

# The Dear Night Of Love

Honore de Balzac

In that winter when commenced that first taking up of arms by those of the religion, which was called the Riot of Amboise, an advocate, named Avenelles, lent his house, situated in the Rue des Marmousets for the interviews and conventions of the Huguenots, being one of them, without knowing, however, that the Prince of Conde, La Regnaudie, and others, intended to carry off the king.

The said Avenelles wore a nasty red beard, as shiny as a stick of liquorice, and was devilishly pale, as are all the rogues who take refuge in the darkness of the law; in short, the most evil-minded advocate that has ever lived, laughing at the gallows, selling everybody, and a true Judas. According to certain authors of a great experience in subtle rogues he was in this affair, half knave, half fool, as it is abundantly proved by this narrative. This procureur had married a very lovely lady of Paris, of whom he was jealous enough to kill her for a pleat in the sheets, for which she could not account, which would have been wrong, because honest creases are often met with. But she folded her clothes very well, so there's the end of the matter. Be assured that, knowing the murderous and evil nature of this man, his wife was faithful enough to him, always ready, like a candlestick, arranged for her duty like a chest which never moves, and opens to order. Nevertheless, the advocate had placed her under the guardianship and pursuing eye of an old servant, a duenna as ugly as a pot without a handle, who had brought up the Sieur Avenelles, and was very fond of him. His poor wife, for all pleasure in her cold domestic life, used to go to the Church of St. Jehan, on the Place de Greve, where, as everyone knows, the fashionable world was accustomed to meet; and while saying her paternosters to God she feasted her eyes upon all these gallants, curled, adorned, and starched, young, comely, and flitting about like true butterflies, and finished by picking out from among the lot a good gentleman, lover of the queen-mother, and a handsome Italian, with whom she was smitten because he was in the May of his age, nobly dressed, a graceful mover, brave in mien, and was all that a lover should be to bestow a heart full of love upon an honest married woman too tightly squeezed by the bonds of matrimony, which torment her, and always excite her to unharness herself from the conjugal yoke. And you can imagine that the young gentleman grew to admire Madame, whose silent love spoke secretly to him, without either the devil or themselves knowing how. Both one and the other had their correspondence of love. At first, the advocate's wife adorned herself only to come to church, and always came in some new sumptuousness; and instead of thinking of God, she made God angry by thinking of her handsome gentleman, and leaving her prayers, she gave herself up to the fire which consumed her heart, and moistened her eyes, her lips, and everything, seeing that this fire always dissolves itself in water; and often said to herself: "Ha! I would give my life for a single embrace with this pretty lover who loves me." Often, too, in place of saying her litanies to Madame the Virgin, she thought in her heart: "To feel the glorious youth of this gentle lover, to have the full joys of love, to taste all in one moment, little should I mind the flames into which the heretics are thrown." Then the gentleman gazing at the charms of this good wife, and her burning blushes when he glanced at her, came always close to her stool, and addressed to her those requests which the ladies understand so well. Then he said aside to himself: "By the double horn on my father, I swear to have the woman, though it cost me my life."

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And when the duenna turned her head, the two lovers squeezed, pressed, breathed, ate, devoured, and kissed each other by a look which would have set light to the match of a musketeer, if the musketeer had been there. It was certain that a love so far advanced in the heart should have an end. The gentleman dressed as a scholar of Montaign, began to regale the clerks of the said Avenelles, and to joke in the company, in order to learn the habits of the husband, his hours of absence, his journeys, and everything, watching for an opportunity to stick his horns on. And this was how, to his injury, the opportunity occurred. The advocate, obliged to follow the course of this conspiracy, and, in case of failure, intending to revenge himself upon the Guises, determined to go to Blois, where the court then was in great danger of being carried off. Knowing this, the gentleman came first to the town of Blois, and there arranged a master-trap, into which the Sieur Avenelles should fall, in spite of his cunning, and not come out until steeped in a crimson cuckoldom. The said Italian, intoxicated with love, called together all his pages and vassals, and posted them in such a manner that on the arrival of the advocate, his wife, and her duenna, it was stated to them at all the hostelries at which they wished to put up that the hostelry being full, in consequence of the sojourn of the court, they must go elsewhere. Then the gentleman made such an arrangement with the landlord of the Soleil Royal, that he had the whole of the house, and occupied, without any of the usual servants of the place remaining there. For greater security, my lord sent the said master and his people into the country, and put his own in their places, so that the advocate should know nothing of this arrangement. Behold my good gentleman who lodges his friends to come to the court in the hostelry, and for himself keeps a room situated above those in which he intends to put his lovely mistress, her advocate, and the duenna, not without first having cut a trap in the boards. And his steward being charged to play the part of the innkeeper, his pages dressed like guests, and his female servants like servants of the inn, he waited for spies to convey to him the *dramatis personae* of this farce--viz., wife, husband, and duenna, none of whom failed to come. Seeing the immense wealth of the great lords, merchants, warriors, members of the service, and others, brought by the sojourn of the young king, of two queens, the Guises, and all the court, no one had a right to be astonished or to talk of the roguish trap, or of the confusion come to the Soleil Royal. Behold now the Sieur Avenelles, on his arrival, bundled about, he, his wife and the duenna from inn to inn, and thinking themselves very fortunate in being received at the Soleil Royal, where the gallant was getting warm, and love was burning. The advocate, being lodged, the lover walked about the courtyard, watching and waiting for a glance from the lady; and he did not have to wait very long, since the fair Avenelles, looking soon into the court, after the custom of the ladies, there recognised not without great throbbing of the heart, her gallant and well-beloved gentleman. At that she was very happy; and if by a lucky chance both had been alone together for an ounce of time, that good gentleman would not have had to wait for his good fortune, so burning was she from head to foot.

"How warm it is in the rays of this lord," said she, meaning to say sun, since it was then shining fiercely.

Hearing this, the advocate sprang to the window, and beheld my gentleman.

"Ha! you want lords, my dear, do you?" said the advocate, dragging her by the arm, and throwing her like one of his bags on to the bed. "Remember that if I have a pence at my side instead of a sword, I have a penknife in this pence, and that penknife will go into

your heart on the least suspicion of conjugal impropriety. I believe I have seen that gentleman somewhere."

The advocate was so terribly spiteful that the lady rose, and said to him--

"Well, kill me. I am not afraid of deceiving you. Never touch me again, after having thus menaced me. And from to-day I shall never think of sleeping save with a lover more gentle than you are."

"There, there, my little one!" said the advocate, surprised. "We have gone a little too far. Kiss me, chick-a-biddy, and forgive me."

"I will neither kiss nor pardon you," said she "You are a wretch!"

Avenelles, enraged, wished to take by force that which his wife denied him, and from this resulted a combat, from which the husband emerged clawed all over. But the worst of it was, that the advocate, covered with scratches, being expected by the conspirators, who were holding a council, was obliged to quit his good wife, leaving her to the care of the old woman.

The knave having departed, the gentleman putting one of his servants to keep watch at the corner of the street, mounts to his blessed trap, lifts it noiselessly, and calls the lady by a gentle psit! psit! which was understood by the heart, which generally understands everything. The lady lifts her head, and sees her pretty lover four flea jumps above her. Upon a sign, she takes hold of two cords of black silk, to which were attached loops, through which she passes her arms, and in the twinkling of an eye is translated by two pulleys from her bed through the ceiling into the room above, and the trap closing as it has opened, left the old duenna in a state of great flabbergastation, when, turning her head, she neither saw robe nor woman, and perceived that the women had been robbed. How? by whom? in what way? where?-- Presto! Foro! Magico! As much knew the alchemists at their furnaces reading Herr Trippa. Only the old woman knew well the crucible, and the great work--the one was cuckoldom, and the other the private property of Madame Advocate. She remained dumbfounded, watching for the Sieur Avenelles--as well say death, for in his rage he would attack everything, and the poor duenna could not run away, because with great prudence the jealous man had taken the keys with him. At first sight, Madame Avenelles found a dainty supper, a good fire in the grate, but a better in the heart of her lover, who seized her, and kissed her, with tears of joy, on the eyes first of all, to thank them for their sweet glances during devotion at the church of St Jehan en Greve. Nor did the glowing better half of the lawyer refuse her little mouth to his love, but allowed herself to be properly pressed, adored, caressed, delighting to be properly pressed, admirably adored, and calorously caressed after the manner of eager lovers. And both agreed to be all in all to each other the whole night long, no matter what the result might be, she counting the future as a fig in comparison with the joys of this night, he relying upon his cunning and his sword to obtain many another. In short, both of them caring little for life, because at one stroke they consummated a thousand lives, enjoyed with each other a thousand delights, giving to each other the double of their own--believing, he and she, that they were falling into an abyss, and wishing to roll there closely clasped, hurling all the love of their souls with rage in one throw. Therein they loved each other well. Thus they knew not love, the poor citizens, who live mechanically with their good wives, since they know not the fierce beating of the heart,

the hot gush of life, and the vigorous clasp as of two young lovers, closely united and glowing with passion, who embrace in face of the danger of death. Now the youthful lady and the gentleman ate little supper, but retired early to rest. Let us leave them there, since no words, except those of paradise unknown to us, would describe their delightful agonies, and agonising delights. Meanwhile, the husband, so well cuckolded that all memory of marriage had been swept away by love,--the said Avenelles found himself in a great fix. To the council of the Huguenots came the Prince of Conde, accompanied by all the chiefs and bigwigs, and there it was resolved to carry off the queen-mother, the Guises, the young king, the young queen, and to change the government. This becoming serious, the advocate seeing his head at stake, did not feel the ornaments being planted there, and ran to divulge the conspiracy to the cardinal of Lorraine, who took the rogue to the duke, his brother, and all three held a consultation, making fine promises to the Sieur Avenelles, whom with the greatest difficulty they allowed, towards midnight, to depart, at which hour he issued secretly from the castle. At this moment the pages of the gentleman and all his people were having a right jovial supper in honour of the fortuitous wedding of their master. Now, arriving at the height of the festivities, in the middle of the intoxication and joyous huzzahs, he was assailed with jeers, jokes, and laughter that turned him sick when he came into his room. The poor servant wished to speak, but the advocate promptly planted a blow in her stomach, and by a gesture commanded her to be silent. Then he felt in his valise, and took therefrom a good poniard. While he was opening and shutting it, a frank, naive, joyous, amorous, pretty, celestial roar of laughter, followed by certain words of easy comprehension, came down through the trap. The cunning advocate, blowing out his candle, saw through the cracks in the boards caused by the shrinking of the door a light, which vaguely explained the mystery to him, for he recognised the voice of his wife, and that of the combatant. The husband took the duenna by the arm, and went softly at the stairs searching for the door of the chamber in which were the lovers, and did not fail to find it. Fancy! that like a horrid, rude advocate, he burst open the door, and with one spring was on the bed, in which he surprised his wife, half dressed, in the arms of the gentleman.

"Ah!" said she.

The lover having avoided the blow, tried to snatch the poniard from the hands of the knave, who held it firmly.

Now, in this struggle of life and death, the husband finding himself hindered by his lieutenant, who clutched him tightly with his fingers of iron, and bitten by his wife, who tore away at him with a will, gnawing him as a dog gnaws a bone, he thought instantly of a better way to gratify his rage. Then the devil, newly horned, maliciously ordered, in his patois, the servants to tie the lovers with the silken cords of the trap, and throwing the poniard away, he helped the duenna to make them fast. And the thing thus done in a moment, he rammed some linen into their mouths to stop their cries, and ran to his good poniard without saying a word. At this moment there entered several officers of the Duke of Guise, whom during the struggle no one had heard turning the house upside down, looking for the Sieur Avenelles. These soldiers, suddenly warned by the cries of the pages of the lord, bound, gagged and half killed, threw themselves between the man with the poniard and the lovers, disarmed him, and accomplished their mission by arresting him, and marching him off to the castle prison, he, his wife, and the duenna. At the same time the people of the Guises, recognising one of their master's friends, with whom at this moment the queen was most anxious to consult, and whom they were enjoined to summon to the

council, invited him to come with them. Then the gentleman soon untied, dressing himself, said aside to the chief of the escort, that on his account, for the love for him, he should be careful to keep the husband away from his wife, promising him his favour, good advancement, and even a few deniers, if he were careful to obey him on this point. And for greater surety he explained to him the why and the wherefore of the affair, adding that if the husband found himself within reach of this fair lady he would give her for certain a blow in the belly from which she would never recover. Finally he ordered him to place the lady in the jail of the castle, in a pleasant place level with gardens, and the advocate in a safe dungeon, not without chaining him hand and foot. The which the said office promised, and arranged matters according to the wish of the gentleman, who accompanied the lady as far as the courtyard of the castle, assuring her that this business would make her a widow, and that he would perhaps espouse her in legitimate marriage. In fact, the Sieur Avenelles was thrown into a damp dungeon, without air, and his pretty wife placed in a room above him, out of consideration for her lover, who was the Sieur Scipion Sardini, a noble of Lucca, exceedingly rich, and, as has been before stated, a friend of Queen Catherine de Medici, who at that time did everything in concert with the Guises. Then he went up quickly to the queen's apartments, where a great secret council was then being held, and there the Italian learned what was going on, and the danger of the court. Monseigneur Sardini found the privy counsellors much embarrassed and surprised at this dilemma, but he made them all agree, telling them to turn it to their own advantage; and to his advice was due the clever idea of lodging the king in the castle of Amboise, in order to catch the heretics there like foxes in a bag, and there to slay them all. Indeed, everyone knows how the queen-mother and Guises dissimulated, and how the Riot of Amboise terminated. This is not, however, the subject of the present narrative. When in the morning everyone had quitted the chamber of the queen-mother, where everything had been arranged, Monseigneur Sardini, in no way oblivious of his love for the fair Avenelles, although he was at the time deeply smitten with the lovely Limeuil, a girl belonging to the queen-mother, and her relation by the house of La Tour de Turenne, asked why the good Judas had been caged. Then the Cardinal of Lorraine told him his intention was not in any way to harm the rogue, but that fearing his repentance, and for greater security of his silence until the end of the affair, he put him out of the way, and would liberate him at the proper time.

"Liberate him!" said the Luccanese. "Never! Put him in a sack, and throw the old black gown into the Loire. In the first place I know him; he is not the man to forgive you his imprisonment, and will return to the Protestant Church. Thus this will be a work pleasant to God, to rid him of a heretic. Then no one will know your secrets, and not one of his adherents will think of asking you what has become of him, because he is a traitor. Let me procure the escape of his wife and arrange the rest; I will take it off your hands."

"Ha, ha!" said the cardinal; "you give good council. Now I will, before distilling your advice, have them both more securely guarded. Hi, there!"

Came an officer of police, who was ordered to let no person whoever he might be, communicate with the two prisoners. Then the cardinal begged Sardini to say at his hotel that the said advocate had departed from Blois to return to his causes in Paris. The men charged with the arrest of the advocate had received a verbal order to treat him as a man of importance, so they neither stripped nor robbed him. Now the advocate had kept thirty gold crowns in his purse, and resolved to lose them all to assure his vengeance, and proved by good arguments to the jailers that it was allowable for him to see his wife, on whom he

doted, and whose legitimate embrace he desired. Monseigneur Sardini, fearing for his mistress the danger of the proximity of this red learned rogue, and for her having great fear of certain evils, determined to carry her off in the night, and put her in a place of safety. Then he hired some boatmen and also their boat, placing them near the bridge, and ordered three of his most active servants to file the bars of the cell, seize the lady, and conduct her to the wall of the gardens where he would await her.

These preparations being made, and good files bought, he obtained an interview in the morning with the queen-mother, whose apartments were situated above the stronghold in which lay the said advocate and his wife, believing that the queen would willingly lend herself to this flight. Presently he was received by her, and begged her not to think it wrong that, at the instigation of the cardinal and of the Duke of Guise, he should deliver this lady; and besides this, urged her very strongly to tell the cardinal to throw the man into the water. To which the queen said "Amen." Then the lover sent quickly to his lady a letter in a plate of cucumbers, to advise her of her approaching widowhood, and the hour of flight, with all of which was the fair citizen well content. Then at dusk the soldiers of the watch being got out of the way by the queen, who sent them to look at a ray of the moon, which frightened her, behold the servants raised the grating, and caught the lady, who came quickly enough, and was led through the house to Monseigneur Sardini.

But the postern closed, and the Italian outside with the lady, behold the lady throw aside her mantle, see the lady change into an advocate, and see my said advocate seize his cuckold by the collar, and half strangle him, dragging him towards the water to throw him to the bottom of the Loire; and Sardini began to defend himself, to shout, and to struggle, without being able, in spite of his dagger, to shake off this devil in long robes. Then he was quiet, falling into a slough under the feet of the advocate, whom he recognised through the mists of this diabolical combat, and by the light of the moon, his face splashed with the blood of his wife. The enraged advocate quitted the Italian, believing him to be dead, and also because servants armed with torches, came running up. But he had to jump into the boat and push off in great haste.

Thus poor Madame Avenelles died alone, since Monseigneur Sardini, badly strangled, was found, and revived from this murder; and later, as everyone knows, married the fair Limeuil after this sweet girl had been brought to bed in the queen's cabinet--a great scandal, which from friendship the queen-mother wished to conceal, and which from great love Sardini, to whom Catherine gave the splendid estate of Chaumont-sur-Loire, and also the castle, covered with marriage.

But he had been so brutally used by the husband, that he did not make old bones, and the fair Limeuil was left a widow in her springtime. In spite of his misdeeds the advocate was not searched after. He was cunning enough eventually to get included in the number of those conspirators who were not prosecuted, and returned to the Huguenots, for whom he worked hard in Germany.

Poor Madame Avenelles, pray for her soul! for she was hurled no one knew where, and had neither the prayers of the Church nor Christian burial. Alas! shed a tear for her, ye ladies lucky in your loves.

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