



## **Guillaume's Gift**

By Blair Borden

A long time ago, in a French village called Touraine, Guillaume lived with his father, Franscois the shoemaker. Guillaume's job was to deliver shoes his father had made. He loved to sing and make up songs as he skipped along the streets of Touraine, carrying shoes to all of his father's customers.

Guillaume's favorite place to deliver shoes was the home of the rich Rousseau family. He would try to catch a glimpse of pretty Renee, and enjoy the kind words of her aunt, Tante Marie, who was always smiling. Sometimes he would sing a song for her, and she would reward him with a treat from the kitchen. But what he liked best about coming to the Rousseau home was hearing the sweet music that the family played on little wooden instruments. The Rousseau family was famous for its great feasts, parties and wonderful hospitality. At these grand parties there was dancing, singing, and always the family played those wonderful wooden instruments.

One day, after delivering Tante Marie's new red shoes, Guillaume sang a new song he had just made up, and Tante Marie liked it so much that she asked him to sing it over and over again. Then, to Guillaume's surprise, she invited him to come, with his father, to a feast the next day and sing for their guests.

The next day Guillaume and his father arrived at the Rousseau home dressed in their finest clothes. As they walked up the front stairs, Guillaume was so honored to be asked to the feast, his knees shook. At the party there was all the food that even a boy of nine could eat. Then they all danced, and after the dancing everyone sang. Guillaume sang his new song and everyone applauded. Then all the people sang part-songs called madrigals. Guillaume joined in with his high, light voice.

At last it was time for recorder playing. Everyone seemed to have one of those wonderful wooden instruments. Some were small, and others were large. Some were shiny and some dull, some dark and some light-colored. They all had the same number of holes for the fingers, and they sounded wonderful to Guillaume's ears.

Tante Marie told Guillaume that the instruments were called recorders. The Rousseau family had a matching set of them, all the same color and made of the same kind of wood. When Renee played the melody on her small soprano recorder, its sound rang out sweet and clear. Tante Marie played a harmony on the larger and lower treble recorder, and its voice was mellow and smooth and soothing. Only Renee's big brother Frederic had fingers long enough to reach the holes on the big tenor recorder, and he could make it sing with rich low tones.

Grandpere, Renee's grandfather, looked as if he were smoking a big pipe as he blew into the tube that came out of the top of his bass recorder. It curved around so that he could blow into the long instrument and still reach the holes with his fingers.

Guillaume's father sat back and smoked his pipe and enjoyed the music. He laughed at funny Grandpere, looked thoughtful when the music was soft and sad, and clicked his heels when the tunes were cheerful and fast moving. Guillaume enjoyed the music too but he felt sad, for he would have liked to play with the others.

After many songs were played and ballads sung, Tante Marie looked down at Guillaume and asked "Why don't you join us, Gui? Did you forget to bring your recorder?" Gui looked so unhappy that she guessed the problem. She put her hand comfortingly on his shoulder for a moment before she continued playing, but she felt his sadness when she saw his finger trying to move in the same patterns as hers.

Finally Francois' eyes grew heavy. "Come, Gui, it's time to go home to bed. There are many unfinished shoes waiting for our hands." Reluctantly, Guillaume joined his father at the door. As his father was thanking Mr. Rousseau for the feast, Tante Marie spoke to Guillaume. She had a mischievous look on her face and was holding her hands behind her back.

"Guillaume, she said, "I would like to thank you for singing, and I have an old friend here who would like to come and live with you." When Tante Marie brought her hands from behind her, Guillaume could not believe his eyes. Tante Marie handed Guillaume one of the marvelous wooden instruments. "This is my soprano recorder which I have played for many years," she told him. "Now my ancient ears prefer the treble. If you would like to keep my old soprano, I would be very happy.

Gui didn't know what to say, but Tante Marie could see the happiness in his face. "Come, sing and play with us any time, Gui," she called as he skipped away. Before they turned the corner Gui paused to look back at the big Rousseau house. He felt happy when he saw Tante Marie's broad face, smiling warmly. With both hands he held on tightly to the little recorder, now his very own. He told himself that he would practice and practice until he could play as well as the Rousseaus', and then he would play his own tunes for Renee and Tante Marie and all their family