

Excerpt from Rooftop Soliloquy

*Excerpt from “The ‘Victory Horse’
Soliloquy”*

(9th Soliloquy)

Let me sing of an evening in spring...

Sweet May had begun and a lofty breeze was blowing warmly winds through the gracious trees along the quais of the Seine. I was walking alone to assemble with friends to feast and celebrate those new pleasant nights that follow blue-skied days. It was a holiday throughout the city and the shops and markets were closed. The restaurants too were closed and it seemed like everyone had gone to the country or had otherwise disappeared.

At the Palais Royal, I met with long-tryed friends. In the square by the silent métropolitain stairs, we stood and planned our evening of victory. All were inspired by the arrival of a good friend: clever-tongued Mich, who had just flown in from Madrid where he'd almost married a tender-lipped Spaniardess, daughter of a well-groomed father who knew of vast land and fortune.

“We’ll drink on the terraces at Place des Vosges,” some proposed.

“The city is empty for the day and night,” others sighed, “the chairs will have been brought in, and there will be no one to serve us.”

“We can feast on the riverside, at the Place du Pont Neuf, near the emerald garden, on the well-worn historic stones.”

“There will be no wine to drink!”

“That’s right, the stores are all closed.”

“And the restaurants too. Nowhere will we find a bottle.”

It was then, that I devised a heroic plan. “Come, men,” I said to the group, “Let us walk to Saint Germain. We will have our wine and our feast amid the river tides and the emerald leaves of the garden!”

So saying, I led my good friends away; thoughtful Niels with his high-flown suit, and clever-tongued Mich among them.

When we reached the rue des Quatres Vents in Saint Germain, I bid my friends wait outside. I could hear them whispering amongst themselves, anticipating the plan. All the while, I slid up to where I could creep to the high windows above that tidy shop, La Crémerie, where the honored Pierrot, man of many crafts, sold goodly wines.

Pierrot was in his nest asleep when I tapped on the window. He crossed his bedroom in his night-hat and opened the pane...

“Good Pierrot le fou!” I cried, “I have a rowdy band outside, and the city is closed down. Nothing to be had elsewhere. We must find libations for our celebratory feast. Help us out with an array of your sweet and ready wines!”

...So saying, I procured from my waist a small stack of crisp bills, newly minted money, rich in colored inks, the kind that pleases all men. Patient Pierrot, man of many crafts, took the offering and bid me climb down to the courtyard and wait for him to dress and descend. So I did, and passing through the street, I signaled success to my waiting comrades and disappeared through the shadows into the long courtyard.

Out back, in a courtyard that resembled a stable where beasts are kept, I awaited for Pierrot to arrive. He quickly appeared and led me out to a place where the floor was packed of straw. A door of wood led down to the wine cave. Near the door, there were several large casks of wine.

“Will this do?” Pierrot asked, motioning to the casks. And what casks they were! Rich in wood, immense in stature and breadth; five casks in all, all bearing brass handles and inlaid lids.

“Pierrot!” I exclaimed, clasping my friend by the collar, “See what you have done! A mighty bacchanal will this wine fuel. I will take all five!”

“How many are you?” he asked. And I stopped to consider my friends who awaited. There was Mich, our clever-tongued guest, and thoughtful Niels, man of foreign lands, and swift-footed Aurélien among us. There was another too: a hefty Dane, hailing from Copenhagen; he had appeared quite suddenly among us, claiming noble kin. Apparently he was the nephew of some flowery Danish princess. He was tagging along our merry group, which made us five men in all. The rest, gentle women included, would be summoned later when we’d arrive at the Place du Pont Neuf with our new-found wine.

“Will you be joining us too?” I asked Pierrot.

“No, my friend. I have to work early tomorrow.”

I looked at the fruitful casks. It would take two men to carry each one, so vast were they, so heavy in form and tall in stature . . . yet two casks alone would not serve the feast I had in mind. I had to develop my stately plan.

“Have you any wood?” I asked Pierrot, “wood for building, sturdy nails, and rope for binding too?”

Looking at me kindly, patient-minded Pierrot said, “I have plenty of wood! . . . wood, good for building; with sturdy nails, ropes and tools too.”

Hearing thus, I told Pierrot I would go fetch one of my men. Only one, though, for the pounding of nails disturbs no city-dweller at night, but the commotion of too many men does cause fear in urban hearts.

Out on the street, I retrieved strong-handed Aurélien, and the two of us returned through the shadows of the courtyard to the place out back. There, Pierrot was waiting with nails and tools, wood and ropes to tie with.

“What is your idea?” asked Aurélien as he calculated my words.

With his question, I set forth to explain my idea to build what I called a ‘Porte-Tonneau.’ . . . “It will involve large uprights shafts,” I said, “cranes to carry each tonneau. Each cask will be tied by the rope and slung around the top-most crest. All of this will be compact—two casks

on each side, and one trailing. The Porte-Tonneau will be on sturdy wheels of wood. Two men alone, it will take to wheel these five casks. A third will be stationed behind to watch the load and the other two men will make merry. All together, we five men will usher these five casks through St-Germain until we reach the statue at Pont Neuf, and from there, we will set one man to guard the casks, while the other four take trips descending the stone steps to the riverside place where we'll feast with the celebratory wine!"

"Some idea you have founded!" exclaimed my friend, swift-footed Aurélien, as he smiled wide at my ingenuity. The two of us then set about to work. We hammered long and hard, sending slim nails flying into moist wood. We set the shafts upright and secured them, set the crane above those. Fatedly, when we hoisted the casks onto the crane, calculating Aurélien forgot to firmly fasten the crane over the shafts.

Once these tasks were achieved, we had the wheels to firmly bolt. This was done by means of stout wooden pegs. After, we said good night to my generous friend, patient Pierrot, man of many crafts, and he wished us well in our revelry. And, setting off, we began to wheel the Porte-Tonneau out through the long courtyard towards the street. An ingenious machine, it was light enough for two men to wheel, though its load was not light... five industrious casks full of gorgeous ready wine!

Aurélien and I wheeled the great Porte-Tonneau out into the rue des Quatres Vents. The band of merry men, clever-tongued Mich, well-tailored Niels and the hefty Dane, were huddled on the corner awaiting us; and all came to meet our bounty with glad hearts and outstretched hands.

"Some feast this will fuel!" they all cried. And, with our spirits high and ascending we all set out to wheel the great Porte-Tonneau through the rue des Quatre Vents, past the closed up markets of Saint Germain, off towards the quais of the Seine.

On the rue de Montfaucon, strong-handed Aurélien took over watching the flank of the great wheeling Port-Tonneau from the backside, while our royal Danish foundling took over the weight on the right side. Those savior casks of wine wobbled only slightly on their

hefty ropes tied to that crane, strong as the neck of a fine-bred steed, and the wheels rolled nicely over the cobblestones. Foreign-born Mich, good at fierce tasks, pushed on the left side of the Porte-Tonneau. With all of this, I was freed up to observe all that passed on the narrow streets.

Passing down the smooth stone streets beneath flickering gas lamps, our singing group marched, proud of the feat we had achieved. I looked to the left and saw a tall wooden house with a closed-up bakery on the ground floor. Next to it was an open cobbler's workshop. A heavy-handed cobbler in an apron stood in the doorway hammering out a pair of animal-hide shoes in the darkness of night. What a sight! Was this a medieval town-centre, or modern-day Paris?

On the rue de Buci, we passed saw a blacksmith stoking a fire to hammer out glowing rods of iron. On the rue de Seine, we saw peasant woman taking a child to leave it to be exposed. Somewhere along the way, thoughtful Niels, man of many myths, procured a sort of tin canister with ridges; and, using a small wooden baton to swipe at its side, he made a rhythm that we could all march to. We all had our hearts set on the great feast that would be made with our wine down along the quai.

(end of excerpt)