

‘The Matrimonial Advertisement’

It was on a fine frosty day in the winter of 1833 that the town mail from Paris to Calais rolled rapidly over the rugged pavement of the town of Abbeville. At this time there was only one individual seated inside; he was a thin, but rather good-looking, devil-me-care kind of a fellow – dressed in a shabby-genteel sort of fashion, with somewhat too large an interval of wrist between the cuffs of his coat and his rusty old black gloves. His hair was combed back off his forehead, and thus exposed the whole of his countenance, to which the small moustache and ragged beard imparted an additional air of rakishness.

But this gentleman, whose age was probably six-and-twenty, seemed very well content with himself – and more so still with the nature of the errand on which he was bent; for every now and then he drew forth a small cracked pocket-mirror, and, surveying his features complacently, exclaimed aloud, though apostrophising himself, ‘Upon my honour, Monsieur Tictac, you are a very handsome fellow – a very handsome fellow; – and you must succeed – there cannot possibly be a doubt about *that* !’

At Abbeville, an old gentleman of most respectable appearance, and elegantly dressed in the style of the ancient *régime*, entered the vehicle, which continued its rapid way towards Calais.

‘Pleasant day, sir,’ exclaimed Tictac. who was always anxious to enter into conversation with any one, and at any time, or in any place. ‘Very pleasant day, sir ! You may think it odd that I don’t wear a cloak as you do sir – but, in faith ! I am not cold. Oh ! no, sir – not at all. I have something *here*, sir,’ he added, slapping his breast very hard with his rusty-gloved right hand, ‘that keeps me as warm, sir – as warm as a furnace.’

‘And pray, what may that be, sir ?’ demanded the old gentleman in a tone of ill-concealed disgust at the other’s self-sufficiency of manner, and doubtless thinking that his companion alluded to a flannel jacket, or perhaps a Burgundy pitch-plaster.

‘What may it be, sir ?’ repeated Tictac: then, bending forward, he added in a solemnly mysterious tone, ‘Love, sir !’

The old gentleman could not suppress a smile; and M. Tictac continued with strange volubility: – ‘Yes, sir – Love now warms my heart; and love is to me a cloak – great-coat – pea-coat – surtout – and everything else at this moment. I dare say you think it would be a bad job for the tailors if Love thus became clothing to everybody. But no matter, sir: Love is all that to me. And the beauty of it is, sir, that I don’t know who the deuce I am in love with, nor have I ever seen the object of my affections. Ah ! you may smile, sir: but it is true enough for all that ! You would not suppose, perhaps, sir, to look at me that I am of a very poetic disposition; and it is my

imagination, sir – my imagination, I repeat – which pictures to me a perfect form in the lady – but, no matter, sir. I'll take a pinch of snuff.'

And, with these words, he wrenched off his glove and helped himself to at least a quarter of an ounce of the contents of the old gentleman's capacious box. He then rattled away with his tongue in such a strange, unconnected manner that the old gentleman began to fear that he had been suddenly thrust into the company of a lunatic escaped from an asylum, when the mail-coach thundered into Boulogne. There another passenger was picked up, much to the relief of the old gentleman.

The new-comer was a fine, middle-aged man, with a military aspect, though dressed in plain clothes; and his somewhat stern expression of countenance would have over-awed any one less impudent than M. Tictac. But this individual would have tried to thrust himself into the good graces of the king, had his majesty condescended to honour the Government mail with his presence.

'Pleasant day, sir,' he said to the new-comer. 'Military gentleman, I presume, sir? Oh, you may frown, but you can't deceive me. I know a military man when I see him. Besides, sir, when we stopped at Boulogne, I got out to stretch my legs and refresh my throat – and I just took the liberty of overhauling your luggage, sir, as the porter was putting it on top of the coach. Meant no offence sir, I can assure you: but it's a habit I have to find out all I can about people. Handsome hat-box you have, sir – name of Captain Clairville on the lid, sir: so I knew that *you're* Captain Clairville, sir. Pretty name, sir – very pretty name. And you sir,' he added, turning towards the old gentleman, 'are Monsieur Dupont. The guard told me *that*. I asked him – and he showed me the way bill. My name is Tictac, gentlemen – Tictac at your service – Tictac at everybody's service. And now we all know each other. I'll take another pinch of snuff, sir.'

And M. Tictac again helped himself from the old gentleman's box; while the old gentleman (whose name it seemed was M. Dupont) exchanged glances with Captain Clairville – those glances saying, as plainly as glances could, 'He's an impudent fellow; but perhaps he means no harm. Besides it is useless to quarrel with such a harum-scarum character.'

By this time it had grown dusk, and M. Tictac ceased talking. His companions supposed that he had wearied himself out by his garrulity; and their idea speedily appeared to receive confirmation from the fact that he began to snore in anything but a melodious fashion.

M. Dupont and Captain Clairville fell into conversation together, and as travellers will do, talked of the objects of their present journey.

It appeared that Dupont was a notary at Abbeville, and that one of his clients had lately died, leaving a considerable property. 'He was a very old man,' said the notary, 'and has left all his fortune to an only daughter, with whom he had for many years ceased to correspond in

consequence of a marriage which she contracted, and which the father deemed beneath her. But she has been a widow for the last eighteen months; and her father's heart softened towards her during the last few weeks of his existence. Then, when he would have forgiven her, the trace which he had previously possessed of her abode was suddenly lost by her removal; and he died without an opportunity of seeing her once more. I have inserted advertisements in various papers, first imploring her to send me her address – then offering a reward of five thousand francs[1] to any one who would give me some information concerning her: But all in vain. At last I ascertained, only a few days ago, that she had lately been at Calais; and thither am I going to see if I can glean any tidings of her. Poor Madame Maillot ! she will be overjoyed –'

Here Tictac gave a peculiar grunt, in the midst of his snoring, which interrupted some fine sentimental sentence that was about to be uttered by M. Dupont.

'Since you have told me the object of your visit to Calais,' said Captain Clairville, after a pause, during which Tictac continued to snore away more lustily than ever, 'I cannot refuse you my confidence. The fact is, M. Dupont, I am very well off in a pecuniary point of view – having a handsome income of my own and excellent prospects of the part of certain wealthy relations. But I am still a bachelor – and against my inclinations. Singular as it may seem for a military man to make such a confession, it is nevertheless strictly true that I am an awful coward in respect to women. I cannot muster up courage to make a proposal; and thus a bachelor I might remain all my life, did not accident seem to favour my views. In fact, I have answered a matrimonial advertisement –'

Here M. Tictac gave another appalling grunt, and M. Dupont uttered an ejaculation of astonishment at the confession of the military man.

'I hope that impudent fellow is really asleep,' observed the captain in a whisper; 'for I shouldn't like him to overhear what I am saying.'

'He is fast asleep,' returned the notary. 'Only hear how he snores. But is it possible, Captain Clairville, that you –'

'That I have answered a matrimonial advertisement !' added the gentleman thus addressed. 'It is indeed very possible – and it is true too. I have corresponded with the lady; and so delicate has been her conduct, that she has hitherto used a feigned name in replying to my letters. But have begged an interview; and she has written to assure me that I shall find a note addressed to me at the Hotel Meurice, where the mail stops at Calais. That is the object of my journey thither; and I think, from the style of her letters and the description that she gives of herself, that she will suit me admirably.'

'And are you sure of winning her, Captain ?' enquired the notary, laughing.

‘I would give anyone five thousand francs who could cut me out, after all I have said of myself in my own letters !’ exclaimed the military gentleman, who, timid as he professed himself to be in the presence of ladies, nevertheless had a very excellent opinion of his art of persuasion in the sphere of letter-writing. ‘Yes,’ he repeated warmly, ‘I would give anyone five thousand francs who could cut me out *there*—that is, M. Dupont, provided I choose to have her, when I have seen her.’

In such conversation as this did the notary and the officer wile away the time until Tictac woke up; and then they could not slide a word in even edgeways.

It was about six o’clock in the evening, when the mail turned into the spacious court-yard of the Hotel Meurice at Calais. The moment it stopped, Tictac sprang out, and having no luggage to look after, hastened away; while the captain and the notary remained to see their trunks safely conveyed to the apartments to which the bustling chambermaids were prepared to conduct them. In the meantime, M. Tictac hurried to a somewhat mean-looking house in an obscure part of Calais, and enquired of the shopkeeper who occupied the ground floor whether he had a lodger of the name of Madame Maillot. The reply was in the affirmative, and the man added, in a surly tone, ‘And if you’re a friend or relation of hers, I wish you’d just settle her rent for her. She’s been here for four months, and I’ve never seen the colour of her money yet.’

‘It’s all right !’ cried Tictac: ‘you’ll be paid in a short time.’ Then, as he groped his way up a narrow and dark stair-case, he muttered to himself, ‘The wicked puss ! to pretend to be so well off, when she actually cannot pay her rent. And if I didn’t know what I *do* know *now*, I should have had all the expenses and trouble of this journey for nothing.’

He stopped in his musings and at a door simultaneously – a gentle knock at that door elicited an invitation, in a gentle voice, to walk in; – and M. Tictac found himself in an indifferently furnished little room, but in the presence of a buxom lady of about five-and-thirty.

‘Madame Maillot ?’ he said enquiringly.

‘That is my name, sir,’ was the simpering reply. ‘And you, sir, are –’

‘Your own Tictac !’ exclaimed the young gentleman, rushing forward and catching the buxom widow in his arms with as much familiarity as if he had known her all his life.

‘And you are M. Tictac ?’ she said, when he released her from his rough embrace. ‘But what *must* you – what *can* you think of me for having — ’

‘Corresponded with a gentleman unknown to you ?’ added Tictac. ‘My dear creature, it was the natural consequence of your inserting an advertisement in the papers with the view to obtain a good husband. But let us sit down, and converse calmly and quietly. You are a very nice lady, and I am perfectly satisfied with your appearance. I knew you must be sweetly beautiful, because

your hand-writing is so good. You really pen a charming letter: not a thing to find fault with – except the spelling. But love is blind to these little defects; and whether the passion is spelt *Love* or *Luv*, it's still the same. And now, on your side, are you satisfied with me ? Don't speak in a hurry: look before you leap. But if you require a modest – unassuming – say-nothing-to-anybody kind of a young man for a husband, I am the very one to suit you to a nicety.'

Madame Maillot simpered a satisfactory reply.

'Then you will accept me for your husband ?' he demanded. 'But before you reply, let me convince you of the disinterest nature of my conduct. You inserted an advertisement in a Paris paper stating that *'a widow lady in easy circumstances would be delighted to meet with a gentleman of cheerful disposition, and possessing some little capital, with a view to a matrimonial alliance.'* Well, I answer the advertisement – I represent myself as everything you require, and possessing a little capital of a few thousand francs – and then you send me your real name and address, and solicit a personal interview. Down I come to Calais – at great inconvenience and expense: and behold ! my dear madam, I find you to be in the most *uneasy* circumstances possible. Your landlord –'

'Oh ! the monster !' cried the widow, beginning to sob.

'Come – come !' exclaimed Tictac: 'don't vex yourself. I do not wish to reproach you for your little deception: everything is fair in love as well as in war. But tell me truly, my charmer – did you receive letters from any other suitors ? And if you did, did you answer them ?'

'Oh, you dear, cunning, prying creature !' ejaculated the widow: 'why will you make me blush ?'

'Because I like to see the red rose turn carnation, my love,' answered Tictac. 'Ah ! I see that my suspicion is well founded. But I will forgive that – and everything else – for I am already up to the chin in love with you. So let us exchange agreements to marry each other as soon as arrangements can be made; and – just for form's sake – we will bind ourselves over each in twenty thousand francs – a mere form, I repeat – to perform the contract. I am quite a man of business – even in matters of love.'

The lady consented to this arrangement. Tictac drew up the documents, and a female lodger in an adjoining room witnessed them. The moment this little matter was arranged, Tictac embraced the lady, and hurried off, promising to return again in a few minutes.

He retraced his way to Meurice's Hotel, desired a servant to conduct him to the room of M. Dupont, the notary, and on appearing in that gentleman's presence, exclaimed 'Good news, my dear sir ! I have found it.'

'What have you found ?' demanded the notary: 'the method of being polite ?'

‘No: the address of Madame Maillot !’ returned Tictac. ‘and therefore I claim the five thousand francs reward which you have offered any one –’

‘My dear sir,’ interrupted the notary, rising from the table at which he was dining when Tictac thus abruptly broke in upon his privacy, ‘if what you say is true –’

‘True !’ repeated the other: ‘it’s as true as that you shall not eat another morsel of that roast fowl, until you come along with me and behold Madame Maillot with your eyes.’

M. Dupont readily acceded to this arrangement; and having put on his cloak, he accompanied Tictac to the house in which Madame Maillot dwelt.

They proceeded upstairs, Tictac leading the way: but as they approached the door, they heard voices speaking somewhat angrily within – and as Tictac paused to listen, M. Dupont was compelled to pause also.

‘Madam, your conduct is incorrect – uncourteous – most insulting !’ cried the unmistakable voice of Captain Clairville. ‘You have not behaved honourably –’

‘My dear sir,’ responded the widow, ‘was it not you who demanded a personal interview ? and did I not, in my reply, state that if the result proved agreeable to both parties –’

‘Well, madam,’ interrupted the captain, ‘I am satisfied with *your* personal appearance: what objection can you have to *me* ?’

‘Simply this,’ answered the widow: ‘I have received a more eligible offer, from a gentleman – somewhat your junior,’ she added in a hesitating manner.

‘Oh ! then I am to understand that I am cut out, madam !’ vociferated Captain Clairville. ‘But I should like to see the whipper-snapper who has dared –’

‘Don’t put yourself out of temper, captain,’ cried Tictac, opening the door and entering the room at this crisis. ‘Pray don’t annoy yourself: you are of a full habit of body – and passion leads to apoplexy.’

‘Sir, !’ exclaimed the officer, in profound astonishment, ‘is it to you –’

‘That you are to pay five thousand francs, captain,’ added Tictac with a chuckling laugh. ‘You remember your declaration in the coach just now ? Ah ! ha ! – those who snore loudest, sometimes sleep least; and I always *did* possess an unaccountable curiosity to learn the affairs of other people. But five thousand francs from you, and five thousand from a gentleman who stands in the shade of the doorway there, will make me up a little capital in reality, which said capital,

my love,' he added, turning towards the widow, 'only existed in my imagination until now. But walk in M. Dupont.'

'M. Dupont here !' cried the captain.

'Yes, certainly,' exclaimed Tictac. 'What ! didn't the note which you received at Meurice's Hotel show you that the lady you came to visit was named Maillot ? and didn't you remember that this was the name mentioned by M. Dupont in the mail ?'

'It never struck me, I must admit !' said the captain.

Explanations on the part of M. Dupont then ensued; and Madame Maillot heard with grief that her father was dead, and with joy that he had left her a considerable fortune.

'Bravo !' shouted Tictac; 'I think I have managed matters pretty well at last. Of course you will keep to your agreement, my love ?'

'I have no wish to depart from it,' simpered the widow.

'But, my dear madam,' said M. Dupont, in a tone of remonstrance, 'pray reflect – ponder upon the step you thus consent to take; – and at least let this young man convince us that his character –'

'I'll take a pinch of snuff, friend Dupont,' interrupted Tictac, 'and, as for character, I can give references to show that I have never done anything wrong, if I have never done any great good. I have lived well – spent the little fortune my father left me – and have seen quite enough of the world of induce me to live tranquilly and respectably in future.'

'Well – well,' muttered M. Dupont, 'it is no business of mine; and if this lady –'

'If she *will* have her own way,' added Captain Clairville, 'we cannot thwart her, M. Dupont; and as an honourable man I must confess that I have fairly lost five thousand francs to M. Tictac, which sum I shall pay him presently.'

'And you shall dance at our wedding, captain,' exclaimed Tictac; 'and the moment the joys of the honeymoon are over, and I have a little spare time on my hands, I'll undertake to find you a wife.'

Reader, we have no more to say – unless it be indeed to assure you that the widow kept her promise to M. Tictac, who also kept his promise to the notary to lead a quiet and steady life. But Captain Clairville is still a bachelor – and is likely to continue so.

[1] £200 at the time of publication.