good brother" replied the Maille, quite overcome with these words, "I wish to demand of thee a still higher proof of thy brave heart. Wilt thou take charge of my wife, defend her against all, be her guide, keep her in check and answer to me for the integrity of my head? Thou canst stay here during my absence, in the green-room, and be my wife's cavalier."

Lavalliere knitted his brow and said--

"It is neither thee nor thy wife that I fear, but evil-minded people, who will take advantage of this to entangle us like skeins of silk."

"Do not be afraid of me," replied Maille, clasping Lavalliere to his breast. "If it be the divine will of the Almighty that I should have the misfortune to be a cuckold, I should be less grieved if it were to your advantage. But by my faith I should die of grief, for my life is bound up in my good, young, virtuous wife."

Saying which, he turned away his head, in order that Lavalliere should not perceive the tears in his eyes; but the fine courtier saw this flow of water, and taking the hand of Maille--

"Brother," said he to him, "I swear to thee on my honour as a man, that before anyone lays a finger on thy wife, he shall have felt my dagger in the depth of his veins! And unless I should die, thou shalt find her on thy return, intact in body if not in heart, because thought is beyond the control of gentlemen."

"It is then decreed above," exclaimed Maille, "that I shall always be thy servant and thy debtor!"

Thereupon the comrade departed, in order not to be inundated with the tears, exclamations, and other expressions of grief which ladies make use of when saying "Farewell." Lavalliere having conducted him to the gate of the town, came back to the hotel, waited until Marie d'Annebaut was out of bed, informed her of the departure of her good husband, and offered to place himself at her orders, in such a graceful manner, that the most virtuous woman would have been tickled with a desire to keep such a knight to herself. But there was no need of this fine paternoster to indoctrinate the lady, seeing that she had listened to the discourse of the two friends, and was greatly offended at her husband's doubt. Alas! God alone is perfect! In all the ideas of men there is always a bad side, and it is therefore a great science in life, but an impossible science, to take hold of everything, even a stick by the right end. The cause of the great difficulty there is in pleasing the ladies is, that there is it in them a thing which is more woman than they are, and but for the respect which is due to them, I would use another word. Now we should never awaken the phantasy of this malevolent thing. The perfect government of woman is a task to rend a man's heart, and we are compelled to remain in perfect submission to them; that is, I imagine, the best manner in which to solve the most agonising enigma of marriage.

Now Marie d'Annebaut was delighted with the bearing and offers of this gallant; but there was something in her smile which indicated a malicious idea, and, to speak plainly, the intention of putting her young guardian between honour and pleasure; to regale him so with love, to surround him with so many little attentions, to pursue him with such warm glances, that he would be faithless to friendship, to the advantage of gallantry.

Everything was in perfect trim for the carrying out of her design, because of the companionship which the Sire de Lavalliere would be obliged to have with her during his stay in the hotel, and as there is nothing in the world can turn a woman from her whim, at every turn the artful jade was ready to catch him in a trap.

At times she would make him remain seated near her by the fire, until twelve o'clock at night, singing soft refrains, and at every opportunity showed her fair shoulders, and the white temptations of which her corset was full, and casting upon him a thousand piercing glances, all without showing in her face the thoughts that surged in her brain.

At times she would walk with him in the morning, in the gardens of the hotel, leaning heavily upon his arm, pressing it, sighing, and making him tie the laces of her little shoes, which were always coming undone in that particular place. Then it would be those soft words and things which the ladies understand so well, little attentions paid to a guest, such as coming in to see if he were comfortable, if his bed were well made, the room clean, if the ventilation were good, if he felt any draughts in the night, if the sun came in during the day, and asking him to forgo none of his usual fancies and habits, saying--

"Are you accustomed to take anything in the morning in bed, such as honey, milk, or spice? Do the meal times suit you? I will conform mine to yours: tell me. You are afraid to ask me. Come--"

She accompanied these coddling little attentions with a hundred affected speeches; for instance, on coming into the room she would say--

"I am intruding, send me away. You want to be left alone--I will go." And always was she graciously invited to remain.

And the cunning Madame always came lightly attired, showing samples of her beauty, which would have made a patriarch neigh, even were he as much battered by time as must have been Mr. Methusaleh, with his nine hundred and sixty years.

That good knight being as sharp as a needle, let the lady go on with her tricks, much pleased to see her occupy herself with him, since it was so much gained; but like a loyal brother, he always called her absent husband to the lady's mind.

Now one evening--the day had been very warm--Lavalliere suspecting the lady's games, told her that Maille loved her dearly, that she had in him a man of honour, a gentleman who doted on her, and was ticklish on the score of his crown.

"Why then, if he is so ticklish in this manner, has he placed you here?"

"Was it not a most prudent thing?" replied he. "Was it not necessary to confide you to some defender of your virtue? Not that it needs one save to protect you from wicked men."

"Then you are my guardian?" said she.

"I am proud of it!" exclaimed Lavalliere.

"Ah!" said she, "he has made a very bad choice."

This remark was accompanied by a little look, so lewdly lascivious that the good brother-inarms put on, by way of reproach, a severe countenance, and left the fair lady alone, much piqued at this refusal to commence love's conflict.

She remained in deep meditation, and began to search for the real obstacle that she had encountered, for it was impossible that it should enter the mind of any lady, that a gentleman could despise that bagatelle which is of such great price and so high value. Now these thoughts knitted and joined together so well, one fitting into the other, that out of little pieces she constructed a perfect whole, and found herself desperately in love; which should teach the ladies never to play with a man's weapons, seeing that like glue, they always stick to the fingers.

By this means Marie d'Annebaut came to a conclusion which she should have known at the commencement--viz., that to keep clear of her snares, the good knight must be smitten with some other lady, and looking round her, to see where her young guest could have found a needle-case to his taste, she thought of the fair Limeuil, one of Queen Catherine's maids, of Mesdames de Nevers, d'Estree, and de Giac, all of whom were declared friends of Lavalliere, and of the lot he must love one to distraction.

From this belief, she added the motive of jealousy to the others which tempted her to seduce her Argus, whom she did not wish to wound, but to perfume, kiss his head, and treat kindly.

She was certainly more beautiful, young, and more appetising and gentle than her rivals; at least, that was the melodious decree of her imaginations. So, urged on by the chords and springs of conscience, and physical causes which affect women, she returned to the charge, to commence a fresh assault upon the heart of the chevalier, for the ladies like that which is well fortified.

Then she played the pussy-cat, and nestled up close to him, became so sweetly sociable, and wheedled so gently, that one evening when she was in a desponding state, although merry enough in her inmost soul, the guardian-brother asked her--

"What is the matter with you?"

To which she replied to him dreamily, being listened to by him as the sweetest music--

That she had married Maille against her heart's will, and that she was very unhappy; that she knew not the sweets of love; that her husband did not understand her, and that her life was full of tears. In fact, that she was a maiden in heart and all, since she confessed in marriage she had experienced nothing but the reverse of pleasure. And she added, that surely this holy state should be full of sweetmeats and dainties of love, because all the ladies hurried into it, and hated and were jealous of those who out-bid them, for it cost certain people pretty dear; that she was so curious about it that for one good day or night of love, she would give her life, and always be obedient to her lover without a murmur; but that he with whom she would sooner than all others try the experiment would not listen to her; that, nevertheless, the secret of their love might be kept eternally, so great was her husband's confidence in him, and that finally if he still refused it would kill her.

And all these paraphrases of the common canticle known to the ladies at their birth were ejaculated between a thousand pauses, interrupted with sighs torn from the heart, ornamented with quiverings, appeals to heaven, upturned eyes, sudden blushings and clutchings at her hair. In fact, no ingredient of temptation was lacking in the dish, and at the bottom of all these words there was a nipping desire which embellished even its blemishes. The good knight fell at the lady's feet, and weeping took them and kissed them, and you may be sure the good woman was quite delighted to let him kiss them, and even without looking too carefully to see what she was going to do, she abandoned her dress to him, knowing well that to keep it from sweeping the ground it must be taken at the bottom to raise it; but it was written that for that evening she should be good, for the handsome Lavalliere said to her with despair--

"Ah, madame, I am an unfortunate man and a wretch."

"Not at all," said she.

"Alas, the joy of loving you is denied to me."

"How?" said she.

"I dare not confess my situation to you!"

"Is it then very bad?"

"Ah, you will be ashamed of me!"

"Speak, I will hide my face in my hands," and the cunning madame hid her face is such a way that she could look at her well-beloved between her fingers.

"Alas!" said he, "the other evening when you addressed me in such gracious words, I was so treacherously inflamed, that not knowing my happiness to be so near, and not daring to confess my flame to you, I ran to a Bordel where all the gentleman go, and there for love of you, and to save the honour of my brother whose head I should blush to dishonour, I was so badly infected that I am in great danger of dying of the Italian sickness."

The lady, seized with terror, gave vent to the cry of a woman in labour, and with great emotion, repulsed him with a gentle little gesture. Poor Lavalliere, finding himself in so pitiable state, went out of the room, but he had not even reached the tapestries of the door, when Marie d'Annebaut again contemplated him, saying to herself, "Ah! what a pity!" Then she fell into a state of great melancholy, pitying in herself the gentleman, and became the more in love with him because he was fruit three times forbidden.

"But for Maille," said she to him, one evening that she thought him handsomer than unusual, "I would willingly take your disease. Together we should then have the same terrors."

"I love you too well," said the brother, "not to be good."

And he left her to go to his beautiful Limeuil. You can imagine that being unable to refuse to receive the burning glances of the lady, during meal times, and the evenings, there was a fire nourished that warmed them both, but she was compelled to live without touching her cavalier, otherwise than with her eyes. Thus occupied, Marie d'Annebaut was fortified at every point against the gallants of the Court, for there are no bounds so impassable as those of love, and no better guardian; it is like the devil, he whom it has in its clutches it surrounds with flames. One evening, Lavalliere having escorted his friend's wife to a dance given by Queen Catherine, he danced with the fair Limeuil, with whom he was madly in love. At that time the knights carried on their amours bravely two by two, and even in troops. Now all the ladies were jealous of La Limeuil, who at that time was thinking of yielding to the handsome Lavalliere. Before taking their places in the quadrille, she had given him the sweetest of assignations for the morrow, during the hunt. Our great Queen Catherine, who from political motives fermented these loves and stirred them up, like pastrycooks make the oven fires burn by poking, glanced at all the pretty couples interwoven in the quadrille, and said to her husband--

"When they combat here, can they conspire against you, eh?"

"Ah! but the Protestants?"

"Bah! have them here as well," said she, laughing. "Why, look at Lavalliere, who is suspected to be a Huguenot; he is converted by my dear little Limeuil, who does not play her cards badly for a young lady of sixteen. He will soon have her name down in his list." "Ah, Madame! do not believe it," said Marie d'Annebaut, "he is ruined through that same sickness of Naples which made you queen."

At this artless confession, Catherine, the fair Diana, and the king, who were sitting together, burst out laughing, and the thing ran round the room. This brought endless shame and mockery upon Lavalliere. The poor gentleman, pointed at by everyone, soon wished somebody else in his shoes, for La Limeuil, who his rivals had not been slow laughingly to warn of her danger, appeared to shrink from her lover, so rapid was the spread, and so violent the apprehensions of this nasty disease. Thus Lavalliere found himself abandoned by everyone like a leper. The king made an offensive remark, and the good knight quitted the ball-room, followed by poor Marie in despair at the speech. She had in every way ruined the man she loved: she had destroyed his honour, and marred his life, since the physicians and master surgeons advance as a fact, incapable of contradiction, that persons Italianised by this love sickness, lost through it their greatest attractions, as well as their generative powers, and their bones went black.

Thus no woman would bind herself in legitimate marriage with the finest gentlemen in the kingdom if he were only suspected of being one of those whom Master Frances Rabelais named "his very precious scabby ones."

As the handsome knight was very silent and melancholy, his companion said to him on the road home from Hercules House, where the fete had been held--

"My dear lord, I have done you a great mischief."

"Ah, madame!" replied Lavalliere, "my hurt is curable; but into what a predicament have you fallen? You should not have been aware of the danger of my love."

"Ah!" said she, "I am sure now always to have you to myself; in exchange for this great obloquy and dishonour, I will be forever your friend, your hostess, and your lady-love-more than that, your servant. My determination is to devote myself to you and efface the traces of this shame; to cure you by a watch and ward; and if the learned in these matters declare that the disease has such a hold of you that it will kill you like our defunct sovereign, I must still have your company in order to die gloriously in dying of your complaint. Even then," said she, weeping, "that will not be penance enough to atone for the wrong I have done you."

These words were accompanied with big tears; her virtuous heart waxed faint, she fell to the ground exhausted. Lavalliere, terrified, caught her and placed his hand upon her heart, below a breast of matchless beauty. The lady revived at the warmth of this beloved hand, experiencing such exquisite delights as nearly to make her again unconscious.

"Alas!" said she, "this sly and superficial caress will be for the future the only pleasure of our love. It will still be a hundred times better than the joys which poor Maille fancies he is bestowing on me. . . . Leave your hand there," said she; "verily it is upon my soul, and touches it."

At these words the knight was in a pitiful plight, and innocently confessed to the Lady that he experienced so much pleasure at this touch that the pains of his malady increased, and

that death was preferable to this martyrdom.

"Let us die then," said she.

But the litter was in the courtyard of the hotel, and as the means of death was not handy, each one slept far from the other, heavily weighed down with love, Lavalliere having lost his fair Limeuil, and Marie d'Annebaut having gained pleasures without parallel.

From this affair, which was quite unforeseen, Lavalliere found himself under the ban of love and marriage and dared no longer appear in public, and he found how much it costs to guard the virtue of a woman; but the more honour and virtue he displayed the more pleasure did he experience in these great sacrifices offered at the shrine of brotherhood. Nevertheless, his duty was very bitter, very ticklish, and intolerable to perform, towards the last days of his guard. And in this way.

The confession of her love, which she believed was returned, the wrong done by her to her cavalier, and the experience of an unknown pleasure, emboldened the fair Marie, who fell into a platonic love, gently tempered with those little indulgences in which there is no danger. From this cause sprang the diabolical pleasures of the game invented by the ladies, who since the death of Francis the First feared the contagion, but wished to gratify their lovers. To these cruel delights, in order to properly play his part, Lavalliere could not refuse his sanction. Thus every evening the mournful Marie would attach her guest to her petticoats, holding his hand, kissing him with burning glances, her cheek placed gently against his, and during this virtuous embrace, in which the knight was held like the devil by a holy water brush, she told him of her great love, which was boundless since it stretched through the infinite spaces of unsatisfied desire. All the fire with which the ladies endow their substantial amours, when the night has no other lights than their eyes, she transferred into the mystic motions of her head, the exultations of her soul, and the ecstasies of her heart. Then, naturally, and with the delicious joy of two angels united by thought alone, they intoned together those sweet litanies repeated by the lovers of the period in honour of love--anthems which the abbot of Theleme has paragraphically saved from oblivion by engraving them on the walls of his Abbey, situated, according to master Alcofribas, in our land of Chinon, where I have seen them in Latin, and have translated them for the benefit of Christians.

"Alas!" said Marie d'Annebaut, "thou art my strength and my life, my joy and my treasure."

"And you," replied he "you are a pearl, an angel."

"Thou art my seraphim."

"You my soul."

"Thou my God."

"You my evening star and morning star, my honour, my beauty, my universe."

"Thou my great my divine master."

"You my glory, my faith, my religion."

"Thou my gentle one, my handsome one, my courageous one, my dear one, my cavalier, my defender, my king, my love. "

"You my fairy, the flower of my days, the dream of my nights."

"Thou my thought at every moment."

"You the delights of my eyes."

"Thou the voice of my soul."

"You my light by day."

"Thou my glimmer in the night."

"You the best beloved among women."

"Thou the most adored of men."

"You my blood, a myself better than myself."

"Thou art my heart, my lustre."

"You my saint, my only joy."

"I yield thee the palm of love, and how great so'er mine be, I believe thou lovest me still more, for thou art the lord."

"No; the palm is yours, my goddess, my Virgin Marie."

"No; I am thy servant, thine handmaiden, a nothing thou canst crush to atoms."

"No, no! it is I who am your slave, your faithful page, whom you see as a breath of air, upon whom you can walk as on a carpet. My heart is your throne."

"No, dearest, for thy voice transfigures me."

"Your regard burns me."

"I see but thee."

"I love but you."

"Oh! put thine hand upon my heart--only thine hand--and thou will see me pale, when my blood shall have taken the heat of thine."

Then during these struggles their eyes, already ardent, flamed still more brightly, and the

good knight was a little the accomplice of the pleasure which Marie d'Annebaut took in feeling his hand upon her heart. Now, as in this light embrace all their strength was put forth, all their desires strained, all their ideas of the thing concentrated, it happened that the knight's transport reached a climax. Their eyes wept warm tears, they seized each other hard and fast as fire seizes houses; but that was all. Lavalliere had promised to return safe and sound to his friend the body only, not the heart.

When Maille announced his return, it was quite time, since no virtue could avoid melting upon this gridiron; and the less licence the lovers had, the more pleasure they had in their fantasies.

Leaving Marie d'Annebaut, the good companion in arms went as far as Bondy to meet his friend, to help him to pass through the forest without accident, and the two brothers slept together, according to the ancient custom, in the village of Bondy.

There, in their bed, they recounted to each other, one of the adventures of his journey, the other the gossip of the camp, stories of gallantry, and the rest. But Maille's first question was touching Marie d'Annebaut, whom Lavalliere swore to be intact in that precious place where the honour of husbands is lodged; at which the amorous Maille was highly delighted.

On the morrow, they were all three re-united, to the great disgust of Marie, who, with the high jurisprudence of women, made a great fuss with her good husband, but with her finger she indicated her heart in an artless manner to Lavalliere, as one who said, "This is thine!"

At supper Lavalliere announced his departure for the wars. Maille was much grieved at this resolution, and wished to accompany his brother; that Lavalliere refused him point blank.

"Madame," said he to Marie d'Annebaut, "I love you more than life, but not more than honour."

He turned pale saying this, and Madame de Maille blanched hearing him, because never in their amorous dalliance had there been so much true love as in this speech. Maille insisted on keeping his friend company as far as Meaux. When he came back he was talking over with his wife the unknown reasons and secret causes of this departure, when Marie, who suspected the grief of poor Lavalliere said, "I know: he is ashamed to stop here because he has the Neapolitan sickness."

"He!" said Maille, quite astonished. "I saw him when we were in bed together at Bondy the other evening, and yesterday at Meaux. There's nothing the matter with him; he is as sound as a bell."

The lady burst into tears, admiring this great loyalty, the sublime resignation to his oath, and the extreme sufferings of this internal passion. But as she still kept her love in the recesses of her heart, she died when Lavalliere fell before Metz, as has been elsewhere related by Messire Bourdeilles de Brantome in his tittle-tattle.

Livros Grátis

(<u>http://www.livrosgratis.com.br</u>)

Milhares de Livros para Download:

Baixar livros de Administração Baixar livros de Agronomia Baixar livros de Arquitetura Baixar livros de Artes Baixar livros de Astronomia Baixar livros de Biologia Geral Baixar livros de Ciência da Computação Baixar livros de Ciência da Informação Baixar livros de Ciência Política Baixar livros de Ciências da Saúde Baixar livros de Comunicação Baixar livros do Conselho Nacional de Educação - CNE Baixar livros de Defesa civil Baixar livros de Direito Baixar livros de Direitos humanos Baixar livros de Economia Baixar livros de Economia Doméstica Baixar livros de Educação Baixar livros de Educação - Trânsito Baixar livros de Educação Física Baixar livros de Engenharia Aeroespacial Baixar livros de Farmácia Baixar livros de Filosofia Baixar livros de Física Baixar livros de Geociências Baixar livros de Geografia Baixar livros de História Baixar livros de Línguas

Baixar livros de Literatura Baixar livros de Literatura de Cordel Baixar livros de Literatura Infantil Baixar livros de Matemática Baixar livros de Medicina Baixar livros de Medicina Veterinária Baixar livros de Meio Ambiente Baixar livros de Meteorologia Baixar Monografias e TCC Baixar livros Multidisciplinar Baixar livros de Música Baixar livros de Psicologia Baixar livros de Química Baixar livros de Saúde Coletiva Baixar livros de Servico Social Baixar livros de Sociologia Baixar livros de Teologia Baixar livros de Trabalho Baixar livros de Turismo