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VOL. 1 \*\*\*

# The Works of Guy de Maupassant

## VOLUME I

### BOULE DE SUIF AND OTHER STORIES

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#### CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	<a href="#">x</a>
BOULE DE SUIF	<a href="#">1</a>
MISS HARRIET	<a href="#">54</a>
FRANCESCA AND CARLOTTA RONDOLI	<a href="#">82</a>
CHÂLI	<a href="#">117</a>
THE UMBRELLA	<a href="#">131</a>
MY UNCLE SOSTHENES	<a href="#">143</a>
HE?	<a href="#">152</a>
A PHILOSOPHER	<a href="#">162</a>
ALWAYS LOCK THE DOOR!	<a href="#">171</a>
A MEETING	<a href="#">179</a>
THE LITTLE CASK	<a href="#">190</a>
HOW HE GOT THE LEGION OF HONOR	<a href="#">198</a>

THE ACCURSED BREAD	<a href="#">206</a>
WHAT WAS REALLY THE MATTER WITH ANDREW	<a href="#">213</a>
MY LANDLADY	<a href="#">221</a>
THE HORLA, OR MODERN GHOSTS	<a href="#">228</a>
LOVE. THREE PAGES FROM A SPORTSMAN'S BOOK	<a href="#">262</a>
THE HOLE	<a href="#">270</a>
SAVED	<a href="#">279</a>
BELLFLOWER	<a href="#">286</a>
THE MARQUIS DE FUMEROL	<a href="#">293</a>
THE SIGNAL	<a href="#">303</a>
THE DEVIL	<a href="#">311</a>
EPIPHANY	<a href="#">321</a>
IN THE WOOD	<a href="#">336</a>
A FAMILY	<a href="#">343</a>
JOSEPH	<a href="#">350</a>
THE INN	<a href="#">358</a>
UGLY	<a href="#">376</a>

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# WORKS OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

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## [INTRODUCTION](#)

[Pg x]

**BY**

**ARTHUR SYMONS**

The first aim of art, no doubt, is the representation of things as they are. But then things are as our eyes see them and as our minds make them; and it is thus of primary importance for the critic to distinguish the precise qualities of the eyes and minds which make the world into imaginative literature. Reality may be so definite and so false, just as it may be so fantastic and so true; and, among work which we can apprehend as dealing justly with reality, there may be quite as much difference in all that constitutes outward form and likeness as there is between a Dutch interior by Peter van der Hooch, the portrait of a king by Velasquez, and the image of a woman smiling by Leonardo da Vinci. The soul, for instance, is at heart as real as the body; but, as we can hear it only through the body speaking, and see it only through bodily eyes, and measure it, often enough, only in the insignificant moment of its action, it may come to seem to us, at all events less realizable; and thus it is that we speak of those who have vividly painted exterior things as realists. Properly speaking, Maupassant is no more a realist than Maeterlinck. He paints a kind of reality which it is easier for us to recognize; that is all.

Every artist has his own vision of the world. Maupassant's vision was of solid superficies, of texture which his hands could touch, of actions which his mind could comprehend from the mere sight of its incidents. He saw the world as the Dutch painters saw it, and he was as great a master of form, of rich and sober color, of the imitation of the outward gestures of life, and of the fashion of external things. He had the same view of humanity, and shows us, with the same indifference, the same violent ferment of life—the life of full-blooded people who have to elbow their way through the world. His sense of desire, of greed, of all the baser passions, was profound: he had the terrible logic of animalism. Love-making, drunkenness, cheating, quarreling, the mere idleness of sitting drowsily in a chair, the gross life of the farmyard and the fields, civic dissensions, the sordid provincial dance of the seven deadly sins, he saw in the same direct, unilluminating way as the Dutch painters; finding, indeed, no beauty in any of these things, but getting his beauty in the deft arrangement of them, in the mere act of placing them in a picture. The world existed for him as something formless which could be cut up into little pictures. He saw no farther than the lines of his frame. The interest of the thing began inside that frame, and what remained outside was merely material.

[Pg xi]

A story of Maupassant, more than almost anything in the world, gives you the impression of manual dexterity. It is adequately thought out, but it does not impress you by its thought; it is clearly seen, but it does not impress you specially by the fidelity of its detail; it has just enough of ordinary human feeling for the limits it has imposed on itself. What impresses you is the extreme ingenuity of its handling; the way in which this juggler keeps his billiard-balls harmoniously rising and falling in the air. Often, indeed, you cannot help noticing the conscious smile which precedes the trick, and the confident bow which concludes it. He does not let you into the secret of the trick, but he prevents you from ignoring that it is after all, only a trick which you have been

[Pg xii]

watching.

There is a philosophy of one kind or another behind the work of every artist. Maupassant's was a simple one, sufficient for his needs as he understood them, though perhaps really consequent upon his artistic methods, rather than at the root of them. It was the philosophy of cynicism: the most effectual means of limiting one's outlook, of concentrating all one's energies on the task in hand. Maupassant wrote for men of the world, and men of the world are content with the wisdom of their counting-houses. The man of the world is perfectly willing to admit that he is no better than you, because he takes it for granted that you will admit yourself to be no better than he. It is a way of avoiding comparison. To Maupassant this cynical point of view was invaluable for his purpose. He wanted to tell stories just for the pleasure of telling them; he wanted to concern himself with his story simply as a story; incidents interested him, not ideas, nor even characters, and he wanted every incident to be immediately effective. Now cynicism, in France, supplies a sufficient basis for all these requirements; it is the equivalent, for popular purposes, of that appeal to the average which in England is sentimentality. Compare, for instance, the admirable story "Boule de Suif," perhaps the best story which Maupassant ever wrote, with a story of somewhat similar motive—Bret Harte's "Outcasts of Poker Flat." Both stories are pathetic; but the pathos of the American (who had formed himself upon Dickens, and in the English tradition) becomes sentimental, and gets its success by being sentimental; while the pathos of the Frenchman (who has formed himself on Flaubert, and on French lines) gets its success precisely by being cynical.

[Pg xiii]

And then the particular variety of Maupassant's cynicism was just that variation of the artistic idea upon the temperament which puts the best finish upon work necessarily so limited, obliged to be so clenching, as the short story. Flaubert's gigantic dissatisfaction with life, his really philosophic sense of its vanity, would have overweighted a writer so thoroughly equipped for his work as the writer of "Boule de Suif" and "La Maison Tellier." Maupassant had no time, he allowed himself no space, to reason about life; the need was upon him to tell story after story, each with its crisis, its thrill, its summing up of a single existence or a single action. The sharp, telling thrust that his conception of art demanded could be given only by a very specious, not very profound, very forthright, kind of cynicism, like the half kindly, half contemptuous laugh of the man who tells a good story at the club. For him it was the point of the epigram.

Maupassant was the man of his period, and his period was that of Naturalism. In "Les Soirees de Medan," the volume in which "Boule de Suif" appeared, there is another story called "Sac au Dos," in which another novelist made his appearance among the five who "publicly affirmed their literary tendencies" about the central figure of Zola. J. K. Huysmans, then but at the outset of his slow and painful course through schools and experiments, was in time to sum up the new tendencies of a new period, as significantly as Maupassant summed up in his short and brilliant, and almost undeviating career, the tendencies of that period in which Taine and science seemed to have at last found out the physical basis of life. Now it is a new realism which appeals to us: it is the turn of the soul. The battle which the "Soirees de Medan" helped to win has been won; having gained our right to deal with humble and unpleasant and sordidly tragic things in fiction, we are free to concern ourselves with other things. But though the period has passed, and will not return, the masterpieces of the period remain. Among these masterpieces are the novels and short stories of Guy de Maupassant.

[Pg xiv]

ARTHUR SYMONS.

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## **BOULE DE SUIF**

[Pg 1]

For several days, straggling remnants of the routed army had passed through the town. There was no question of organized troops, it was simply a disjointed rabble, the men unshaven and dirty, their uniforms in tatters, slouching along without regimental colors, without order—worn out, broken down, incapable of thought or resolution, marching from pure habit and dropping with fatigue the moment they stopped. The majority belonged to the militia, men of peaceful pursuits, retired tradespeople, sinking under the weight of their accouterments; quick-witted little moblets as prone to terror as they were to enthusiasm, as ready to attack as they were to fly; and here and there a few red trousers, remnants of a company mowed down in one of the big battles; somber-coated artillerymen, side by side with these various uniforms of the infantry, and now and then the glittering helmet of a heavily booted dragoon who followed with difficulty the march of the lighter-footed soldiers of the line.

Companies of franc-tireurs, heroically named "Avengers of the Defeat," "Citizens of the Tomb," "Companies in Death," passed in their turn, looking like a horde of bandits.

Their chiefs—formerly drapers or corn-dealers, retired soap-boilers or suet-refiners, warriors of circumstance created officers for their money or the length of their moustaches, heaped with arms, flannels, and gold lace—talked loudly, discussed plans of campaign, and gave you to understand that they were the sole support of France in her death-agony; but they were generally in terror of their own soldiers, men "of the sack and cord," most of them brave to foolhardiness, all of them given to pillage and debauchery.

[Pg 2]

Report said that the Prussians were about to enter Rouen. The National Guard, which for two

months past had made the most careful reconnoiterings in the neighboring wood, even to the extent of occasionally shooting their own sentries and putting themselves in battle array if a rabbit stirred in the brushwood, had now retired to their domestic hearths; their arms, their uniforms, all the murderous apparatus with which they had been wont to strike terror to the hearts of all beholders for three leagues round, had vanished.

Finally, the last of the French soldiery crossed the Seine on their way to Pont-Audemer by Saint Sever and Bourg-Achard; and then, last of all, came their despairing general tramping on foot between two orderlies, powerless to attempt any action with these disjointed fragments of his forces, himself utterly dazed and bewildered by the downfall of a people accustomed to victory and now so disastrously beaten in spite of its traditional bravery.

After that a profound calm, the silence of terrified suspense, fell over the city. Many a rotund bourgeois, emasculated by a purely commercial life, awaited the arrival of the victors with anxiety, trembling lest their meat-skewers and kitchen carving-knives should come under the category of arms.

Life seemed to have come to a standstill, the shops were closed, the streets silent. From time to time an inhabitant, intimidated by their silence, would flit rapidly along the pavement, keeping close to the walls.

[Pg 3]

In this anguish of suspense, men longed for the coming of the enemy.

In the latter part of the day following the departure of the French troops, some Uhlans, appearing from goodness knows where, traversed the city hastily. A little later, a black mass descended from the direction of Sainte-Catherine, while two more invading torrents poured in from the roads from Darnetal and Bois-guillaume. The advance guards of the three corps converged at the same moment into the square of the Hotel de Ville, while battalion after battalion of the German army wound in through the adjacent streets, making the pavement ring under their heavy rhythmic tramp.

Orders shouted in strange and guttural tones were echoed back by the apparently dead and deserted houses, while from behind the closed shutters eyes peered furtively at the conquerors, masters by right of might, of the city and the lives and fortunes of its inhabitants. The people in their darkened dwellings fell a prey to the helpless bewilderment which comes over men before the floods, the devastating upheavals of the earth, against which all wisdom and all force are unavailing. The same phenomenon occurs each time that the established order of things is overthrown, when public security is at an end, and when all that the laws of man or of nature protect is at the mercy of some blind elemental force. The earthquake burying an entire population under its falling houses; the flood that carries away the drowned body of the peasant with the carcasses of his cattle and the beams torn from his roof-tree; or the victorious army massacring those who defend their lives, and making prisoners of the rest—pillaging in the name of the sword, and thanking God to the roar of cannon—are so many appalling scourges which overthrow all faith in eternal justice, all the confidence we are taught to place in the protection of Providence and the reason of man.

[Pg 4]

Small detachments now began knocking at the doors and then disappearing into the houses. It was the occupation after the invasion. It now behooved the vanquished to make themselves agreeable to the victors.

After a while, the first alarms having subsided, a new sense of tranquillity began to establish itself. In many families the Prussian officer shared the family meals. Not infrequently he was a gentleman, and out of politeness expressed his commiseration with France and his repugnance at having to take part in such a war. They were grateful enough to him for this sentiment—besides, who knew when they might not be glad of his protection? By gaining his good offices one might have fewer men to feed. And why offend a person on whom one was utterly dependent? That would not be bravery but temerity, a quality of which the citizens of Rouen could no longer be accused as in the days of those heroic defenses by which the city had made itself famous. Above all, they said, with the unassailable urbanity of the Frenchman, it was surely permissible to be on politely familiar terms in private, provided one held aloof from the foreign soldier in public. In the street, therefore, they ignored one another's existence, but once indoors they were perfectly ready to be friendly, and each evening found the German staying longer at the family fireside.

[Pg 5]

The town itself gradually regained its wonted aspect. The French inhabitants did not come out much, but the Prussian soldiers swarmed in the streets. For the rest, the blue hussar officers who trailed their mighty implements of death so arrogantly over the pavement did not appear to entertain a vastly deeper grade of contempt for the simple townsfolk than did the officers of the Chasseurs who had drunk in the same cafés the year before. Nevertheless there was a something in the air; something subtle and indefinable, an intolerably unfamiliar atmosphere like a widely diffused odor—the odor of invasion. It filled the private dwellings and the public places, it affected the taste of food, and gave one the impression of being on a journey, far away from home, among barbarous and dangerous tribes.

The conquerors demanded money—a great deal of money. The inhabitants paid and went on paying; for the matter of that, they were rich. But the wealthier a Normandy tradesman becomes, the more keenly he suffers at each sacrifice each time he sees the smallest particle of his fortune pass into the hands of another.

Two or three leagues beyond the town, however, following the course of the river about Croisset

Dieppedalle or Biessard, the sailors and the fishermen would often drag up the swollen corpse of some uniformed German, killed by a knife-thrust or a kick, his head smashed in by a stone, or thrown into the water from some bridge. The slime of the river bed swallowed up many a deed of vengeance, obscure, savage, and legitimate; unknown acts of heroism, silent onslaughts more perilous to the doer than battles in the light of day and without the trumpet blasts of glory.

[Pg 6]

For hatred of the Alien is always strong enough to arm some intrepid beings who are ready to die for an Idea.

At last, seeing that though the invaders had subjected the city to their inflexible discipline they had not committed any of the horrors with which rumor had accredited them throughout the length of their triumphal progress, the worthy tradespeople took heart of grace and the commercial spirit began once more to stir within them. Some of them who had grave interests at stake at Havre, then occupied by the French army, purposed trying to reach that port by going overland to Dieppe and there taking ship.

They took advantage of the influence of German officers whose acquaintance they had made, and a passport was obtained from the general in command.

Having therefore engaged a large diligence with four horses for the journey, and ten persons having entered their names at the livery stable office, they resolved to start on the Tuesday morning before daybreak, to avoid all public remark.

For some days already the ground had been hard with frost, and on the Monday, about three o'clock in the afternoon, thick dark clouds coming up from the north brought the snow, which fell without intermission all the evening and during the whole night.

At half past four the travelers were assembled in the courtyard of the Hotel de Normandie, from whence they were to start.

They were all still half asleep, their teeth chattering with cold in spite of their thick wraps. It was difficult to distinguish one from another in the darkness, their heaped-up winter clothing making them look like fat priests in long cassocks. Two of the men, however, recognized each other; they were joined by a third, and they began to talk. "I am taking my wife with me," said one. "So am I." "And I too." The first one added: "We shall not return to Rouen, and if the Prussians come to Havre we shall slip over to England."

[Pg 7]

They were all like-minded and all had the same project.

Meanwhile there was no sign of the horses being put in. A small lantern carried by a hostler appeared from time to time out of one dark doorway only to vanish instantly into another. There was a stamping of horses' hoofs deadened by the straw of the litter, and the voice of a man speaking to the animals and cursing sounded from the depths of the stables. A faint sound of bells gave evidence of harnessing, and became presently a clear and continuous jingle timed by the movement of the beast, now stopping, now going on again with a brisk shake, and accompanied by the dull tramp of hob-nailed sabots.

A door closed sharply. All sound ceased. The frozen travelers were silent, standing stiff and motionless. A veil of white snow-flakes glistened incessantly as it fell to the ground, blotting out the shape of things, powdering everything with an icy froth; and in the utter stillness of the town, quiet and buried under its winter pall, nothing was audible but this faint, fluttering, and indefinable rustle of falling snow—more a sensation than a sound—the intermingling of ethereal atoms seeming to fill space, to cover the world.

The man reappeared with his lantern, dragging after him by a rope a dejected and unwilling horse. He pushed it against the pole, fixed the traces, and was occupied for a long time in buckling the harness, having only the use of one hand as he carried the lantern in the other. As he turned away to fetch the other horse he caught sight of the motionless group of travelers, by this time white with snow. "Why don't you get inside the carriage?" he said, "you would at least be under cover."

[Pg 8]

It had never occurred to them, and they made a rush for it. The three men packed their wives into the upper end and then got in themselves, after which other distinct and veiled forms took the remaining seats without exchanging a word.

The floor of the vehicle was covered with straw into which the feet sank. The ladies at the end, who had brought little copper charcoal foot-warmers, proceeded to light them, and for some time discussed their merits in subdued tones, repeating to one another things which they had known all their lives.

At last, the diligence having been furnished with six horses instead of four on account of the difficulties of the road, a voice outside asked, "Is everybody here?" A voice from within answered "Yes," and they started.

The conveyance advanced slowly—slowly—the wheels sinking in the snow; the whole vehicle groaned and creaked, the horses slipped, wheezed, and smoked, and the driver's gigantic whip cracked incessantly, flying from side to side, twining and untwining like a slender snake, and cutting sharply across one or other of the six humping backs, which would thereupon straighten up with a more violent effort.

[Pg 9]

Imperceptibly the day grew. The airy flakes which a traveler—a Rouennais "pur sang"—once likened to a shower of cotton, had ceased to fall; a dirty gray light filtered through the heavy thick clouds which served to heighten the dazzling whiteness of the landscape, where now a long line of trees crusted with icicles would appear, now a cottage with a hood of snow.

In the light of this melancholy dawn the occupants of the diligence began to examine one another curiously.

Right at the end, in the best seats, opposite to one another, dozed Madame and Monsieur Loiseau, whole-sale wine merchant of the Rue Grand Pont.

The former salesman of a master who had become bankrupt, Loiseau had bought up the stock and made his fortune. He sold very bad wine at very low prices to the small country retail dealers, and enjoyed the reputation among his friends and acquaintances of being an unmitigated rogue, a thorough Norman full of trickery and jovial humor.

His character for knavery was so well established that one evening at the Prefecture, Monsieur Tournel, a man of keen and trenchant wit, author of certain fables and songs—a local glory—seeing the ladies growing drowsy, proposed a game of "L'oiseau vole."<sup>[1]</sup> The pun itself flew through the prefect's reception rooms and afterwards through the town, and for a whole month called up a grin on every face in the province.

Loiseau was himself a noted wag and famous for his jokes both good and bad, and nobody ever mentioned him without adding immediately, "That Loiseau is simply priceless!"

[Pg 10]

He was of medium height with a balloon-like stomach and a rubicund face framed in grizzled whiskers. His wife—tall, strong, resolute, loud in voice and rapid of decision—represented order and arithmetic in the business, which he enlivened by his jollity and bustling activity.

Beside them, in a more dignified attitude as befitted his superior station, sat Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, a man of weight; an authority on cotton, proprietor of three branch businesses, officer of the Legion of Honor and member of the General Council. All the time of the Empire he had remained leader of a friendly opposition, for the sole purpose of making a better thing out of it when he came round to the cause which he had fought with polite weapons, to use his own expression. Madame Carré-Lamadon, who was much younger than her husband, was the consolation of all officers of good family who might be quartered at the Rouen garrison. She sat there opposite to her husband, very small, very dainty, very pretty, wrapped in her furs, and regarding the lamentable interior of the vehicle with despairing eyes.

Their neighbors, the Count and Countess Hubert de Breville, bore one of the most ancient and noble names in Normandy. The Count, an elderly gentleman of dignified appearance, did all in his power to accentuate by every artifice of the toilet his natural resemblance to Henri Quatre, who, according to a legend of the utmost glory to the family, had honored with his royal embraces a Dame de Breville, whose husband had, in consequence, been made Count and Governor of the province.

A colleague of Monsieur Carré-Lamadon in the General Council, Count Hubert represented the Orleanist faction in the department. The history of his marriage with the daughter of a small tradesman of Nantes had always remained a mystery. But as the Countess had an air of grandeur, understood better than any one else the art of receiving, passed even for having been beloved by one of the sons of Louis Philippe, the neighboring nobility bowed down to her, and her salon held the first place in the county, the only one which preserved the traditions of the viel le galanterie and to which the entree was difficult.

[Pg 11]

The fortune of the Brevilles—all in Government Funds—was reported to yield them an income of five hundred thousand francs.

The six passengers occupied the upper end of the conveyance, the representatives of reformed society, serene in the consciousness of its strength—honest well-to-do people possessed of Religion and Principles.

By some strange chance all the women were seated on the same side, the Countess having two sisters of Mercy for neighbors, wholly occupied in fingering their long rosaries and mumbling Paters and Aves. One of them was old and so deeply pitted with the small-pox that she looked as if she had received a charge of grape shot full in the face; the other was very shadowy and frail, with a pretty unhealthy little face, a narrow phthisical chest, consumed by that devouring faith which creates martyrs and ecstasies.

Seated opposite to the two nuns were a man and woman who excited a good deal of attention.

The man, who was well known, was Cornudet, "the demon," the terror of all respectable, law-abiding people. For twenty years he had dipped his great red beard into the beer mugs of all the democratic café's. In the company of kindred spirits he had managed to run through a comfortable little fortune inherited from his father, a confectioner, and he looked forward with impatience to the Republic, when he should obtain the well-merited reward for so many revolutionary draughts. On the Fourth of September—probably through some practical joke—he understood that he had been appointed prefect, but on attempting to enter upon his duties the clerks, who had remained sole masters of the offices, refused to recognize him, and he was constrained to retire. For the rest, he was a good fellow, inoffensive and serviceable, and had busied himself with incomparable industry in organizing the defense of the town; had had holes

[Pg 12]

dug all over the plain, cut down all the young trees in the neighboring woods, scattered pitfalls up and down all the high roads, and at the threatened approach of the enemy—satisfied with his preparations—had fallen back with all haste on the town. He now considered that he would be more useful in Havre, where fresh entrenchments would soon become necessary.

The woman, one of the so-called "gay" sisterhood, was noted for her precocious stoutness, which had gained her the nickname of "Boule de Suif"—"ball of fat." She was a little roly-poly creature, cushioned with fat, with podgy fingers squeezed in at the joints like rows of thick, short sausages; her skin tightly stretched and shiny, her bust enormous, and yet with it all so wholesomely, temptingly fresh and appetizing that it was a pleasure to look at her. Her face was like a ruddy apple—a peony rose just burst into bloom—and out of it gazed a pair of magnificent dark eyes overshadowed by long thick lashes that deepened their blackness; and lower down, a charming little mouth, dewy to the kiss, and furnished with a row of tiny milk-white teeth. Over and above all this she was, they said, full of inestimable qualities.

[Pg 13]

No sooner was her identity recognized than a whisper ran through the ladies in which the words "prostitute" and "public scandal," were so conspicuously distinct that she raised her head and retaliated by sweeping her companions with such a bold and defiant look that deep silence instantly fell upon them, and they all cast down their eyes with the exception of Loiseau, who watched her with a kindling eye.

However, conversation was soon resumed between the three ladies, whom the presence of this "person" had suddenly rendered friendly—almost intimate. It seemed to them that they must, as it were, raise a rampart of their dignity as spouses between them and this shameless creature who made a traffic of herself; for legalized love always takes a high hand with her unlicensed sister.

The three men too, drawn to one another by a conservative instinct at sight of Cornudet, talked money in a certain tone of contempt for the impecunious. Count Hubert spoke of the damage inflicted on him by the Prussians, of the losses which would result to him from the seizing of cattle and from ruined crops, but with all the assurance of a great landed proprietor, ten times millionaire, whom these ravages might inconvenience for the space of a year at most. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, of great experience in the cotton industry, had taken the precaution to send six hundred thousand francs across to England as provision against a rainy day. As for Loiseau, he made arrangements to sell all the wine in his cellars to the French commission of supplies, consequently the Government owed him a formidable sum, which he counted upon receiving at Havre.

[Pg 14]

The three exchanged rapid and amicable glances. Although differing in position they felt themselves brothers in money, and of the great freemasonry of those who possess, of those who can make the gold jingle when they put their hands in the breeches-pockets.

The diligence went so slowly that by ten o'clock in the morning they had not made four leagues. The men got out three times and climbed the hill on foot. They began to grow anxious, for they were to have lunched at Totes, and now they despaired of reaching that place before night. Everybody was on the look-out for some inn by the way, when the vehicle stuck fast in a snowdrift, and it took two hours to get it out.

Meanwhile the pangs of hunger began to affect them severely both in mind and body, and yet not an inn, not a tavern even, was to be seen; the approach of the Prussians and the passage of the famished French troops had frightened away all trade.

The gentlemen foraged diligently for the provisions in the farms by the roadside; but they failed to obtain so much as a piece of bread, for the mistrustful peasant hid all reserve stores for fear of being pillaged by the soldiers, who, having no food supplied to them, took by force everything they could lay their hands on.

Towards one o'clock Loiseau announced that he felt a very decided void in his stomach. Everybody had been suffering in the same manner for a long time, and the violent longing for food had extinguished conversation.

[Pg 15]

From time to time some one would yawn, to be almost immediately imitated by another and then each of the rest in turn, and according to their disposition, manners, or social standing, would open their mouth noisily, or modestly cover with the hand the gaping cavity from which the breath issued in a vapor.

Boule de Suif had several times stooped down as if feeling for something under her skirts. She hesitated a moment, looked at her companions, and then composedly resumed her former position. The faces were pale and drawn. Loiseau declared he would give a thousand francs for a ham. His wife made a faint movement as to protest, but restrained herself. It always affected her painfully to hear of money being thrown away, nor could she even understand a joke upon the subject.

"To tell the truth," said the Count, "I do not feel quite myself either—how could I have omitted to think of bringing provisions?" And everybody reproached themselves with the same neglectfulness.

Cornudet, however, had a flask of rum which he offered round. It was coldly refused. Loiseau alone accepted a mouthful, and handed back the flask with thanks saying, "That's good! that



warms you up and keeps the hunger off a bit." The alcohol raised his spirits somewhat, and he proposed that they should do the same as on the little ship in the song—eat the fattest of the passengers. This indirect but obvious allusion to Boule De Suif shocked the gentle people. Nobody responded and only Cornudet smiled. The two Sisters of Mercy had ceased to tell their beads and sat motionless, their hands buried in their wide sleeves, their eyes obstinately lowered, doubtless engaged in offering back to Heaven the sacrifice of suffering which it sent them.

[Pg 16]

At last, at three o'clock, when they were in the middle of an interminable stretch of bare country without a single village in sight, Boule de Suif, stooping hurriedly, drew from under the seat a large basket covered with a white napkin.

Out of it she took, first of all, a little china plate and a delicate silver drinking-cup, and then an immense dish, in which two whole fowls ready carved lay stiffened in their jelly. Other good things were visible in the basket: patties, fruits, pastry—in fact provisions for a three days' journey in order to be independent of inn cookery. The necks of four bottles protruded from between the parcels of food. She took the wing of a fowl and began to eat it daintily with one of those little rolls which they call "Regence" in Normandy.

Every eye was fixed upon her. As the odor of the food spread through the carriage nostrils began to quiver and mouths to fill with water, while the jaws, just below the ears contracted painfully. The dislike entertained by the ladies for this abandoned young woman grew savage, almost to the point of longing to murder her or at least to turn her out into the snow, her and her drinking-cup and her basket and her provisions.

Loiseau, however, was devouring the dish of chicken with his eyes. "Madame has been more prudent than we," he said. "Some people always think of everything."

[Pg 17]

She turned her head in his direction. "If you would care for any, Monsieur—? It is not comfortable to fast for so long."

He bowed. "Ma foi!—frankly, I won't refuse. I can't stand this any longer—the fortune of war, is it not, madame?" And with a comprehensive look he added: "In moments such as this we are only too glad to find any one who will oblige us." He had a newspaper which he spread on his knee to save his trousers, and with the point of a knife which he always carried in his pocket he captured a drumstick all glazed with jelly, tore it with his teeth, and then proceeded to chew it with satisfaction so evident that a deep groan of distress went up from the whole party.

Upon this Boule de Suif in a gentle and humble tone invited the two Sisters to share the collation. They both accepted on the spot, and without raising their eyes began to eat very hurriedly, after stammering a few words of thanks. Nor did Cornudet refuse his neighbor's offer, and with the Sisters they formed a kind of table by spreading out newspapers on their knees.

The jaws opened and shut without a pause, biting, chewing, gulping ferociously. Loiseau, hard at work in his corner, urged his wife in a low voice to follow his example. She resisted for some time, then, after a pang which gripped her very vitals, she gave in. Whereupon her husband, rounding off his phrases, asked if their "charming fellow-traveler" would permit him to offer a little something to Madame Loiseau.

"Why, yes, certainly, Monsieur," she answered with a pleasant smile, and handed him the dish.

There was a moment of embarrassment when the first bottle of claret was uncorked—there was but the one drinking-cup. Each one wiped it before passing it to the rest. Cornudet alone, from an impulse of gallantry no doubt, placed his lips on the spot still wet from the lips of his neighbor.

[Pg 18]

Then it was that, surrounded by people who were eating, suffocated by the fragrant odor of the viands, the Count and Countess de Breville and Monsieur and Madame Carré-Lamadon suffered the agonies of that torture which has ever been associated with the name of Tantalus. Suddenly the young wife of the cotton manufacturer gave a deep sigh. Every head turned towards her; she was as white as the snow outside, her eyes closed, her head fell forward—she had fainted. Her husband, distraught with fear, implored assistance of the whole company. All lost their heads till the elder of the two Sisters, who supported the unconscious lady, forced Boule de Suif's drinking-cup between her lips and made her swallow a few drops of wine. The pretty creature stirred, opened her eyes, smiled and then declared in an expiring voice that she felt quite well now. But to prevent her being overcome again in the same manner, the Sister induced her to drink a full cup of wine, adding, "It is simply hunger—nothing else."

At this Boule de Suif, blushing violently, looked at the four starving passengers and faltered shyly, "Mon Dieu! If I might make so bold as to offer the ladies and gentlemen—" She stopped short, fearing a rude rebuff.

Loiseau, however, at once threw himself into the breach. "Parbleu! under such circumstances we are all companions in misfortune and bound to help each other. Come, ladies, don't stand on ceremony—take what you can get and be thankful: who knows whether we shall be able to find so much as a house where we can spend the night? At this rate we shall not reach Totes till tomorrow afternoon."

[Pg 19]

They still hesitated, nobody having the courage to take upon themselves the responsibility of the decisive "Yes." Finally the Count seized the bull by the horns. Adopting his most grandiose air, he turned with a bow to the embarrassed young woman and said, "We accept your offer with thanks, madame."



The first step only was difficult. The Rubicon once crossed, they fell to with a will. They emptied the basket, which contained, besides the provisions already mentioned; a pate de foie gras, a lark pie, a piece of smoked tongue, some pears, a slab of gingerbread, mixed biscuits, and a cup of pickled onions and gherkins in vinegar—for, like all women, Boule de Suif adored crudities.

They could not well eat the young woman's provisions and not speak to her, so they conversed—stiffly at first, and then, seeing that she showed no signs of presuming, with less reserve. Mesdames de Breville and Carré-Lamadon, having a great deal of "savoir vivre," knew how to make themselves agreeable with tact and delicacy. The Countess, in particular, exhibited the amiable condescension of the extremely high-born lady whom no contact can sully, and was charming. But big Madame Loiseau, who had the soul of a gendarme, remained unmoved, speaking little and eating much.

The conversation naturally turned upon the war. They related horrible deeds committed by the Prussians and examples of the bravery of the French; all these people who were flying rendering full homage to the courage of those who remained behind. Incidents of personal experience soon followed, and Boule de Suif told, with that warmth of coloring which women of her type often employ in expressing their natural feelings, how she had come to leave Rouen.

[Pg 20]

"I thought at first I should be able to hold out," she said, "for I had plenty of provisions in my house, and would much rather feed a few soldiers than turn out of my home and go goodness knows where. But when I saw them—these Prussians—it was too much for me. They made my blood boil with rage, and I cried the whole day for shame. Oh, if I had only been a man!—well, there! I watched them from my window—fat pigs that they were with their spiked helmets—and my servant had to hold my hands to prevent me throwing the furniture down on the top of them. Then some of them came to be quartered on me, and I flew at the throat of the first one—they are not harder to strangle than any one else—and would have finished him too if they had not dragged me off by the hair. Of course I had to lie low after that. So as soon as I found an opportunity I left—and here I am."

Everybody congratulated her. She rose considerably in the estimation of her companions, who had not shown themselves of such valiant mettle, and listening to her tale, Cornudet smiled the benignant and approving smile of an apostle—as a priest might on hearing a devout person praise the Almighty; democrats with long beards having the monopoly of patriotism as the men of the cassock possess that of religion. He then took up the parable in a didactic tone with the phraseology culled from the notices posted each day on the walls, and finished up with a flourish of eloquence in which he scathingly alluded to "that blackguard of a Badinguet."<sup>[2]</sup>

[Pg 21]

But Boule de Suif fired up at this for she was a Bonapartist. She turned upon him with scarlet cheeks and stammering with indignation, "Ah! I should just like to have seen any of you in his place! A nice mess you would have made of it! It is men of your sort that ruined him, poor man. There would be nothing for it but to leave France for good if we were governed by cowards like you!"

Cornudet, nothing daunted, preserved a disdainful and superior smile, but there was a feeling in the air that high words would soon follow, whereupon the Count interposed, and managed, not without difficulty, to quiet the infuriated young woman by asserting authoritatively that every sincere opinion was to be respected. Nevertheless the Countess and the manufacturer's wife, who nourished in their hearts the unreasoning hatred of all well-bred people for the Republic and at the same time that instinctive weakness of all women for uniformed and despotic governments, felt drawn, in spite of themselves, to this woman of the street who had so much sense of the fitness of things and whose opinions so closely resembled their own.

The basket was empty—this had not been difficult among ten of them—they only regretted it was not larger. The conversation was kept up for some little time longer, although somewhat more coldly after they had finished eating.

The night fell, the darkness grew gradually more profound, and the cold, to which digestion rendered them more sensitive, made even Boule de Suif shiver in spite of her fat. Madame de Breville thereupon offered her her charcoal foot-warmer, which had been replenished several times since the morning; she accepted with alacrity, for her feet were like ice. Mesdames Carré-Lamadon and Loiseau lent theirs to the two Sisters.

[Pg 22]

The driver had lit his lanterns, which shed a vivid light over the cloud of vapor that hung over the steaming back of the horses and over the snow at each side of the road, which seemed to open out under the shifting reflection of the lights.

Inside the conveyance nothing could be distinguished any longer, but there was a sudden movement between Boule de Suif and Cornudet, and Loiseau, peering through the gloom, fancied he saw the man with the beard start back quickly as if he had received a well-directed but noiseless blow.

Tiny points of fire appeared upon the road in front. It was Totes. The travelers had been driving for eleven hours, which, with the four half-hours for food and rest to the horses, made thirteen. They entered the town and stopped in front of the Hotel de la Commerce.

The door opened. A familiar sound caused every passenger to tremble—it was the clink of a scabbard on the stones. At the same moment a German voice called out something.

Although the diligence had stopped, nobody attempted to get out, as though they expected to be massacred on setting foot to the ground. The driver then appeared holding up one of the lanterns, which suddenly illumined the vehicle to its farthest corner and revealed the two rows of bewildered faces with their open mouths and startled eyes wide with alarm.

Beside the driver in the full glare of the light stood a German officer, a tall young man excessively slender and blonde, compressed into his uniform like a girl in her stays, and wearing, well over one ear, a flat black wax-cloth cap like the "Boots" of an English hotel. His preposterously long moustache, which was drawn out stiff and straight, and tapered away indefinitely to each side till it finished off in a single thread so thin that it was impossible to say where it ended, seemed to weigh upon the corners of his mouth and form a deep furrow in either cheek. [Pg 23]

In Alsatian-French and stern accents he invited the passengers to descend: "Vill you get out, chentlemen and laties?"

The two Sisters were the first to obey with the docility of holy women accustomed to unfaltering submission. The Count and Countess appeared next, followed by the manufacturer and his wife, and after them Loiseau pushing his better half in front of him. As he set foot to the ground he remarked to the officer, more from motives of prudence than politeness, "Good evening, Monsieur," to which the other with the insolence of the man in possession, vouchsafed no reply but a stare.

Boule de Suif and Cornudet, though the nearest the door, were the last to emerge—grave and haughty in face of the enemy. The buxom young woman struggled hard to command herself and be calm; the democrat tugged at his long rusty beard with a tragic and slightly trembling hand. They sought to preserve their dignity, realizing that in such encounters each one, to a certain extent, represents his country; and the two being similarly disgusted at the servile readiness of their companions, she endeavored to show herself prouder than her fellow travelers who were honest women, while he, feeling that he must set an example, continued in his attitude his mission of resistance begun by digging pitfalls in the high roads. [Pg 24]

They all entered the huge kitchen of the inn, and the German, having been presented with the passport signed by the general in command—where each traveler's name was accompanied by a personal description and a statement as to his or her profession—he proceeded to scrutinize the party for a long time, comparing the persons with the written notices.

Finally, he exclaimed unceremoniously, "C'est bien—that's all right," and disappeared.

They breathed again more freely. Hunger having reasserted itself, supper was ordered. It would take half an hour to prepare, so while two servants were apparently busied about it the travelers dispersed to look at their rooms. These were all together down each side of a long passage ending in a door with ground glass panels.

At last, just as they were sitting down to table, the innkeeper himself appeared. He was a former horse-dealer, a stout asthmatic man with perpetual wheezings and blowings and rattlings of phlegm in his throat. His father had transmitted to him the name of Follenvie.

"Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset?" he said.

Boule de Suif started and turned round. "That is my name."

"Mademoiselle, the Prussian officer wants to speak to you at once."

"To me?"

"Yes, if you really are Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset." [Pg 25]

She hesitated, thought for a moment, and then declared roundly: "That may be, but I'm not going."

There was a movement round about her—everybody was much exercised as to the reason of this summons. The Count came over to her.

"You may do wrong to refuse, madame, for it may entail considerable annoyance not only to yourself but on the rest of your companions. It is a fatal mistake ever to offer resistance to people who are stronger than ourselves. The step can have no possible danger for you—it is probably about some little formality that has been omitted."

One and all concurred with him, implored and urged and scolded, till they ended by convincing her; for they were all apprehensive of the results of her contumacy.

"Well, I do it for you sure enough!" she said at last. The Countess pressed her hand. "And we are most grateful to you."

She left the room, and the others agreed to wait for her before beginning the meal. Each one lamented at not having been asked for instead of this hot-headed, violent young woman, and mentally prepared any number of platitudes for the event of being called in their turn.

At the end of ten minutes she returned, crimson with rage, choking, snorting,—“Oh, the blackguard; the low blackguard!” she stammered.

They all crowded round her to know what had happened, but she would not say, and the Count

becoming insistent, she answered with much dignity, "No, it does not concern anybody! I can't speak of it."

They then seated themselves round a great soup tureen from which steamed a smell of cabbage. In spite of this little contretemps the supper was a gay one. The cider, of which the Loiseaus and the two nuns partook from motives of economy, was good. The rest ordered wine and Cornudet called for beer. He had a particular way with him of uncorking the bottle, of making the liquid froth, of gazing at it while he tilted the glass, which he then held up between his eye and the light to criticise the color; while he drank, his great beard, which had the tints of his favorite beverage, seemed to quiver fondly, his eyes squinting that he might not lose sight of his tankard for a moment, and altogether he had the appearance of fulfilling the sole function for which he had been born. You would have said that he established in his own mind some connection or affinity between the two great passions that monopolized his life—Ale and Revolution—and most assuredly he never dipped into the one without thinking of the other.

[Pg 26]

Monsieur and Madame Follenvie supped at the farther end of the table. The husband—puffing and blowing like a bursting locomotive—had too much cold on the chest to be able to speak and eat at the same time, but his wife never ceased talking. She described her every impression at the arrival of the Prussians and all they did and all they said, execrating them in the first place because they cost so much, and secondly because she had two sons in the army. She addressed herself chiefly to the Countess, as it flattered her to be able to say she had conversed with a lady of quality.

She presently lowered her voice and proceeded to recount some rather delicate matters, her husband breaking in from time to time with—"You had much better hold your tongue, Madame Follenvie,"—to which she paid not the slightest attention, but went on.

[Pg 27]

"Well, madame, as I was saying—these men, they do nothing but eat potatoes and pork and pork and potatoes from morning till night. And as for their habits—! And you should see them exercising for hours and days together out there in the fields—It's forward march and backward march, and turn this way and turn that. If they even worked in the fields or mended the roads in their own country! But, no, madame, these soldiers are no good to anybody, and the poor people have to keep them and feed them simply that they may learn how to massacre. I know I am only a poor ignorant old woman, but when I see these men wearing themselves out by tramping up and down from morning till night, I cannot help saying to myself, if there are some people who make a lot of useful discoveries, why should others give themselves so much trouble to do harm? After all, isn't it an abomination to kill anybody, no matter whether they are Prussians, or English, or Poles, or French? If you revenge yourself on some one who has harmed you that is wicked, and you are taken up and punished; but let them shoot down our sons as if they were game, and it is all right, and they give medals to the man who kills the most. No, no, look you, I shall never be able to see any rhyme or reason in that!"

"War is barbarous if one attacks an unoffending neighbor—it is a sacred duty if one defends one's country," remarked Cornudet in a declamatory tone.

The old woman nodded assent. "Yes—defending oneself, of course, that is quite another thing; but wouldn't it be better to kill all these kings who do this for their pleasure?"

[Pg 28]

Cornudet's eyes flashed. "Bravo, citizeness!" he cried.

Monsieur Carré-Lamadon was lost in thought. Although he was an ardent admirer of famous military men, the sound common sense of this peasant woman's observations made him reflect upon the wealth which would necessarily accrue to the country if all these unemployed and consequently ruinous hands—so much unproductive force—were available for the great industrial works that would take centuries to complete.

Loiseau meanwhile had left his seat and gone over beside the innkeeper, to whom he began talking in a low voice. The fat man laughed, coughed, and spat, his unwieldy stomach shaking with mirth at his neighbor's jokes, and he bought six hogsheads of claret from him for the spring when the Prussians would have cleared out.

Supper was scarcely over when, dropping with fatigue, everybody went off to bed.

Loiseau, however, who had made certain observations, let his wife go to bed and proceeded to glue first his ear and then his eye to the keyhole, endeavoring to penetrate what he called "the mysteries of the corridor."

After about half an hour he heard a rustling, and hurrying to the keyhole, he perceived Boule de Suif looking ampler than ever in a dressing-gown of blue cashmere trimmed with white lace. She had a candle in her hand and was going towards the end of the corridor. Then a door at one side opened cautiously, and when she returned after a few minutes, Cornudet in his shirt sleeves was following her. They were talking in a low voice and presently stood still; Boule de Suif apparently defending the entrance of her room with much energy. Unfortunately Loiseau was unable to hear what they said till, at the last, as they raised their voices somewhat, he caught a word or two. Cornudet was insisting eagerly. "Look here," he said, "you are really very ridiculous—what difference can it make to you?"

[Pg 29]

And she with an offended air retorted, "No!—let me tell you there are moments when that sort of thing won't do; and besides—here—it would be a crying shame."

He obviously did not understand. "Why?"

At this she grew angry. "Why?" and she raised her voice still more, "you don't see why? and there are Prussians in the house—in the next room for all you know!"

He made no reply. This display of patriotic prudery evidently aroused his failing dignity, for with a brief salute he made for his own door on tiptoe.

Loiseau deeply thrilled and amused, executed a double shuffle in the middle of the room, donned his nightcap, and slipped into the blankets where the bony figure of his spouse already reposed.

The whole house sank to silence. But anon there arose from somewhere—it might have been the cellar, it might have been the attics—impossible to determine the direction—a rumbling—sonorous, even, regular, dull, prolonged roar as of a boiler under high steam pressure: Monsieur Follenvie slept.

It had been decided that they should start at eight o'clock the next morning, so they were all assembled in the kitchen by that hour; but the diligence, roofed with snow, stood solitary in the middle of the courtyard without horses or driver. The latter was sought for in vain either in the stables or the coachhouse. The men of the party then resolved to beat the country round for him, and went out accordingly. They found themselves in the public square with the church at one end, and low-roofed houses down each side in which they caught sight of Prussian soldiers. The first one they came upon was peeling potatoes; farther on another was washing out a barber's shop; while a third, bearded to the eyes, was soothing a crying child and rocking it to and fro on his knee to quiet it. The big peasant woman whose men were all "with the army in the war" were ordering about their docile conquerors and showing them by signs what work they wanted done—chopping wood, grinding coffee, fetching water; one of them was even doing the washing for his hostess, a helpless old crone.

[Pg 30]

The Count, much astonished, stopped the beadle, who happened to come out of the vestry at that moment, and asked the meaning of it all.

"Oh," replied the old church rat, "these are not at all bad. From what I hear they are not Prussians, either; they come from farther off, but where I can't say; and they have all left a wife and children at home. I am very sure the women down there are crying for their men, too, and it will all make a nice lot of misery for them as well as for us. We are not so badly off here for the moment, because they do not harm and are working just as if they were in their own homes. You see, Monsieur, the poor always help one another; it is the great people who make the wars."

[Pg 31]

Cornudet, indignant at the friendly understanding established between the victors and the vanquished, retired from the scene, preferring to shut himself up in the inn. Loiseau of course must have his joke. "They are re-populating," he said. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon found a more fitting expression. "They are repairing."

But the driver was nowhere to be found. At last he was unearthed in the village café hobnobbing fraternally with the officer's orderly.

"Did you not have orders to have the diligence ready by eight o'clock?" the Count asked him.

"Oh, yes, but I got another order later on."

"What?"

"Not to put the horses in at all."

"Who gave you that order?"

"Ma foi—the Prussian commandant."

"Why?"

"I don't know—you had better ask him. I am told not to harness the horses, and so I don't harness them—there you are."

"Did he tell you so himself?"

"No, Monsieur, the innkeeper brought me the message from him."

"When was that?"

"Last night, just as I was going to bed."

The three men returned much disconcerted. They asked for Monsieur Follenvie, but were informed by the servant that on account of his asthma he never got up before ten o'clock—he had even positively forbidden them to awaken him before then except in case of fire.

[Pg 32]

Then they asked to see the officer, but that was absolutely impossible, although he lodged at the inn.

Monsieur Follenvie alone was authorized to approach him on non-military matters. So they had to wait. The women returned to their rooms and occupied themselves as best they could.

Cornudet installed himself in the high chimney-corner of the kitchen, where a great fire was burning. He had one of the little coffee-room tables brought to him and a can of beer, and puffed

away placidly at his pipe, which enjoyed among the democrats almost equal consideration with himself, as if in serving Cornudet it served the country also. The pipe was a superb meerschaum, admirably colored, black as the teeth of its owner, but fragrant, curved, shining familiar to his hand, and the natural complement to his physiognomy. He sat there motionless, his eyes fixed alternately on the flame of the hearth and the foam on the top of his tankard, and each time after drinking he passed his bony fingers with a self-satisfied gesture through his long greasy hair, while he wiped the fringe of froth from his moustache.

Under the pretext of stretching his legs, Loiseau went out and palmed off his wines on the country retail dealers. The Count and the manufacturer talked politics. They forecast the future of France, the one putting his faith in the Orleans, the other in an unknown savior, a hero who would come to the fore when things were at their very worst—a Du Guesclin, a Joan of Arc perhaps, or even another Napoleon I. Ah, if only the Prince Imperial were not so young! Cornudet listened to them with the smile of a man who could solve the riddle of Fate if he would. His pipe perfumed the whole kitchen with its balmy fragrance.

[Pg 33]

On the stroke of ten Monsieur Follenvie made his appearance. They instantly attacked him with questions, but he had but one answer which he repeated two or three times without variation. "The officer said to me, 'Monsieur Follenvie, you will forbid them to harness the horses for these travelers to-morrow morning. They are not to leave till I give my permission. You understand?' That is all."

They demanded to see the officer; the Count sent up his card, on which Monsieur Carré-Lamadon added his name and all his titles. The Prussian sent word that he would admit the two men to his presence after he had lunched, that is to say, about one o'clock.

The ladies came down and they all managed to eat a little in spite of their anxiety. Boule de Suif looked quite ill and very much agitated.

They were just finishing coffee when the orderly arrived to fetch the two gentlemen.

Loiseau joined them, but when they proposed to bring Cornudet along to give more solemnity to their proceedings, he declared haughtily that nothing would induce him to enter into any communication whatsoever with the Germans, and he returned to his chimney-corner and ordered another bottle of beer.

The three men therefore went upstairs without him, and were shown into the best room of the inn, where they were received by the officer lolling in an armchair, his heels on the chimney-piece, smoking a long porcelain pipe, and arrayed in a flamboyant dressing-gown, taken, no doubt, from the abandoned dwelling-house of some bourgeois of inferior taste. He did not rise, he vouchsafed them no greeting of any description, he did not even look at them—a brilliant sample of the victorious military cad.

[Pg 34]

At last after some moments waiting he said: "Vat do you vant?"

The Count acted as spokesman.

"We wish to leave, Monsieur."

"No."

"May I take the liberty of asking the reason for this refusal?"

"Pecause I do not shoose."

"With all due respect, Monsieur, I would draw your attention to the fact that your general gave us a permit for Dieppe, and I cannot see that we have done anything to justify your hard measures."

"I do not shoose—dat's all—you can co town."

They all bowed and withdrew.

The afternoon was miserable. They could make nothing of this caprice of the German's, and the most far-fetched ideas tortured their minds. The whole party remained in the kitchen engaging in endless discussions, imagining the most improbable things. Were they to be kept as hostages?—but if so, to what end?—or taken prisoners—or asked a large ransom? This last suggestion threw them into a cold perspiration of fear. The wealthiest were seized with the worst panic and saw themselves forced, if they valued their lives, to empty bags of gold into the rapacious hands of this soldier. They racked their brains for plausible lies to dissemble their riches, to pass themselves off as poor—very poor. Loiseau pulled off his watch-chain and hid it in his pocket. As night fell their apprehensions increased. The lamp was lighted, and as there were still two hours till supper Madame Loiseau proposed a game of "trente et un." It would be some little distraction, at any rate. The plan was accepted; even Cornudet, who had put out his pipe from motives of politeness, taking a hand.

[Pg 35]

The Count shuffled the cards, dealt, Boule de Suif had "trente et un" at the first deal; and very soon the interest in the game allayed the fears which beset their minds. Cornudet, however, observed that the two Loiseaus were in league to cheat.

Just as they were sitting down to the evening meal Monsieur appeared and said in his husky voice: "The Prussian officer wishes to know if Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset has not changed her mind yet?"

Boule de Suif remained standing and turned very pale, then suddenly her face flamed and she fell into such a paroxysm of rage that she could not speak. At last she burst out: "You can tell that scoundrel—that low scum of a Prussian—that I won't—and I never will—do you hear?—never! never! never!"

The fat innkeeper retired. They instantly surrounded Boule de Suif, questioning, entreating her to disclose the mystery of her visit. At first she refused, but presently, carried away by her indignation, she told them in plain terms what he demanded of her.

The general indignation was so violent that nobody was shocked. Cornudet brought his beer glass down on the table with such a bang that it broke. There was a perfect babel of invective against the base wretch, a hurricane of wrath, a union of all for resistance, as if each had been required to contribute a portion of the sacrifice demanded of the one. The Count protested with disgust that these people behaved really as if they were early barbarians. The women, in particular, accorded her the most lively and affectionate sympathy. The nuns, who only appeared at meals, dropped their eyes and said nothing.

[Pg 36]

The first fury of the storm having abated, they sat down to supper, but there was little conversation and a good deal of thoughtful abstraction.

The ladies retired early; the men, while they smoked, got up a game of *ecarté*, which Monsieur Follenvie was invited to join, as they intended pumping him skillfully as to the means that could be employed for overcoming the officer's opposition to their departure. Unfortunately, he would absorb himself wholly in his cards, and neither listened to what they said nor gave any answer to their questions, but repeated incessantly, "Play, gentlemen, play!" His attention was so deeply engaged that he forgot to cough, with the result of eliciting organ tones from his chest; his wheezing lungs running through the whole gamut of asthma from notes of the profoundest bass to the shrill, hoarse crow of the young cock.

He refused to go to bed when his wife, who was dropping with sleep, came to fetch him. She therefore departed alone, for on her devolved the "day duty," and she always rose with the sun, while her husband took the "night day," and was always ready to sit up all night with friends. He merely called out, "Mind you put my chicken broth in front of the fire!" and returned to his cards. When they were convinced that there was nothing to be got out of him, they declared that it was high time to go to bed, and left him.

They were up again pretty early the next day, filled with an indefinite hope, a still keener desire to be gone, and a horror of another day to be got through in this odious tavern.

[Pg 37]

Alas! the horses were still in the stable and the coachman remained invisible. For lack of something better to do, they sadly wandered round the diligence.

Lunch was very depressing, and a certain chilliness had sprung up with regard to Boule de Suif, for the night—which brings counsel—had somewhat modified the heat of their opinions. They were almost vexed with the girl now for not having gone to the Prussian secretly, and thus prepared a pleasant surprise for her companions in the morning. What could be simpler, and, after all, who would have been any the wiser? She might have saved appearances by telling the officer that she could not bear to see their distress any longer. It could make so very little difference to her one way or another!

But, as yet, nobody confessed to these thoughts.

In the afternoon, as they were feeling bored to extinction, the Count proposed a walk round the village. Everybody wrapped up carefully and the little party started, with the exception of Cornudet, who preferred sitting by the fire, and the two Sisters, who passed their days in the church or with the curé.

The cold—grown more intense each day—nipped their noses and ears viciously, and the feet became so painful that every step was anguish; but when they caught sight of the open stretch of country it appeared to them so appallingly lugubrious under its illimitable white covering that they turned back with one accord, their hearts constricted, their spirits below zero. The four ladies walked in front, the three men following a little behind.

[Pg 38]

Loiseau, who thoroughly took in the situation, suddenly broke out, "How long was this fool of a girl going to keep them hanging on in this hole?" The Count, courteous as ever, observed that one could not demand so painful a sacrifice of any woman—the offer must come from her. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon remarked that if—as there was every reason to believe—the French made an offensive counter-march by way of Dieppe, the collision could only take place at Totes. This reflection greatly alarmed the other two. "Why not escape on foot?" suggested Loiseau. The Count shrugged his shoulders. "How can you think of such a thing in this snow—and with our wives? Besides which, we should instantly be pursued, caught in ten minutes, and brought back prisoners at the mercy of these soldiers." This was incontestable—there was nothing more to be said.

The ladies talked dress, but a certain constraint seemed to have risen up between them.

All at once, at the end of the street, the officer came in sight, his tall figure, like a wasp in uniform, silhouetted against the dazzling background of snow, and walking with his knees well apart, with that movement peculiar to the military when endeavoring to save their carefully polished boots from the mud.

In passing the ladies he bowed, but only stared contemptuously at the men, who, be it said, had the dignity not to lift their hats, though Loiseau made a faint gesture in that direction.

Boule de Suif blushed up to her eyes, and the three married women felt it a deep humiliation to have encountered this soldier while they were in the company of the young woman he had treated so cavalierly.

[Pg 39]

The conversation then turned upon him, his general appearance, his face. Madame Carré-Lamadon, who had known a great many officers and was competent to judge of them "en connoisseur," considered this one really not half bad—she even regretted that he was not French, he would have made such a fascinating hussar, and would certainly have been much run after.

Once indoors again, they did not know what to do with themselves. Sharp words were exchanged on the most insignificant pretexts. The silent dinner did not last long, and they shortly afterwards went to bed, hoping to kill time by sleep.

They came down next morning with jaded faces and tempers on the thin edge. The women scarcely addressed a word to Boule de Suif.

Presently the church bell began to ring; it was for a christening. Boule de Suif had a child out at nurse with some peasants near Yvetot. She did not see it once in a year and never gave it a thought, but the idea of this baby which was going to be baptized filled her heart with sudden and violent tenderness for her own, and nothing would satisfy her but that she should assist at the ceremony.

No sooner was she gone than they all looked at one another and proceeded to draw up their chairs; for everybody felt that things had come to that point that something must be decided upon. Loiseau had an inspiration: that they should propose to the officer to keep Boule de Suif and let the rest go.

Monsieur Follenvie undertook the mission, but returned almost immediately. The German, who had some knowledge of human nature, had simply turned him out of the room. He meant to retain the whole party so long as his desire was unsatisfied.

[Pg 40]

At this Madame Loiseau's plebeian tendencies got the better of her. "But surely we are not going to sit down calmly here and die of old age! As that is her trade, I don't see that she has any right to refuse one man more than another. Why, she took anybody she could get in Rouen, down to the very cab drivers. Oh, yes, I know it positively from the coachman of the Prefecture, who bought his wine at our shop. And now, when it lies with her to get us out of this scrape, she pretends to be particular—the brazen hussy! For my part, I consider the officer has behaved very well! He has probably not had a chance for some time, and there were three here whom, no doubt, he would have preferred; but no—he is content to take the one who is public property. He respects married women. Remember, he is master here. He had only to say 'I will,' and he could have taken us by force with his soldiers!"

A little shudder ran through the other two women. Pretty little Madame Carré-Lamadon's eyes shone and she turned rather pale as though she already felt herself forcibly seized by the officer.

The men, who had been arguing the matter in a corner, now joined them. Loiseau, foaming with rage, was for delivering up "the hussy" bound hand and foot to the enemy. But the Count, coming of three generations of ambassadors, and gifted with the physique of the diplomatist, was on the side of skill as opposed to brute force.

"She must be persuaded," he said. Whereupon they conspired.

[Pg 41]

The women drew up closer together, voices were lowered, and the discussion became general, each one offering his or her advice. Nothing was said to shock the proprieties. The ladies, in particular, were most expert in felicitous turns of phrase, charming subtleties of speech for expressing the most ticklish things. A foreigner would have understood nothing, the language was so carefully veiled. But as the slight coating of modesty with which every woman of the world is enveloped is hardly more than skin deep, they expanded under the influence of this equivocal adventure, enjoying themselves wildly at bottom, thoroughly in their element, dabbling in sensuality with the gusto of an epicurean cook preparing a toothsome delicacy for somebody else.

The story finally appeared to them so funny that they quite recovered their spirits. The Count indulged in some rather risky pleasantries, but so well put that they raised a responsive smile; Loiseau, in his turn, rapped out some decidedly strong jokes which nobody took in bad part, and the brutal proposition expressed by his wife swayed all their minds: "As that is her trade, why refuse one man more than another?" Little Madame Carré-Lamadon seemed even to think that in her place she would refuse this one less readily than another.

They were long in preparing the blockade, as if against an invested fortress. Each one agreed upon the part they would play, the arguments they would bring forward, the maneuvers they would execute. They arranged the plan of attack, the stratagems to be employed, and the surprises of the assault for forcing this living citadel to receive the enemy within its gates.



They were so profoundly occupied with the matter in hand that they never heard Boule de Suif enter the room. But the Count breathed a low warning "Hush!" and they lifted their heads. She was there. The talking ceased abruptly, and a certain feeling of embarrassment prevented them from addressing her at first, till the Countess, more versed than the others in the duplicities of the drawing-room, asked how she had enjoyed the christening.

Still full of emotion at what she had witnessed, Boule de Suif described every detail—the people's faces, their attitudes, even the appearance of the church. It was so nice to pray now and then, she added.

Till luncheon, however, the ladies confined themselves merely to being agreeable to her in order to increase her confidence in them and her docility to their counsels. But once seated at the table, the attack began. It first took the form of a desultory conversation on devotion to a cause. Examples from ancient history were cited: Judith and Holofernes, and then, without any apparent connection, Lucretia and Sextus, Cleopatra admitting to her couch all the hostile generals, and reducing them to the servility of slaves. Then began a fantastic history, which had sprung up in the minds of these ignorant millionaires, in which the women of Rome were seen on their way to Capua, to rock Hannibal to sleep in their arms, and his officers along with him, and the phalanxes of the mercenaries. The women were mentioned who had arrested the course of conquerors, made of their bodies a rampart, a means of dominating, a weapon; who had vanquished by their heroic embraces beings hideous or repulsive, and sacrificed their chastity to vengeance or patriotism.

[Pg 43]

And all this in so discreet and moderate a manner, with now and then a little burst of warm enthusiasm, admirably calculated to excite emulation. To hear them you would have finally come to the conclusion that woman's sole mission here below was to perpetually sacrifice her person, to abandon herself continually to the caprices of the warrior.

The two Sisters appeared to be deaf to it all, sunk in profound thought. Boule de Suif said nothing.

They allowed her all the afternoon for reflection, but instead of calling her "Madame," as they had done up till now, they addressed her simply as "Mademoiselle"—nobody could have said exactly why—as if to send her down a step in the esteem she had gained, and force her to feel the shame of her position.

In the evening just as the soup was being brought to the table Monsieur Follenvie made his appearance again with the same message as before: "The Prussian officer sends to ask Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset if she had not changed her mind."

"No, Monsieur," Boule de Suif replied curtly.

At supper the coalition weakened. Loiseau made three jokes that hung fire; everybody beat their brains for fresh instances to the point; and found none, when the Countess, possibly without premeditation and only from a vague desire to render homage to religion, interrogated the older of the two Sisters on the main incidents in the lives of the saints. Now, several of them had committed acts which would be counted crimes in our eyes, but the Church readily pardons such misdeeds when they are accomplished for the glory of God or the benefit of our neighbors. Then by one of those tacit agreements, those veiled complaisances in which every one who wears ecclesiastical habit excels, or perhaps simply from a happy want of intelligence, a helpful stupidity, the old nun brought formidable support to the conspiracy. They had imagined her timid; she proved herself bold, verbose, violent. She was not troubled by any of the shilly-shallyings of casuistry, her doctrine was like a bar of iron, her faith never wavered, her conscience knew no scruples. She considered Abraham's sacrifice a very simple affair, for she herself would have instantly killed father or mother at an order from above, and nothing, she averred, could displease the Lord if the intention were commendable. The Countess, taking advantage of the sacred authority of her unexpected ally, drew her on to make an edifying paraphrase, as it were, on the well-known moral maxim: "The end justifies the means."

[Pg 44]

"Then, Sister," she inquired, "you think God approves of every pathway that leads to Him, and pardons the deed if the motive be a pure one?"

"Who can doubt it, Madame? An action blamable in itself is often rendered meritorious by the impulse which inspires it."

And she continued in the same strain, unraveling the intricacies of the will of the Almighty, predicting His decisions, making Him interest Himself in matters which, of a truth, did not concern Him at all.

All this was skillfully and discreetly wrapped up, but each word of the pious woman in the big white cap made a breach in the indignant resistance of the courtesan. The conversation then glancing off slightly, the woman of the pendent rosaries went on to speak of the religious houses of her Order, of her superior, of herself and her fragile little companion, her dear little Sister St. Nicephora. They had been sent for to Havre to nurse the hundreds of soldiers there down with small-pox. She described the condition of these poor wretches, gave details of their disorder; and while they were thus stopped upon the road by the whim of this Prussian, many French soldiers might die whom perhaps they could have saved. That was her specialty—nursing soldiers. She

[Pg 45]

had been in the Crimea, in Italy, in Austria; and relating her campaigns, she suddenly revealed herself as one of those Sisters of the fife and drum who seem made for following the camp, picking up the wounded in the thick of battle, and better than any officer for quelling with a word the great hulking undisciplined recruits—a regular Sister Rataplan, her ravaged face all riddled with pits, calling up an image of the devastations of war.

No one spoke after her for fear of spoiling the excellent effect.

Immediately after dinner they hurried to their rooms, not to reappear till pretty late the next morning.

Luncheon passed off quietly. They allowed the seed sown yesterday time to grow and bear fruit.

In the afternoon the Countess proposed a walk, whereupon the Count, following the preconcerted arrangement, took Boule de Suif's arm and fell behind with her a little. He adopted that familiar, paternal, somewhat contemptuous tone which elderly men affect towards such girls, calling her "my dear child," treating her from the height of his social position and indisputable respectability.

He came to the point without further preamble. "So you prefer to keep us here exposed like yourself to all the violence which must inevitably follow a check to the Prussian arms, rather than consent to accord one of those favors you have so often dispensed in your time?"

[Pg 46]

Boule de Suif did not reply.

He then appealed to her kindness of heart, her reason, her sentiment. He knew how to remain "Monsieur le Comte," yet showing himself at the same time chivalrous, flattering—in a word, altogether amiable. He exalted the sacrifice she would be making for them, touched upon their gratitude, and with a final flash of roguishness, "Besides, my dear, he may think himself lucky—he will not find many such pretty girls as you in his own country!"

Boule de Suif said nothing and rejoined the rest of the party.

When they returned, she went straight to her room and did not come down again. The anxiety was terrible. What was she going to do? How unspeakably mortifying if she still persisted in her refusal!

The dinner-hour arrived, they waited for her in vain. Monsieur Follenvie, entering presently, announced that Mademoiselle Rousset was indisposed, and that there was consequently no need to delay supper any longer. They all pricked up their ears. The Countess approached the innkeeper with a whispered "All right?"

"Yes."

For propriety's sake he said nothing to his companions, but he made them a slight sign of the head. A great sigh of relief went up from every heart, every face lit up with joy.

"Saperlipopette!" cried Loiseau, "I will stand champagne if there is such a thing in this establishment!"

[Pg 47]

Madame Loiseau suffered a pang of anguish when the innkeeper returned with four bottles in his hands. Everybody suddenly turned communicative and cheerful, and their hearts overflowed with brotherly love. The Count seemed all at once to become aware that Madame Carré-Lamadon was charming; the manufacturer paid compliments to the Countess. Conversation became lively, sprightly, and full of sparkle.

By the end of the repast the women themselves were indulging in decidedly risky witticisms. Eyes grew bright, tongues were loosened, a good deal of wine had been consumed. The Count, who, even in his cups, retained his characteristic air of diplomatic gravity, made some highly spiced comparisons on the subject of the end of the winter season at the Pole and the joy of ice-bound mariners at sight of an opening to the south.

Loiseau, now in full swing, rose, and lifting high his glass of champagne, "To our deliverance!" he cried. Everybody started to their feet with acclamation. Even the two Sisters of Mercy, yielding to the solicitations of the ladies, consented to take a sip of the effervescent wine which they had never tasted before. They pronounced it to be very like lemonade, though, on the whole, more refined.

"What a pity there is no piano," said Loiseau as a crowning point to the situation, "we might have finished up with a little hop."

Cornudet had not uttered a word, nor made a sign of joining in the general hilarity; he was apparently plunged in the gravest abstractions, only pulling viciously at his great beard from time to time as if to draw it out longer than before. At last, about midnight, when the company was preparing to separate, Loiseau came hiccupping over to him, and digging him in the ribs: "You seem rather down in the mouth this evening, citizen—haven't said a word."

[Pg 48]

Cornudet threw up his head angrily, and sweeping the company with a flashing and terrible look: "I tell you all that what you have done to-day is an infamy!"

He rose, made his way to the door, exclaimed once again, "An infamy!" and vanished.

This somewhat dashed their spirits for the moment. Loiseau, nonplussed at first, soon regained

his aplomb and burst into a roar of laughter. "Sour grapes, old man—sour grapes!"

The others not understanding the allusion, he proceeded to relate the "mysteries of the corridor." This was followed by an uproarious revival of gaiety. The ladies were in a frenzy of delight, the Count and Monsieur Carré-Lamadon laughed till they cried. They could not believe it.

"Do you mean to say he wanted—"

"I tell you I saw it with my own eyes."

"And she refused?"

"Because the Prussian was in the next room."

"It is incredible."

"As true as I stand here!"

The Count nearly choked; the manufacturer held both his sides.

"And you can understand that he does not quite see the joke of the thing this evening—oh, no—not at all!"

And they all three went off again, breathless, choking, sick with laughter.

After that they parted for the night. But Madame Loiseau remarked to her husband when they were alone that that little cat of a Carré-Lamadon had laughed on the wrong side of her mouth all the evening. "You know how it is with these women—they dote upon a uniform, and whether it is French or Prussian matters precious little to them. But, Lord—it seems to me a poor way of looking at things."

[Pg 49]

Apparently nobody got much sleep that night, for it was long before the lights ceased to shine under the doors. Champagne, they say, often has that disturbing effect; it makes one restless and wakeful.

Next morning a brilliant winter sun shone on the dazzling snow. The diligence was by this time ready and waiting before the door, while a flock of white pigeons, muffled in their thick plumage, strutted solemnly in and out among the feet of the six horses, seeking what they might devour.

The driver, enveloped in his sheepskin, sat on the box smoking his pipe, and the radiant travelers were busily laying in provisions for the rest of the journey.

They were only waiting now for Boule de Suif. She appeared.

She looked agitated and downcast as she advanced timidly towards her fellow travelers, who all, with one movement, turned away their heads as if they had not seen her. The Count, with a dignified movement, took his wife by the arm and drew her away from this contaminating contact.

The poor thing stopped short, bewildered; then gathering up her courage she accosted the wife of the manufacturer with a humble "Good morning, Madame." The other merely replied with an impertinent little nod, accompanied by a stare of outraged virtue. Everybody seemed suddenly extremely busy, and they avoided her as if she had brought the plague in her skirts. They then precipitated themselves into the vehicle, where she arrived the last and by herself, and resumed in silence the seat she had occupied during the first part of the journey.

[Pg 50]

They affected not to see her, not to recognize her; only Madame Loiseau, glancing round at her with scorn and indignation, said half audibly to her husband, "It's a good thing that I am not sitting beside her!"

The heavy conveyance jolted off, and the journey recommenced.

No one spoke for the first little while. Boule de Suif did not venture to raise her eyes. She felt incensed at her companions, and at the same time deeply humiliated at having yielded to their persuasions, and let herself be sullied by the kisses of this Prussian into whose arms they had hypocritically thrust her.

The Countess was the first to break the uncomfortable silence. Turning to Madame Carré-Lamadon, she said, "You know Madame d'Etrelles, I think?"

"Oh, yes; she is a great friend of mine."

"What a charming woman!"

"Fascinating! So truly refined; very cultivated, too, and an artist to the tips of her fingers—she sings delightfully, and draws to perfection."

The manufacturer was talking to the Count, and through the rattle of the crazy windowpanes one caught a word here and there; shares—dividends—premium—settling day—and the like. Loiseau, who had appropriated an old pack of cards from the inn, thick with the grease of the five years' rubbing on dirty tables, started a game of bezique with his wife. The two Sisters pulled up the long rosaries hanging at their waists, made the sign of the cross, and suddenly began moving their lips rapidly, faster and faster, hurrying their vague babble as if for a wager; kissing a medal from time to time, crossing themselves again, and then resuming their rapid and monotonous

[Pg 51]

murmur.

Cornudet sat motionless—thinking.

At the end of the three hours' steady traveling Loiseau gathered up his cards and remarked facetiously, "It's turning hungry."

His wife then produced a parcel, which she untied, and brought out a piece of cold veal. This she cut up into thin, firm slices, and both began to eat.

"Supposing we do the same?" said the Countess, and proceeded to unpack the provisions prepared for both couples. In one of those oblong dishes with a china hare upon the cover to indicate that a roast hare lies beneath, was a succulent selection of cold viands—brown slices of juicy venison mingled with other meats. A delicious square of gruyere cheese wrapped in newspaper still bore imprinted on its dewy surface the words "General News."

The two Sisters brought out a sausage smelling of garlic, and Cornudet, plunging his hands into the vast pockets of his loose greatcoat, drew up four hard-boiled eggs from one and a big crust of bread from the other. He peeled off the shells and threw them into the straw under his feet, and proceeded to bite into the egg, dropping pieces of the yolk into his long beard, from whence they shone out like stars.

In the hurry and confusion of the morning Boule de Suif had omitted to take thought for the future, and she looked on, furious, choking with mortification, at these people all munching away so placidly. A storm of rage convulsed her, and she opened her mouth to hurl at them the torrent of abuse that rose to her lips, but she could not speak, suffocated by her indignation.

[Pg 52]

Nobody looked at her, nobody thought of her. She felt herself drowning in the flood of contempt shown towards her by these honest scoundrels who had first sacrificed her and then cast her off like some useless and unclean thing. Then her thoughts reverted to her great basket full of good things which they had so greedily devoured—the two fowls in their glittering coat of jelly, her patties, her pears, her four bottles of claret; and her fury suddenly subsided like the breaking of an overstrung chord and she felt that she was on the verge of tears. She made the most strenuous efforts to overcome it—straightened herself up and choked back her sobs as children do, but the tears would rise. They glittered for a moment on her lashes, and presently two big drops rolled slowly over her cheeks. Others gathered in quick succession like water dripping from a rock and splashed onto the ample curve of her bosom. She sat up very straight, her eyes fixed, her face pale and rigid, hoping that nobody would notice.

But the Countess saw her and nudged her husband. He shrugged his shoulders as much as to say, "What can you expect? It is not my fault." Madame Loiseau gave a silent chuckle of triumph and murmured, "She is crying for shame." The two Sisters had resumed their devotions after carefully wrapping up the remnants of their sausages.

Then Cornudet, while digesting his eggs, stretched his long legs under the opposite seat, leaned back, smiled like a man who has just thought of a capital joke, and began to softly whistle the Marseillaise.

[Pg 53]

The faces clouded; the popular air seemed displeasing to his neighbors; they became nervous—irritable—looking as if they were ready to throw back their heads and howl like dogs at the sound of a barrel organ. He was perfectly aware of this, but did not stop. From time to time he hummed a few of the words: "Liberty, cherished liberty, Fight thou on the side of thy defenders."

They drove at a much quicker pace to-day, the snow being harder; and all the way to Dieppe, during the long, dull hours of the journey, through all the jolting and rattling of the conveyance, in the falling shades of evening and later in the profound darkness, he continued with unabated persistency his vengeful and monotonous whistling; forcing his wearied and exasperated fellow travelers to follow the song from end to end and to remember every word that corresponded to each note.

And Boule de Suif wept on, and at times a sob which she could not repress broke out between two couplets in the darkness.

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## MISS HARRIET

[Pg 54]

There were seven of us in a break, four women and three men, one of which latter was on the box seat beside the coachman, and we were following, at a foot pace, the broad highway which serpentine along the coast.

Setting out from Etretat at break of day, in order to visit the ruins of Tancarville, we were still asleep, benumbed by the fresh air of the morning. The women, especially, who were little accustomed to these early excursions, let their eyelids fall and rise every moment, nodding their heads or yawning, quite insensible to the emotion of the breaking of day.

It was autumn. On both sides of the road, the bare fields stretched out, yellowed by the corn and wheat stubble which covered the soil, like a beard that had been badly shaved. The spongy earth seemed to smoke. The larks were singing, high up in the air, while other birds piped in the

bushes.

The sun rose at length in front of us, a bright red on the plane of the horizon; and in proportion as it ascended, growing clearer from minute to minute, the country seemed to awake, to smile, to shake itself, stretch itself, like a young girl who is leaving her bed, in her white vapor chemise. The Count of Etraille, who was seated on the box, cried:

"Look! look! a hare!" and he extended his arm towards the left, pointing to a piece of hedge. The animal threaded its way along, almost concealed by the field, raising only its large ears. Then it swerved across a deep rut, stopped, pursued again its easy course, changed its direction, stopped anew, disturbed, spying out every danger, undecided as to the route it should take; when suddenly it began to run with great bounds of the hind legs, disappearing finally, in a large patch of beet-root. All the men had woken up to watch the course of the beast.

[Pg 55]

René Lemanoir then exclaimed:

"We are not at all gallant this morning," and regarding his neighbor, the little Baroness of Serennes, who struggled against sleep, he said to her in a subdued voice: "You are thinking of your husband, Baroness. Reassure yourself; he will not return before Saturday, so you have still four days."

She responded to him with a sleepy smile: "How rude you are." Then, shaking off her torpor, she added: "Now, let somebody say something that will make us all laugh. You, Monsieur Chenal, who have the reputation of possessing a larger fortune than the Duke of Richelieu, tell us a love story in which you have been mixed up, anything you like."

Léon Chenal, an old painter, who had once been very handsome, very strong, very proud of his physique, and very amiable, took his long white beard in his hand and smiled, then, after a few moments' reflection, he became suddenly grave.

"Ladies, it will not be an amusing tale; for I am going to relate to you the most lamentable love affair of my life, and I sincerely hope that none of my friends have ever passed through a similar experience."

[Pg 56]

## I

I was at the time twenty-five years of age, and I was making daubs along the coast of Normandy. I call "making daubs" that wandering about, with a bag on one's back, from mountain to mountain, under the pretext of studying and of sketching nature. I know nothing more enjoyable than that happy-go-lucky wandering life, in which one is perfectly free, without shackles of any kind, without care, without preoccupation, without thinking even of to-morrow. One goes in any direction one pleases, without any guide, save his fancy, without any counselor save his eyes. One pulls up, because a running brook seduces one, because one is attracted, in front of an inn, by the smell of potatoes frying. Sometimes it is the perfume of clematis which decides one in his choice, or the naïve glance of the servant at an inn. Do not despise me for my affection for these rustics. These girls have a soul as well as feeling, not to mention firm cheeks and fresh lips; while their hearty and willing kisses have the flavor of wild fruit. Love always has its price, come whence it may. A heart that beats when you make your appearance, an eye that weeps when you go away, are things so rare, so sweet, so precious, that they must never be despised.

I have had rendezvous in ditches in which cattle repose, and in barns among the straw, still steaming from the heat of the day. I have recollections of canvas being spread on rude and elastic benches, and of hearty and fresh, free kisses, more delicate and unaffectedly sincere than the subtle attractions of charming and distinguished women.

But what one loves most amidst all these varied adventures is the country, the woods, the risings of the sun, the twilight, the light of the moon. These are, for the painter, honeymoon trips with nature. One is alone with her in that long and tranquil rendezvous. You go to bed in the fields, amidst marguerites and wild poppies, and, with eyes wide open, you watch the going down of the sun, and descry in the distance the little village, with its pointed clock tower, which sounds the hour of midnight.

[Pg 57]

You sit down by the side of a spring which gushes out from the foot of an oak, amidst a covering of fragile herbs, upright and redolent of life. You go down on your knees, bend forward, you drink that cold and pellucid water which wets your moustache and nose, you drink it with a physical pleasure, as though you kissed the spring, lip to lip. Sometimes, when you encounter a deep hole, along the course of these tiny brooks, you plunge into it, quite naked, and you feel on your skin, from head to foot, like an icy and delicious caress, the lovely and gentle quivering of the current.

You are gay on the hills, melancholy on the verge of pools, exalted when the sun is crowned in an ocean of blood-red shadows, and when it casts on the rivers its red reflection. And, at night, under the moon, which passes across the vault of heaven, you think of things, and singular things, which would never have occurred to your mind under the brilliant light of day.

So, in wandering through the same country where we are this year, I came to the little village of Benouville, on the Falaise, between Yport and Etretat. I came from Fécamp, following the coast, a high coast, and as perpendicular as a wall, with its projecting and rugged rocks falling perpendicularly into the sea. I had walked since the morning on the shaven grass, as smooth and as yielding as a carpet. And singing lustily, I walked with long strides, looking sometimes at the

[Pg 58]

slow and ambling flight of a gull, with its short, white wings, sailing in the blue heavens, sometimes on the green sea, at the brown sails of a fishing bark. In short, I had passed a happy day, a day of listlessness and of liberty.

I was shown a little farm house, where travelers were put up, a kind of inn, kept by a peasant, which stood in the center of a Norman court, which was surrounded by a double row of beeches.

Quitting the Falaise, I gained the hamlet, which was hemmed in by great trees, and I presented myself at the house of Mother Lecacheur.

She was an old, wrinkled and austere rustic, who seemed always to succumb to the pressure of new customs with a kind of contempt.

It was the month of May: the spreading apple-trees covered the court with a whirling shower of blossoms which rained unceasingly both upon people and upon the grass.

I said:

"Well, Madame Lecacheur, have you a room for me?"

Astonished to find that I knew her name, she answered:

"That depends; everything is let; but, all the same, there will be no harm in looking."

In five minutes we were in perfect accord, and I deposited my bag upon the bare floor of a rustic room, furnished with a bed, two chairs, a table, and a wash-stand. The room looked into the large and smoky kitchen, where the lodgers took their meals with the people of the farm and the farmer, who was a widower.

[Pg 59]

I washed my hands, after which I went out. The old woman fricasseed a chicken for dinner in a large fireplace, in which hung the stew pot, black with smoke.

"You have travelers, then, at the present time?" I said to her.

She answered, in an offended tone of voice:

"I have a lady, an English lady, who has attained to years of maturity. She is going to occupy my other room."

I obtained, by means of an extra five sous a day, the privilege of dining out in the court when the weather was fine.

My cover was then placed in front of the door, and I commenced to gnaw with my teeth the lean members of the Normandy chicken, to drink the clear cider, and to munch the hunk of white bread, which was four days old, though excellent.

Suddenly, the wooden barrier which gave into the highway, was opened, and a strange person directed her steps towards the house. She was very slender, very tall, enveloped in a Scotch shawl with red borders, and one might have believed that she had no arms, if one had not seen a long hand appear just above the haunches, holding a white tourist umbrella. The face of a mummy, surrounded with sausage rolls of plaited, gray hair, which bounded at every step she took, made me think, I know not why, of a sour herring adorned with curling papers. Lowering her eyes, she passed quickly in front of me, and entered the house.

That singular apparition made me yearn. She undoubtedly was my neighbor, the aged English lady of whom our hostess had spoken.

[Pg 60]

I did not see her again that day. The next day, when I had installed myself to commence painting, at the end of that beautiful valley, which you know, and which extends as far as Etretat, I perceived, in lifting my eyes suddenly, something singularly attired, standing on the crest of the declivity; one might indeed say, a pole decked out with flags. It was she. On seeing me, she suddenly disappeared. I re-entered the house at midday for lunch, and took my seat at the common table, so as to make the acquaintance of this old original. But she did not respond to my polite advances, was insensible even to my little attentions. I poured water out for her with great alacrity; I passed her the dishes with great eagerness. A slight, almost imperceptible movement of the head, and an English word, murmured so low that I did not understand it, were her only acknowledgments.

I ceased occupying myself with her, although she had disturbed my thoughts.

At the end of three days, I knew as much about her as did Madame Lecacheur herself.

She was called Miss Harriet. Seeking out a secluded village in which to pass the summer, she had been attracted to Benouville, some six months before, and did not seem disposed to quit it. She never spoke at table, ate rapidly, reading all the while a small book, treating of some protestant propaganda. She gave a copy of it to everybody. The curé himself had received no less than four copies, conveyed by an urchin to whom she had paid two sous' commission. She said sometimes to our hostess, abruptly, without preparing her in the least for the declaration:

[Pg 61]

"I love the Savior more than all; I admire him in all creation; I adore him in all nature, I carry him always in my heart."

And she would immediately present the old woman with one of her brochures which were

destined to convert the universe.

In the village she was not liked. In fact, the schoolmaster had declared that she was an atheist, and that a kind of reprobation weighed down on her. The curé, who had been consulted by Madame Lecacheur, responded:

"She is a heretic, but God does not wish the death of the sinner, and I believe her to be a person of pure morals."

These words, "Atheist," "Heretic," words which no one can precisely define, threw doubts into some minds. It was asserted, however, that this English woman was rich, and that she had passed her life in traveling through every country in the world, because her family had thrown her off. Why had her family thrown her off. Because of her natural impiety?

She was, in fact, one of those people of exalted principles, one of those opinionated puritans, of which England produces so many, one of those good and insupportable old women who haunt the table d'hôtes of every hotel in Europe, who spoil Italy, impoison Switzerland, render the charming cities of the Mediterranean uninhabitable, carry everywhere their fantastic manias, their petrified vestal manners, their indescribable toilettes and a certain odor of India rubber, which makes one believe that at night they slip themselves into a case of that material. [Pg 62]

When I encounter one of these people some fine day in a hotel, I act like the birds, who see a manakin in a field.

This woman, however, appeared so singular that she did not displease me.

Madame Lecacheur, hostile by instinct to everything that was not rustic, felt in her narrow soul a kind of hatred for the ecstatic extravagances of the old girl. She had found a phrase by which to describe her, a phrase assuredly contemptible, which she had got, I know not whence, upon her lips, invented by I know not what confused and mysterious travail of soul. She said: "That woman is a demoniac." This phrase, culled by that austere and sentimental creature, seemed to me irresistibly comic. I myself, never called her now anything else, but "the demoniac," exercising a singular pleasure in pronouncing aloud this word on perceiving her.

I would ask Mother Lecacheur: "Well, what is our demoniac about to-day?"

To which my rustic friend responded, with an air of having been scandalized:

"What do you think, sir, she has picked up a toad which has had its paw battered, and carried it to her room, and has put it in her wash-stand, and dressed it up like a man. If that is not profanation, I should like to know what is!"

On another occasion, when walking along the Falaise, she had bought a large fish which had just been caught, simply to throw it back into the sea again. The sailor, from whom she had bought it, though paid handsomely, was greatly provoked at this act, more exasperated, indeed, than if she had put her hand into his pocket and taken his money. For a whole month he could not speak of the circumstance without getting into a fury and denouncing it as an outrage. Oh yes! She was indeed a demoniac, this Miss Harriet, and Mother Lecacheur must have had an inspiration of genius in thus christening her. [Pg 63]

The stable-boy, who was called Sapeur, because he had served in Africa in his youth, entertained other aversions. He said, with a roguish air: "She is an old hag who has lived her days."

If the poor woman had but known!

The little, kind-hearted Céleste, did not wait upon her willingly, but I was never able to understand why. Probably, her only reason was that she was a stranger, of another race, of a different tongue, and of another religion. She was, in good truth, a demoniac!

She passed her time wandering about the country, adoring and searching for God in nature. I found her one evening on her knees in a cluster of bushes. Having discovered something red through the leaves, I brushed aside the branches and Miss Harriet at once rose to her feet, confused at having been found thus, fixed on me eyes as terrible as those of a wild cat, surprised in open day.

Sometimes, when I was working among the rocks, I would suddenly descry her on the banks of the Falaise like a semaphore signal. She passionately gazed at the vast sea, glittering in the sunlight, and the boundless sky empurpled with fire. Sometimes I would distinguish her at the bottom of a valley, walking quickly, with an English, elastic step; and I would go towards her, attracted I know not by what, simply to see her illuminated visage, her dried-up, ineffable features, which seemed to glow with interior and profound happiness. [Pg 64]

I would often encounter her also in the corner of a field sitting on the grass, under the shadow of an apple tree, with her little Bible lying open on her knee, which she looked at meditatively at the distance.

I could no longer tear myself away from that quiet country neighborhood, being bound to it by a thousand links of love for its sweeping and soft landscapes. At this farm I was unknown to the world, far removed from everything, but in close proximity to the soil, the good, healthy, beautiful and green soil. And, must I avow it; there was something besides curiosity which retained me at the residence of Mother Lecacheur. I wished to become acquainted a little with this strange Miss



Harriet, and to know what passed in the solitary souls of those wandering old, English dames.

## II

We became acquainted in a rather singular manner. I had just finished a study, which appeared to me to display play brain power; and so it must, as it was sold for ten thousand francs, fifteen years later. It was as simple, however, as that two and two make four, and had nothing to do with academic rules. The whole of the right side of my canvas represented a rock, an enormous rock, covered with sea-wrack, brown, yellow, and red, across which the sun poured like a stream of oil. The light, without which one could see the stars concealed in the back ground, fell upon the stone, and gilded it as if by fire. That was all. A first stupid attempt at dealing with light, burning rays, the sublime.

[Pg 65]

On the left was the sea, not the blue sea, the slate-colored sea, but a jade of a sea, as greenish, milky and thick as the overcast sky.

I was so pleased with my work that I danced from sheer delight as I carried it back to the inn. I had wished that the whole world could have seen it at one and the same moment. I can remember that I showed it to a cow, which was browsing by the wayside, exclaiming at the same time: "Look at that, my old beauty, you shall not often see its like again."

When I had reached the front of the house, I immediately called out to Mother Lecacheur, shouting with all my might:

"Ohè! Ohè! my mistress, come here and look at this."

The rustic advanced and regarded my work with her stupid eyes which distinguished nothing, and which did not even recognize whether the picture was the representation of an ox or a house.

Miss Harriet returned to the house, and she passed in rear of me just at the moment when, holding out my canvas at arm's length, I was exhibiting it to the female innkeeper. The demoniac could not help but see it, for I took care to exhibit the thing in such a way that it could not escape her notice. She stopped abruptly and stood motionless, stupefied. It was her rock which was depicted, the one which she climbed to dream away her time undisturbed.

She uttered a British "Aoh," which was at once so accentuated and so flattering, that I turned round to her, smiling, and said:

[Pg 66]

"This is my last work, Mademoiselle."

She murmured ecstatically, comically and tenderly:

"Oh! Monsieur, you must understand what it is to have a palpitation."

I colored up, of course, and was more excited by that compliment than if it had come from a queen. I was seduced, conquered, vanquished. I could have embraced her; upon my honor.

I took a seat at the table beside her, as I had always done. For the first time, she spoke, drawling out in a loud voice:

"Oh! I love nature so much."

I offered her some bread, some water, some wine. She now accepted these with the vacant smile of a mummy. I then began to converse with her about the scenery.

After the meal, we rose from the table together and we walked leisurely across the court; then, being attracted by the fiery glow which the setting sun cast over the surface of the sea, I opened the outside gate which opened in the direction of the Falaise, and we walked on side by side, as satisfied as any two persons could be, who have just learned to understand and penetrate each other's motives and feelings.

It was a muggy, relaxing evening, one of those enjoyable evenings, which impart happiness to mind and body alike. All is joy, all is charm. The luscious and balmy air, loaded with the perfumes of herbs, the perfumes of grass-wrack, which caresses the odor of the wild flowers, caresses the potato with its marine flavor, caresses the soul with a penetrating sweetness. We were going to the brink of the abyss, which overlooked the vast sea, and which rolled past us at the distance of less than a hundred meters.

[Pg 67]

And we drank with open mouth and expanded chest that fresh breath which came from the ocean and which glided slowly over the skin, salted by its long contact with the waves.

Wrapped up in her square shawl, inspired by the balmy air and with teeth firmly set, the English woman gazed fixedly at the great sun ball, as it descended towards the sea. Soon its rim touched the waters, just in rear of a ship which appeared on the horizon, until, by degrees, it was swallowed up by the ocean. It was seen to plunge, diminish, and finally to disappear.

Miss Harriet contemplated with a passionate regard the last glimmer of the flaming orb of day.

She muttered: "Aoh! I loved ... I loved ..." I saw a tear start in her eye. She continued: "I wish I were a little bird, so that I could mount up into the firmament."

She remained standing as I had often before seen her, perched on the river's banks, her face as

red as her purple shawl. I should have liked to have sketched her in my album. It would have been an ecstatic caricature.

I turned my face away from her so as to be able to laugh.

I then spoke to her of painting, as I would have done to a fellow artist, using the technical terms common among the devotees of the profession. She listened attentively to me, eagerly seeking to define the sense of the obscure words, so as to penetrate my thoughts. From time to time, she would exclaim: "Oh! I understand, I understand. This has been very interesting."

[Pg 68]

We returned home.

The next day, on seeing me, she approached me eagerly, holding out her hand; and we became firm friends immediately.

She was a brave creature who had a kind of elastic soul, which became enthusiastic at a bound. She lacked equilibrium, like all women who are spinsters at the age of fifty. She seemed to be pickled in vinegar innocence, though her heart still retained something of youth and of girlish effervescence. She loved both nature and animals with a fervent ardor, a love like old wine, fermented through age, with a sensual love that she had never bestowed on men.

One thing is certain, that a bitch in pup, a mare roaming in a meadow with a foal at its side, a bird's nest full of young ones, squeaking, with their open mouths and enormous heads, made her quiver with the most violent emotion.

Poor solitary beings! Tristias and wanderers from table d'hôte to table d'hôte, poor beings, ridiculous and lamentable. I love you ever since I became acquainted with Miss Harriet!

I soon discovered that she had something she would like to tell me, but she dare not, and I was amused at her timidity. When I started out in the morning with my box on my back, she accompanied me as far as the end of the village, silent, but evidently struggling inwardly to find words with which to begin a conversation. Then she left me abruptly, and, with a jaunty step, walked away quickly.

One day, however, she plucked up courage:

[Pg 69]

"I would like to see how you paint pictures? Will you? I have been very curious."<sup>[3]</sup>

And she colored up as though she had given utterance to words extremely audacious.

I conducted her to the bottom of the Petit-Val, where I had commenced a large picture.

She remained standing near me, following all my gestures with concentrated attention. Then, suddenly, fearing, perhaps, that she was disturbing me she said to me: "Thank you," and walked away.

But in a short time she became more familiar, and accompanied me every day, her countenance exhibiting visible pleasure. She carried her folding stool under her arm, and would not consent to my carrying it, and she sat always by my side. She would remain there for hours, immovable and mute, following with her eye the point of my brush, in its every movement. When I would obtain, by a large splash of color spread on with a knife, a striking and unexpected effect, she would, in spite of herself, give vent to a half-suppressed "Ah!" of astonishment, of joy, of admiration. She had the most tender respect for my canvases, an almost religious respect for that human reproduction of a part of nature's work divine. My studies appeared to her as a kind of pictures of sanctity, and sometimes she spoke to me of God, with the idea of converting me.

Oh! He was a queer good-natured being, this God of hers. He was a sort of village philosopher without any great resources, and without great power; for she always figured him to herself as a being quivering over injustices committed under his eyes, and as though he was helpless to prevent them.

She was, however, on excellent terms with him, affecting even to be the confidant of his secrets and of his contrarities. She said:

[Pg 70]

"God wills, or God does not will," just like a sergeant announcing to a recruit: "The colonel has commanded."

At the bottom of her heart, she deplored my ignorance of the intentions of the Eternal, which she strove, and felt herself compelled to impart to me.

Almost every day, I found in my pockets, in my hat when I lifted it from the ground, in my box of colors, in my polished shoes, standing in the mornings in front of my door, those little pious brochures, which she, no doubt, received directly from Paradise.

I treated her as one would an old friend, with unaffected cordiality. But I soon perceived that she had changed somewhat in her manner; but, for a while, I paid little attention to it.

When I walked about, whether to the bottom of the valley, or through some country lanes, I would see her suddenly appear, as though she were returning from a rapid walk. She would then sit down abruptly, out of breath, as though she had been running, or overcome by some profound emotion. Her face would be red, that English red which is denied to the people of all other countries; then, without any reason, she would grow pale, become the color of the ground and

seem ready to faint away. Gradually, however, I would see her regain her ordinary color, whereupon she would begin to speak.

Then, without warning, she would break off in the middle of a sentence, spring up from her seat, and march off so rapidly and so strangely, that it would, sometimes, put me to my wits ends to try and discover whether I had done or said anything to displease or offend her.

[Pg 71]

I finally came to the conclusion that this arose from her early habits and training, somewhat modified, no doubt, in honor of me, since the first days of our acquaintanceship.

When she returned to the farm, after walking for hours on the wind-beaten coast, her long curled hair would be shaken out and hanging loose, as though it had broken away from its bearings. It was seldom that this gave her any concern; looking sometimes as though she had just returned from dining *sans cérémonie*; her locks having become dishevelled by the breezes.

She would then go up to her room in order to adjust what I called her glass lamps; and when I would say to her, in the familiar gallantry, which, however, always offended her:

"You are as beautiful as a planet to-day, Miss Harriet," a little blood would immediately mount into her cheeks, the blood of a young maiden, the blood of sweet fifteen.

Then she would become abruptly savage and cease coming to watch me paint. I thought thus:

"This is only a fit of temper she is passing through."

But it did not always pass away. When I spoke to her sometimes, she would answer me, either with an air of affected indifference, or in sullen anger; and became by turns rude, impatient, and nervous. For a time I never saw her except at meals, and we spoke but little. I concluded, at length, that I must have offended her in something: and, accordingly, I said to her one evening:

[Pg 72]

"Miss Harriet, why is it that you do not act towards me as formerly? What have I done to displease you? You are causing me much pain!"

She responded, in an angry tone, in a manner altogether *sui generis*:

"I be always with you the same as formerly.<sup>[4]</sup> It is not true, not true," and she ran upstairs and shut herself up in her room.

At times she would look upon me with strange eyes. Since that time I have often said to myself that those who are condemned to death must look thus when they are informed that their last day has come. In her eye there lurked a species of folly, a folly at once mysterious and violent; and even more; a fever, an exasperated desire, impatient, and at once incapable of being realized and unrealizable!

Nay, it seemed to me that there was also going on within her a combat, in which her heart struggled against an unknown force that she wished to overcome, and even, perhaps, something else. But what could I know? What could I know?

### III

This was indeed a singular revelation.

For some time I had commenced to work, as soon as daylight appeared, on a picture, the subject of which was as follows:

A deep ravine, steep banks, dominated by two declivities, lined with brambles and long rows of trees, hidden, drowned in that milky vapor, clad in that musty robe which sometimes floats over valleys, at break of day. And at the extreme end of that thick and transparent fog, you see coming or, rather already come, a human couple, a stripling and a maiden, embraced, inter-laced, she, with head leaning on him, he, inclined towards her, and lips to lips.

[Pg 73]

A first ray of the sun glistening through the branches, has traversed that fog of the dawn, has illuminated it with a rosy reflection, just behind the rustic lovers, on which can be seen their vague shadows in a clear silver. It was well done, yes, indeed, well done.

I was working on the declivity which led to the Val d'Etretat. This particular morning, I had, by chance, the sort of floating vapor, which was necessary for my purpose. Suddenly, an object appeared in front of me, a kind of phantom; it was Miss Harriet. On seeing me, she took to flight. But I called after her saying: "Come here, come here, Mademoiselle, I have a nice little picture for you."

She came forward, though with seeming reluctance. I handed her my sketch. She said nothing, but stood for a long time, motionless, regarding it; and, suddenly, she burst into tears. She wept spasmodically, like men who have been struggling hard against shedding tears, but who can do so no longer, and abandon themselves to grief, though still resisting. I got up, trembling, moved myself by the sight of a sorrow I did not comprehend, and I took her by the hand with an impulse of brusque affection, a true French impulse which impels one quicker than one thinks.

She let her hands rest in mine for a few seconds, and I felt them quiver as if her whole nervous system was twisting and turning. Then she withdrew her hands abruptly, or, rather tore them out of mine.

I recognized that shiver, as soon as I had felt it; I was deceived in nothing. Ah! the live shiver of a woman, whether she is fifteen or fifty years of age, whether she is one of the people or one of the *monde*, goes so straight to my heart that I never had any compunctions in understanding it!

[Pg 74]

Her whole frail being trembled, vibrated, swooned. I knew it. She walked away before I had time to say a word, leaving me as surprised as if I had witnessed a miracle, and as troubled as if I had committed a crime.

I did not go in to breakfast. I went to make a tour on the banks of the Falaise, feeling that I would just as lieve weep as laugh, looking on the adventure as both comic and deplorable, and my position as ridiculous, fain to believe that I had lost my head.

I asked myself what I ought to do. I debated with myself whether I ought to take my leave of the place and almost immediately my resolution was formed.

Somewhat sad and perplexed, I wandered about until dinner time, and I entered the farm house just when the soup had been served up.

I sat down at the table, as usual. Miss Harriet was there, munching away solemnly, without speaking to anyone, without even lifting eyes. She wore, however, her usual expression, both of countenance and manner.

I waited, patiently, till the meal had been finished, when, turning towards the landlady I said: "See here, Madame Lecacheur, it will not be long now before I shall have to take my leave of you."

The good woman, at once surprised and troubled, replied in a quivering voice: "My dear sir, what is it I have just heard you say? you are going to leave us, after I have become so much accustomed to you?"

[Pg 75]

I regarded Miss Harriet from the corner of my eye. Her countenance did not change in the least; but the under-servant came towards me with eyes wide open. She was a fat girl, of about eighteen years of age, rosy, fresh, as strong as a horse, yet possessing the rare attribute in one in her position—she was very neat and clean. I had embraced her at odd times, in out of the way corners, in the manner of a mountain guide, nothing more.

The dinner being at length over, I went to smoke my pipe under the apple trees, walking up and down at my ease, from one end of the court to the other. All the reflections which I had made during the day, the strange discovery of the morning, that grotesque love and passionate attachment for me, the recollections which that revelation had suddenly called up, recollections at once charming and perplexing, perhaps, also, that look which the servant had cast on me at the announcement of my departure—all these things, mixed up and combined, put me now in a jolly humor of body, recalling the tickling sensation of kisses on the lips, and in the veins, something which urged me on to commit some folly.

Night having come on, casting its dark shadows under the trees, I descried Céleste, who had gone to shut the hen coops, at the other end of the enclosure. I darted towards her, running so noiselessly that she heard nothing, and as she got up from closing the small traps by which the chickens got in and out, I clasped her in my arms and rained on her coarse, fat face a shower of kisses. She made a struggle, laughing all the same, as she was accustomed to do in such circumstances. Wherefore did I suddenly loose my grip of her? Why did I at once experience a shock? What was it that I heard behind me?

[Pg 76]

It was Miss Harriet who had come upon us, who had seen us, and who stood in front of us, as motionless as a specter. Then she disappeared in the darkness.

I was ashamed, embarrassed, more desperate at having been surprised by her than if she had caught me committing some criminal act.

I slept badly that night; I was completely enervated and haunted by sad thoughts. I seemed to hear loud weeping; but in this I was no doubt deceived. Moreover, I thought several times that I heard some one walking up and down in the house, and who had opened my door from the outside.

Towards morning, I was overcome by fatigue and sleep seized on me. I got up late and did not go downstairs until breakfast time, being still in a bewildered state, not knowing what kind of face to put on.

No one had seen Miss Harriet. We waited for her at table, but she did not appear. At length Mother Lecacheur went to her room. The English woman had gone out. She must have set out at break of day, as she was wont to do, in order to see the sun rise.

Nobody seemed astonished at this and we began to eat in silence.

The weather was hot, very hot, one of those still, boiling days, when not a leaf stirs. The table had been placed out of doors, under an apple tree; and from time to time Sapeur had gone to the cellar to draw a jug of cider, everybody was so thirsty. Céleste brought the dishes from the kitchen, a ragout of mutton with potatoes, a cold rabbit and a salad. Afterwards she placed before us a dish of strawberries, the first of the season.

[Pg 77]

As I wanted to wash and refresh these, I begged the servant to go and bring a pitcher of cold

water.

In about five minutes she returned, declaring that the well was dry. She had lowered the pitcher to the full extent of the cord, and had touched the bottom, but on drawing the pitcher up again, it was empty. Mother Lecacheur, anxious to examine the thing for herself, went and looked down the hole. She returned announcing that one could see clearly something in the well, something altogether unusual. But this, no doubt, was pottles of straw, which, out of spite, had been cast down it by a neighbor.

I wished also to look down the well, hoping I would be able to clear up the mystery, and perched myself close to its brink. I perceived, indistinctly, a white object. What could it be? I then conceived the idea of lowering a lantern at the end of a cord. When I did so, the yellow flame danced on the layers of stone and gradually became clearer. All the four of us were leaning over the opening, Sapeur and Céleste having now joined us. The lantern rested on a black and white, indistinct mass, singular, incomprehensible. Sapeur exclaimed:

"It is a horse. I see the hoofs. It must have escaped from the meadow, during the night, and fallen in headlong."

But, suddenly, a cold shiver attacked my spine, I first recognized a foot, then a clothed limb; the body was entire, but the other limb had disappeared under the water.

[Pg 78]

I groaned and trembled so violently that the light of the lamp danced hither and thither over the object, discovering a slipper.

"It is a woman! who ... who ... can it be? It is Miss Harriet."

Sapeur alone did not manifest horror. He had witnessed many such scenes in Africa.

Mother Lecacheur and Céleste began to scream and to shriek, and ran away.

But it was necessary to recover the corpse of the dead. I attached the valet securely by the loins to the end of the pulley-rope, and I lowered him slowly, and watched him disappear in the darkness. In the one hand he had a lantern, and held on by the rope with the other. Soon I recognized his voice, which seemed to come from the center of the earth, crying:

"Stop."

I then saw him fish something out of the water. It was the other limb. He then bound the two feet together, and shouted anew:

"Haul up."

I commenced to wind him up, but I felt my arms crack, my muscles twitch, and I was in terror lest I should let the man fall to the bottom. When his head appeared at the brink, I asked:

"Well, what is it?" as though I only expected that he would inform me of what he had discovered at the bottom.

We both got on to the stone slab at the edge of the well, and, face to face, we hoisted the body.

Mother Lecacheur and Céleste watched us from a distance, concealed from view behind the wall of the house. When they saw, issuing from the hole, the black slippers and the white stockings of the drowned person, they disappeared.

[Pg 79]

Sapeur seized the ankles of the poor chaste woman, and we drew it up, sloping, as it was, in the most immodest posture. The head was shocking to look at, being bruised and black; and the long, gray hair, hanging down tangled and disordered.

"In the name of all that is holy, how lean she is!" exclaimed Sapeur, in a contemptuous tone.

We carried her into the room, and as the women did not put in an appearance, I, with the assistance of the stable lad, dressed the corpse for burial.

I washed her disfigured face. To the touch of my hand, an eye was slightly opened, which regarded me with that pale regard, with that cold look, with that terrible look that corpses have, which seemed to come from beyond life. I plaited up, as well as I could, her disheveled hair, and I adjusted on her forehead, a novel and singularly formed lock. Then I took off her dripping wet garments, baring, not without a feeling of shame, as though I had been guilty of some profanation, her shoulders and her chest, and her long arms, as slim as the twigs of branches.

I next went to fetch some flowers, corn poppies, blue beetles, marguerites, and fresh and perfumed herbs, with which to strew her funeral couch.

I being the only person near her, it was necessary for me to perform the usual ceremonies. In a letter found in her pocket, written at the last moment, it was ordered that her body was to be buried in the village in which she had passed the last days of her life. A frightful thought then pressed on my heart. Was it not on my account that she wished to be laid to rest in this place?

[Pg 80]

Towards the evening, all the female gossips of the locality came to view the remains of the defunct; but I would not allow a single person to enter; I wanted to be alone; and I watched by the corpse the whole night.

I looked at the corpse by the flickering lights of the candles, this miserable woman, wholly unknown, who had died lamentably and so far away from home. Had she left no friends, no relations behind her? What had her infancy been? What had been her life? Whence had she hailed thither thus, all alone, wanderer, lost like a dog driven from its home? What secrets of sufferings and despair were sealed up in that disagreeable body, in that spent, tarnished body—tarnished during the whole of its existence, that impenetrable envelope which had driven her far away from all affection, from all love?

How many unhappy beings there are! I felt that there weighed upon that human creature the eternal injustice of implacable nature! It was all over with her, without her ever having experienced, perhaps, that which sustains the greatest outcasts—to wit, the hope of being loved for once! Otherwise, why should she thus have concealed herself, fled from the face of the others? Why did she love everything so tenderly and so passionately, everything living that was not a man?

I recognized, also, that she believed in a God, and that she hoped to receive compensation from the latter for all the miseries she had endured. She had begun now to decompose, and to become, in turn, a plant. She who had blossomed in the sun, was now to be eaten up by the cattle, carried away in seeds, and flesh of beasts, would become again human flesh. But that which is called the soul, had been extinguished at the bottom of the dark well. She suffered no longer. She had changed her life for that of others yet to be born.

[Pg 81]

Hours passed away in this silent and sinister communion with the dead. A pale light at length announced the dawn of a new day, when a bright ray glistened on the bed, shed a dash of fire on the bed clothes and on her hands. This was the hour she had so much loved, when the awakened birds began to sing in the trees.

I opened the window to its fullest extent, I drew back the curtains, so that the whole heavens might look in upon us, and bending towards the glassy corpse, I took in my hands the mutilated head; then, slowly, without terror or disgust, I imprinted a kiss, a long kiss, upon those lips, which had never before received any.

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Léon Chenal remained silent. The women wept. We heard on the box seat the Count d'Etraille, who blows his nose, from time to time. The coachman alone had gone to sleep. The horses, which felt no longer the sting of the whip, had slowed their pace and dragged along softly, and the brake, hardly advancing at all, became suddenly torpid, as if it had been charged with sorrow.

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## **FRANCESCA AND CARLOTTA RONDOLI**

[Pg 82]

### **I**

No (said my friend Charles Jouvent), I do not know Italy; I started to see it thoroughly twice, and each time I was stopped at the frontier and could not manage to get any further. And yet my two attempts gave me a charming idea of the manners of that beautiful country. I must, however, some time or other visit its cities, as well as the museums and works of art with which it abounds. I will also make another attempt to penetrate into the interior, which I have not yet succeeded in doing.

You don't understand me, so I will explain myself: In the spring of 1874 I was seized with an irresistible desire to see Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples. I am, as you know, not a great traveler; it appears to me a useless and fatiguing business. Nights spent in a train, the disturbed slumbers of the railway carriage, with the attendant headache, and stiffness in every limb, the sudden waking in that rolling box, the unwashed feeling with your eyes and hair full of dust, the smell of the coal on which one's lungs feed, those bad dinners in the draughty refreshment rooms are, according to my ideas, a horrible way of beginning a pleasure trip.

After this introduction by the express, we have the miseries of the hotel; of some great hotel full of people, and yet so empty; the strange room, and the dubious bed! I am most particular about my bed; it is the sanctuary of life. We intrust our almost naked and fatigued bodies to it so that they may be reanimated by reposing between soft sheets and feathers.

[Pg 83]

There we find the most delightful hours of our existence, the hours of love and of sleep. The bed is sacred, and should be respected, venerated, and loved by us as the best and most delightful of our earthly possessions.

I cannot lift up the sheets of an hotel bed without a shiver of disgust. What have its occupants been doing in it the night before? Perhaps dirty, revolting people have slept in it. I begin, then, to think of all the horrible people with whom one rubs shoulders every day, people with suspicious-looking skin which makes one think of the feet and all the rest! I call to mind those who carry about with them the sickening smell of garlic or of humanity. I think of those who are deformed and purulent, of the perspiration emanating from the sick, and of everything that is ugly and filthy in man.



And all this, perhaps, in the bed in which I am going to sleep! The mere idea of it makes me feel ill as I get in.

And then the hotel dinners—those dreary *table d'hôte* dinners in the midst of all sorts of extraordinary people, or else those terrible solitary dinners at a small table in a restaurant, feebly lighted up by a wretched composite candle under a shade.

Again, those terribly dull evenings in some unknown town! Do you know anything more wretched than when it is getting dark on such an occasion? One goes about as if almost in a dream, looking at faces which one has never seen before and will never see again; listening to people talking about matters which are quite indifferent to you in a language that perhaps you do not understand. You have a terrible feeling, almost as if you were lost, and you continue to walk on so as not to be obliged to return to the hotel, where you would feel more lost still because you are *at home*, in a home which belongs to anyone who can pay for it, and at last you fall into a chair of some well-lit café, whose gilding and lights overwhelm you a thousand times more than the shadows in the streets. Then you feel so abominably lonely sitting in front of the glass of flat *bock*,<sup>[5]</sup> that a kind of madness seizes you, the longing to go somewhere or other, no matter where, as long as you need not remain in front of that marble table and in the dazzling brightness.

[Pg 84]

And then, suddenly, you perceive that you are really alone in the world, always and everywhere; but that in places which we know the familiar jostlings give us the illusion only of human fraternity. At such moments of self-abandonment and somber isolation in distant cities one thinks broadly, clearly, and profoundly. Then one suddenly sees the whole of life outside the vision of eternal hope, outside the deceptions of our innate habits, and of our expectations of happiness, of which we indulge in dreams never to be realized.

It is only by going a long distance that we can fully understand how short-lived and empty everything near at hand is; by searching for the unknown we perceive how commonplace and evanescent everything is; only by wandering over the face of the earth can we understand how small the world is, and how very much alike everywhere.

[Pg 85]

How well I know, and how I hate and almost fear those haphazard walks through unknown streets; and this was the reason why, as nothing would induce me to undertake a tour in Italy by myself, I made up my mind to accompany my friend Paul Pavilly.

You know Paul, and how woman is everything, the world, life itself, to him. There are many men like that, to whom existence becomes poetical and idealized by the presence of women. The earth is inhabitable only because they are there; the sun shines and is warm because it lights upon them; the air is soft and balmy because it blows upon their skin and ruffles the short hairs on their temples, and the moon is charming because it makes them dream and imparts a languorous charm to love. Every act and action of Paul's has woman for its motive; all his thoughts, all his efforts and hopes are centered on them.

When I mentioned Italy to Paul he at first absolutely refused to leave Paris. I, however, began to tell him of the adventures I had on my travels. I assured him that all Italian women are charming, and I made him hope for the most refined pleasures at Naples, thanks to certain letters of introduction which I had; and so at last he allowed himself to be persuaded.

## II

We took the express one Thursday evening, Paul and I. Hardly anyone goes South at that time of the year, so that we had the carriage to ourselves, and both of us were in a bad temper on leaving Paris, sorry for having yielded to the temptation of this journey, and regretting Marly, the Seine, and our lazy boating excursions, and all those pleasures in and near Paris which are so dear to every true Parisian.

[Pg 86]

As soon as the train started Paul stuck himself into his corner, and said, "It is most idiotic to go all that way," and as it was too late for him to change his mind then, I said, "Well, you should not have come."

He gave me no answer, and I felt very much inclined to laugh when I saw how furious he looked. He is certainly always rather like a squirrel, but then every one of us has retained the type of some animal or other as the mark of his primitive race. How many people have jaws like a bulldog, or heads like goats, rabbits, foxes, horses, or oxen. Paul is a squirrel turned into a man. He has its bright, quick eyes, its old hair, pointed nose, its small, fine, supple, active body, and a certain mysterious resemblance in his general bearing: in fact, a similarity of movements, of gestures, and of bearing which might almost be taken for a recollection.

At last we both went to sleep with that uncomfortable slumber of the railway carriage, which is interrupted by horrible cramps in the arms and neck, and by the sudden stoppages of the train.

We woke up as we were going along the Rhone. Soon the continued noise of the grasshoppers came in through the window, that cry which seems to be the voice of the warm earth, the song of Provence; and seemed to instill into our looks, our breasts, and our souls the light and happy feeling of the South, that odor of the parched earth, of the stony and light soil of the olive, with its gray-green foliage.

When the train stopped again a railway servant ran along the train calling out "Valence" in a



sonorous voice, with an accent that again gave us a taste of that Provence which the shrill note of the grasshoppers had already imparted to us. [Pg 87]

Nothing new happened until we got to Marseilles, where we got out to breakfast, but when we returned to our carriage we found a woman installed there.

Paul, with a delightful look at me, gave his short moustache a mechanical twirl, and passed his fingers through his hair, which had become slightly out of order with the night's journey. Then he sat down opposite the newcomer.

Whenever I happen to see a striking new face, either while traveling or in society, I always have the strongest inclination to find out what character, mind, and intellectual capacities are hidden beneath those features.

She was a young and pretty woman, a native of the South of France certainly, with splendid eyes, beautiful wavy black hair, which was so thick, long, and strong that it seemed almost too heavy for her head. She was dressed with a certain Southern elegant bad taste which made her look a little vulgar. Her regular features had none of the grace and finish of the refined races, of that slight delicacy which members of the aristocracy inherit from their birth, and which is the hereditary mark of thinner blood.

Her bracelets were too big to be of gold; she wore earrings with large white stones which were certainly not diamonds, and she belonged unmistakably to the commonalty. One would have guessed that she would talk too loud, and shout on every occasion with exaggerated gestures.

When the train started she remained motionless in her place, in the attitude of a woman who was in a rage, without even looking at us. [Pg 88]

Paul began to talk to me, evidently with an eye to effect, trying to attract her attention, like shopkeepers who expose their choice wares to catch the notice of passers-by.

She, however, did not appear to be paying the least attention.

"Toulon! Ten minutes to wait! Refreshment room!" the porters shouted.

Paul motioned to me to get out, and as soon as we had done so, he said:

"I wonder who on earth she can be?"

I began to laugh. "I am sure I don't know, and I don't the least care."

He was quite excited.

"She is an uncommonly fresh and pretty girl. What eyes she has, and how cross she looks. She must have been dreadfully worried, for she takes no notice of anything."

"You will have all your trouble for nothing," I growled.

He began to lose his temper.

"I am not taking any trouble, my dear fellow. I think her an extremely pretty woman, that is all. If one could only speak to her! But I don't know how to begin. Cannot you give me an idea? Can't you guess who she is?"

"Upon my word, I cannot. However, I should rather think she is some strolling actress who is going to rejoin her company after a love adventure."

He seemed quite upset, as if I had said something insulting.

"What makes you think that? On the contrary, I think she looks most respectable." [Pg 89]

"Just look at her bracelets," I said, "her earrings and her whole dress. I should not be the least surprised if she were a dancer or a circus rider, but most likely a dancer. Her whole style smacks very much of the theater."

He evidently did not like the idea.

"She is much too young, I am sure; why, she is hardly twenty."

"Well," I replied, "there are many things which one can do before one is twenty; dancing and reciting are among them, without counting another little business which is, perhaps, her sole occupation."

"Take your seats for Nice, Vintimiglia," the guards and porters called out.

We got in; our fellow passenger was eating an orange, and certainly she did not do it elegantly. She had spread her pocket-handkerchief on her knees, and the way in which she tore off the peel and opened her mouth to put in the figs, and then spat the pips out of the window, showed that her education had been decidedly vulgar.

She seemed, also, more put out than ever, and swallowed the fruit with an exceedingly comic air of rage.

Paul devoured her with his eyes, and tried to attract her attention and excite her curiosity, but in spite of his talk and of the manner in which he brought in well-known names, she did not pay the

least attention to him.

After passing Fréjus and St. Raphael, the train passed through a veritable garden, a paradise of roses, and groves of oranges and lemons covered with fruit and flowers at the same time. That delightful coast from Marseilles to Genoa is a kingdom of perfumes in a home of flowers.

[Pg 90]

June is the time to see it in all its beauty, when in every narrow valley and on every slope, the most exquisite flowers are growing luxuriantly. And the roses! fields, hedges, groves of roses. They climb up the walls, blossom on the roofs, hang from the trees, peep out from among the bushes; they are white, red, yellow, large and small, single, with a simple self-colored dress, or full and heavy in brilliant toilets.

Their continual breath makes the air heavy and relaxing, while the still more penetrating odor of the orange blossoms sweetens the atmosphere till it might almost be called the sugar-plum of the smell.

The shore, with its brown rocks, was bathed by the motionless Mediterranean. The hot summer sun stretched like a fiery cloth over the mountains, over the long expanses of sand, and over the hard, fixed blue sea. The train went on, through the tunnels, along the slopes, above the water, on straight, wall-like viaducts, and a soft, vague, saltish smell, a smell of drying seaweed, mingled at times with the strong, heavy perfume of the flowers.

But Paul neither saw, looked at, nor smelled anything, for our fellow traveler engrossed all his attention.

When we got to Cannes, as he wished to speak to me he signed to me to get out again, and as soon as I had done so he took me by the arm.

"Do you know, she is really charming. Just look at her eyes; and I never saw anything like her hair."

"Don't excite yourself," I replied, "or else tackle her, if you have any intentions that way. She does not look impregnable, I fancy, although she appears to be a little bit grumpy."

"Why don't you speak to her?" he said.

[Pg 91]

"I don't know what to say, for I am always terribly stupid at first; I can never make advances to a woman in the street. I follow them, go round and round them, and quite closely to them, but I never know what to say at first. I only once tried to enter into conversation with a woman in that way. As I clearly saw that she was waiting for me to make overtures, and as I felt bound to say something, I stammered out, 'I hope you are quite well, madam?' She laughed in my face, and I made my escape."

I promised Paul to do all I could to bring about a conversation, and when we had taken our places again, I politely asked our neighbor:

"Have you any objection to the smell of tobacco, madam?"

She merely replied, "*Non capisco*."<sup>[6]</sup>

So she was Italian! I felt an absurd inclination to laugh. As Paul did not understand a word of that language, I was obliged to act as his interpreter, so I said in Italian:

"I asked you, madam, whether you had any objection to tobacco smoke?"

With an angry look she replied, "*Che mi fa*."<sup>[7]</sup>

She had neither turned her head nor looked at me, and I really did not know whether to take this "What does it matter to me" for an authorization, a refusal, a real sign of indifference, or for a mere "Leave me alone."

"Madame," I replied, "if you mind the smell of tobacco in the least—"

[Pg 92]

She again said, "*Mica*,"<sup>[8]</sup> in a tone of voice which seemed to mean, "I wish to goodness you would leave me alone!" It was, however, a kind of permission, so I said to Paul:

"You can smoke."

He looked at me in that curious sort of way that people have when they try to understand others who are talking in a strange language before them, and asked me:

"What did you say to her?"

"I asked if we might smoke, and she said we might do whatever we liked."

Whereupon I lighted my cigar.

"Did she not say anything more?"

"If you had counted her words you would have noticed that she used exactly six, two of which gave me to understand that she knew no French, so four remained, and a lot can be said in four words."

Paul seemed quite unhappy, disappointed, and "at sea," so to speak.

But suddenly the Italian asked me, in that tone of discontent which seemed habitual to her, "Do you know at what time we shall get to Genoa?"

"At eleven o'clock," I replied. Then after a moment I went on:

"My friend and I are also going to Genoa, and if we can be of any service to you, we shall be very happy, as you are quite alone." But she interrupted with such a "*Mica*" that I did not venture on another word.

"What did she say?" Paul asked.

"She said that she thought you were charming."

But he was in no humor for joking, and begged me, dryly, not to make fun of him, so I translated her question and my polite offer, which had been so rudely rejected. [Pg 93]

Then he really became as agitated as a squirrel in a cage.

"If we only knew," he said, "what hotel she was going to, we would go to the same. Try and find out, so as to have another opportunity for making her speak."

It was not particularly easy, and I did not know what pretext to invent, anxious as I was to make the acquaintance of this unapproachable person.

We passed Nice, Monaco, Mentone, and the train stopped at the frontier for the examination of luggage.

Although I hate those badly brought-up people who breakfast and dine in railway-carriages, I went and bought a quantity of good things to make one last attack on her by their means. I felt sure that this girl must, ordinarily, be by no means inaccessible. Something had put her out and made her irritable, but very little would suffice, a mere word or some agreeable offer, to decide her and overcome her.

We started again, and we three were still alone. I spread my eatables out on the seat. I cut up the fowl, put the slices of ham neatly on a piece of paper, and then carefully laid out our dessert, the strawberries, plums, cherries, and cakes, close to the girl.

When she saw that we were going to eat she took a piece of chocolate and two little crisp cakes out of her pocket and began to munch them.

"Ask her to have some of ours," Paul said in a whisper. [Pg 94]

"That is exactly what I want to do, but it is rather a difficult matter."

As she, however, glanced from time to time at our provisions, I felt sure that she would still be hungry when she had finished what she had, so as soon as her frugal meal was over, I said to her:

"It would be very kind of you if you would take some of this fruit."

Again she said "*Mica*," but less crossly than before.

"Well, then," I said, "may I offer you a little wine? I see you have not drunk anything. It is Italian wine, and as we are now in your own country, we should be very pleased to see such a pretty Italian mouth accept the offer of its French neighbors."

She shook her head slightly, evidently wishing to refuse, but very desirous of accepting, and her *mica* *this* time was almost polite. I took the bottle, which was covered with straw in the Italian fashion, and filling the glass I offered it to her.

"Please drink it," I said, "to bid us welcome to your country."

She took the glass with her usual look, and emptied it at a draught, like a woman tormented with thirst, and then gave it back to me without even saying "Thank you."

Then I offered her the cherries. "Please take some," I said; "we shall be so pleased if you will."

Out of her corner she looked at all the fruit spread out before her, and said so rapidly that I could scarcely follow her: "*A me non piacciono ne le ciliegie ne le susine; amo soltanto le fragole.*"

"What does she say?" Paul asked. [Pg 95]

"That she does not care for cherries or plums, but only for strawberries."

I put a newspaper full of wild strawberries on her lap, and she ate them quickly, throwing them into her mouth from some distance in a coquettish and charming manner.

When she had finished the little red heap which we had seen rapidly diminishing, crushed and disappearing under the rapid action of her hands, I asked her:

"What may I offer you now?"

"I will take a little chicken," she replied.

She certainly devoured half of it, tearing it to pieces with the rapid movements of her jaws like some carnivorous animal. Then she made up her mind to have some cherries, which she "did not like," then some plums, then some little cakes. Then she said, "I have had enough," and sat back

in her corner.

I was much amused, and tried to make her eat more, pressing her, in fact, till she suddenly got in a rage again, and flung such a furious *mica* at me, that I would no longer run the risk of spoiling her digestion.

I turned to my friend. "My poor Paul," I said, "I am afraid we have had our trouble for nothing."

The night came on, one of those hot summer nights which extend their warm shade over the burning and exhausted earth. Here and there, in the distance by the sea on capes and promontories, bright stars began to shine on the dark horizon, which I was, at times, almost inclined to confound with lighthouses.

The scent of the orange-trees became more penetrating, and we breathed with delight, distending our lungs to inhale it more deeply. The balmy air was soft, delicious, almost divine.

[Pg 96]

Suddenly I noticed something like a shower of stars under the dense shade of the trees along the line, where it was quite dark. It might have been taken for drops of light, leaping, flying, playing and running among the leaves, or for small stars fallen from the skies in order to have an excursion on the earth; but they were only fireflies dancing a strange fiery ballet in the perfumed air.

One of them happened to come into our carriage, and shed its intermittent light, which seemed to be extinguished one moment and to be burning the next. I covered the carriage-lamp with its blue shade, and watched the strange fly careering about in its fiery flight. Suddenly it settled on the dark hair of our neighbor, who was half dozing after dinner. Paul seemed delighted, with his eyes fixed on the bright, sparkling spot which looked like a living jewel on the forehead of the sleeping woman.

The Italian woke up at about eleven o'clock, with the bright insect still in her hair. When I saw her move, I said: "We are just getting to Genoa, madam," and she murmured, without answering me, as if possessed by some obstinate and embarrassing thought:

"What am I going to do, I wonder?"

And then she suddenly asked:

"Would you like me to come with you?"

I was so taken aback that I really did not understand her.

"With us? How do you mean?"

She repeated, looking more and more furious:

"Would you like me to go with you now, as soon as we get out of the train?"

[Pg 97]

"I am quite willing; but where do you want to go to? Where shall I take you to?"

She shrugged her shoulders with an air of supreme indifference.

"Wherever you like; what does it matter to me?" She repeated her *Che mi fa?* twice.

"But we are going to the hotel."

"Very well, let us all go to the hotel," she said, in a contemptuous voice.

I turned to Paul, and said:

"She wants to know if we should like her to come with us."

My friend's utter surprise restored my self-possession. He stammered:

"With us? Where to? What for? How?"

"I don't know, but she made this strange proposal to me in a most irritable voice. I told her that we were going to the hotel, and she said: 'Very well, let us all go there!' I suppose she is without a halfpenny. She certainly has a very strange way of making acquaintances."

Paul, who was very much excited, exclaimed:

"I am quite agreeable. Tell her that we will take her wherever she likes." Then, after a moment's hesitation, he said uneasily:

"We must know, however, with whom she wants to go—with you or with me?"

I turned to the Italian, who did not even seem to be listening to us, and said:

"We shall be very happy to take you with us, but my friend wants to know whether you will take my arm or his?"

[Pg 98]

She opened her black eyes wide with vague surprise, and said, "*Che mi fa?*"

I was obliged to explain myself. "In Italy, I believe, when a man looks after a woman, fulfills all her wishes, and satisfies all her caprices, he is called a *patito*. Which of us two will you take for your *patito*?"

Without the slightest hesitation she replied:

"You!"

I turned to Paul. "You see, my friend, she chooses me; you have no chance."

"All the better for you," he replied, in a rage. Then, after thinking for a few moments, he went on:

"Do you really care about taking this creature with you? She will spoil our journey. What are we to do with this woman, who looks like I don't know what? They will not take us in at any decent hotel."

I, however, just began to find the Italian much nicer than I had thought her at first, and I was now very anxious to take her with us. The idea delighted me. I already felt those little shivers which the expectation of a night of love sends through the veins.

I replied, "My dear fellow, we have accepted and it is too late to recede. You were the first to advise me to say 'Yes.'"

"It is very stupid," he growled, "but do as you please."

The train whistled, slackened speed, and we ran into the station.

I got out of the carriage, and offered my new companion my hand. She jumped out lightly, and I gave her my arm, which she took with an air of seeming repugnance. As soon as we had claimed our luggage we started off into the town, Paul walking in utter silence.

[Pg 99]

"To what hotel shall we go?" I asked him. "It may be difficult to get into the *City of Paris* with a woman, especially with this Italian."

Paul interrupted me. "Yes, with an Italian who looks more like a strumpet than a duchess. However, that is no business of mine. Do just as you please."

I was in a state of perplexity. I had written to the *City of Paris* to retain our rooms, and now I did not know what to do.

Two commissionaires followed us with our luggage. I continued: "You might as well go on first, and say that we are coming; and give the landlord to understand that I have a—a friend with me, so that we should like rooms quite by themselves for us three, so as not to be brought in contact with other travelers. He will understand, and we will decide according to his answer."

But Paul growled, "Thank you; such sort of commissions and such parts do not suit me by any means. I did not come here to get ready your apartments or to minister to your pleasures."

But I was urgent: "Look here, don't be angry. It is surely far better to go to a good hotel than to a bad one, and it is not difficult to ask the landlord for three separate bedrooms and a dining-room."

I put a stress on *three*, and that decided him.

He went on first, and I saw him go into a large hotel while I remained on the other side of the street dragging along my fair Italian, who did not say a word, and followed by the porters with the luggage.

Paul came back at last, looking as dissatisfied as my companion.

"That is settled," he said, "and they will take us in; but there are only two bedrooms. You must settle it as you can."

[Pg 100]

I followed him, rather ashamed of going in with such a strange companion.

There were two bedrooms separated by a small sitting-room. I ordered a cold supper, and then I turned to the Italian with a perplexed look.

"We have only been able to get two rooms, so you must choose which you like."

She replied with her eternal *Che mi fa?* I thereupon took her little black wooden box, just like servants use, and took it into the room on the right, which I had chosen for her, ... for us. A bit of paper was fastened on to the box, on which was written, *Mademoiselle Francesca Rondoli, Genoa.*

"Your name is Francesca?" I asked, and she nodded her head, without replying.

"We shall have supper directly," I continued. "Meanwhile, I daresay you would like to arrange your dress a little?"

She answered with a *mica*, a word which she employed just as frequently as *Che mi fa*, but I went on: "It is always pleasant after a journey."

Then I suddenly remembered that she had not, perhaps, the necessary objects, for she appeared to me in a very singular position, as if she had just escaped from some disagreeable adventure, and I brought her my dressing-case.

I put out all the little instruments for cleanliness and comfort which it contained: a nailbrush, a new toothbrush—for I always carry a selection of them about with me—my nail-scissors, a nail-

file, and sponges. I uncorked a bottle of eau de cologne, one of lavender-water, and a little bottle of new-mown hay, so that she might have a choice. Then I opened my powder-box, and put out the powder-puff, put my fine towels over the water-jug, and placed a piece of new soap near the basin.

[Pg 101]

She watched my movements with a vexed look in her wide open eyes, without appearing either astonished or satisfied at my forethought.

"Here is all that you require," I then said; "I will tell you when supper is ready."

When I returned to the sitting-room I found that Paul had taken possession of the other room, and had shut himself in, so I sat down to wait.

A waiter went backwards and forwards, bringing plates and glasses. He laid the table slowly, then put a cold fowl on it, and told me that all was ready.

I knocked gently at Mademoiselle Rondoli's door. "Come in," she said, and when I did so I was struck by a strong, heavy smell of perfumes, as if I were in a hairdresser's and perfumer's shop.

The Italian was sitting on her box in an attitude either of thoughtful discontent or absent-mindedness. The towel was still folded over the water-jug that was quite full, and the soap, untouched and dry, was laying beside the empty basin; but one would have thought that the young woman had drunk half of the bottles of scent. The eau de cologne, however, had been spared, as only about a third of it had gone; but to make up for that she had used a surprising amount of lavender-water and new-mown hay. A cloud of violet-powder, a vague white mist, seemed still to be floating in the air, from the effects of her over-powdering her face and neck. It seemed to cover her eyelashes, eyebrows, and the hair on her temples like snow, while her cheeks were plastered with it, and layers of it covered her nostrils, the corners of her eyes, and her chin.

[Pg 102]

When she got up she exhaled such a strong odor of scent that it almost made me feel faint.

When she sat down to supper, I found that Paul was in a most execrable temper, and I could get nothing out of him but blame, irritable words, and disagreeable compliments.

Mademoiselle Francesca ate like an ogre, and as soon as she had finished her meal she threw herself upon the sofa. As for me, I saw the decisive moment approaching for settling how we were to apportion the rooms. I determined to take the bull by the horns, and sitting down by the Italian I said gallantly, kissing her hand:

"As we have only two bedrooms, will you allow me to share yours with you?"

"Do just as you like," she said. "It is all the same to me. *Che mi fa?*"

Her indifference vexed me.

"But you are sure you do not mind my being in your room with you?" I said.

"It is all the same to me; do just as you like."

"Should you like to go to bed at once?"

"Yes; I am very sleepy."

She got up, yawned, gave Paul her hand, who took it with a furious look, and I lighted her into our room. A disquieting feeling haunted me. "Here is all you want," I said again.

This time I took care to pour half the water into the basin, and to put a towel near the soap.

Then I went back to Paul. As soon as I got into the room, he said, "You have got a nice sort of camel there!" and I answered, laughing. "My dear friend, don't speak ill of sour grapes," and he replied, ill-temperedly:

[Pg 103]

"Just take care how this ends, my good fellow."

I almost trembled with that feeling of fear which assails us after some suspicious love escapade—that fear which spoils our pleasant meetings, our unexpected caresses, our chance kisses. However, I put a bold face on the matter. "At any rate, the girl is no adventuress."

But the fellow had me in his power; he had seen the shadow of my anxiety on my face.

"What do you know about her? You really astonish me. You pick up an Italian woman traveling alone by railway, and she volunteers, with most singular cynicism, to go and to be your mistress in the first hotel you come to. You take her with you, and then you declare that she is not a——! And you persuade yourself that you are not running more risk than if you were to go and spend the night with a woman who had the small-pox."

He laughed with an unpleasant and angry laugh. I sat down, a prey to uneasiness. What was I to do, for he was right after all? And a struggle began within me, between desire and fear.

He went on: "Do as you like, I have warned you, so, do not complain of the consequences."

But I saw an ironical gayety in his eyes, such a delight in his revenge, and he made fun of me so jovially that I did not hesitate any longer. I gave him my hand, and said, "Good night. You know

the old saying: *A victory without peril is a triumph without glory*, and upon my word, the victory is worth the danger."

[Pg 104]

And with a firm step I went into Francesca's room.

I stopped short at the door in surprise and astonishment. She was already asleep. Sleep had overcome her when she had finished undressing, and she was reposing in the charming attitude of one of Titian's women.

It seemed as if she had lain down from sheer fatigue in order to take off her stockings, for they were lying on the bed. Then she had thought of something pleasant, no doubt, for she had waited to finish her reverie before moving, and then, closing her eyes, she had lost consciousness. A nightgown, embroidered about the neck such as one buys in cheap ready-made shops, was lying on the chair.

She was charming, young, firm and fresh.

There is nothing prettier than a pretty woman asleep, and in a moment, seeing her thus in all her naïve charms, I was going to forget my friend's prudent counsels, but, suddenly turning to the toilet-table, I saw everything in the same state as I left it, and I sat down, anxious, and a prey to irresolution.

I remained thus for a long time, not able to make up my mind either what to do. Retreat was impossible, and I must either pass the night on a chair, or go to bed myself at my own risk and peril.

I had no thoughts of sleeping either here or there, for my head was too excited and my eyes too occupied.

I moved about without stopping, feverish uncomfortable, enervated. Then I began to reason with myself, certainly with a view to capitulation. "If I lie down that does not bind me to anything, and I shall certainly be more comfortable on a mattress than on a chair."

I undressed slowly, and then, stepping over the sleeping girl, I stretched myself out against the wall, turning my back on temptation. [Pg 105]

In this position I remained for a long time without going to sleep, when suddenly my neighbor woke up. She opened her eyes with astonishment, and still with that discontented look in them; then, perceiving that she was undressed, she got up, and calmly put on her nightgown with as much indifference as if I had not been present.

Returning, she did not trouble herself at all about me, and immediately went quietly to sleep again with her head resting on her right arm.

As for me, I began to meditate on human weakness and fatuity, and then I went to sleep also.

She got up early, like a woman who is used to work in the morning. She woke me up by doing so, and I watched her through my half-closed eyelids.

She came and went without hurrying herself, as if she were astonished at having nothing to do. At length she went to the toilet-table, and in a moment she emptied all the scent that remained in my bottles. She certainly also used some water, but very little.

When she was quite dressed, she sat down on her box again, and holding one knee between her hands, she seemed to be thinking.

At that moment I first pretended to notice her, and said:

"Good morning, Francesca."

Without seeming in at all a better temper than the previous night, she murmured, "Good morning."

When I asked her whether she slept well, she nodded *Yes*, and jumping out of bed, I went and kissed her.

She turned her face towards me like a child who is being kissed against its will; but I took her tenderly in my arms, and gently put my lips on her large eyes, which she closed with evident distaste under my kisses on her fresh cheeks and full lips which she turned away. [Pg 106]

"You don't seem to like being kissed," I said to her.

"*Mica*" was her only answer.

I sat down on the trunk by her side, and, passing my arm through hers, I said: "*Mica! mica! mica!* in reply to everything. I shall call you Mademoiselle *Mica*, I think."

For the first time I fancied that I saw the shadow of a smile on her lips, but it passed by so quickly that I may have been mistaken.

"But if you never say anything but *Mica* I shall not know what to do to try to please you. Let us see; what shall we do to-day?"

She hesitated a moment as if some fancy had flitted through her head, and then she said



carelessly: "It is all the same to me; whatever you like."

"Very well, Mademoiselle *Mica*, we will have a carriage and go for a drive."

"As you please," she said.

Paul was waiting for us in the dining-room, looking as bored as third parties generally do in love affairs. I assumed a delighted air, and shook hands with him with triumphant energy.

"What are you thinking of doing?" he asked.

"First of all we will go and see a little of the town, and then we might take a carriage, for a drive in the neighborhood."

We breakfasted nearly in silence and then started. I dragged Francesca from palace to palace, and she either looked at nothing or merely just glanced carelessly at all the various masterpieces. Paul followed us, growling all sorts of disagreeable things. Then we all three took a silent drive into the country and returned to dinner.

[Pg 107]

The next day it was the same thing and the next day again; so on the third Paul said to me: "Look here, I am going to leave you; I am not going to stop here for three weeks watching you make love to this creature."

I was perplexed and annoyed, for to my great surprise I had become singularly attached to Francesca. A man is but weak and foolish, carried away by the merest trifle, and a coward every time that his senses are excited or mastered. I clung to this unknown girl, silent and dissatisfied as she always was. I liked her somewhat ill-tempered face, the dissatisfied droop of her mouth, the weariness of her look; I liked her fatigued movements, the contemptuous way in which she yielded to my desires, the very indifference of her caresses. A secret bond, that mysterious bond of animal love, the secret attachment of that possession which does not satiate, bound me to her. I told Paul so, quite frankly. He treated me as if I had been a fool, and then said:

"Very well, take her with you."

But she obstinately refused to leave Genoa, without giving any reason. I besought, I reasoned, I promised, but all was of no avail, and so I stayed on.

Paul declared that he would go by himself, and went so far as to pack up his portmanteau; but he remained all the same.

Thus a fortnight passed. Francesca was always silent and irritable, lived beside me rather than with me, responded to all my desires, all my demands, and all my propositions with her perpetual *Che mi fa*, or with her no less perpetual *Mica*.

[Pg 108]

My friend got more and more furious, but my only answer was, "You can go if you are tired of staying. I am not detaining you."

Then he called me names, overwhelmed me with reproaches, and exclaimed: "Where do you think I can go to now? We had three weeks at our disposal, and here is a fortnight gone! I cannot continue my journey now; and, in any case, I am not going to Venice, Florence, and Rome all by myself. But you will pay for it, and more dearly than you think for, most likely. You are not going to bring a man all the way from Paris in order to shut him up at an hotel in Genoa with an Italian adventuress."

When I told him, very calmly, to return to Paris, he exclaimed that he was going to do so the very next day; but the next day he was still there, still in a rage and swearing.

By this time we began to be known in the streets through which we wandered from morning till night. Sometimes French people would turn round astonished at meeting their fellow-countrymen in the company of this girl with her striking costume, and who looked singularly out of place, not to say compromising, beside us.

She used to walk along, leaning on my arm, without looking at anything. Why did she remain with me, with us, who seemed to procure her so little pleasure? Who was she? Where did she come from? What was she doing? Had she any plan or idea? Where did she live? As an adventuress, or by chance meetings? I tried in vain to find out and to explain it. The better I knew her the more enigmatical she became. She was not one of those who make a living by any profession of venal love. She rather seemed to me to be a girl of poor family who had been seduced and taken away, and then cast aside and lost. What did she think was going to become of her, or whom was she waiting for? She certainly did not appear to be trying to make a conquest of me, or to get any real profit out of me.

[Pg 109]

I tried to question her, to speak to her of her childhood and family; but she never gave me an answer. I stayed with her, my heart unfettered and my senses enchained, never wearied of holding her in my arms, that proud and quarrelsome woman, captivated by my senses, or rather seduced, overcome by a youthful, healthy, powerful charm, which emanated from her sweet-smelling person and from the robust lines of her body.

Another week passed, and the term of my journey was drawing on, for I had to be back in Paris by July 11. By this time Paul had come to take his part in the adventure, though still grumbling at me, while I invented pleasures, distractions, and excursions to amuse my mistress and my friend; and in order to do this I gave myself a large amount of trouble.

One day I proposed an excursion to Sta Margarita, that charming little town in the midst of gardens, hidden at the foot of a slope which stretches far into the sea up to the village of Portofino. We all three were following the excellent road which goes along the foot of the mountain. Suddenly Francesca said to me: "I shall not be able to go with you to-morrow; I must go and see some of my relations."

That was all; I did not ask her any questions, as I was quite sure she would not answer me.

[Pg 110]

The next morning she got up very early; then, as I remained in bed, she sat down at the foot of it, and said in a constrained and hesitating voice:

"If I do not come back to-night, shall you come and fetch me?"

"Most certainly I shall," was my reply. "Where must I come to?"

Then she explained: "You must go into the Street Victor-Emmanuel, down the Passage Falene, and go into the furniture shop at the bottom, in a court, and there you must ask for Mme. Rondoli—That is where it is."

And so she went away, leaving me rather astonished.

When Paul saw that I was alone he stammered out: "Where is Francesca?" And when I told him what had happened he exclaimed:

"My dear fellow, let us make use of our chance, and bolt; as it is, our time is up. Two days, more or less, make no difference. Let us start at once; go and pack up your things. Off we go!"

But I refused. I could not, as I told him, leave the girl in such a manner, after having lived with her for nearly three weeks. At any rate, I ought to say good-bye to her, and make her accept a present; I certainly had no intention of behaving badly to her.

But he would not listen; he pressed and worried me, but I would not give way.

I remained indoors for several hours, expecting Francesca's return, but she did not come, and at last, at dinner, Paul said with a triumphant air: "She has thrown you over, my dear fellow; it is certainly very strange."

I must acknowledge that I was surprised and rather vexed. He laughed in my face, and made fun of me.

[Pg 111]

"It is not exactly a bad way of getting rid of you, though rather primitive. 'Just wait for me, I shall be back in a moment,' they often say. How long are you going to wait? I should not wonder if you were foolish enough to go and look for her at the address she gave you. 'Does Mme. Rondoli live here, please?' 'No, Sir.' I'll bet that you are longing to go there."

"Not in the least," I protested, "and I assure you that if she does not come back to-morrow morning I shall start by the express at eight o'clock. I shall have waited twenty-four hours, and that is enough; my conscience will be quite clear."

I spent an uneasy and unpleasant evening, for I really had at heart a very tender feeling for her. I went to bed at twelve o'clock, and hardly slept at all. I got up at six, called Paul, packed up my things, and two hours later we started for France together.

### III

The next year, at just about the same period, I was seized, as one is with a periodical fever, with a new desire to go to Italy, and I immediately made up my mind to carry it into effect. There is no doubt that every well-educated man ought to see Florence, Venice, and Rome. It has, also, the additional advantage of providing many subjects of conversation in society, and of giving one an opportunity for bringing forward artistic generalities which appear profound.

This time I went alone, and I arrived at Genoa at the same time as the year before, but without any adventure on the road. I went to the same hotel, and actually happened to have the same room.

[Pg 112]

I was scarcely in bed when the recollection of Francesca which, since the evening before, had been floating vaguely through my mind, haunted me with strange persistency. I thought of her nearly the whole night, and by degrees the wish to see her again seized me, a confused desire at first, which gradually grew stronger and more intense. At last I made up my mind to spend the next day in Genoa to try and find her, and if I should not succeed, I would take the evening train.

Early in the morning I set out on my search. I remembered the directions she had given me when she left me, perfectly—Victor-Emmanuel Street, etc., etc., house of the furniture-dealer, at the bottom of the yard on the right.

I found it without the least difficulty, and I knocked at the door of a somewhat dilapidated-looking dwelling. A fat woman opened it, who must have been very handsome, but who actually was only very dirty. Although she was too fat, she still bore the lines of majestic beauty; her untidy hair fell over her forehead and shoulders, and one fancied one could see her fat body floating about in an enormous dressing-gown covered with spots of dirt and grease. Round her neck she wore a great gilt necklace, and on her wrists were splendid bracelets of Genoa filigree work.

In rather a hostile manner she asked me what I wanted, and I replied by requesting her to tell me whether Francesca Rondoli lived there.

"What do you want with her?" she asked.

[Pg 113]

"I had the pleasure of meeting her last year, and I should like to see her again."

The old woman looked at me suspiciously.

"Where did you meet her?" she asked.

"Why here, in Genoa itself."

"What is your name?"

I hesitated a moment, and then I told her. I had scarcely done so when the Italian put out her arms as if to embrace me. "Oh! you are the Frenchman; how glad I am to see you! But what grief you caused the poor child. She waited for you a month; yes, a whole month. At first she thought you would come to fetch her. She wanted to see whether you loved her. If you only knew how she cried when she saw that you were not coming! She cried till she seemed to have no tears left. Then she went to the hotel, but you had gone. She thought that most likely you were traveling in Italy, and that you would return by Genoa to fetch her, as she would not go with you. And she waited more than a month, Monsieur; and she was so unhappy; so unhappy. I am her mother."

I really felt a little disconcerted, but I regained my self-possession, and asked:

"Where is she now?"

"She has gone to Paris with a painter, a delightful man, who loves her very much, and who gives her everything that she wants. Just look at what she sent me; they are very pretty, are they not?"

And she showed me, with quite Southern animation, her heavy bracelets and necklace. "I have also," she continued, "earrings with stones in them, a silk dress, and some rings; but I only wear them on grand occasions. Oh! she is very happy, Sir, very happy. She will be so pleased when I tell her you have been here. But pray come in and sit down. You will take something or other, surely?"

[Pg 114]

But I refused, as I now wished to get away by the first train; but she took me by the arm and pulled me in, saying:

"Please, come in; I must tell her that you have been in here."

I found myself in a small, rather dark room, furnished with only a table and a few chairs.

She continued: "O! She is very happy now, very happy. When you met her in the train she was very miserable, for her lover had just left her at Marseilles, and she was coming back, poor child. But she liked you at once, though she was still rather sad, you understand. Now she has all she wants, and she writes and tells me everything that she does. His name is Bellemin, and they say he is a great painter in your country. He met her in the street here, and fell in love with her out of hand. But you will take a glass of syrup?—it is very good. Are you quite alone, this year?"

"Yes," I said, "quite alone."

I felt an increasing inclination to laugh, as my first disappointment was dispelled by what Mother Rondoli said. I was obliged, however, to drink a glass of her syrup.

"So you are quite alone?" she continued. "How sorry I am that Francesca is not here now; she would have been company for you all the time you stayed. It is not very amusing to go about all by oneself, and she will be very sorry also."

Then, as I was getting up to go, she exclaimed:

"But would you not like Carlotta to go with you? She knows all the walks very well. She is my second daughter, Sir."

[Pg 115]

No doubt she took my look of surprise for consent, for she opened the inner door and called out up the dark stairs which I could not see:

"Carlotta! Carlotta! make haste down, my dear child."

I tried to protest, but she would not listen.

"No; she will be very glad to go with you; she is very nice, and much more cheerful than her sister, and she is a good girl, a very good girl, whom I love very much."

In a few moments, a tall, slender, dark girl appeared, with her hair hanging down, and whose youthful figure showed unmistakably beneath an old dress of her mother's.

The latter at once told her how matters stood.

"This is Francesca's Frenchman, you know, the one whom she knew last year. He is quite alone, and has come to look for her, poor fellow; so I told him that you would go with him to keep him company."

The girl looked at me with her handsome dark eyes, and said, smiling:

"I have no objection, if he wishes it."

I could not possibly refuse, and merely said:

"Of course I shall be very glad of your company."

Her mother pushed her out. "Go and get dressed directly; put on your blue dress and your hat with the flowers, and make haste."

As soon as she had left the room the old woman explained herself: "I have two others, but they are much younger. It costs a lot of money to bring up four children. Luckily the eldest is off my hands at present."

[Pg 116]

Then she told all about herself, about her husband, who had been an employé on the railway, but who was dead, and she expatiated on the good qualities of Carlotta, her second girl, who soon returned, dressed, as her sister had been, in a striking, peculiar manner.

Her mother examined her from head to foot, and, after finding everything right, she said:

"Now, my children, you can go." Then turning to the girl, she said: "Be sure you are back by ten o'clock to-night; you know the door is locked then." The answer was:

"All right, mamma; don't alarm yourself."

She took my arm, and we went wandering about the streets, just as I had done the previous year with her sister.

We returned to the hotel for lunch, and then I took my new friend to Santa Margarita, just as I had done with her sister the year previously.

And she did not go home that night, although the door was to be closed at ten o'clock!

During the whole fortnight which I had at my disposal I took Carlotta to all the places of interest in and about Genoa. She gave me no cause to regret the other.

She cried when I left her, and the morning of my departure I gave her four bracelets for her mother, besides a substantial token of my affection for herself.

One of these days I intend to return to Italy, and I cannot help remembering, with a certain amount of uneasiness, mingled with hope, that Mme. Rondoli has two more daughters.

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## CHÂLI

[Pg 117]

Admiral de la Vallee, who seemed to be half asleep in his armchair, said in a voice which sounded like an old woman's:

"I had a very singular little love adventure once; would you like to hear it?"

He spoke from the depths of his great chair, with that everlasting dry, wrinkled smile on his lips, that smile *à la Voltaire*, which made people take him for a terrible skeptic.

## I

I was thirty years of age and first lieutenant in the navy, when I was intrusted with an astronomical expedition to Central India. The English Government provided me with all the necessary means for carrying out my enterprise, and I was soon busied with a few followers in that strange, surprising, prodigious country.

It would take me ten volumes to relate that journey. I went through wonderfully magnificent regions, and was received by strangely handsome princes, who entertained me with incredible magnificence. For two months it seemed to me as if I were walking in a poem, and that I was going about in a fairy kingdom, on the back of imaginary elephants. In the midst of wild forests I discovered extraordinary ruins, delicate and chiseled like jewels, fine as lace and enormous as mountains, those fabulous, divine monuments which are so graceful that one falls in love with their form like one falls in love with a woman, and that one feels a physical and sensual pleasure in looking at them. As Victor Hugo says, "*Whilst wide-awake, I was walking in a dream.*"

[Pg 118]

Towards the end of my journey I reached Ganhard, which was formerly one of the most prosperous towns in Central India, but is now much decayed and governed by a wealthy, arbitrary, violent, generous, and cruel prince. His name is Rajah Maddan, a true Oriental potentate, delicate and barbarous, affable and sanguinary, combining feminine grace with pitiless ferocity.

The city lies at the bottom of a valley, on the banks of a little lake which is surrounded by pagodas, which bathe their walls in the water.

At a distance the city looks like a white spot which grows larger as one approaches it, and by degrees one discovers the domes and spires, all the slender and graceful summits of Indian monuments.

At about an hour's distance from the gates, I met a superbly caparisoned elephant, surrounded by a guard of honor which the sovereign had sent me, and I was conducted to the palace with great ceremony.

I should have liked to have taken the time to put on my gala uniform, but royal impatience would not admit of it. He was anxious to make my acquaintance, to know what he might expect from me, and then he would see.

I was introduced into a great hall surrounded by galleries, in the midst of bronze-colored soldiers in splendid uniforms, while all about were standing men dressed in striking robes studded with precious stones.

I saw a shining mass, a kind of sitting sun reposing on a bench like our garden benches, without a back; it was the rajah who was waiting for me, motionless, in a robe of the purest canary color. He had some ten or fifteen million francs worth of diamonds on him, and by itself, on his forehead glistened the famous star of Delhi, which has always belonged to the illustrious dynasty of the Pariharas of Mundore, from whom my host was descended. [Pg 119]

He was a man of about five-and-twenty, who seemed to have some negro blood in his veins, although he belonged to the purest Hindoo race. He had large, almost motionless, rather vague eyes, fat lips, a curly beard, low forehead, and dazzling sharp white teeth, which he frequently showed with a mechanical smile. He got up and gave me his hand in the English fashion, and then made me sit down beside him on a bench which was so high that my feet hardly touched the ground, and I was very uncomfortable on it.

He immediately proposed a tiger hunt for the next day; war and hunting were his chief occupations, and he could hardly understand how one could care for anything else. He was evidently fully persuaded that I had only come all that distance to amuse him a little, and to be the companion of his pleasures.

As I stood greatly in need of his assistance, I tried to flatter his tastes, and he was so pleased with me that he immediately wished to show me how his trained boxers fought, and he led the way into a kind of arena situated within the palace.

At his command two naked men appeared, their hands covered with steel claws. They immediately began to attack each other, trying to strike one another with this sharp weapon, which left long cuts, from which the blood flowed freely down their dark skin. [Pg 120]

It lasted for a long time, till their bodies were a mass of wounds, and the combatants were tearing each other's flesh with this sort of rake made of pointed blades. One of them had his jaw smashed, while the ear of the other was split into three pieces.

The prince looked on with ferocious pleasure, uttered grunts of delight, and imitated all their movements with careless gestures, crying out constantly:

"Strike, strike hard!"

One fell down unconscious, and had to be carried out of the arena, covered with blood, while the rajah uttered a sigh of regret because it was over so soon.

He turned to me to know my opinion; I was disgusted, but I congratulated him loudly. He then gave orders that I was to be conducted to Couch-Mahal (the palace of pleasure), where I was to be lodged.

This bijou palace was situated at the extremity of the royal park, and one of its walls was built into the sacred lake of Vihara. It was square, with three rows of galleries with colonnades of most beautiful workmanship. At each angle there were light, lofty or low towers, standing either singly or in pairs: no two were alike, and they looked like flowers growing out of that graceful plant of Oriental architecture. All were surmounted by fantastic roofs, like coquettish ladies' caps.

In the middle of the edifice a large dome raised its round cupola like a large white woman's breast, beside a beautiful clock-tower.

The whole building was covered with sculpture from top to bottom, with those exquisite arabesques which delight the eye, of motionless processions of delicate figures whose attitudes and gestures in stone told the story of Indian manners and customs. [Pg 121]

The rooms were lighted by windows with dentelated arches, looking on to the gardens. On the marble floor were designs of graceful bouquets in onyx, lapis-lazuli, and agate.

I had scarcely had time to finish my toilet when Haribada, a court dignitary who was specially charged to communicate between the prince and me, announced his sovereign's visit.

The saffron-colored rajah appeared, again shook hands with me, and began to tell me a thousand different things, constantly asking me for my opinion, which I had great difficulty in giving him. Then he wished to show me the ruins of the former palace at the other extremity of the gardens.

It was a real forest of stones inhabited by a large tribe of apes. On our approach the males began to run along the walls, making the most hideous faces at us, while the females ran away, showing their bare rumps, and carrying off their young in their arms. The rajah shouted with laughter and pinched my arm to draw my attention, and to testify his own delight, and sat down in the midst of the ruins, while around us, squatting on the top of the walls, perching on every eminence, a

number of animals with white whiskers put out their tongues and shook their fists at us.

When he had seen enough of this, the yellow rajah rose and began to walk sedately on, keeping me always at his side, happy at having shown me such things on the very day of my arrival, and reminding me that a grand tiger-hunt was to take place the next day, in my honor.

[Pg 122]

I was present at it, at a second, a third, at ten, twenty in succession. We hunted all the animals which the country produces in turn; the panther, the bear, elephant, antelope, the hippopotamus and the crocodile—what do I know of, half the beasts in creation I should say. I was disgusted at seeing so much blood flow, and tired of this monotonous pleasure.

At length the prince's ardor abated and, at my urgent request, he left me a little leisure for work, and contented himself by loading me with costly presents. He sent me jewels, magnificent stuffs, and well-broken animals of all sorts, which Haribada presented to me with apparently as grave respect as if I had been the sun himself although he heartily despised me at the bottom of his heart.

Every day a procession of servants brought me in covered dishes, a portion of each course that was served at the royal table; every day he seemed to take an extreme pleasure in getting up some new entertainment for me—dances by the Bayaderes, jugglers, reviews of the troops, and I was obliged to pretend to be most delighted with it, so as not to hurt his feelings when he wished to show me his wonderful country in all its charm and all its splendor.

As soon as I was left alone for a few moments I either worked or went to see the monkeys, whose company pleased me a great deal better than that of their royal master.

One evening, however, on coming back from a walk, I found Haribada outside the gate of my palace. He told me in mysterious tones that a gift from the king was waiting for me in my room, and he said that his master begged me to excuse him for not having sooner thought of offering me that of which I had been deprived for such a long time.

[Pg 123]

After these obscure remarks the ambassador bowed and withdrew.

When I went in I saw six little girls standing against the wall motionless, side-by-side, like smelts on a skewer. The eldest was perhaps ten and the youngest eight years old. For the first moment I could not understand why this girls' school had taken up its abode in my rooms; then, however, I divined the prince's delicate attention: he had made me a present of a harem, and had chosen it very young from an excess of generosity. There, the more unripe the fruit is, in the higher estimation it is held.

For some time I remained confused and embarrassed, ashamed in the presence of these children, who looked at me with great grave eyes which seemed already to divine what I should want of them.

I did not know what to say to them; I felt inclined to send them back; but one cannot return the presents of a prince; it would have been a mortal insult. I was obliged, therefore, to keep them, and to install this troop of children in my rooms.

They stood motionless, looking at me, waiting for my orders, trying to read my thoughts in my eyes. Confound such a present! How dreadfully it was in my way. At last, thinking that I must be looking rather ridiculous, I asked the eldest her name.

"Châli," she replied.

This little creature, with her beautiful skin, which was slightly yellow, like old ivory, was a marvel, a perfect statue, with her face and its long and severe lines.

[Pg 124]

I then asked, in order to see what she would reply, and also, perhaps, to embarrass her:

"What have you come here for?"

She replied, in her soft, harmonious voice:

"I have come to be altogether at my lord's disposal, and to do whatever he wishes."

She was evidently quite resigned.

I put the same question to the youngest, who answered immediately in her shrill voice:

"I am here to do whatever you ask me, my master."

This one was like a little mouse, and was very taking, just as they all were, so I took her in my arms and kissed her. The others made a movement to go away, thinking, no doubt, that I had made my choice; but I ordered them to stay, and sitting down in the Indian fashion, I made them all sit round me, and began to tell them fairy-tales, for I spoke their language tolerably well.

They listened very attentively, and trembled, wringing their hands in agony. Poor little things, they were not thinking any longer of the reason why they were sent to me.

When I had finished my story, I called Latchmân, my confidential servant, and made him bring sweetmeats and cakes, of which they ate enough to make themselves ill; then, as I began to find the adventure rather funny, I organized games to amuse my wives.

One of these diversions had an enormous success. I made a bridge of my legs, and the six children ran underneath, the smallest beginning and the tallest always knocking against them a little, because she did not stoop enough. It made them shout with laughter, and these young voices sounding beneath the low vaults of my sumptuous palace, seemed to wake it up and to people it with childlike gaiety, filling it with life.

[Pg 125]

Next I took great interest in seeing to the sleeping apartments of my innocent concubines, and in the end I saw them safely locked up under the surveillance of four female servants, whom the prince had sent me at the same time in order to take care of my sultanas.

For a week I took the greatest pleasure in acting the papa towards these living dolls. We had capital games of *hide-and-peek*, *puss-in-the-corner*, &c., which gave them the greatest pleasure, for every day I taught them a new game, to their intense delight.

My house now seemed to be one large class, and my little friends, dressed in beautiful silk stuffs, and in materials embroidered with gold and silver, ran up and down the long galleries and the quiet rooms like little human animals.

At last, one evening, without my knowing exactly how it happened, the oldest of them, the one called Châli, and who looked so like an ivory statue, became my wife.

She was an adorable little creature, timid and gentle, who soon got to love me ardently, with some degree of shame, with hesitation as if afraid of European justice, with reserve and scruples, and yet with passionate tenderness. I cherished her as if I had been her father.

I beg your pardon, ladies; I am going rather too far.

The others continued to play in the palace, like a lot of happy kittens, and Châli never left me except when I went to the prince.

[Pg 126]

We passed delicious hours together in the ruins of the old castle, among the monkeys, who had become our friends.

She used to lie on my knees, and remain there, turning all sorts of things over in her little sphinx's head, or perhaps not thinking of anything, retaining that beautiful, charming, hereditary pose of that noble and dreamy people, the hieratic pose of the sacred statues.

In a large brass dish I had brought provisions, cakes, fruits. The apes came nearer and nearer, followed by their young ones, who were more timid; at last they sat down round us in a circle, without daring to come any nearer, waiting for me to distribute my delicacies. Then, almost invariably, a male more daring than the rest would come to me with outstretched hand, like a beggar, and I would give him something, which he would take to his wife. All the others immediately began to utter furious cries, cries of rage and jealousy; and I could not make the terrible racket cease except by throwing each one his share.

As I was very comfortable in the ruins I had my instruments brought there, so that I might be able to work. As soon, however, as they saw the copper fittings on my scientific instruments, the monkeys, no doubt taking them for some deadly engines, fled on all sides, uttering the most piercing cries.

I often also spent my evenings with Châli on one of the external galleries that looked on to the lake of Vihara. Without speaking we looked at the bright moon gliding over the sky and throwing a mantle of trembling silver over the water, and down there, on the further shore, the row of small pagodas like elegant mushrooms with their stalks in the water. Taking the thoughtful head of my little mistress between my hands, I printed a long, soft kiss on her polished brow, on her great eyes, which were full of the secret of that ancient and fabulous land, and on her calm lips which opened to my caress. I felt a confused, powerful, above all, a poetical, sensation, the sensation that I possessed a whole race in this little girl, that mysterious race from which all the others seem to have taken their origin.

[Pg 127]

The prince, however, continued to load me with presents. One day he sent me a very unexpected object, which excited a passionate admiration in Châli. It was merely one of those cardboard boxes covered with shells stuck on outside, and they can be bought at any European seaside resort for a penny or two. But there it was a jewel beyond price, and no doubt was the first that had found its way into the kingdom. I put it on a table and left it there, wondering at the value which was set upon this trumpery article out of a bazaar.

But Châli never got tired of looking at it, of admiring it ecstatically. From time to time she would say to me, "May I touch it?" And when I had given her permission she raised the lid, closed it again with the greatest precaution, touched the shells very gently, and the contact seemed to give her real physical pleasure.

However, I had finished my work, and it was time for me to return. I was a long time in making up my mind, kept back by my tenderness for my little friend, but at last I was obliged to fix the day of my departure.

The prince got up fresh hunting excursions and fresh wrestling matches, and after a fortnight of these pleasures I declared that I could stay no longer, and he gave me my liberty.

[Pg 128]

My farewell from Châli was heartrending. She wept, lying beside me, with her head on my breast, shaken with sobs. I did not know how to console her; my kisses were no good.

All at once an idea struck me, and getting up I went and got the shell-box, and putting it into her hands, I said, "That is for you; it is yours."

Then I saw her smile at first. Her whole face was lighted up with internal joy, with that profound joy when impossible dreams are suddenly realized, and she embraced me ardently.

All the same, she wept bitterly when I bade her a last farewell.

I gave paternal kisses and cakes to all the rest of my wives, and then I started.

## II

Two years had passed when my duties again called me to Bombay, and, because I knew the country and the language well, I was left there to undertake another mission.

I finished what I had to do as quickly as possible, and as I had a considerable amount of spare time on my hands I determined to go and see my friend the King of Ganhard and my dear little Châli once more, though I expected to find her much changed.

The rajah received me with every demonstration of pleasure, and hardly left me for a moment during the first day of my visit. At night, however, when I was alone, I sent for Haribada, and after several misleading questions I said to him:

[Pg 129]

"Do you know what has become of little Châli, whom the rajah gave me?"

He immediately assumed a sad and troubled look, and said, in evident embarrassment:

"We had better not speak of her."

"Why? She was a dear little woman."

"She turned out badly, Sir."

"What—Châli? What has become of her? Where is she?"

"I mean to say that she came to a bad end."

"A bad end! Is she dead?"

"Yes. She committed a very dreadful action."

I was very much distressed. I felt my heart beat, and my breast was oppressed with grief, and insisted on knowing what she had done and what had happened to her.

The man became more and more embarrassed, and murmured, "You had better not ask about it."

"But I want to know."

"She stole—"

"Who—Châli? What did she steal?"

"Something that belonged to you."

"To me? What do you mean?"

"The day you left she stole that little box which the prince had given you; it was found in her hands."

"What box are you talking about?"

"The box covered with shells."

"But I gave it to her."

The Indian looked at me with stupefaction, then replied: "Well, she declared with the most sacred oaths that you had given it to her, but nobody could believe that you could have given a king's present to a slave, and so the rajah had her punished."

[Pg 130]

"How was she punished? What was done to her?"

"She was tied up in a sack, and thrown into the lake from this window, from the window of the room in which we are, where she had committed the theft."

I felt the most terrible grief that I ever experienced, and I made a sign to Haribada to go away, so that he might not see my tears; and I spent the night on the gallery that looked on to the lake, on the gallery where I had so often held the poor child on my knees.

I pictured to myself her pretty little body lying decomposed in a sack in the dark waters beneath me, which we had so often looked at together formerly.

The next day I left again, in spite of the rajah's entreaties and evident vexation; and I now still feel as if I had never loved any woman but Châli.



Mme. Oreille was a very economical woman; she thoroughly knew the value of a halfpenny, and possessed a whole storehouse of strict principles with regard to the multiplication of money, so that her cook found the greatest difficulty in making what the servants call their *market-penny*, while her husband was hardly allowed any pocket-money at all. They were, however, very comfortably off, and had no children; but it really pained Mme. Oreille to see any money spent; it was like tearing at her heartstrings when she had to take any of those nice crown-pieces out of her pocket; and whenever she had to spend anything, no matter how necessary it was, she slept badly the next night.

Oreille was continually saying to his wife:

"You really might be more liberal, as we have no children, and never spend our income."

"You don't know what may happen," she used to reply. "It is better to have too much than too little."

She was a little woman of about forty, very active, rather hasty, wrinkled, very neat and tidy, and with a very short temper.

Her husband very often used to complain of all the privations she made him endure; some of them were particularly painful to him, as they touched his vanity.

He was one of the upper clerks in the War Office, and only kept on there in obedience to his wife's wish, so as to increase their income, which they did not nearly spend.

[Pg 132]

For two years he had always come to the office with the same old patched umbrella, to the great amusement of his fellow-clerks. At last he got tired of their jokes, and insisted upon his wife buying him a new one. She bought one for eight francs and a half, one of those cheap articles which large houses sell as an advertisement. When the others in the office saw the article, which was being sold in Paris by the thousands, they began their jokes again, and Oreille had a dreadful time of it with them, and they even made a song about it, which he heard from morning till night all over the immense building.

Oreille was very angry, and peremptorily told his wife to get him a new one, a good silk one, for twenty francs, and to bring him the bill, so that he might see that it was all right.

She bought him one for eighteen francs, and said, getting red with anger as she gave it to her husband:

"This will last you for five years at least."

Oreille felt quite triumphant, and obtained a small ovation at the office with his new acquisition.

When he went home in the evening, his wife said to him, looking at the umbrella uneasily:

"You should not leave it fastened up with the elastic; it will very likely cut the silk. You must take care of it, for I shall not buy you a new one in a hurry."

She took it, unfastened it, and remained dumbfounded with astonishment and rage; in the middle of the silk there was a hole as big as a sixpenny-piece; it had been made with the end of a cigar.

[Pg 133]

"What is that?" she screamed.

Her husband replied quietly, without looking at it: "What is it? What do you mean?"

She was choking with rage, and could hardly get out a word.

"You—you—have burnt—your umbrella! Why—you must be—mad! Do you wish to ruin us outright?"

He turned round, and felt that he was growing pale.

"What are you talking about?"

"I say that you have burnt your umbrella. Just look here—"

And rushing at him as if she were going to beat him, she violently thrust the little circular burnt hole under his nose.

He was so utterly struck dumb at the sight of it that he could only stammer out:

"What—what is it? How should I know? I have done nothing, I will swear. I don't know what is the matter with the umbrella."

"You have been playing tricks with it at the office; you have been playing the fool and opening it, to show it off," she screamed.

"I only opened it once, to let them see what a nice one it was, that is all, I declare."

But she shook with rage, and got up one of those conjugal scenes which make a peaceable man dread the domestic hearth more than a battlefield where bullets are raining.

She mended it with a piece of silk cut out of the old umbrella, which was of a different color, and the next day Oreille went off very humbly with the mended article in his hand. He put it into a cupboard, and thought no more about it than one thinks of some unpleasant recollection.

[Pg 134]

But he had scarcely got home that evening when his wife took the umbrella from him, opened it, and nearly had a fit when she saw what had befallen it, for the disaster was irreparable. It was covered with small holes, which, evidently, proceeded from burns, just as if someone had emptied the ashes from a lighted pipe on to it. It was done for utterly, irreparably.

She looked at it without a word, in too great a passion to be able to say anything. He also, when he saw the damage, remained almost struck stupid, in a state of frightened consternation.

They looked at each other, then he looked on to the floor; and the next moment she threw the useless article at his head, screaming out in a transport of the most violent rage, for she had recovered her voice by that time:

"Oh! you brute! you brute! You did it on purpose, but I will pay you out for it. You shall not have another."

And then the scene began again, and after the storm had raged for an hour, he, at last, was enabled to explain himself. He declared that he could not understand it at all, and that it could only proceed from malice or from vengeance.

A ring at the bell saved him; it was a friend whom they were expecting for dinner.

Mme. Oreille submitted the case to him. As for buying a new umbrella, that was out of the question; her husband should not have another.

The friend very sensibly said that in that case his clothes would be spoilt, and they were certainly worth more than the umbrella. But the little woman, who was still in a rage, replied:

[Pg 135]

"Very well, then, when it rains he may have the kitchen umbrella, for I will not give him a new silk one."

Oreille utterly rebelled at such an idea.

"All right," he said; "then I shall resign my post. I am not going to the office with the kitchen umbrella."

The friend interposed:

"Have this one re-covered; it will not cost much."

But Mme. Oreille, being in the temper that she was, said:

"It will cost at least eight francs to re-cover it. Eight and eighteen are twenty-six. Just fancy, twenty-six francs for an umbrella! It is utter madness!"

The friend, who was only a poor man of the middle-classes, had an inspiration:

"Make your Fire Assurance pay for it. The companies pay for all articles that are burnt, as long as the damage has been done in your own house."

On hearing this advice the little woman calmed down immediately, and then, after a moment's reflection, she said to her husband:

"To-morrow, before going to your office, you will go to the *Maternelle* Assurance Company, show them the state your umbrella is in, and make them pay for the damage."

M. Oreille fairly jumped, he was so startled at the proposal.

"I would not do it for my life! It is eighteen francs lost that is all. It will not ruin us."

[Pg 136]

The next morning he took a walking-stick when he went out, and, luckily, it was a fine day.

Left at home alone, Mme. Oreille could not get over the loss of her eighteen francs by any means. She had put the umbrella on the dining-room table, and she looked at it without being able to come to any determination.

Every moment she thought of the Assurance Company, but she did not dare to encounter the quizzical looks of the gentlemen who might receive her, for she was very timid before people, and grew red at a mere nothing, and was embarrassed when she had to speak to strangers.

But the regret at the loss of the eighteen francs pained her as if she had been wounded. She tried not to think of it any more, and yet every moment the recollection of the loss struck her painfully. What was she to do, however? Time went on, and she could not decide; but suddenly, like all cowards, on becoming determined, she made up her mind.

"I will go, and we will see what will happen."

But first of all she was obliged to prepare the umbrella so that the disaster might be complete, and the reason of it quite evident. She took a match from the mantelpiece, and between the ribs she burnt a hole as big as the palm of her hand; then she delicately rolled it up, fastened it with the elastic band, put on her bonnet and shawl, and went quickly towards the Rue de Rivoli, where the Assurance Office was.

But the nearer she got the slower she walked. What was she going to say, and what reply would she get?

She looked at the numbers of the houses; there were still twenty-eight. That was all right, so she had time to consider, and she walked slower and slower. Suddenly she saw a door on which was a large brass plate with "*La Maternelle* Fire Assurance Office" engraved on it. Already! She waited for a moment, for she felt nervous and almost ashamed; then she went past, came back, went past again, and came back again.

[Pg 137]

At last she said to herself:

"I must go in, however, so I may as well do it sooner as later."

She could not help noticing, however, how her heart beat as she entered.

She went into an enormous room with grated wicket openings all round, and a man behind each of them, and as a gentleman, carrying a number of papers, passed her, she stopped him and said, timidly:

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur, but can you tell me where I must apply for payment for anything that has been accidentally burnt?"

He replied in a sonorous voice:

"The first door on the left; that is the department you want."

This frightened her still more, and she felt inclined to run away, to make no claim, to sacrifice her eighteen francs. But the idea of that sum revived her courage, and she went upstairs, out of breath, stopping at almost every other step.

She knocked at a door which she saw on the first landing, and a clear voice said, in answer:

"Come in!"

She obeyed mechanically, and found herself in a large room where three solemn gentlemen, all with a decoration in their buttonholes, were standing talking.

[Pg 138]

One of them asked her: "What do you want, Madame?"

She could hardly get out her words, but stammered: "I have come—I have come on account of an accident, something—"

He very politely pointed out a seat to her.

"If you will kindly sit down I will attend to you in a moment."

And, returning to the other two, he went on with the conversation.

"The Company, gentlemen, does not consider that it is under any obligation to you for more than four hundred thousand francs, and we can pay no attention to your claim to the further sum of a hundred thousand, which you wish to make us pay. Besides that, the surveyor's valuation—"

One of the others interrupted him:

"That is quite enough, Monsieur; the Law Courts will decide between us, and we have nothing further to do than to take your leave." And they went out after mutual ceremonious bows.

Oh! If she could only have gone away with them, how gladly she would have done it; she would have run away and given up everything. But it was too late, for the gentleman came back, and said, bowing:

"What can I do for you, Madame?"

She could scarcely speak, but at last she managed to say:

"I have come—for this."

The manager looked at the object which she held out to him in mute astonishment.

With trembling fingers she tried to undo the elastic, and succeeded, after several attempts, and hastily opened the damaged remains of the umbrella.

[Pg 139]

"It looks to me to be in a very bad state of health," he said, compassionately.

"It cost me twenty francs," she said, with some hesitation.

He seemed astonished. "Really! As much as that?"

"Yes, it was a capital article, and I wanted you to see the state it is in."

"Very well, I see; very well. But I really do not understand what it can have to do with me."

She began to feel uncomfortable; perhaps this Company did not pay for such small articles, and she said:

"But—it is burnt."

He could not deny it.

"I see that very well," he replied.

She remained open-mouthed, not knowing what to say next; then suddenly forgetting that she had left out the main thing, she said hastily:

"I am Mme. Oreille; we are assured in *La Maternelle*, and I have come to claim the value of this damage."

"I only want you to have it re-covered," she added quickly, fearing a positive refusal.

The manager was rather embarrassed, and said:

"But, really, Madame, we do not sell umbrellas; we cannot undertake such kinds of repairs."

The little woman felt her courage reviving; she was not going to give up without a struggle; she was not even afraid any more, and said:

"I only want you to pay me the cost of repairing it; I can quite well get it done myself."

[Pg 140]

The gentleman seemed rather confused.

"Really, Madame, it is such a very small matter! We are never asked to give compensation for such trivial losses. You must allow that we cannot make good pocket-handkerchiefs, gloves, brooms, slippers, all the small articles which are every day exposed to the chances of being burnt."

She got red, and felt inclined to fly into a rage.

"But, Monsieur, last December one of our chimneys caught fire, and caused at least five hundred francs' damage; M. Oreille made no claim on the Company, and so it is only just that it should pay for my umbrella now."

The manager, guessing that she was telling a lie, said, with a smile.

"You must acknowledge, Madame, that it is very surprising that M. Oreille should have asked no compensation for damages amounting to five hundred francs, and should now claim five or six francs for mending an umbrella."

She was not the least put out, and replied:

"I beg pardon, Monsieur, the five hundred francs affected M. Oreille's pocket, whereas this damage, amounting to eighteen francs, concerns Mme. Oreille's pocket only, which is a totally different matter."

As he saw that he had no chance of getting rid of her, and that he would only be wasting his time, he said, resignedly:

"Will you kindly tell me how the damage was done?"

She felt that she had won the victory, and said:

"This is how it happened, Monsieur: In our hall there is a bronze stick-and umbrella-stand, and the other day, when I came in, I put my umbrella into it. I must tell you that just above there is a shelf for the candlesticks and matches. I put out my hand, took three or four matches, and struck one, but it missed fire, so I struck another, which ignited, but went out immediately, and a third did the same."

[Pg 141]

The manager interrupted her, to make a joke.

"I suppose they were Government matches, then?"

She did not understand him, and went on:

"Very likely. At any rate, the fourth caught fire, and I lit my candle, and went into my room to go to bed; but in a quarter-of-an-hour I fancied that I smelt something burning, and I have always been terribly afraid of fire. If ever we have an accident it will not be my fault, I assure you. I am terribly nervous since our chimney was on fire, as I told you; so I got up, and hunted about everywhere, sniffing like a dog after game, and at last I noticed that my umbrella was burning. Most likely a match had fallen between the folds and burnt it. You can see how it has damaged it."

The manager had taken his clue, and asked her:

"What do you estimate the damage at?"

She did not know what to say, as she was not certain what amount to put on it, but at last she replied:

"Perhaps you had better get it done yourself. I will leave it to you."

He, however, naturally refused.

"No, Madame, I cannot do that. Tell me the amount of your claim, that is all I want to know."

"Well!—I think that—Look here, Monsieur, I do not want to make any money out of you, so I will tell you what we will do. I will take my umbrella to the maker, who will re-cover it in good, durable silk, and I will bring the bill to you. Will that suit you, Monsieur?"

[Pg 142]

"Perfectly, Madame; we will settle it so. Here is a note for the cashier, who will repay you whatever it costs you."

He gave Mme. Oreille a slip of paper, who took it, got up and went out, thanking him, for she was in a hurry to escape lest he should change his mind.

She went briskly through the streets, looking out for a really good umbrella-maker, and when she found a shop which appeared to be a first class one, she went in, and said, confidently:

"I want this umbrella recovered in silk, good silk. Use the very best and strongest you have; I don't mind what it costs."

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## MY UNCLE SOSTHENES

[Pg 143]

My Uncle Sosthenes was a Freethinker, like so many others are, from pure stupidity; people are very often religious in the same way. The mere sight of a priest threw him into a violent rage; he shook his fist and grimaced at him, and touched a piece of iron when the priest's back was turned, forgetting that the latter action showed a belief after all, the belief in the evil eye. Now when beliefs are unreasonable one should have all or none at all. I myself am a Freethinker; I revolt at all the dogmas which have invented the fear of death, but I feel no anger towards places of worship, be they Catholic, Apostolic, Roman, Protestant, Greek, Russian, Buddhist, Jewish, or Mohammedan. I have a peculiar manner of looking at them and explaining them. A place of worship represents the homage paid by man to THE UNKNOWN. The more extended our thoughts and our views become, the more *the unknown* diminishes, and the more places of worship will decay. I, however, in the place of church furniture, in the place of pulpits, reading desks, altars, and so on, would fit them up with telescopes, microscopes, and electrical machines; that is all.

My uncle and I differed on nearly every point. He was a patriot, while I was not, for after all patriotism is a kind of religion; it is the egg from which wars are hatched.

My uncle was a Freemason, and I used to declare that they are stupider than old women devotees. That is my opinion, and I maintain it; if we must have any religion at all the old one is good enough for me.

[Pg 144]

What is their object? Mutual help to be obtained by tickling the palms of each other's hands. I see no harm in it, for they put into practice the Christian precept: "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you." The only difference consists in the tickling, but it does not seem worth while to make such a fuss about lending a poor devil half-a-crown.

To all my arguments my uncle's reply used to be:

"We are raising up a religion against a religion; Freethought will kill clericalism. Freemasonry is the headquarters of those who are demolishing all deities."

"Very well, my dear uncle," I would reply (in my heart I felt inclined to say, "You old idiot!"); "it is just that which I am blaming you for. Instead of destroying, you are organizing competition; it is only a case of lowering the prices. And then, if you only admitted Freethinkers among you I could understand it, but you admit anybody. You have a number of Catholics among you, even the leaders of the party. Pius IX. is said to have been one of you before he became Pope. If you call a society with such an organization a bulwark against clericalism, I think it is an extremely weak one."

"My dear boy," my uncle would reply, with a wink, "our most formidable actions are political; slowly and surely we are everywhere undermining the monarchical spirit."

Then I broke out: "Yes, you are very clever! If you tell me that Freemasonry is an election-machine, I will grant it you. I will never deny that it is used as a machine to control stove for candidates of all shades; if you say that it is only used to hoodwink people, to drill them to go to the voting-urn as soldiers are sent under fire, I agree with you; if you declare that it is indispensable to all political ambitions because it changes all its members into electoral agents, I should say to you, 'That is as clear as the sun.' But when you tell me that it serves to undermine the monarchical spirit, I can only laugh in your face."

[Pg 145]

"Just consider that vast and democratic association which had Prince Napoleon for its Grand Master under the Empire; which has the Crown Prince for its Grand Master in Germany, the Czar's brother in Russia, and to which the Prince of Wales and King Humbert and nearly all the royalists of the globe belong."

"You are quite right," my uncle said; "but all these persons are serving our projects without guessing it."

I felt inclined to tell him he was talking a pack of nonsense.

It was, however, indeed a sight to see my uncle when he had a Freemason to dinner.

On meeting they shook hands in a manner that was irresistibly funny; one could see that they were going through a series of secret mysterious pressures. When I wished to put my uncle in a rage, I had only to tell him that dogs also have a manner which savors very much of Freemasonry, when they greet one another on meeting.

Then my uncle would take his friend into a corner to tell him something important, and at dinner they had a peculiar way of looking at each other, and of drinking to each other, in a manner as if to say: "We know all about it, don't we?"

[Pg 146]

And to think that there are millions on the face of the globe who are amused at such monkey tricks! I would sooner be a Jesuit.

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Now in our town there really was an old Jesuit who was my uncle's detestation. Every time he met him, or if he only saw him at a distance, he used to say: "Go on, you toad!" And then, taking my arm, he would whisper to me:

"Look here, that fellow will play me a trick some day or other, I feel sure of it."

My uncle spoke quite truly, and this was how it happened and through my fault also.

It was close on Holy Week, and my uncle made up his mind to give a dinner on Good Friday, a real dinner with his favorite chitterlings and blackpuddings. I resisted as much as I could, and said:

"I shall eat meat on that day, but at home, quite by myself. Your *manifestation*, as you call it, is an idiotic idea. Why should you manifest? What does it matter to you if people do not eat any meat?"

But my uncle would not be persuaded. He asked three of his friends to dine with him at one of the best restaurants in the town, and as he was going to pay the bill, I had certainly, after all, no scruples about *manifesting*.

At four o'clock we took a conspicuous place in the most frequented restaurant in the town, and my uncle ordered dinner in a loud voice for six o'clock.

We sat down punctually, and at ten o'clock he had not finished yet. Five of us had drunk eighteen bottles of fine still wines, and four of champagne. Then my uncle proposed what he was in the habit of calling: "The archbishop's turn." Each man put six small glasses in front of him, each of them filled with a different liquor, and then they had all to be emptied at one gulp, one after another, while one of the waiters counted twenty. It was very stupid, but my uncle thought it was very suitable to the occasion.

[Pg 147]

At eleven o'clock he was as drunk as a fly. So we had to take him home in a cab and put him to bed, and one could easily foresee that his anti-clerical demonstration would end in a terrible fit of indigestion.

As I was going back to my lodgings, being rather drunk myself, with a cheerful Machiavelian drunkenness which quite satisfied all my instincts of skepticism, an idea struck me.

I arranged my necktie, put on a look of great distress, and went and rang loudly at the old Jesuit's door. As he was deaf he made me wait a long while, but at length he appeared at his window in a cotton nightcap and asked what I wanted.

I shouted out at the top of my voice:

"Make haste, reverend Sir, and open the door; a poor, despairing, sick man is in need of your spiritual ministrations."

The good, kind man put on his trousers as quickly as he could, and came down without his cassock. I told him in a breathless voice that my uncle, the Freethinker, had been taken suddenly ill, and fearing it was going to be something serious he had been seized with a sudden fear of death, and wished to see him and talk to him; to have his advice and comfort, to make his peace with the Church, and to confess, so as to be able to cross the dreaded threshold at peace with himself; and I added in a mocking tone:

[Pg 148]

"At any rate he wishes it, and if it does him no good it can do him no harm."

The old Jesuit, who was startled, delighted, and almost trembling, said to me:

"Wait a moment, my son, I will come with you;" but I replied: "Pardon me, reverend Father, if I do not go with you; but my convictions will not allow me to do so. I even refused to come and fetch you; so I beg you not to say that you have seen me, but to declare that you had a presentiment—a sort of revelation of his illness."

The priest consented, and went off quickly, knocked at my uncle's door, and was soon let in; and I saw the black cassock disappear within that stronghold of Freethought.

I hid under a neighboring gateway to wait for events. Had he been well, my uncle would have half-murdered the Jesuit, but I knew that he would scarcely be able to move an arm, and I asked

myself, gleefully, what sort of a scene would take place between these antagonists, what explanation would be given? and what would be the issue of the situation which my uncle's indignation would render more tragic still?

I laughed till I had to hold my sides, and said to myself, half aloud: "Oh! what a joke, what a joke!"

Meanwhile it was getting very cold, and I noticed that the Jesuit stayed a long time, and thought: "They are having an explanation, I suppose."

One, two, three hours passed, and still the reverend Father did not come out. What had happened? Had my uncle died in a fit when he saw him, or had he killed the cassocked gentleman? Perhaps they had mutually devoured each other? This last supposition appeared very unlikely, for I fancied that my uncle was quite incapable of swallowing a grain more nourishment at that moment.

[Pg 149]

At last the day broke.

I was very uneasy, and, not venturing to go into the house myself, I went to one of my friends who lived opposite. I knocked him up, explained matters to him, much to his amusement and astonishment, and took possession of his window.

At nine o'clock he relieved me, and I got a little sleep. At two o'clock I, in my turn, replaced him. We were utterly astonished.

At six o'clock the Jesuit left, with a very happy and satisfied look on his face, and we saw him go away with a quiet step.

Then, timid and ashamed, I went and knocked at my uncle's door; and when the servant opened it I did not dare to ask her any questions, but went upstairs without saying a word.

My uncle was lying pale, exhausted, with weary, sorrowful eyes and heavy arms, on his bed. A little religious picture was fastened to one of the bed-curtains with a pin.

"Why, uncle," I said, "you in bed still? Are you not well?"

He replied in a feeble voice:

"Oh! my dear boy, I have been very ill, nearly dead."

"How was that, uncle?"

"I don't know; it was most surprising. But, what is stranger still is, that the Jesuit priest who has just left—you know, that excellent man whom I have made such fun of—had a divine revelation of my state, and came to see me."

[Pg 150]

I was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh, and with difficulty said: "Oh, really!"

"Yes, he came. He heard a Voice telling him to get up and come to me, because I was going to die. It was a revelation."

I pretended to sneeze, so as not to burst out laughing; I felt inclined to roll on the ground with amusement.

In about a minute I managed to say, indignantly: "And you received him, uncle, you? You, a Freethinker, a Freemason? You did not have him thrown out-of-doors?"

He seemed confused, and stammered:

"Listen a moment, it is so astonishing—so astonishing and providential! He also spoke to me about my father; it seems he knew him formerly."

"Your father, uncle? But that is no reason for receiving a Jesuit."

"I know that, but I was very ill, and he looked after me most devotedly all night long. He was perfect; no doubt he saved my life; those men are all a little bit of a doctor."

"Oh! he looked after you all night? But you said just now that he had only been gone a very short time."

"That is quite true; I kept him to breakfast after all his kindness. He had it at a table by my bedside while I drank a cup of tea."

"And he ate meat?"

My uncle looked vexed, as if I had said something very much out of place, and then added:

"Don't joke, Gaston; such things are out of place at times. He has shown me more devotion than many a relation would have done, and I expect to have his convictions respected."

[Pg 151]

This rather upset me, but I answered, nevertheless: "Very well, uncle; and what did you do after breakfast?"

"We played a game of bezique, and then he repeated his breviary while I read a little book which he happened to have in his pocket, and which was not by any means badly written."

"A religious book, uncle?"

"Yes, and no, or rather—no. It is the history of their missions in Central Africa, and is rather a book of travels and adventures. What these men have done is very grand."

I began to feel that matters were going badly, so I got up. "Well, good-bye, uncle," I said, "I see you are going to leave Freemasonry for religion; you are a renegade."

He was still rather confused, and stammered:

"Well, but religion is a sort of Freemasonry."

"When is your Jesuit coming back?" I asked.

"I don't—I don't know exactly; to-morrow, perhaps; but it is not certain."

I went out, altogether overwhelmed.

My joke turned out very badly for me! My uncle became radically converted, and if that had been all I should not have cared so much. Clerical or Freemason, to me it is all the same; six of one and half-a-dozen of the other; but the worst of it is that he has just made his will—yes, made his will—and he has disinherited me in favor of that rascally Jesuit!

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## HE?

[Pg 152]

My dear friend, you cannot understand it by any possible means, you say, and I perfectly believe you. You think I am going mad? It may be so, but not for the reasons which you suppose.

Yes, I am going to get married, and I will give you what has led me to take that step.

My ideas and my convictions have not changed at all. I look upon all legalized cohabitation as utterly stupid, for I am certain that nine husbands out of ten are cuckolds; and they get no more than their deserts for having been idiotic enough to fetter their lives, and renounce their freedom in love, the only happy and good thing in the world, and for having clipped the wings of fancy, which continually drives us on towards all women, &c., &c., &c. You know what I mean. More than ever I feel that I am incapable of loving one woman alone, because I shall always adore all the others too much. I should like to have a thousand arms, a thousand mouths, and a thousand —*temperaments*, to be able to strain an army of these charming creatures in my embrace at the same moment.

And yet I am going to get married!

I may add that I know very little of the girl who is going to become my wife to-morrow; I have only seen her four or five times. I know that there is nothing displeasing about her, and that is enough for my purpose. She is small, fair, and stout; so of course the day after to-morrow I shall ardently wish for a tall, dark, thin woman.

[Pg 153]

She is not rich, and belongs to the middle-classes. She is a girl such as you may find by the gross, well adapted for matrimony, without any apparent faults, and with no particularly striking qualities. People say of her:

"Mlle. Lajolle is a very nice girl," and to-morrow they will say: "What a very nice woman Madame Raymon is." She belongs, in a word, to that immense number of girls whom one is glad to have for one's wife till the moment comes, when one discovers that one happens to prefer all the other women to that particular woman whom one has married.

"Well," you will say to me, "what on earth did you get married for?"

I hardly like to tell you the strange and seemingly improbable reason that urged me on to this senseless act; the fact, however, is that I am frightened of being alone!

I don't know how to tell you or to make you understand me, but my state of mind is so wretched that you will pity me and despise me.

I do not want to be alone any longer at night; I want to feel that there is someone close to me, touching me, a being who can speak and say something, no matter what it be.

I wish to be able to awaken somebody by my side, so that I may be able to ask some sudden question, a stupid question even if I feel inclined, so that I may hear a human voice, and feel that there is some waking soul close to me, someone whose reason is at work; so that when I hastily light the candle I may see some human face by my side—because—because—I am ashamed to confess it—because I am afraid of being alone.

[Pg 154]

Oh! you don't understand me yet.

I am not afraid of any danger; if a man were to come into the room I should kill him without trembling. I am not afraid of ghosts, nor do I believe in the supernatural. I am not afraid of dead people, for I believe in the total annihilation of every being that disappears from the face of this earth.



Well,—yes, well, it must be told; I am afraid of myself, afraid of that horrible sensation of incomprehensible fear.

You may laugh, if you like. It is terrible, and I cannot get over it. I am afraid of the walls, of the furniture, of the familiar objects, which are animated, as far as I am concerned, by a kind of animal life. Above all, I am afraid of my own dreadful thoughts, of my reason, which seems as if it were about to leave me, driven away by a mysterious and invisible agony.

At first I feel a vague uneasiness in my mind which causes a cold shiver to run all over me. I look round, and of course nothing is to be seen, and I wish there were something there, no matter what, as long as it were something tangible: I am frightened, merely because I cannot understand my own terror.

If I speak, I am afraid of my own voice. If I walk, I am afraid of I know not what, behind the door, behind the curtains, in the cupboard, or under my bed, and yet all the time I know there is nothing anywhere, and I turn round suddenly because I am afraid of what is behind me, although there is nothing there, and I know it.

I get agitated; I feel that my fear increases, and so I shut myself up in my own room, get into bed, and hide under the clothes, and there, cowering down rolled into a ball, I close my eyes in despair, and remain thus for an indefinite time, remembering that my candle is alight on the table by my bedside, and that I ought to put it out, and yet—I dare not do it!

[Pg 155]

It is very terrible, is it not, to be like that?

Formerly I felt nothing of all that; I came home quite comfortably, and went up and down in my rooms without anything disturbing my calmness of mind. Had anyone told me that I should be attacked by a malady—for I can call it nothing else—of most improbable fear, such a stupid and terrible malady as it is, I should have laughed outright. I was certainly never afraid of opening the door in the dark; I went to bed slowly without locking it, and never got up in the middle of the night to make sure that everything was firmly closed.

It began last year in a very strange manner, on a damp autumn evening. When my servant had left the room, after I had dined, I asked myself what I was going to do. I walked up and down my room for some time, feeling tired without any reason for it, unable to work, and even without energy to read. A fine rain was falling, and I felt unhappy, a prey to one of those fits of despondency, without any apparent cause which makes us feel inclined to cry, or to talk, no matter to whom, so as to shake off our depressing thoughts.

I felt that I was alone, and my rooms seemed to me to be more empty than they had ever done before, while I was surrounded by a sensation of infinite and overwhelming solitude. What was I to do? I sat down, but then a kind of nervous impatience agitated my legs, so I got up and began to walk about again. I was rather feverish, for my hands, which I had clasped behind me, as one often does when walking slowly, almost seemed to burn one another. Then suddenly a cold shiver ran down my back, and I thought the damp air might have penetrated into my room, so I lit the fire for the first time that year, and sat down again and looked at the flames. But soon I felt that I could not possibly remain quiet, and so I got up again and determined to go out, to pull myself together, and to find a friend to bear me company.

[Pg 156]

I could not find anyone, so I went on to the boulevards to try and meet some acquaintance or other there.

It was wretched everywhere, and the wet pavement glistened in the gaslight, while the oppressive warmth of the almost impalpable rain lay heavily over the streets and seemed to obscure the light from the lamps.

I went on slowly, saying to myself, "I shall not find a soul to talk to."

I glanced into several cafés, from the Madeleine as far as the Faubourg Poissonnière, and saw many unhappy-looking individuals sitting at the tables, who did not seem even to have enough energy left to finish the refreshments they had ordered.

For a long time I wandered aimlessly up and down, and about midnight I started off for home; I was very calm and very tired. My concierge<sup>[9]</sup> opened the door at once, which was quite unusual for him, and I thought that another lodger had no doubt just come in.

When I go out I always double-lock the door of my room, and I found it merely closed, which surprised me; but I supposed that some letters had been brought up for me in the course of the evening.

[Pg 157]

I went in, and found my fire still burning, so that it lighted up the room a little, and, in the act of taking up a candle, I noticed somebody sitting in my armchair by the fire, warming his feet, with his back towards me.

I was not in the slightest degree frightened. I thought very naturally that some friend or other had come to see me. No doubt the porter, whom I had told when I went out, had lent him his own key. In a moment I remembered all the circumstances of my return, how the street door had been opened immediately, and that my own door was only latched, and not locked.

I could see nothing of my friend but his head, and he had evidently gone to sleep while waiting for me, so I went up to him to rouse him. I saw him quite clearly; his right arm was hanging down

and his legs were crossed, while his head, which was somewhat inclined to the left of the armchair, seemed to indicate that he was asleep. "Who can it be?" I asked myself. I could not see clearly, as the room was rather dark, so I put out my hand to touch him on the shoulder, and it came in contact with the back of the chair. There was nobody there; the seat was empty.

I fairly jumped with fright. For a moment I drew back as if some terrible danger had suddenly appeared in my way; then I turned round again, impelled by some imperious desire of looking at the armchair again, and I remained standing upright, panting with fear, so upset that I could not collect my thoughts, and ready to drop.

But I am a cool man, and soon recovered myself. I thought: "It is a mere hallucination, that is all," and I immediately began to reflect about this phenomenon. Thoughts fly very quickly at such moments.

[Pg 158]

I had been suffering from a hallucination, that was an incontestable fact. My mind had been perfectly lucid and had acted regularly and logically, so there was nothing the matter with the brain. It was only my eyes that had been deceived; they had had a vision, one of those visions which lead simple folk to believe in miracles. It was a nervous accident to the optical apparatus, nothing more; the eyes were rather congested, perhaps.

I lit my candle, and when I stooped down to the fire in so doing, I noticed that I was trembling, and I raised myself up with a jump, as if somebody had touched me from behind.

I was certainly not by any means quiet.

I walked up and down a little, and hummed a tune or two.

Then I double-locked my door, and felt rather reassured; now, at any rate, nobody could come in.

I sat down again, and thought over my adventure for a long time; then I went to bed, and blew out my light.

For some minutes all went well; I lay quietly on my back, but then an irresistible desire seized me to look round the room, and I turned on to my side.

My fire was nearly out, and the few glowing embers threw a faint light on to the floor by the chair, where I fancied I saw the man sitting again.

I quickly struck a match, but I had been mistaken, for there was nothing there; I got up, however, and hid the chair behind my bed, and tried to get to sleep as the room was now dark, but I had not forgotten myself for more than five minutes when in my dream I saw all the scene which I had witnessed as clearly as if it were reality. I woke up with a start, and having lit the candle, I sat up in bed, without venturing even to try and go to sleep again.

[Pg 159]

Twice, however, sleep overcame me for a few moments in spite of myself, and twice I saw the same thing again, till I fancied I was going mad; when day broke, however, I thought that I was cured, and slept peacefully till noon.

It was all past and over. I had been feverish, had had the nightmare; I don't know what. I had been ill, in a word, but yet I thought that I was a great fool.

I enjoyed myself thoroughly that evening; I went and dined at a restaurant; afterwards I went to the theater, and then started home. But as I got near the house I was seized by a strange feeling of uneasiness once more; I was afraid of *seeing* him again. I was not afraid of him, not afraid of his presence, in which I did not believe; but I was afraid of being deceived again; I was afraid of some fresh hallucination, afraid lest fear should take possession of me.

Far more than an hour I wandered up and down the pavement; then I thought that I was really too foolish, and at last I returned home. I panted so that I could scarcely get upstairs, and I remained standing outside my door for more than ten minutes; then suddenly I took courage, and screwed myself together. I inserted my key into the lock, and went in with a candle in my hand. I kicked open my half-open bedroom door, and gave a frightened look towards the fireplace; there was nothing there. A—h!

What a relief and what a delight! What a deliverance! I walked up and down briskly and boldly, but I was not altogether reassured, and kept turning round with a jump; the very shadows in the corner disquieted me.

[Pg 160]

I slept badly, and was constantly disturbed by imaginary noises, but I did not see *him*; no, that was all over.

Since that time I have been afraid of being alone at night. I feel that the specter is there, close to me, around me; but it has not appeared to me again. And supposing it did, what would it matter, since I do not believe in it, and know that it is nothing?

It still worries me, however, because I am constantly thinking of it: *his right arm hanging down and his head inclined to the left like a man who was asleep...* Enough of that, in Heaven's name! I don't want to think about it!

Why, however, am I so persistently possessed with this idea? His feet were close to the fire!

He haunts me; it is very stupid, but so it is. Who and what is HE? I know that he does not exist

except in my cowardly imagination, in my fears, and in my agony! There—enough of that!...

Yes, it is all very well for me to reason with myself, *to stiffen myself*, so to say; but I cannot remain at home, because I know he is there. I know I shall not see him again; he will not show himself again; that is all over. But he is there all the same in my thoughts. He remains invisible, but that does not prevent his being there. He is behind the doors, in the closed cupboards, in the wardrobe, under the bed, in every dark corner. If I open the door or the cupboard, if I take the candle to look under the bed and throw a light on to the dark places, he is there no longer, but I feel that he is behind me. I turn round, certain that I shall not see him, that I shall never see him again; but he is, for all that, none the less behind me.

[Pg 161]

It is very stupid, it is dreadful; but what am I to do? I cannot help it.

But if there were two of us in the place, I feel certain that he would not be there any longer, for he is there just because I am alone; simply and solely because I am alone!

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## **A PHILOSOPHER**

[Pg 162]

Blérot had been my most intimate friend from childhood; we had no secrets from each other, and were united heart and soul by a brotherly intimacy and a boundless confidence in each other, and I had been intrusted with the secret of all his love affairs, as he had been with mine.

When he told me that he was going to get married I was hurt, just as if he had been guilty of a treacherous act with regard to me. I felt that it must interfere with that cordial and absolute affection which had united us hitherto. His wife would come between us. The intimacy of the marriage-bed establishes a kind of complicity of mysterious alliance between two persons, even when they have ceased to love each other. Man and wife are like two discreet partners who will not let anyone else into their secrets. But that close bond which the conjugal kiss fastens is widely loosened on the day on which the woman takes a lover.

I remember Blérot's wedding as if it were but yesterday. I would not be present at the signing of the marriage contract, as I have no particular liking for such ceremonies, but I only went to the civil wedding and to the church.

His wife, whom I had never seen before, was a tall, slight girl, with pale hair, pale cheeks, pale hands, and eyes to match. She walked with a slightly undulating motion, as if she were on board a ship, and seemed to advance with a succession of long, graceful curtsies.

[Pg 163]

Blérot seemed very much in love with her. He looked at her constantly, and I felt a shiver of an immoderate desire for her pass through my frame.

I went to see him in a few days, and he said to me:

"You do not know how happy I am; I am madly in love with her; but then she is ... she is ..." He did not finish his sentence, but he put the tips of his fingers to his lips with a gesture which signified:

"Divine! delicious! perfect!" and a good deal more besides.

I asked, laughing, "What! all that?"

"Everything that you can imagine," was his answer.

He introduced me to her. She was very pleasant, on easy terms with me, as was natural, and begged me to look upon their house as my own. I felt that he, Blérot, did not belong to me any longer. Our intimacy was altogether checked, and we hardly found a word to say to each other.

I soon took my leave, and shortly afterwards went to the East, and returned by way of Russia, Germany, Sweden, and Holland, after an absence of eighteen months from Paris.

The morning after my arrival, as I was walking along the boulevards to breathe the air once more, I saw a pale man with sunken cheeks coming towards me, who was as much like Blérot as it was possible for a physically emaciated man to be to a strong, ruddy, rather stout man. I looked at him in surprise, and asked myself: "Can it possibly be he?" But he saw me, and came towards me with outstretched arms, and we embraced in the middle of the boulevard.

After we had gone up and down once or twice from the Rue Druot to the Vaudeville Theater, just as we were taking leave of each other—for he already seemed quite done up with walking—I said to him:

[Pg 164]

"You don't look at all well. Are you ill?"

"I do feel rather out of sorts," was all he said.

He looked like a man who was going to die, and I felt a flood of affection for my old friend, the only real one that I had ever had. I squeezed his hands.

"What is the matter with you? Are you in pain?"

"A little tired; but it is nothing."

"What does your doctor say?"

"He calls it anæmia, and has ordered me to eat no white meat and to take tincture of iron."

A suspicion flashed across me.

"Are you happy?" I asked him.

"Yes, very happy; my wife is charming, and I love her more than ever."

But I noticed that he grew rather red and seemed embarrassed, as if he was afraid of any further questions, so I took him by the arm and pushed him into a café, which was nearly empty at that time of day. I forced him to sit down, and looking him straight in the face, I said:

"Look here, old fellow, just tell me the exact truth."

"I have nothing to tell you," he stammered.

"That is not true," I replied firmly. "You are ill, mentally perhaps, and you dare not reveal your secret to anyone. Something or other is doing you harm, and I mean you to tell me what it is. Come, I am waiting for you to begin."

Again he got very red, stammered, and turning his head away, he said:

"It is very idiotic—but I—I am done for!"

[Pg 165]

As he did not go on, I said:

"Just tell me what it is."

"Well, I have got a wife who is killing me, that is all," he said abruptly, almost desperately.

I did not understand at first. "Does she make you unhappy? How? What is it?"

"No," he replied in a low voice, as if he were confessing some crime; "I love her too much, that is all."

I was thunderstruck at this brutal avowal, and then I felt inclined to laugh, but at length I managed to reply:

"But surely, at least so it seems to me, you might manage to—to love her a little less."

He had got very pale again, and at length made up his mind to speak to me openly, as he used to do formerly.

"No," he said, "that is impossible; and I am dying from it I know; it is killing me, and I am really frightened. Some days, like to-day, I feel inclined to leave her, to go away altogether, to start for the other end of the world, so as to live for a long time; and then, when the evening comes, I return home in spite of myself, but slowly, and feeling uncomfortable. I go upstairs hesitatingly and ring, and when I go in I see her there sitting in her easy chair, and she says, 'How late you are,' I kiss her, and we sit down to dinner. During the meal I think to myself: 'I will go directly it is over, and take the train for somewhere, no matter where;' but when we get back to the drawing-room I am so tired that I have not the courage to get up out of my chair, and so I remain, and then—and then—I succumb again."

I could not help smiling again. He saw it, and said: "You may laugh, but I assure you it is very horrible."

[Pg 166]

"Why don't you tell your wife?" I asked him. "Unless she be a regular monster she would understand."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is all very well for you to talk. I don't tell her because I know her nature. Have you ever heard it said of certain women, 'She has just married a third time?' Well, and that makes you laugh like you did just now, and yet it is true. What is to be done? It is neither her fault nor mine. She is so, because nature has made her so; I assure you, my dear old friend, she has the temperament of a Messalina. She does not know it, but I do; so much the worse for me. She is charming, gentle, tender, and thinks that our conjugal intercourse, which is wearing me out and killing me, is natural and quite moderate. She seems like an ignorant schoolgirl, and she really is ignorant, poor child."

"Every day I form energetic resolutions, for you must understand that I am dying. But one look of her eyes, one of those looks in which I can read the ardent desire of her lips, is enough for me, and I succumb at once, saying to myself: 'This is really the end; I will have no more of her death-giving kisses,' and then, when I have yielded again, like I have to-day, I go out and walk on ahead, thinking of death, and saying to myself that I am lost, that all is over."

"I am so mentally ill that I went for a walk to Père Lachaise cemetery yesterday. I looked at all the graves, standing in a row like dominoes, and I thought to myself: 'I shall soon be there,' and then I returned home, quite determined to pretend to be ill, and so escape, but I could not."

"Oh! You don't know what it is. Ask a smoker who is poisoning himself with nicotine whether he can give up his delicious and deadly habit. He will tell you that he has tried a hundred times

[Pg 167]

without success, and he will, perhaps, add: 'So much the worse, but I had rather die than go without tobacco.' That is just the case with me. When once one is in the clutches of such a passion or such a vice, one must give oneself up to it entirely."

He got up and gave me his hand. I felt seized with a tumult of rage, and with hatred for this woman, this careless, charming, terrible woman; and as he was buttoning up his coat to go out I said to him, brutally perhaps:

"But, in God's name, why don't you let her have a lover, rather than kill yourself like that?"

He shrugged his shoulders without replying, and went off.

For six months I did not see him. Every morning I expected a letter of invitation to his funeral, but I would not go to his house from a complicated feeling of contempt for him and for that woman; of anger, of indignation, of a thousand sensations.

One lovely spring morning I was walking in the Champs Elysées. It was one of those warm days which makes our eyes bright and stir up in us a tumultuous feeling of happiness from the mere sense of existence. Someone tapped me on the shoulder, and turning round I saw my old friend, looking well, stout and rosy.

He gave me both hands, beaming with pleasure, and exclaimed:

"Here you are, you erratic individual!"

I looked at him, utterly thunderstruck.

"Well, on my word—yes. By Jove! I congratulate you; you have indeed changed in the last six months!" [Pg 168]

He flushed scarlet, and said, with an embarrassed laugh:

"One can but do one's best."

I looked at him so obstinately that he evidently felt uncomfortable, so I went on:

"So—now—you are—completely cured?"

He stammered, hastily:

"Yes, perfectly, thank you." Then changing his tone, "How lucky that I should have come across you, old fellow. I hope we shall often meet now."

But I would not give up my idea; I wanted to know how matters really stood, so I asked:

"Don't you remember what you told me six months ago? I suppose—I—eh—suppose you resist now?"

"Please don't talk any more about it," he replied, uneasily; "forget that I mentioned it to you; leave me alone. But, you know, I have no intention of letting you go; you must come and dine at my house."

A sudden fancy took me to see for myself how matters stood, so that I might understand all about it, and I accepted.

His wife received me in a most charming manner, and she was, as a matter of fact, a most attractive woman. Her long hands, her neck and cheeks were beautifully white and delicate, and marked her breeding, and her walk was undulating and delightful.

René gave her a brotherly kiss on the forehead and said:

"Has not Lucien come yet?"

"Not yet," she replied, in a clear, soft voice; "you know he is almost always rather late." [Pg 169]

At that moment the bell rang, and a tall man was shown in. He was dark, with a thick beard, and looked like a modern Hercules. We were introduced to each other; his name was Lucien Delabarre.

René and he shook hands in a most friendly manner, and then we went to dinner.

It was a most enjoyable meal, without the least constraint. My old friend spoke with me constantly, in the old familiar cordial manner, just as he used to do. It was: "You know, old fellow!"—"I say, old fellow!"—"Just listen a moment, old fellow!" Suddenly he exclaimed:

"You don't know how glad I am to see you again; it takes me back to old times."

I looked at his wife and the other man. Their attitude was perfectly correct, though I fancied once or twice that they exchanged a rapid and furtive look.

As soon as dinner was over René turned to his wife, and said:

"My dear, I have just met Pierre again, and I am going to carry him off for a walk and a chat along the boulevards to remind us of old times. I am leaving you in very good company."

The young woman smiled, and said to me, as she shook hands with me:

"Don't keep him too long."

As we went along, arm-in-arm, I could not help saying to him, for I was determined to know how matters stood:

"I say, what has happened? Do tell me!"

He, however, interrupted me roughly, and answered like a man who has been disturbed without any reason.

[Pg 170]

"Just look here, old fellow leave one alone with your questions."

Then he added, half aloud, as if talking to himself:

"After all, it would have been too stupid to have let oneself go to pot like that."

I did not press him. We walked on quickly and began to talk. All of a sudden he whispered in my ear:

"I say, suppose we go and have a bottle of 'fizz' with some girls! Eh?"

I could not prevent myself from laughing heartily.

"Just as you like; come along, let us go."

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## **ALWAYS LOCK THE DOOR!**

[Pg 171]

The four glasses which were standing in front of the diners were now still nearly half full, which is a sign, as a general rule, that the guests are quite so. They were beginning to speak without waiting for an answer; no one took any notice of anything except what was going on inside him, either in his mind or stomach; voices grew louder, gestures more animated, eyes brighter.

It was a bachelors' dinner of confirmed old bachelors. They had instituted this regular banquet twenty years before, christening it "The Celibate," and at the time there were fourteen of them, all fully determined never to marry. Now there were only four of them left; three were dead and the other seven were married.

These four stuck firmly to it, and, as far as lay in their power, they scrupulously observed the rules which had been laid down at the beginning of their curious association. They had sworn, hand-in-hand, to turn aside every woman they could from the right path, and their friends' wives for choice, and more especially those of their most intimate friends. For this reason, as soon as any of them left the society, in order to set up in domestic life for himself, he took care to quarrel definitely with all his former companions.

Besides this, they were pledged at every dinner to relate most minutely their last adventures, which had given rise to this familiar phrase amongst them:

"To lie like an old bachelor."

[Pg 172]

They professed, moreover, the most profound contempt for woman whom they talked of as an animal made solely for their pleasure. Every moment they quoted Schopenhauer, who was their god, and his well-known essay "On Women;" they wished that harems and towers might be reintroduced, and had the ancient maxim: "Mulier, perpetuus infans,"<sup>[10]</sup> woven into their table-linen, and below it, the line of Alfred de Vigny's:

*La femme, enfant malade et douze fois impure.*<sup>[11]</sup>

So that by dint of despising women they lived only for them, while all their efforts and all their desires were directed towards them.

Those of them who had married called them old fops, made fun of them, and—feared them.

When they began to feel the exhilarating effects of the champagne, this was the moment that their old bachelor experiences began.

On the day in question, these old fellows, for they were old by this time, and the older they got the more extraordinary *good fortune* in the way of love affairs they had to relate, were quite inexhaustible. For the last month, to hear them, each of them had played the gallant with at least one woman a day; and what women! the youngest, the noblest, the richest, and the most beautiful!

After they had finished their tales, one of them, he who having spoken first had been obliged to listen to all the others, rose and said:

"Now that we have finished drawing the long-bow, I should like to tell you, not my last, but my first adventure,—I mean the first adventure of my life, my first fall,—for it is a moral fall after all, in the arms of Venus. Oh! I am not going to tell you my first—what shall I call it?—my first appearance; certainly not. The leap over the first hedge (I am speaking figuratively) has nothing interesting about it. It is generally rather a disagreeable one, and one picks oneself up rather

[Pg 173]

abashed, with one charming illusion the less, with a vague feeling of disappointment and sadness. That *realization* of love the first time one experiences it is rather repugnant; we had dreamt of it as being so different, so delicate, so refined. It leaves a physical and moral sense of disgust behind it, just like as when one has happened to have put one's hand into some clammy matter and feels in a hurry to *wash* it off. You may *rub* it as hard as you like, but the moral feeling remains.

"Yes! but one very soon gets quite used to it; there is no doubt about that. For my part, however, I am very sorry it was not in my power to give the Creator the benefit of my advice when He was arranging these little matters. I wonder what *I* should have done? I am not quite sure, but I think with the English savant, John Stuart Mill, I should have managed differently; I should have found some more convenient and more poetical combination; yes—more poetical.

"I really think that the Creator showed Himself to be too much of a naturalist ... too ... what shall I say? His invention lacks poetry.

"However, what I am going to tell you is about my first woman of the world, the first woman in society I ever made love to;—I beg your pardon, I ought to say the first woman of the world that ever triumphed over me. For at first it is *we* who allow ourselves to be taken, while, later on—

[Pg 174]

well, then it is quite another matter.  
"She was a friend of my mother's, a charming woman in every way. When such women are chaste, it is generally from sheer stupidity, and when they are in love they are furiously so. And then—*we* are accused of corrupting *them*! Yes, yes, of course! With them it is always the rabbit that begins and never the sportsman. I know all about it; they don't seem to put their fingers near us, but they do it all the same, and do what they like with us, without it being noticed, and then they actually accuse us of having ruined them, dishonored them, humiliated them, and all the rest of it.

"The woman in question certainly had a great desire to be humiliated by me. She may have been about thirty-five, while I was scarcely two-and-twenty. I no more thought of dishonoring her than I did of turning Trappist. Well, one day when I was calling on her, and while I was looking at her dress with considerable astonishment, for she had on a morning wrapper which was open as wide as a church-door when the bells are ringing for service, she took my hand and squeezed it—squeezed it, you know, like they will do at such moments—and said, with a deep sigh, one of those sighs, you know, which come from right down the bottom of the chest: 'Oh! don't look at me like that, child!' I got as red as a tomato, and felt more nervous than usual, naturally. I was very much inclined to bolt, but she held my hand tightly, and putting it onto her well-developed bust, she said: 'Just feel how my heart beats!' Of course it was beating, and I began to understand what was the matter, but I did not know what to do. I have changed considerably since then.

[Pg 175]

"As I remained standing there, with one hand on the soft covering of her heart, while I held my hat in the other, and continuing to look at her with a confused, silly smile—a timid, frightened smile—she suddenly drew back, and said in an irritated voice:

"'Young man, what are you doing? You are indecent and badly brought up.'

"You may be sure I took my hand away quickly, stopped smiling, and stammering out some excuse, I got up and took my leave as if I had lost my head.

"But I was caught, and dreamt of her. I thought her charming, adorable; I fancied that I loved her, that I had always loved her, and I determined to see her again.

"When I saw her again she gave me a little smile like an actress might behind the scenes. Oh, how that little smile upset me! And she shook hands with a long, significant pressure.

"From that day it seems that I made love to her; at least, she declared afterwards that I had ruined her, captured her, dishonored her, with rare Machiavelism, with consummate cleverness, with the perseverance of a mathematician, and the cunning of an Apache Indian.

"But one thing troubled me strangely; where was my triumph to be accomplished? I lived with my family, and on this point my family was most particular. I was not bold enough to venture to go to an hotel in broad daylight with a woman on my arm, and I did not know whom to ask for advice.

"Now, my fair friend had often said in joke that every young man ought to have a room for himself somewhere or other from home. We lived in Paris, and this was a sort of inspiration. I took a room, and she came. She came one day in November; I should have liked to put off her visit because I had no fire, and I had no fire because the chimney smoked. The very evening before, I had spoken to my landlord, a retired shopkeeper, about it, and he had promised that he would send for the chimneysweep in a day or two to get it all put to rights.

[Pg 176]

"As soon as she came in, I said:

"'There is no fire because my chimney smokes.'

"She did not even appear to hear me, but stammered: 'That does not matter, I have ...;' and when I looked surprised, she stopped short in confusion, and then went on: 'I don't know what I am saying; I am mad.... I have lost my head.... Oh! what am I doing? Why did I come? How unhappy I am! What a disgrace, what a disgrace!' And she threw herself sobbing into my arms.

"I thought that she really felt remorse, and swore that I would respect her. Then, however, she



sank down at my knees, sighing: 'But don't you see that I love you, that you have overcome me, that it seems as though you had thrown a charm over me?'

"Then I thought it was about time to show myself a man. But she trembled, got up, ran and hid behind a wardrobe, crying out: 'Oh! don't look at me; no! no! If only you did not see me, if we were only in the dark! I am ashamed in the light. Cannot you imagine it? What a dreadful dream! Oh! this light, this light!'

"I rushed to the window; I closed the outside shutters, drew the curtains, and hung a coat over a ray of light that peeped in, and then, stretching out my hands so as not to fall over the chairs, with my heart beating, and felt for her, and found her. [Pg 177]

"It was a fresh journey for the two of us then, groping our way, with our hands united, towards the other corner where the sofa stood. I don't suppose we went straight, for first of all I knocked against the mantelpiece, and then against a chest of drawers, before finding what we wanted. After we sat down I forgot everything, and we almost went to sleep in each other's arms.

"I was half dreaming; but in my dream I fancied that someone was calling me and crying for help; then I received a violent blow, and opened my eyes.

"O—h!" The setting sun, magnificent and red, shone full into the room through the door, which was wide open, and seemed to look at us from the verge of the horizon, illuminating us both, especially my companion, who was screaming, struggling, and twisting, and trying with hands and feet to get under the sofa, while in the middle of the room stood my landlord by the side of the concierge<sup>[12]</sup> and a chimneysweep, as black as the devil, who were looking at us with stupid eyes.

"I stood up in rage, ready to jump at his throat, and shouted:

"'What the deuce are you doing in my room?'

"The chimneysweep laughed so that he let his brush fall on the floor. The porter looked as if he were going out of his mind, and the landlord stammered:

"'But, Monsieur, it was—it was—about the chimney—the chimney, the chimney which—'

"'Go to the devil!' I roared. So he took off his hat, which he had kept on in his confusion, and said, in a confused but very civil manner: [Pg 178]

"'I beg your pardon, Monsieur; if I had known, I should not have disturbed you; I should not have come. The concierge told me you had gone out. Pray excuse me.' And they all went out.

"Ever since that time I never draw the curtains but am always very careful to lock the door first."

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## A MEETING

[Pg 179]

It was all an accident, a pure accident. Tired of standing, Baron d'Etraille went, as all the Princess's rooms were open on that particular evening, into an empty bedroom, which appeared almost dark after coming out of the brilliantly lighted drawing-rooms.

He looked round for a chair in which to have a doze, as he was sure his wife would not go away before daylight. As soon as he got inside the door he saw the big bed with its azure-and-gold hangings, in the middle of the great room, looking like a catafalque in which love was buried, for the Princess was no longer young. Behind it, a large bright spot looked like a lake seen at a distance from the window. It was a large looking-glass, which, discreetly covered with dark drapery, that, however, was very rarely let down, seemed to look at the bed, which was its accomplice. One might almost fancy that it felt regrets, and that one was going to see in it charming shapes of naked women, and the gentle movement of arms about to embrace them.

The Baron stood still for a moment, smiling, rather moved, on the threshold of this chamber dedicated to love. But suddenly something appeared in the looking-glass, as if the phantoms which he had evoked had risen up before him. A man and a woman who had been sitting on a low couch hidden in the shade had got up, and the polished surface, reflecting their figures, showed that they were kissing each other before separating. [Pg 180]

The Baron recognized his wife and the Marquis de Cervigné. He turned and went away like a man who is fully master of himself, and waited till it was day before taking away the Baroness; but he had no longer any thoughts of sleeping.

As soon as they were alone he said.

"Madame, I saw you just now in Princess de Raynes' room; I need say no more, and I am not fond either of reproaches, acts of violence, or of ridicule. As I wish to avoid all such things, we shall separate without any scandal. Our lawyers will settle your position according to my orders. You will be free to live as you please when you are no longer under my roof; but, as you will continue to bear my name, I must warn you that, should any scandal arise, I shall show myself inflexible."

She tried to speak, but he stopped her, bowed, and left the room.



He was more astonished and sad than unhappy. He had loved her dearly during the first period of their married life; but his ardor had cooled, and now he often had a caprice, either in a theater or in society, though he always preserved a certain liking for the Baroness.

She was very young, hardly four-and-twenty, small, slight—too slight—and very fair. She was a true Parisian doll: clever, spoiled, elegant, coquettish, witty, with more charm than real beauty. He used to say familiarly to his brother, when speaking of her:

"My wife is charming, attractive, but—there is nothing to lay hold of. She is like a glass of champagne that is all froth—when you have got to the wine it is very good, but there is too little of it, unfortunately."

He walked up and down the room in great agitation, and thinking of a thousand things. At one moment he felt in a great rage, and felt inclined to give the Marquis a good thrashing or to smack his face publicly, in the club. But he thought that would not do, it would not be at all *the thing*; he would be laughed at, and not the Marquis, and as he felt that his anger proceeded more from wounded vanity than from a broken heart he went to bed, but could not go to sleep.

[Pg 181]

A few days afterwards it was known in Paris that the Baron and Baroness d'Etraille had agreed to an amicable separation on account of incompatibility of temper. Nobody suspected anything, nobody laughed, and nobody was astonished.

The Baron, however, to avoid meeting her, traveled for a year, then he spent the summer at the seaside, and the autumn in shooting, returning to Paris for the winter. He did not meet his wife once.

He did not even know what people said about her. At any rate, she took care to save appearances, and that was all he asked for.

He got dreadfully bored, traveled again, restored his old castle of Villebosc, which took him two years; then for over a year he received relays of friends there, till at last, tired of all these commonplace, so-called pleasures, he returned to his mansion in the Rue de Lills, just six years after their separation.

He was then forty-five, with a good crop of gray hair, rather stout, and with that melancholy look of people who have been handsome, sought after, and much liked, and who are deteriorating daily.

A month after his return to Paris he took cold on coming out of his club, and had a bad cough, so his medical man ordered him to Nice for the rest of the winter.

[Pg 182]

He started by the express on Monday evening. He was late, and got to the station only a very short time before the departure of the train, and had barely time to get into a carriage, with only one occupant, who was sitting in a corner so wrapped in furs and cloaks that he could not even make out whether it were a man or a woman, as nothing of the figure could be seen. When he perceived that he could not find out, he put on his traveling-cap, rolled himself up in his rugs, and stretched himself out comfortably to sleep.

He did not wake up till the day was breaking, and looked immediately at his fellow-traveler. He had not stirred all night, and seemed still to be sound asleep.

M. d'Etraille made use of the opportunity to brush his hair and his beard, and to try and freshen himself up a little generally, for a night's traveling changes one's looks very much when one has attained to a certain age.

A great poet has said:—

"When we are young, our mornings are triumphant."

Then we wake up with a cool skin, a bright eye, and glossy hair.

When one grows older one wakes up in a very different state. Dull eyes, red, swollen cheeks, dry lips, the hair and beard all disarranged, impart an old, fatigued, wornout look to the face.

The Baron opened his traveling dressing-case, and made himself as tidy as he could, and then he waited.

The engine whistled and the train stopped, and his neighbor moved. No doubt he was awake. They started off again, and then an oblique ray of sun shone into the carriage just on to the sleeper, who moved again, shook himself, and then calmly showed his face.

[Pg 183]

It was a young, fair, pretty, stout woman, and the Baron looked at her in amazement. He did not know what to believe. He could really have sworn that it was—his wife, but wonderfully changed for the better: stouter—why she had grown as stout as he was—only it suited her much better than it did him.

She looked at him quietly, did not seem to recognize him, and then slowly laid aside her wraps. She had that calm assurance of a woman who is sure of herself, the insolent audacity of a first awakening, knowing and feeling that she was in her full beauty and freshness.

The Baron really lost his head. Was it his wife, or somebody else who was as like her as any sister could be? As he had not seen her for six years he might be mistaken.

She yawned, and he knew her by her gesture, and she turned and looked at him again, calmly, indifferently, as if she scarcely saw him, and then looked out at the country again.

He was upset and dreadfully perplexed, and waited, looking at her sideways, steadfastly.

Yes; it was certainly his wife. How could he possibly have doubted? There could certainly not be two noses like that, and a thousand recollections flashed through him, slight details of her body, a beauty-spot on one of her thighs, and another opposite to it on her back. How often he had kissed them! He felt the old feeling of the intoxication of love stealing over him, and he called to mind the sweet odor of her skin, her smile when she put her arms on to his shoulders, the soft intonations of her voice, all her graceful, coaxing ways.

[Pg 184]

But how she had changed and improved! It was she and yet not she. He thought her riper, more developed, more of a woman, more seductive, more desirable, adorably desirable.

And this strange, unknown woman, whom he had accidentally met in a railway-carriage belonged to him; he had only to say to her:

"I insist upon it."

He had formerly slept in her arms, existed only in her love, and now he had found her again certainly, but so changed that he scarcely knew her. It was another, and yet she at the same time. It was another who had been born, and had formed and grown since he had left her. It was she, indeed; she whom he had possessed but who was now altered, with a more assured smile and greater self-possession. There were two women in one, mingling a great past of what was new and unknown with many sweet recollections of the past. There was something singular, disturbing, exciting about it—a kind of mystery of love in which there floated a delicious confusion. It was his wife in a new body and in new flesh which lips had never pressed.

And he thought that in six years everything changes in us, only the outline can be recognized, and sometimes even that disappears.

The blood, the hair, the skin all change, and is reconstituted, and when people have not seen each other for a long time, when they meet they find another totally different being, although it be the same and bear the same name.

[Pg 185]

And the heart also can change. Ideas may be modified and renewed, so that in forty years of life we may, by gradual and constant transformations, become four or five totally new and different beings.

He dwelt on this thought till it troubled him; it had first taken possession of him when he surprised her in the Princess's room. He was not the least angry; it was not the same woman that he was looking at—that thin, excitable little doll of those days.

What was he to do? How should he address her? and what could he say to her? Had she recognized him?

The train stopped again. He got up, bowed, and said: "Bertha, do you want anything I could bring you?..."

She looked at him from head to foot, and answered, without showing the slightest surprise or confusion, or anger, but with the most perfect indifference:

"I do not want anything,—thank you."

He got out and walked up and down the platform a little in order to recover himself, and, as it were, to recover his senses after a fall. What should he do now? If he got into another carriage it would look as if he were running away. Should he be polite or importunate? That would look as if he were asking for forgiveness. Should he speak as if he were her master? He would look like a fool, and besides, he really had no right to do so.

He got in again and took his place.

During his absence she had hastily arranged her dress and hair, and was now lying stretched out on the seat, radiant, and without showing any emotion.

He turned to her, and said: "My dear Bertha, since this singular chance has brought us together after a separation of six years—a quite friendly separation—are we to continue to look upon each other as irreconcilable enemies? We are shut up together, *tête-à-tête*, which is so much the better or so much the worse. I am not going to get into another carriage, so don't you think it is preferable to talk as friends till the end of our journey?"

[Pg 186]

She answered quite calmly again:

"Just as you please."

Then he suddenly stopped, really not knowing what to say; but as he had plenty of assurance, he sat down on the middle-seat, and said:

"Well, I see I must pay my court to you; so much the better. It is, however, really a pleasure, for you are charming. You cannot imagine how you have improved in the last six years. I do not know any woman who could give me that delightful sensation which I experienced just now when you emerged from your wraps. I could really have thought such a change impossible...."

Without moving her head or looking at him, she said: "I cannot say the same with regard to you; you have certainly deteriorated a great deal."

He got red and confused, and then, with a smile of resignation, he said:

"You are rather hard."

"Why?" was her reply. "I am only stating facts. I don't suppose you intend to offer me your love? It must, therefore, be a matter of perfect indifference to you what I think about you. But I see it is a painful subject, so let us talk of something else. What have you been doing since I last saw you?"

[Pg 187]

He felt rather out of countenance, and stammered:

"I? I have traveled, shot, and grown old, as you see. And you?"

She said, quite calmly: "I have taken care of appearances, as you ordered me."

He was very near saying something brutal, but he checked himself, and kissed his wife's hand:

"And I thank you," he said.

She was surprised. He was indeed cool and always master of himself.

He went on: "As you have acceded to my first request, shall we now talk without any bitterness?"

She made a little movement of surprise.

"Bitterness? I don't feel any; you are a complete stranger to me; I am only trying to keep up a difficult conversation."

He was still looking at her, carried away in spite of her harshness, and he felt seized with a brutal desire, the desire of the master.

Perceiving that she had hurt his feelings, she said:

"How old are you now? I thought you were younger than you look."

He grew rather pale.

"I am forty-five;" and then he added: "I forgot to ask after Princess de Raynes. Are you still intimate with her?"

She looked at him as if she hated him:

"Yes, I certainly am. She is very well, thank you."

They remained sitting side-by-side, agitated and irritated. Suddenly he said:

"My dear Bertha, I have changed my mind. You are my wife, and I expect you to come with me to-day. You have, I think, improved both morally and physically, and I am going to take you back again. I am your husband, and it is my right to do so."

[Pg 188]

She was stupefied, and looked at him, trying to divine his thoughts; but his face was resolute and impenetrable.

"I am very sorry," she said, "but I have made other engagements."

"So much the worse for you," was his reply. "The law gives me the power, and I mean to use it."

They were getting to Marseilles, and the train whistled and slackened speed. The Baroness got up, carefully rolled up her wraps, and then turning to her husband, she said:

"My dear Raymond, do not make a bad use of the *tête-à-tête* which I had carefully prepared. I wished to take precautions, according to your advice, so that I might have nothing to fear from you or from other people, whatever might happen. You are going to Nice, are you not?"

"I shall go wherever you go."

"Not at all; just listen to me, and I am sure that you will leave me in peace. In a few moments, when we get to the station, you will see the Princess de Raynes and Countess Hermit waiting for me with their husbands. I wished them to see us, and to know that we had spent the night together in the railway-carriage. Don't be alarmed; they will tell it everywhere as a most surprising fact."

"I told you just now that I had most carefully followed your advice and saved appearances. Anything else does not matter, does it? Well, in order to do so, I wished to be seen with you. You told me carefully to avoid any scandal, and I am avoiding it, for, I am afraid—I am afraid—"

[Pg 189]

She waited till the train had quite stopped, and as her friends ran up to open the carriage-door, she said:

"I am afraid that I am in the family-way."

The Princess stretched out her arms to embrace her, and the Baroness said, pointing to the Baron, who was dumb with astonishment, and was trying to get at the truth:

"You do not recognize Raymond? He has certainly changed a good deal, and he agreed to come with me so that I might not travel alone. We take little trips like this, occasionally, like good friends who cannot live together. We are going to separate here; he has had enough of me already."

She put out her hand, which he took mechanically, and then she jumped out on to the platform among her friends, who were waiting for her.

The Baron hastily shut the carriage-door, for he was too much disturbed to say a word or come to any determination. He heard his wife's voice, and their merry laughter as they went away.

He never saw her again, nor did he ever discover whether she had told him a lie or was speaking the truth.

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## THE LITTLE CASK

[Pg 190]

Jules Chicot, the innkeeper, who lived at Épreville, pulled up his tilbury in front of Mother Magloire's farmhouse. He was a tall man of about forty, with a red face and a round stomach, and was generally said to be *a very knowing customer*.

He hitched his horse up to the gatepost and went in. He owned some land adjoining that of the old woman's, which he had been coveting for a long while, and had tried in vain to buy a score of times, but she had always obstinately refused to part with it.

"I was born here, and here I mean to die," was all she said.

He found her peeling potatoes outside the farmhouse door. She was a woman of about seventy-two, very thin, shriveled and wrinkled, almost dried up in fact, and much bent, but as active and untiring as a girl. Chicot patted her on the back in a very friendly fashion, and then sat down by her on a stool.

"Well, Mother, you are always pretty well and hearty, I am glad to see."

"Nothing to complain of, considering, thank you. And how are you, Mons. Chicot?"

"Oh! pretty well, thank you, except a few rheumatic pains occasionally; otherwise, I should have nothing to complain of."

"That's all the better!"

And she said no more, while Chicot watched her going on with her work. Her crooked, knotty fingers, hard as a lobster's claws, seized the tubers, which were lying in a pail, as if they had been a pair of pincers, and she peeled them rapidly, cutting off long strips of skin with an old knife which she held in the other hand, throwing the potatoes into the water as they were done. Three daring fowls jumped one after the other into her lap, seized a bit of peel, and then ran away as fast as their legs would carry them with it in their beak.

[Pg 191]

Chicot seemed embarrassed, anxious, with something on the tip of his tongue which he could not get out. At last he said hurriedly:

"I say, Mother Magloire—"

"Well, what is it?"

"You are quite sure that you do not want to sell your farm?"

"Certainly not; you may make up your mind to that. What I have said, I have said, so don't refer to it again."

"Very well; only I fancy I have thought of an arrangement that might suit us both very well."

"What is it?"

"Here you are. You shall sell it to me, and keep it all the same. You don't understand? Very well, so just follow me in what I am going to say."

The old woman left off peeling her potatoes, and looked at the innkeeper attentively from under her bushy eyebrows, and he went on:

"Let me explain myself. Every month I will give you one hundred and fifty francs. You understand me, I suppose? Every month I will come and bring you thirty crowns<sup>[13]</sup> and it will not make the slightest difference in your life—not the very slightest. You will have your own home just as you have now, will not trouble yourself about me, and will owe me nothing; all you will have to do will be to take my money. Will that arrangement suit you?"

[Pg 192]

He looked at her good-humoredly, one might almost have said benevolently, and the old woman returned his looks distrustfully, as if she suspected a trap, and said:

"It seems all right, as far as I am concerned, but it will not give you the farm."

"Never mind about that," he said, "you will remain here as long as it pleases God Almighty to let you live; it will be your home. Only you will sign a deed before a lawyer making it over to me after your death. You have no children, only nephews and nieces for whom you don't care a straw. Will that suit you? You will keep everything during your life, and I will give you the thirty crowns a month. It is pure gain as far as you are concerned."

The old woman was surprised, rather uneasy, but nevertheless, very much tempted to agree, and answered:

"I don't say that I will not agree to it, but I must think about it. Come back in a week, and we will talk it over again, and I will then give you my definite answer."

And Chicot went off, as happy as a king who has conquered an empire.

Mother Magloire was thoughtful, and did not sleep at all that night; in fact, for four days she was in a fever of hesitation. She *smelt*, so to say, that there was something underneath the offer which was not to her advantage; but then the thought of thirty crowns a month, of all those coins chinking in her apron, falling to her, as it were, from the skies, without her doing anything for it, filled her with covetousness.

[Pg 193]

She went to the notary, and told him about it. He advised her to accept Chicot's offer, but said she ought to ask for an annuity of fifty instead of thirty, as her farm was worth sixty thousand francs at the lowest calculation.

"If you live for fifteen years longer," he said, "even then he will only have paid forty-five thousand francs for it."

The old woman trembled with joy at this prospect of getting fifty crowns a month; but she was still suspicious, fearing some trick, and she remained a long time with the lawyer, asking questions without being able to make up her mind to go. At last she gave him instructions to draw up the deed, and returned home with her head in a whirl, just as if she had drunk four jugs of new cider.

When Chicot came again to receive her answer she took a lot of persuading, and declared that she could not make up her mind to agree to his proposal, though she was all the time on tenter-hooks lest he should not consent to give the fifty crowns: but at last, when he grew urgent, she told him what she expected for her farm.

He looked surprised and disappointed, and refused.

Then, in order to convince him, she began to talk about the probable duration of her life.

"I am certainly not likely to live for more than five or six years longer. I am nearly seventy-three, and far from strong, even considering my age. The other evening I thought I was going to die, and could hardly manage to crawl into bed."

[Pg 194]

But Chicot was not going to be taken in.

"Come, come, old lady, you are as strong as the church tower, and will live till you are a hundred at least; you will be sure to see me put underground first."

The whole day was spent in discussing the money, and as the old woman would not give way, the landlord consented to give the fifty crowns, and she insisted upon having ten crowns over and above to strike the bargain.

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Three years passed by, and the old dame did not seem to have grown a day older. Chicot was in despair, and it seemed to him as if he had been paying that annuity for fifty years, that he had been taken in, done, that he was ruined. From time to time he went to see his annuitant, just as one goes in July to see when the harvest is likely to begin. She always met him with a cunning look, and one would have felt inclined to think that she was congratulating herself on the trick she had played him. Seeing how well and hearty she seemed, he very soon got into his tilbury again, growling to himself:

"Will you never die, you old brute?"

He did not know what to do, and he felt inclined to strangle her when he saw her. He hated her with a ferocious, cunning hatred, the hatred of a peasant who has been robbed, and began to cast about for means of getting rid of her.

One day he came to see her again, rubbing his hands like he did the first time when he proposed the bargain, and, after having chatted for a few minutes, he said:

[Pg 195]

"Why do you never come and have a bit of dinner at my place when you are in Épreville? The people are talking about it, and saying that we are not on friendly terms, and that pains me. You know it will cost you nothing if you come, for I don't look at the price of a dinner. Come whenever you feel inclined; I shall be very glad to see you."

Old Mother Magloire did not need to be told twice, and the next day but one, as she was going to town in any case, it being market-day, in her gig, driven by her man, she, without any demur, put

her trap up in Chicot's stable, and went in search of her promised dinner.

The publican was delighted, and treated her like a lady, giving her roast fowl, blackpudding, leg of mutton, and bacon and cabbage. But she ate next to nothing. She had always been a small eater, and had generally lived on a little soup and a crust of bread and butter.

Chicot was disappointed, and pressed her to eat more, but she refused, and she would drink next to nothing either, and declined any coffee, so he asked her:

"But surely, you will take a little drop of brandy or liqueur?"

"Well, as to that, I don't know that I will refuse." Whereupon he shouted out:

"Rosalie, bring the superfine brandy,—*the special*,—you know."

The servant appeared, carrying a long bottle ornamented with a paper vine-leaf, and he filled two liqueur glasses.

"Just try that; you will find it first-rate."

The good woman drank it slowly in sips, so as to make the pleasure last all the longer, and when she had finished her glass, draining the last drops so as to make the pleasure last all the longer, she said:

[Pg 196]

"Yes, that is first-rate!"

Almost before she had said it, Chicot had poured her out another glassful. She wished to refuse, but it was too late, and she drank it very slowly, like she had done the first, and he asked her to have a third. She objected, but he persisted.

"It is as mild as milk, you know; I can drink ten or a dozen without any ill effects; it goes down like sugar, and leaves no signs in the head, one would think that it evaporated on the tongue. It is the most wholesome thing you can drink."

She took it, for she really wished to have it, but she left half the glass.

Then Chicot, in an excess of generosity, said:

"Look here, as it is so much to your taste, I will give you a small keg of it, just to show that you and I are still excellent friends." So she took one away with her, feeling slightly overcome by the effects of what she had drunk.

The next day the innkeeper drove into her yard, and took a little iron-hooped keg out of his gig. He insisted on her tasting the contents, to make sure it was the same delicious article, and, when they had each of them drunk three more glasses, he said, as he was going away:

"Well, you know, when it is all gone, there is more left; don't be modest, for I shall not mind. The sooner it is finished, the better pleased I shall be."

Four days later he came again. The old woman was outside her door cutting up the bread for her soup.

[Pg 197]

He went up to her, and put his face close to hers, so that he might smell her breath; and when he smelt the alcohol he felt pleased.

"I suppose you will give me a glass of *the special*?" he said. And they had three glasses each.

Soon, however, it began to be whispered abroad that Mother Magloire was in the habit of getting drunk all by herself. She was picked up in her kitchen, then in her yard, then in the roads in the neighborhood, and she was often brought home like a log.

Chicot did not go near her any more, and, when people spoke to him about her, he used to say, putting on a distressed look:

"It is a great pity that she should have taken to drink at her age; but when people get old there is no remedy. It will be the death of her in the long run."

And it certainly was the death of her. She died the next winter. About Christmas-time she fell down, unconscious, in the snow, and was found dead the next morning.

And when Chicot came in for the farm he said:

"It was very stupid of her; if she had not taken to drink she might very well have lived for ten years longer."

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## **HOW HE GOT THE LEGION OF HONOR**

[Pg 198]

Some people are born with a predominant instinct, with some vocation or some desire which has been evoked as soon as they begin to speak or to think.

Ever since he was a child M. Caillard had only had one idea in his head—to be decorated. When he was still quite a small boy he used to wear a zinc Cross of the Legion of Honor in his tunic, just like other children wear a soldier's cap, and he took his mother's hand in the street with a proud look, sticking out his little chest with its red ribbon and metal star so that it might show to advantage.

His studies were not a success, and he failed in his Examination for Bachelor of Arts; so, not knowing what to do, he married a pretty girl, as he had plenty of money of his own.

They lived in Paris, like many rich middle-class people do, mixing with their own particular set, without going among other people, and proud of knowing a Deputy, who might perhaps be a Minister some day, while two Chiefs of Division were among their friends.

But Mons. Caillard could not get rid of his one absorbing idea, and he felt constantly unhappy because he had not the right to wear a little bit of colored ribbon in his buttonhole.

When he met any men who were decorated, on the boulevards, he looked at them askance, with intense jealousy. Sometimes, when he had nothing to do in the afternoon, he would count them, and say to himself: "Just let me see how many I shall meet between the Madeleine and the Rue Druot."

[Pg 199]

Then he would walk slowly, looking at every coat with a practiced eye for the little bit of red ribbon, and when he had got to the end of his walk he always said the numbers out aloud. "Eight officers and seventeen knights. As many as that! It is stupid to sow the Cross broadcast in that fashion. I wonder how many I shall meet going back?"

And he returned slowly, unhappy when the crowd of passers-by interfered with his seeing them.

He knew the places where most were to be found. They swarmed in the Palais Royal. Fewer were seen in the Avenue de l'Opera than in the Rue de la Paix, while the right side of the boulevard was more frequented by them than the left.

They also seemed to prefer certain cafés and theaters. Whenever he saw a group of white-haired old gentlemen standing together in the middle of the pavement, interfering with the traffic, he used to say to himself: "They are officers of the Legion of Honor," and he felt inclined to take off his hat to them.

He had often remarked that the officers had a different bearing to the mere knights. They carried their head differently, and one felt that they enjoyed a higher official consideration, and a more widely-extended importance.

Sometimes again the worthy man would be seized with a furious hatred for everyone who was decorated; he felt like a Socialist towards them.

Then, when he got home, excited at meeting so many Crosses—just like a poor hungry wretch is on passing some dainty provision shop—he used to ask in a loud voice:

[Pg 200]

"When shall we get rid of this wretched Government?" And his wife would be surprised, and ask:

"What is the matter with you to-day?"

"I am indignant," he replied, "at the injustice I see going on around us. Oh! the Communards were certainly right!"

After dinner he would go out again and look at the shops where all the decorations were sold, and he examined all the emblems of various shapes and colors. He would have liked to possess them all, and to have walked gravely at the head of a procession with his crush-hat under his arm and his breast covered with decorations, radiant as a star, amid a buzz of admiring whispers and a hum of respect.

But, alas! he had no right to wear any decoration whatever.

He used to say to himself: "It is really too difficult for any man to obtain the Legion of Honor unless he is some public functionary. Suppose I try to get appointed an officer of the Academy!"

But he did not know how to set about it, and spoke to his wife on the subject, who was stupefied.

"Officer of the Academy! What have you done to deserve it?"

He got angry. "I know what I am talking about; I only want to know how to set about it. You are quite stupid at times."

She smiled. "You are quite right; I don't understand anything about it."

An idea struck him: "Suppose you were to speak to M. Rosselin, the Deputy, he might be able to advise me. You understand I cannot broach the subject to him directly. It is rather difficult and delicate, but coming from you it might seem quite natural."

[Pg 201]

Mme. Caillard did what he asked her, and M. Rosselin promised to speak to the Minister about it, and then Caillard began to worry him, till the Deputy told him he must make a formal application and put forward his claims.

"What were his claims?" he said. "He was not even a Bachelor of Arts."

However, he set to work and produced a pamphlet, with the title, "The People's Right to Instruction," but he could not finish it for want of ideas.

He sought for easier subjects, and began several in succession. The first was, "The Instruction of Children by means of the Eye." He wanted gratuitous theaters to be established in every poor quarter of Paris for little children. Their parents were to take them there when they were quite young, and, by means of a magic-lantern, all the notions of human knowledge were to be imparted to them. There were to be regular courses. The sight would educate the mind, while the pictures would remain impressed on the brain, and thus science would, so to say, be made visible. What could be more simple than to teach universal history, natural history, geography, botany, zoology, anatomy, &c., &c., thus?

He had his ideas printed in tract form, and sent a copy to each Deputy, ten to each Minister, fifty to the President of the Republic, ten to each Parisian and five to each provincial newspaper.

Then he wrote on "Street Lending-Libraries." His idea was to have little carts full of books drawn about the streets, like orange-carts are. Every householder or lodger would have a right to ten volumes a month by means of a halfpenny subscription. [Pg 202]

"The people," M. Caillard said, "will only disturb itself for the sake of its pleasures, and since it will not go to instruction, instruction must come to it," &c., &c.

His essays attracted no attention, but he sent in his application, and he got the usual formal official reply. He thought himself sure of success, but nothing came of it.

Then he made up his mind to apply personally. He begged for an interview with the Minister of Public Instruction, and he was received by a young subordinate, who already was very grave and important, and who kept touching the knobs of electric-bells to summon ushers, and footmen, and officials inferior to himself. He declared to M. Caillard that his matter was going on quite favorably, and advised him to continue his remarkable labors, and M. Caillard set at it again.

M. Rosselin, the Deputy, seemed now to take a great interest in his success, and gave him a lot of excellent, practical advice. He was decorated, although nobody knew exactly what he had done to deserve such a distinction.

He told Caillard what new studies he ought to undertake; he introduced him to learned Societies which took up particularly obscure points of science, in the hope of gaining credit and honors thereby; and he even took him under his wing at the Ministry.

One day, when he came to lunch with his friend (for several months past he had constantly taken his meals there), he said to him in a whisper as he shook hands: "I have just obtained a great favor for you. The Committee of Historical Works is going to intrust you with a commission. There are some researches to be made in various libraries in France." [Pg 203]

Caillard was so delighted that he could scarcely eat or drink, and a week later he set out. He went from town to town, studying catalogues, rummaging in lofts full of dusty volumes, and was hated by all the librarians.

One day, happening to be at Rouen, he thought he should like to go and embrace his wife, whom he had not seen for more than a week, so he took the nine o'clock train, which would land him at home by twelve at night.

He had his latchkey, so he went in without making any noise, delighted at the idea of the surprise he was going to give her. She had locked herself in. How tiresome! However, he cried out through the door:

"Jeanne, it is I."

She must have been very frightened, for he heard her jump out of bed and speak to herself, as if she were in a dream. Then she went to her dressing-room, opened and closed the door, and went quickly up and down her room barefoot two or three times, shaking the furniture till the vases and glasses sounded. Then at last she asked:

"Is it you, Alexander?"

"Yes, yes," he replied; "make haste and open the door."

As soon as she had done so, she threw herself into his arms, exclaiming:

"Oh! what a fright!... What a surprise!... What a pleasure!..." [Pg 204]

He began to undress himself methodically, like he did everything, and from a chair he took his overcoat, which he was in the habit of hanging up in the hall. But, suddenly, he remained motionless, struck dumb with astonishment—there was a red ribbon in the buttonhole!

"Why," he stammered, "this—this—this—this overcoat has got the rosette in it!"

In a second his wife threw herself on him, and taking it from his hands, she said:

"No! you have made a mistake—give it to me."

But he still held it by one of the sleeves, without letting it go, repeating, in a half-dazed manner:



"Oh! Why? Just explain ... whose overcoat is it? It is not mine, as it has the Legion of Honor on it."

She tried to take it from him, terrified, and hardly able to say:

"Listen ... listen ... give it me ... I must not tell you ... it is a secret ... listen to me."

But he grew angry, and turned pale:

"I want to know how this overcoat comes to be here? It does not belong to me."

Then she almost screamed at him:

"Yes it does; listen ... swear to me ... well ... you are decorated."

She did not intend to joke at his expense.

He was so overcome that he let the overcoat fall, and dropped into an armchair.

"I am ... you say I am ... decorated?"

"Yes, but it is a secret, a great secret."

[Pg 205]

She had put the glorious garment into a cupboard, and came to her husband pale and trembling.

"Yes," she continued, "it is a new overcoat that I have had made for you. But I swore that I would not tell you anything about it, as it will not be officially announced for a month or six weeks, and you were not to have known till your return from your business journey. M. Rosselin managed it for you."

"Rosselin!" he contrived to utter in his joy; "he has obtained the decoration for me? He—Oh!"

And he was obliged to drink a glass of water.

A little piece of white paper fell to the floor out of the pocket of the overcoat. Caillard picked it up; it was a visiting-card, and he read out:

"Rosselin—Deputy."

"You see how it is," said his wife.

He almost cried with joy, and, a week later, it was announced in the *Journal Officiel* that M. Caillard had been awarded the Legion of Honor on account of his exceptional services.

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## **THE ACCURSED BREAD**

[Pg 206]

Daddy Taille had three daughters: Anna, the eldest, who was scarcely ever mentioned in the family; Rose, the second girl, who was eighteen; and Clara, the youngest, who was a girl of fifteen.

Old Taille was a widower, and a foreman in M. Lebrument's button-manufactory. He was a very upright man, very well thought of, abstemious; in fact a sort of model workman. He lived at Havre, in the Rue d'Angoulême.

When Anna ran away the old man flew into a fearful rage. He threatened to kill the seducer, who was head clerk in a large draper's establishment in that town. Then, when he was told by various people that she was keeping very steady and investing money in Government securities, that she was no gadabout, but was kept by a Mons. Dubois, who was a judge of the Tribunal of Commerce, the father was appeased.

He even showed some anxiety as to how she was getting on, asked some of her old friends who had been to see her how she was getting on; and when told that she had her own furniture, and that her mantelpiece was covered with vases and the walls with pictures, that there were clocks and carpets everywhere, he gave a broad, contented smile. He had been working for thirty years to get together a wretched five or six thousand francs. This girl was evidently no fool.

One fine morning the son of Touchard, the cooper, at the other end of the street, came and asked him for the hand of Rose, the second girl. The old man's heart began to beat, for the Touchards were rich and in a good position. He was decidedly lucky with his girls.

[Pg 207]

The marriage was agreed upon, and it was settled that it should be a grand affair, and the wedding dinner was to be held at Sainte-Adresse, at Mother Lusa's restaurant. It would cost a lot certainly; but never mind, it did not matter just for once in a way.

But one morning, just as the old man was going home to breakfast with his two daughters the door opened suddenly, and Anna appeared. She was elegantly dressed, wore rings and an expensive bonnet, and looked undeniably pretty and nice. She threw her arms round her father's neck before he could say a word, then fell into her sister's arms with many tears, and then asked for a plate, so that she might share the family soup. Taille was moved to tears in his turn and said several times:

"That is right, dear; that is right."

Then she told them about herself. She did not wish Rose's wedding to take place at Sainte-Adresse,—certainly not. It should take place at her house, and would cost her father nothing. She had settled everything and arranged everything, so it was "no good to say any more about it,—there!"

"Very well, my dear! very well!" the old man said, "we will leave it so." But then he felt some doubt. Would the Touchards consent? But Rose, the bride-elect, was surprised and asked, "Why should they object, I should like to know? Just leave that to me, I will talk to Philip about it."

She mentioned it to her lover the very same day, and he declared that it would suit him exactly. Father and Mother Touchard were naturally delighted at the idea of a good dinner which would cost them nothing, and said:

[Pg 208]

"You may be quite sure that everything will be in first-rate style, as M. Dubois is made of money."

They asked to be allowed to bring a friend, Mme. Florence, the cook on the first floor, and Anna agreed to everything.

The wedding was fixed for the last Tuesday of the month.

## II

After the civil formalities and the religious ceremony the wedding party went to Anna's house. Among those whom the Tailles had brought was a cousin of a certain age, a M. Sauvetanin, a man given to philosophical reflections, serious, and always very self-possessed, and Mme. Lamonois, an old aunt.

M. Sauvetanin had been told off to give Anna his arm, as they were looked upon as the two most important persons in the company.

As soon as they had arrived at the door of Anna's house she let go her companion's arm, and ran on ahead, saying, "I will show you the way," and ran upstairs while the invited guests followed more slowly; and, when they got upstairs, she stood on one side to let them pass, and they rolled their eyes and turned their heads in all directions to admire this mysterious and luxurious dwelling.

The table was laid in the drawing-room as the dining-room had been thought too small. Extra knives, forks, and spoons had been hired from a neighboring restaurant, and decanters full of wine under the rays of the sun which shown in through the window.

[Pg 209]

The ladies went into the bedroom to take off their shawls and bonnets, and Father Touchard, who was standing at the door, squinted at the low wide bed, and made funny and suggestive signs to the men, with many a wink and a nod. Daddy Taille, who thought a great deal of himself, looked with fatherly pride at his child's well-furnished rooms, and went from one to the other holding his hat in his hand, making a mental inventory of everything, and walking like a verger in a church.

Anna went backwards and forwards, ran about giving orders and hurrying on the wedding feast. Soon she appeared at the door of the dining-room, and cried: "Come here, all of you, for a moment," and when the twelve guests did as they were asked they saw twelve glasses of Madeira on a small table.

Rose and her husband had their arms round each other's waists, and were kissing each other in every corner. Mons. Sauvetanin never took his eyes off Anna; he no doubt felt that ardor, that sort of expectation which all men, even if they are old and ugly, feel for women of a certain stamp, as if they owed a little of themselves, professionally, to all males.

They sat down, and the wedding-breakfast began; the relations sitting at one end of the table and the young people at the other. Mme. Touchard, the mother, presided on the right and the bride on the left. Anna looked after everybody, saw that the glasses were kept filled and the plates well supplied. The guests evidently felt a certain respectful embarrassment at the sight of all the sumptuousness of the rooms and at the lavish manner in which they were treated. They all ate heartily of the good things provided, but there were no jokes such as are prevalent at weddings of that sort; it was all too grand, and it made them feel uncomfortable. Old Madame Touchard, who was fond of a bit of fun, tried to enliven matters a little, and at the beginning of the dessert she exclaimed: "I say, Philip, do sing us something." The neighbors in their street considered that he had the finest voice in all Havre.

[Pg 210]

The bridegroom got up, smiled, and turning to his sister-in-law, from politeness and gallantry, tried to think of something suitable for the occasion, something serious and correct, to harmonize with the seriousness of the repast.

Anna had a satisfied look on her face, and leaned back in her chair to listen, and all assumed looks of attention, though prepared to smile should smiles be called for.

The singer announced, "The Accursed Bread," and extending his right arm, which made his coat ruck up into his neck, he began.

It was decidedly long, three verses of eight lines each, with the last line and the last line but one repeated twice.

All went well for the first two verses; they were the usual commonplaces about bread gained by

honest labor and by dishonesty. The aunt and the bride wept outright. The cook, who was present, at the end of the first verse looked at a roll which she held in her hand with running eyes, as if they applied to her, while all applauded vigorously. At the end of the second verse the two servants, who were standing with their backs to the wall, joined loudly in the chorus, and the aunt and the bride wept outright. Daddy Taille blew his nose with the noise of a trombone, and old Touchard brandished a whole loaf half over the table, and the cook shed silent tears on the crust which she was still holding.

[Pg 211]

Amidst the general emotion M. Sauvetanin said:

"That is the right sort of song; very different to the nasty, risky things one generally hears at weddings."

Anna, who was visibly affected, kissed her hand to her sister, and pointed to her husband with an affectionate nod, as if to congratulate her.

Intoxicated by his success, the young man continued, and unfortunately the last verse contained the words about the bread of dishonor gained by young girls who had been led astray from the paths of virtue. No one took up the refrain about this bread, supposed to be eaten with tears, except old Touchard and the two servants. Anna had grown deadly pale, and cast down her eyes, while the bridegroom looked from one to the other without understanding the reason for this sudden coldness, and the cook hastily dropped the crust as if it were poisoned.

Mons. Sauvetanin said solemnly, in order to save the situation: "That last couplet is not at all necessary;" and Daddy Taille, who had got red up to the ears, looked round the table fiercely.

Then Anna, with her eyes swimming in tears, told the servants, in the faltering voice of a woman trying to stifle her sobs, to bring the champagne.

All the guests were suddenly seized with exuberant joy, and all their faces became radiant again. And when old Touchard, who had seen, felt, and understood nothing of what was going on, and, pointing to the guests so as to emphasize his words, sang the last words of the refrain:

[Pg 212]

"Children, I warn you all to eat not of that bread," the whole company, when they saw the champagne bottles, with their necks covered with gold foil appear, burst out singing, as if electrified by the sight:

"Children, I warn you all to eat not of that bread."

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## **WHAT WAS REALLY THE MATTER WITH ANDREW**

[Pg 213]

The lawyer's house looked on to the Square. Behind it, there was a nice, well-kept garden, with a back entrance into a narrow street which was almost always deserted, and from which it was separated by a wall.

At the bottom of that garden Maitre<sup>[14]</sup> Moreau's wife had promised, for the first time, to meet Captain Sommerive, who had been making love to her for a long time.

Her husband had gone to Paris for a week, so she was quite free for the time being. The Captain had begged so hard, and had used such loving words, she was certain that he loved her so ardently, and she felt so isolated, so misunderstood, so neglected amidst all the law business which seemed to be her husband's sole pleasure, that she had given away her heart without even asking herself whether it would give her anything else at some future time.

Then, after some months of platonic love, of pressing of hands, of kisses rapidly stolen behind a door, the Captain had declared that he would ask permission to exchange, and leave the town immediately, if she would not grant him a meeting, a real meeting, during her husband's absence; and so at length she yielded to his importunity.

Just then she was waiting, close against the wall, with a beating heart, trembling at the slightest sound, and when at length she heard somebody climbing up the wall, she very nearly ran away.

[Pg 214]

Suppose it were not he, but a thief? But no; someone called out softly, "*Matilda!*" and when she replied, "*Etienne!*" a man jumped on to the path with a crash.

It was he,—and what a kiss!

For a long time they remained in each other's arms, with united lips. But suddenly a fine rain began to fall, and the drops from the leaves fell on to her neck and made her start. Whereupon he said:

"Matilda, my adored one, my darling, my angel, let us go indoors. It is twelve o'clock, we can have nothing to fear; please let us go to your room."

"No, dearest; I am too frightened."

But he held her in his arms, and whispered in her ear:

"Your servants sleep on the third floor, looking on to the Square, and your room, on the first, looks on to the garden, so nobody can hear us. I love you so that I wish to love you entirely, from head to foot." And he embraced her vehemently.

She resisted still, frightened and even ashamed. But he put his arms round her, lifted her up, and carried her off under the rain, which was by this time descending in torrents.

The door was open; they groped their way upstairs; and when they were in the room he bolted the door while she lit a match.

Then she fell, half fainting, into a chair, while he knelt down beside her.

At last, she said, panting:

"No! no! Etienne, please let me remain a virtuous woman; I should be too angry with you afterwards; and after all, it is so horrid, so common. Cannot we love each other with a spiritual love only?... Oh! Etienne!"

[Pg 215]

But he was inexorable, and then she tried to get up and escape from his attacks.

In her fright she ran to the bed in order to hide herself behind the curtains; but it was a dangerous place of refuge, and he followed her. But in haste he took off his sword too quickly, and it fell on the floor with a crash.

And then—a prolonged, shrill child's cry came from the next room, the door of which had remained open.

"You have awakened the child," she whispered, "and perhaps he will not go to sleep again."

He was only fifteen months old, and slept in a room opening out of hers, so that she might be able to hear him.

The Captain exclaimed, ardently:

"What does it matter, Matilda? How I love you; you must come to me, Matilda."

But she struggled, and resisted in her fright.

"No! no! Just listen how he is crying; he will wake up the nurse, and what should we do if she were to come? We should be lost. Just listen to me, Etienne. When he screams at night his father always takes him into our bed, and he is quiet immediately; it is the only means of keeping him still. Do let me take him...."

The child roared, uttered shrill screams, which pierced the thickest walls, so as to be heard by passers-by in the streets.

[Pg 216]

In his consternation, the Captain got up, and Matilda jumped out and took the child into her bed, when he was quiet at once.

Etienne sat astride on a chair, and made a cigarette, and in about five minutes Andrew went to sleep again.

"I will take him back," his mother said; and she took him back very carefully to his bed.

When she returned, the Captain was waiting for her with open arms, and put his arms round her in a transport of love, while she, embracing him more closely, said, stammering:

"Oh! Etienne, my darling, if you only knew how I love you; how...."

Andrew began to cry again, and he, in a rage, exclaimed:

"Confound it all, won't the little brute be quiet?"

No, the little brute would not be quiet, but howled all the louder, on the contrary.

She thought she heard a noise downstairs; no doubt the nurse was coming, so she jumped up, and took the child into bed, and he grew quiet directly.

Three times she put him back, and three times she had to fetch him again, and an hour before daybreak the Captain had to go, swearing like the proverbial trooper; and, to calm his impatience, Matilda promised to receive him again the next night.

Of course he came, more impatient and ardent than ever, excited by the delay.

He took care to put his sword carefully into a corner; he took off his boots like a thief, and spoke so low that Matilda could hardly hear him. At last, he was just going to be really happy when the floor, or some piece of furniture, or perhaps the bed itself, creaked; it sounded as if something had broken; and in a moment a cry, feeble at first, but which grew louder every moment, made itself heard. Andrew was awake again.

[Pg 217]

He *yapped* like a fox, and there was not the slightest doubt that if he went on like that the whole house would awake; so his mother, not knowing what to do, got up and brought him. The Captain was more furious than ever, but did not move, and very carefully he put out his hand, took a small piece of the child's skin between his two fingers, no matter where it was, the thighs or elsewhere, and pinched it. The little one struggled and screamed in a deafening manner, but his

tormentor pinched everywhere furiously and more vigorously. He took a morsel of flesh and twisted and turned it, and then let go in order to take hold of another piece, and then another and another.

The child screamed like a chicken that is having its throat cut, or a dog that is being mercilessly beaten. His mother caressed him, kissed him, and tried to stifle his cries by her tenderness; but Andrew grew purple, as if he were going into convulsions, and kicked and struggled with his little arms and legs in an alarming manner.

The Captain said, softly:

"Try and take him back to his cradle; perhaps he will be quiet."

And Matilda went into the other room with the child in her arms.

As soon as he was out of his mother's bed he cried less loudly, and when he was in his own he was quiet, with exception of a few broken sobs.

The rest of the night was tranquil.

The next night he came again. As he happened to speak rather loudly, Andrew awoke again and began to scream. His mother went and fetched him immediately, but the Captain pinched so hard and long that the child was nearly suffocated by its cries, and its eyes turned in its head and it foamed at the mouth; as soon as it was back in its cradle it was quiet, and in four days Andrew did not cry any more to come into his mother's bed.

[Pg 218]

On Saturday evening the lawyer returned, and took his place again at the domestic hearth and in the conjugal chamber.

As he was tired with his journey he went to bed early; but he had not long lain down when he said to his wife:

"Why, how is it that Andrew is not crying? Just go and fetch him, Matilda; I like to feel that he is between us."

She got up and brought the child, but as soon as he saw that he was in that bed, in which he had been so fond of sleeping a few days previously, he wriggled and screamed so violently in his fright that she had to take him back to his cradle.

M. Moreau could not get over his surprise. "What a very funny thing! What is the matter with him this evening? I suppose he is sleepy?"

"He has been like that all the time that you were away; I have never been able to have him in bed with me once."

In the morning the child woke up and began to laugh and play with his toys.

The lawyer, who was an affectionate man, got up, kissed his offspring, and took him into his arms to carry him to their bed. Andrew laughed, with that vacant laugh of little creatures whose ideas are still vague. He suddenly saw the bed and his mother in it, and his happy little face puckered up, till suddenly he began to scream furiously, and struggled as if he were going to be put to the torture.

[Pg 219]

In his astonishment his father said:

"There must be something the matter with the child," and mechanically he lifted up his little nightshirt.

He uttered a prolonged "O—o—h!" of astonishment. The child's calves, thighs, and buttocks were covered with blue spots as big as halfpennies.

"Just look, Matilda!" the father exclaimed; "this is horrible!" And the mother rushed forward in a fright. It was horrible; no doubt the beginning of some sort of leprosy, of one of those strange affections of the skin which doctors are often at a loss to account for.

The parents looked at one another in consternation.

"We must send for the doctor," the father said.

But Matilda, pale as death, was looking at her child, who was spotted like a leopard. Then suddenly uttering a violent cry, as if she had seen something that filled her with horror, she exclaimed:

"Oh! the wretch!"

In his astonishment M. Moreau asked: "What are you talking about? What wretch?"

She got red up to the roots of her hair, and stammered:

"Oh, nothing! but I think I can guess—it must be—we ought to send for the doctor ... it must be that wretch of a nurse who has been pinching the poor child to make him keep quiet when he cries."

In his rage the lawyer sent for the nurse, and very nearly beat her. She denied it most impudently, but was instantly dismissed, and the Municipality having been informed of her

[Pg 220]

conduct, she will find it a hard matter to get another situation.

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## MY LANDLADY

[Pg 221]

At that time (George Kervelen said) I was living in furnished lodgings in the Rue des Saints-Pères.

When my father had made up his mind that I should go to Paris to continue my law studies, there had been a long discussion about settling everything. My allowance had been fixed at first at two thousand five hundred francs, but my poor mother was so anxious, that she said to my father that if I spent my money badly I might not take enough to eat, and then my health would suffer, and so it was settled that a comfortable boarding-house should be found for me, and that the amount should be paid to the proprietor himself, or herself, every month.

Some of our neighbors told us of a certain Mme. Kergaran, a native of Brittany, who took in boarders, and so my father arranged matters by letter with this respectable person, at whose house I and my luggage arrived one evening.

Mme. Kergaran was a woman of about forty. She was very stout, had a voice like a drill-sergeant, and decided everything in a very abrupt manner. Her house was narrow, with only one window opening on to the street on each story, which rather gave it the appearance of a ladder of windows, or better, perhaps, of a slice of a house sandwiched in between two others.

The landlady lived on the first floor with her servant, the kitchen and dining-room were on the second, and four boarders from Brittany lived on the third and fourth, and I had two rooms on the fifth.

[Pg 222]

A little dark corkscrew staircase led up to these attics. All day long Mme. Kergaran was up and down these stairs like a captain on board ship. Ten times a day she would go into each room, noisily superintending everything, seeing that the beds were properly made, the clothes well brushed, if the attendance were all that it should be; in a word, she looked after her boarders like a mother, and better than a mother.

I soon made the acquaintance of my four fellow-countrymen. Two were medical and two were law students, but all impartially endured the landlady's despotic yoke. They were as frightened of her as a boy robbing an orchard would be of a rural policeman.

I, however, immediately felt that I wished to be independent; it is my nature to rebel. I declared at once that I meant to come in at whatever time I liked, for Mme. Kergaran had fixed twelve o'clock at night as the limit. On hearing this she looked at me for a few moments, and then said:

"It is quite impossible; I cannot have Annette awakened at any hour of the night. You can have nothing to do out-of-doors at such a time."

I replied firmly that, according to the law, she was obliged to open the door for me at any time.

"If you refuse," I said, "I shall get a policeman to witness the fact, and go and get a bed at some hotel, at your expense, in which I shall be fully justified. You will, therefore, be obliged either to open the door for me or to get rid of me. Do which you please."

I laughed in her face as I told her my conditions. She could not speak for a moment for surprise, then she tried to negotiate, but I was firm, and she was obliged to yield; and so it was agreed that I should have a latchkey, on my solemn undertaking that no one else should know it.

[Pg 223]

My energy made such a wholesome impression on her that from that time she treated me with marked favor; she was most attentive, and even showed me a sort of rough tenderness which was not at all unpleasing. Sometimes when I was in a jovial mood I would kiss her by surprise, if only for the sake of getting the box on the ears which she gave me immediately afterwards. When I managed to duck my head quickly enough, her hand would pass over me as swiftly as a ball, and I would run away laughing, while she would call after me:

"Oh! you wretch, I will pay you out for that."

However, we soon became real friends.

It was not long before I made the acquaintance of a girl who was employed in a shop, and whom I constantly met. You know what such sort of love affairs are in Paris. One fine day, going to a lecture, you meet a work-girl going to work arm-in-arm with a friend. You look at her and feel that pleasant little shock which the eye of some women gives you. The next day at the same time, going through the same street, you meet her again, and the next, and the succeeding days. At last you speak, and the love affair follows its course just like an illness.

Well, by the end of three weeks I was on that footing with Emma which precedes a fall. The fall would indeed have taken place much sooner had I known where to bring it about. The girl lived at home, and utterly refused to go to an hotel. I did not know how to manage, but at last I took the desperate resolve to take her to my room some night at about eleven o'clock, under the pretense of giving her a cup of tea. Mme. Kergaran always went to bed at ten, so that we could

[Pg 224]

get in by means of my latchkey without exciting any attention, and go down again in an hour or two in the same way.

After a good deal of entreaty on my part, Emma accepted my invitation.

I did not spend a very pleasant day, for I was by no means easy in my mind. I was afraid of complications, of a catastrophe, of some scandal. At night I went into a café, and drank two cups of coffee, and three or four glasses of cognac, to give me courage, and when I heard the clock strike half-past ten, I went slowly to the place of meeting, where she was already waiting for me. She took my arm in a coaxing manner, and we set off slowly towards my lodgings. The nearer we got to the door the more nervous I got, and I thought to myself—"If only Mme. Kergaran is in bed already."

I said to Emma two or three times:

"Above all things, don't make any noise on the stairs," to which she replied, laughing:

"Are you afraid of being heard?"

"No," I said, "but I am afraid of waking the man who sleeps in the room next to me, who is not at all well."

When I got near the house I felt as frightened as a man does who is going to the dentist's. All the windows were dark, so no doubt everybody was asleep, and I breathed again. I opened the door as carefully as a thief, let my fair companion in, shut it behind me, and went upstairs on tiptoe, holding my breath, and striking wax-matches lest the girl should make a false step.

[Pg 225]

As we passed the landlady's door I felt my heart beating very quickly, but we reached the second floor, then the third, and at last the fifth, and got into my room. Victory!

However, I only dared to speak in a whisper, and took off my boots so as not to make any noise. The tea, which I made over a spirit-lamp, was soon drunk, and then I became pressing, till little by little, as if in play, I, one by one, took off my companion's clothes, who yielded while resisting, blushing, confused.

She had absolutely nothing more on except a short white petticoat when my door suddenly opened, and Mme. Kergaran appeared with a candle in her hand, in exactly the same costume as Emma.

I jumped away from her and remained standing up, looking at the two women, who were looking at each other. What was going to happen?

My landlady said, in a lofty tone of voice which I had never heard from her before:

"Monsieur Kervelen, I will not have prostitutes in my house."

"But, Madame Kergaran," I stammered, "the young lady is a friend of mine. She just came in to have a cup of tea."

"People don't take tea in their chemise. You will please make this person go directly."

Emma, in a natural state of consternation, began to cry, and hid her face in her petticoat, and I lost my head, not knowing what to do or say. My landlady added, with irresistible authority:

[Pg 226]

"Help her to dress, and take her out at once."

It was certainly the only thing I could do, so I picked up her dress from the floor, put it over her head, and began to fasten it as best I could. She helped me, crying all the time, hurrying and making all sorts of mistakes and unable to find either buttonholes or laces, while Mme. Kergaran stood by motionless, with the candle in her hand, looking at us with the severity of a judge.

As soon as Emma was dressed, without even stopping to button her boots, she rushed past the landlady and ran down stairs. I followed her in my slippers and half undressed, and kept repeating: "Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!"

I felt that I ought to say something to her, but I could not find anything. I overtook her just by the street-door, and tried to take her into my arms, but she pushed me violently away, saying in a low, nervous voice:

"Leave me alone, leave me alone!" and so ran out into the street, closing the door behind her.

When I went upstairs again I found that Mme. Kergaran was waiting on the first landing, and I went up slowly, expecting, and ready for, anything.

Her door was open, and she called me in, saying in a severe voice:

"I want to speak to you, M. Kervelen."

I went in, with my head bent. She put her candle on the mantelpiece, and then, folding her arms over her expansive bosom, which a fine white dressing-jacket hardly covered, she said:

"So, Monsieur Kervelen, you think my house is a house of ill-fame?"

I was not at all proud. I murmured:

[Pg 227]



"Oh, dear, no! But, Mme. Kergaran, you must not be angry; you know what young men are."

"I know," was her answer, "that I will not have such creatures here, so you will understand that. I expect to have my house respected, and I will not have it lose its reputation, you understand me? I know...."

She went on thus for at least twenty minutes, overwhelming me with the good name of her house, with reasons for her indignation, and loading me with severe reproofs. I went to bed crestfallen, and resolved never again to try such an experiment, so long, at least, as I continued to be a lodger of Mme. Kergaran.

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## **THE HORLA, OR MODERN GHOSTS**

[Pg 228]

*May 8.* What a beautiful day! I have spent all the morning lying in the grass in front of my house, under the enormous plantain tree which covers it, and shades and shelters the whole of it. I like this part of the country and I am fond of living here because I am attached to it by deep roots, profound and delicate roots which attach a man to the soil on which his ancestors were born and died, which attach him to what people think and what they eat, to the usages as well as to the food, local expressions, the peculiar language of the peasants, to the smell of the soil, of the villages and of the atmosphere itself.

I love my house in which I grew up. From my windows I can see the Seine which flows by the side of my garden, on the other side of the road, almost through my grounds, the great wide Seine, which goes to Rouen and Havre, and which is covered with boats passing to and fro.

On the left, down yonder, lies Rouen, that large town with its blue roofs, under its pointed, Gothic towers. They are innumerable, delicate or broad, dominated by the spire of the cathedral, and full of bells which sound through the blue air on fine mornings, sending their sweet and distant iron clang, to me; their metallic sound which the breeze wafts in my direction, now stronger and now weaker, according as the wind is stronger or lighter.

What a delicious morning it was!

[Pg 229]

About eleven o'clock, a long line of boats drawn by a steam-tug, as big as a fly, and which scarcely puffed while emitting its thick smoke, passed my gate.

After two English schooners, whose red flag fluttered towards the sky, there came a magnificent Brazilian three-master; it was perfectly white and wonderfully clean and shining. I saluted it, I hardly know why, except that the sight of the vessel gave me great pleasure.

*May 12.* I have had a slight feverish attack for the last few days, and I feel ill, or rather I feel low-spirited.

Whence do these mysterious influences come, which change our happiness into discouragement, and our self-confidence into diffidence? One might almost say that the air, the invisible air, is full of unknowable Forces, whose mysterious presence we have to endure. I wake up in the best spirits, with an inclination to sing in my throat. Why? I go down by the side of the water, and suddenly, after walking a short distance, I return home wretched, as if some misfortune were awaiting me there. Why? Is it a cold shiver which, passing over my skin, has upset my nerves and given me low spirits? Is it the form of the clouds, or the color of the sky, or the color of the surrounding objects which is so changeable, which have troubled my thoughts as they passed before my eyes? Who can tell? Everything that surrounds us, everything that we see without looking at it, everything that we touch without knowing it, everything that we handle without feeling it, all that we meet without clearly distinguishing it, has a rapid, surprising and inexplicable effect upon us and upon our organs, and through them on our ideas and on our heart itself.

[Pg 230]

How profound that mystery of the Invisible is! We cannot fathom it with our miserable senses, with our eyes which are unable to perceive what is either too small or too great, too near to, or too far from us; neither the inhabitants of a star nor of a drop of water ... with our ears that deceive us, for they transmit to us the vibrations of the air in sonorous notes. They are fairies who work the miracle of changing that movement into noise, and by that metamorphosis give birth to music, which makes the mute agitation of nature musical ... with our sense of smell which is smaller than that of a dog ... with our sense of taste which can scarcely distinguish the age of a wine!

Oh! If we only had other organs which would work other miracles in our favor, what a number of fresh things we might discover around us!

*May 16.* I am ill, decidedly! I was so well last month! I am feverish, horribly feverish, or rather I am in a state of feverish enervation, which makes my mind suffer as much as my body. I have without ceasing that horrible sensation of some danger threatening me, that apprehension of some coming misfortune or of approaching death, that presentiment which is, no doubt, an attack of some illness which is still unknown, which germinates in the flesh and in the blood.

*May 18.* I have just come from consulting my medical man, for I could no longer get any sleep. He



found that my pulse was high, my eyes dilated, my nerves highly strung, but no alarming symptoms. I must have a course of shower baths and of bromide of potassium.

*May 25.* No change! My state is really very peculiar. As the evening comes on, an incomprehensible feeling of disquietude seizes me, just as if night concealed some terrible menace towards me. I dine quickly, and then try to read, but I do not understand the words, and can scarcely distinguish the letters. Then I walk up and down my drawing-room, oppressed by a feeling of confused and irresistible fear, the fear of sleep and fear of my bed.

[Pg 231]

About ten o'clock I go up to my room. As soon as I have got in I double lock, and bolt it: I am frightened ... of what? Up till the present time I have been frightened of nothing ... I open my cupboards, and look under my bed; I listen ... I listen ... to what? How strange it is that a simple feeling of discomfort, impeded or heightened circulation, perhaps the irritation of a nervous thread, a slight congestion, a small disturbance in the imperfect and delicate functions of our living machinery, can turn the most light-hearted of men into a melancholy one, and make a coward of the bravest? Then, I go to bed, and I wait for sleep as a man might wait for the executioner. I wait for its coming with dread, and my heart beats and my legs tremble, while my whole body shivers beneath the warmth of the bedclothes, until the moment when I suddenly fall asleep, as one would throw oneself into a pool of stagnant water in order to drown oneself. I do not feel as I used to do formerly, this perfidious sleep which is close to me and watching me, which is going to seize me by the head, to close my eyes and annihilate me, coming over me.

I sleep—a long time—two or three hours perhaps—then a dream—no—a nightmare lays hold on me. I feel that I am in bed and asleep ... I feel it and I know it ... and I feel also that somebody is coming close to me, is looking at me, touching me, is getting on to my bed, is kneeling on my chest, is taking my neck between his hands and squeezing it ... squeezing it with all his might in order to strangle me.

[Pg 232]

I struggle, bound by that terrible powerlessness which paralyzes us in our dreams; I try to cry out—but I cannot; I want to move—I cannot; I try, with the most violent efforts and out of breath, to turn over and throw off this being which is crushing and suffocating me—I cannot!

And then suddenly, I wake up, shaken and bathed in perspiration; I light a candle and find that I am alone, and after that crisis, which occurs every night, I at length fall asleep and slumber tranquilly till morning.

*June 2.* My state has grown worse. What is the matter with me? The bromide does me no good, and the shower baths have no effect whatever. Sometimes, in order to tire myself out, though I am fatigued enough already, I go for a walk in the forest of Roumare. I used to think at first that the fresh light and soft air, impregnated with the odor of herbs and leaves, would instill new blood into my veins and impart fresh energy to my heart. I turned into a broad ride in the wood, and then I turned towards La Bouille, through a narrow path, between two rows of exceedingly tall trees, which placed a thick, green, almost black roof between the sky and me.

A sudden shiver ran through me, not a cold shiver, but a shiver of agony, and so I hastened my steps, uneasy at being alone in the wood, frightened stupidly and without reason, at the profound solitude. Suddenly it seemed to me as if I were being followed, that somebody was walking at my heels, close, quite close to me, near enough to touch me.

[Pg 233]

I turned round suddenly, but I was alone. I saw nothing behind me except the straight, broad ride, empty and bordered by high trees, horribly empty; on the other side it also extended until it was lost in the distance, and looked just the same, terrible.

I closed my eyes. Why? And then I began to turn round on one heel very quickly, just like a top. I nearly fell down, and opened my eyes; the trees were dancing round me and the earth heaved; I was obliged to sit down. Then, ah! I no longer remembered how I had come! What a strange idea! What a strange, strange idea! I did not the least know. I started off to the right, and got back into the avenue which had led me into the middle of the forest.

*June 3.* I have had a terrible night. I shall go away for a few weeks, for no doubt a journey will set me up again.

*July 2.* I have come back, quite cured, and have had a most delightful trip into the bargain. I have been to Mount Saint-Michel, which I had not seen before.

What a sight, when one arrives as I did, at Avranches towards the end of the day! The town stands on a hill, and I was taken into the public garden at the extremity of the town. I uttered a cry of astonishment. An extraordinarily large bay lay extended before me, as far as my eyes could reach, between two hills which were lost to sight in the mist; and in the middle of this immense yellow bay, under a clear, golden sky, a peculiar hill rose up, somber and pointed in the midst of the sand. The sun had just disappeared, and under the still flaming sky the outline of that fantastic rock stood out, which bears on its summit a fantastic monument.

[Pg 234]

At daybreak I went to it. The tide was low as it had been the night before, and I saw that wonderful abbey rise up before me as I approached it. After several hours walking, I reached the enormous mass of rocks which supports the little town, dominated by the great church. Having climbed the steep and narrow street, I entered the most wonderful Gothic building that has ever been built to God on earth, as large as a town, full of low rooms which seem buried beneath vaulted roofs, and lofty galleries supported by delicate columns.

I entered this gigantic granite jewel which is as light as a bit of lace, covered with towers, with slender belfries to which spiral staircases ascend, and which raise their strange heads that bristle with chimeras, with devils, with fantastic animals, with monstrous flowers, and which are joined together by finely carved arches, to the blue sky by day, and to the black sky by night.

When I had reached the summit, I said to the monk who accompanied me: "Father, how happy you must be here!" And he replied: "It is very windy, Monsieur;" and so we began to talk while watching the rising tide, which ran over the sand and covered it with a steel cuirass.

And then the monk told me stories, all the old stories belonging to the place, legends, nothing but legends.

One of them struck me forcibly. The country people, those belonging to the Mornet, declare that at night one can hear talking going on in the sand, and then that one hears two goats bleat, one with a strong, the other with a weak voice. Incredulous people declare that it is nothing but the cry of the sea birds, which occasionally resembles bleatings, and occasionally human lamentations; but belated fishermen swear that they have met an old shepherd, whose head, which is covered by his cloak, they can never see, wandering on the downs, between two tides, round the little town placed so far out of the world, and who is guiding and walking before them, a he-goat with a man's face, and a she-goat with a woman's face, and both of them with white hair; and talking incessantly, quarreling in a strange language, and then suddenly ceasing to talk in order to bleat with all their might.

[Pg 235]

"Do you believe it?" I asked the monk. "I scarcely know," he replied, and I continued: "If there are other beings besides ourselves on this earth, how comes it that we have not known it for so long a time, or why have you not seen them? How is it that I have not seen them?" He replied: "Do we see the hundred thousandth part of what exists? Look here; there is the wind, which is the strongest force in nature, which knocks down men, and blows down buildings, uproots trees, raises the sea into mountains of water, destroys cliffs and casts great ships onto the breakers; the wind which kills, which whistles, which sighs, which roars,—have you ever seen it, and can you see it? It exists for all that, however."

I was silent before this simple reasoning. That man was a philosopher, or perhaps a fool; I could not say which exactly, so I held my tongue. What he had said, had often been in my own thoughts.

*July 3.* I have slept badly; certainly there is some feverish influence here, for my coachman is suffering in the same way as I am. When I went back home yesterday, I noticed his singular paleness, and I asked him: "What is the matter with you, Jean?" "The matter is that I never get any rest, and my nights devour my days. Since your departure, Monsieur, there has been a spell over me."

[Pg 236]

However, the other servants are all well, but I am very frightened of having another attack, myself.

*July 4.* I am decidedly taken again; for my old nightmares have returned. Last night I felt somebody leaning on me who was sucking my life from between my lips with his mouth. Yes, he was sucking it out of my neck, like a leech would have done. Then he got up, satiated, and I woke up, so beaten, crushed and annihilated that I could not move. If this continues for a few days, I shall certainly go away again.

*July 5.* Have I lost my reason? What has happened, what I saw last night is so strange, that my head wanders when I think of it!

As I do now every evening, I had locked my door, and then, being thirsty, I drank half a glass of water, and I accidentally noticed that the water-bottle was full up to the cut-glass stopper.

Then I went to bed and fell into one of my terrible sleeps, from which I was aroused in about two hours by a still more terrible shock.

Picture to yourself a sleeping man who is being murdered and who wakes up with a knife in his chest, and who is rattling in his throat, covered with blood, and who can no longer breathe and is going to die and does not understand anything at all about it—there it is.

Having recovered my senses, I was thirsty again, so I lit a candle and went to the table on which my water-bottle was. I lifted it up and tilted it over my glass, but nothing came out. It was empty! It was completely empty! At first I could not understand it at all, and then suddenly I was seized by such a terrible feeling that I had to sit down, or rather I fell into a chair! Then I sprang up with a bound to look about me, and then I sat down again, overcome by astonishment and fear, in front of the transparent crystal bottle! I looked at it with fixed eyes, trying to conjecture, and my hands trembled! Somebody had drunk the water, but who? I? I without any doubt. It could surely only be I? In that case I was a somnambulist. I lived, without knowing it, that double mysterious life which makes us doubt whether there are not two beings in us, or whether a strange, unknowable and invisible being does not at such moments, when our soul is in a state of torpor, animate our captive body which obeys this other being, as it does us ourselves, and more than it does ourselves.

[Pg 237]

Oh! Who will understand my horrible agony? Who will understand the emotion of a man who is sound in mind, wide awake, full of sound sense, and who looks in horror at the remains of a little water that has disappeared while he was asleep, through the glass of a water-bottle! And I remained there until it was daylight, without venturing to go to bed again.

*July 6.* I am going mad. Again all the contents of my water-bottle have been drunk during the night;—or rather, I have drunk it!

But is it I? Is it I? Who could it be? Who? Oh! God! Am I going mad? Who will save me?

*July 10.* I have just been through some surprising ordeals. Decidedly I am mad! And yet!...

[Pg 238]

On July 6, before going to bed, I put some wine, milk, water, bread and strawberries on my table. Somebody drank—I drank—all the water and a little of the milk, but neither the wine, bread nor the strawberries were touched.

On the seventh of July I renewed the same experiment, with the same results, and on July 8, I left out the water and the milk and nothing was touched.

Lastly, on July 9 I put only water and milk on my table, taking care to wrap up the bottles in white muslin and to tie down the stoppers. Then I rubbed my lips, my beard and my hands with pencil lead, and went to bed.

Irresistible sleep seized me, which was soon followed by a terrible awakening. I had not moved, and my sheets were not marked. I rushed to the table. The muslin round the bottles remained intact; I undid the string, trembling with fear. All the water had been drunk, and so had the milk! Ah! Great God!...

I must start for Paris immediately.

*July 12.* Paris. I must have lost my head during the last few days! I must be the plaything of my enervated imagination, unless I am really a somnambulist, or that I have been brought under the power of one of those influences which have been proved to exist, but which have hitherto been inexplicable, which are called suggestions. In any case, my mental state bordered on madness, and twenty-four hours of Paris sufficed to restore me to my equilibrium.

Yesterday after doing some business and paying some visits which instilled fresh and invigorating mental air into me, I wound up my evening at the *Théâtre-Français*. A play by Alexandre Dumas the Younger was being acted, and his active and powerful mind completed my cure. Certainly solitude is dangerous for active minds. We require men who can think and can talk, around us. When we are alone for a long time, we people space with phantoms.

[Pg 239]

I returned along the boulevards to my hotel in excellent spirits. Amid the jostling of the crowd I thought, not without irony, of my terrors and surmises of the previous week, because I believed, yes, I believed, that an invisible being lived beneath my roof. How weak our head is, and how quickly it is terrified and goes astray, as soon as we are struck by a small, incomprehensible fact.

Instead of concluding with these simple words: "I do not understand because the cause escapes me," we immediately imagine terrible mysteries and supernatural powers.

*July 14. Fête of the Republic.* I walked through the streets, and the crackers and flags amused me like a child. Still it is very foolish to be merry on a fixed date, by a Government decree. The populace, an imbecile flock of sheep, now steadily patient, and now in ferocious revolt. Say to it: "Amuse yourself," and it amuses itself. Say to it: "Go and fight with your neighbor," and it goes and fights. Say to it: "Vote for the Emperor," and it votes for the Emperor, and then say to it: "Vote for the Republic," and it votes for the Republic.

Those who direct it are also stupid; but instead of obeying men, they obey principles, which can only be stupid, sterile and false, for the very reason that they are principles, that is to say, ideas which are considered as certain and unchangeable, in this world where one is certain of nothing, since light is an illusion and noise is an illusion.

[Pg 240]

*July 16.* I saw some things yesterday that troubled me very much.

I was dining with my cousin Madame Sablé, whose husband is colonel of the 76th Chasseurs at Limoges. There were two young women there, one of whom had married a medical man, Dr. Parent, who devotes himself a great deal to nervous diseases and the extraordinary manifestations to which at this moment experiments in hypnotism and suggestion give rise.

He related to us at some length the remarkable results obtained by English scientists and the doctors of the medical school at Nancy, and the facts which he adduced, appeared to me so strange, that I declared that I was altogether incredulous.

"We are," he declared, "on the point of discovering one of the most important secrets of nature, I mean to say, one of its most important secrets on this earth, for there are certainly some which are of a different kind of importance up in the stars, yonder. Ever since man has thought, since he has been able to express and write down his thoughts, he has felt himself close to a mystery which is impenetrable to his coarse and imperfect senses, and he endeavors to supplement the want of power of his organs, by the efforts of his intellect. As long as that intellect still remained in its elementary stage, this intercourse with invisible spirits, assumed forms which were commonplace though terrifying. Thence sprang the popular belief in the supernatural, the legends of wandering spirits, of fairies, of gnomes, ghosts, I might even say the legend of God, for our conceptions of the workman-creator, from whatever religion they may have come down to us, are certainly the most mediocre, the stupidest and the most unacceptable inventions that ever sprang from the frightened brain of any human creatures. Nothing is truer than what Voltaire says: 'God made man in His own image, but man has certainly paid Him back again.'"

[Pg 241]

"But for rather more than a century, men seem to have had a presentiment of something new. Mesmer and some others have put us on an unexpected track, and especially within the last two or three years, we have arrived at really surprising results."

My cousin, who is also very incredulous, smiled, and Doctor Parent said to her: "Would you like me to try and send you to sleep, Madame?" "Yes, certainly."

She sat down in an easy-chair, and he began to look at her fixedly, so as to fascinate her. I suddenly felt myself somewhat uncomfortable, with a beating heart and a choking feeling in my throat. I saw that Madame Sablé's eyes were growing heavy, her mouth twitched and her bosom heaved, and at the end of ten minutes she was asleep.

"Stand behind her," the doctor said to me, and so I took a seat behind her. He put a visiting-card into her hands, and said to her: "This is a looking-glass; what do you see in it?" And she replied: "I see my cousin." "What is he doing?" "He is twisting his moustache." "And now?" "He is taking a photograph out of his pocket." "Whose photograph is it?" "His own."

That was true, and that photograph had been given me that same evening at the hotel.

[Pg 242]

"What is his attitude in this portrait?" "He is standing up with his hat in his hand."

So she saw on that card, on that piece of white paste-board, as if she had seen it in a looking-glass.

The young women were frightened, and exclaimed: "That is quite enough! Quite, quite enough!"

But the doctor said to her authoritatively: "You will get up at eight o'clock to-morrow morning; then you will go and call on your cousin at his hotel and ask him to lend you five thousands francs which your husband demands of you, and which he will ask for when he sets out on his coming journey."

Then he woke her up.

On returning to my hotel, I thought over this curious *séance* and I was assailed by doubts, not as to my cousin's absolute and undoubted good faith, for I had known her as well as if she had been my own sister ever since she was a child, but as to a possible trick on the doctor's part. Had not he, perhaps, kept a glass hidden in his hand, which he showed to the young woman in her sleep, at the same time as he did the card? Professional conjurors do things which are just as singular.

So I went home and to bed, and this morning, at about half past eight, I was awakened by my footman, who said to me: "Madame Sablé has asked to see you immediately, Monsieur," so I dressed hastily and went to her.

She sat down in some agitation, with her eyes on the floor, and without raising her veil she said to me: "My dear cousin, I am going to ask a great favor of you." "What is it, cousin?" "I do not like to tell you, and yet I must. I am in absolute want of five thousand francs." "What, you?" "Yes, I, or rather my husband, who has asked me to procure the money for him."

[Pg 243]

I was so stupefied that I stammered out my answers. I asked myself whether she had not really been making fun of me with Doctor Parent, if it were not merely a very well-acted farce which had been got up beforehand. On looking at her attentively, however, my doubts disappeared. She was trembling with grief, so painful was this step to her, and I was sure that her throat was full of sobs.

I knew that she was very rich and so I continued: "What! Has not your husband five thousand francs at his disposal! Come, think. Are you sure that he commissioned you to ask me for them?"

She hesitated for a few seconds, as if she were making a great effort to search her memory, and then she replied: "Yes ... yes, I am quite sure of it." "He has written to you?"

She hesitated again and reflected, and I guessed the torture of her thoughts. She did not know. She only knew that she was to borrow five thousand francs of me for her husband. So she told a lie. "Yes, he has written to me." "When pray? You did not mention it to me yesterday." "I received his letter this morning." "Can you show it me?" "No; no ... no ... it contained private matters ... things too personal to ourselves ... I burnt it." "So your husband runs into debt?"

She hesitated again, and then murmured: "I do not know." Thereupon I said bluntly: "I have not five thousand francs at my disposal at this moment, my dear cousin."

[Pg 244]

She uttered a kind of a cry as if she were in pain and said: "Oh! oh I beseech you, I beseech you to get them for me...."

She got excited and clasped her hands as if she were praying to me! I heard her voice change its tone; she wept and stammered, harassed and dominated by the irresistible order that she had received.

"Oh! oh! I beg you to ... if you knew what I am suffering.... I want them to-day."

I had pity on her: "You shall have them by and by, I swear to you." "Oh! thank you! thank you! How kind you are."

I continued: "Do you remember what took place at your house last night?" "Yes." "Do you remember that Doctor Parent sent you to sleep?" "Yes." "Oh! Very well then; he ordered you to

come to me this morning to borrow five thousand francs, and at this moment you are obeying that suggestion."

She considered for a few moments, and then replied: "But as it is my husband who wants them...."

For a whole hour I tried to convince her, but could not succeed, and when she had gone I went to the doctor. He was just going out, and he listened to me with a smile, and said: "Do you believe now?" "Yes, I cannot help it." "Let us go to your cousin's."

She was already dozing on a couch, overcome with fatigue. The doctor felt her pulse, looked at her for some time with one hand raised towards her eyes which she closed by degrees under the irresistible power of this magnetic influence, and when she was asleep, he said:

"Your husband does not require the five thousand francs any longer! You must, therefore, forget that you asked your cousin to lend them to you, and, if he speaks to you about it, you will not understand him."

[Pg 245]

Then he woke her up, and I took out a pocketbook and said: "Here is what you asked me for this morning, my dear cousin." But she was so surprised, that I did not venture to persist; nevertheless, I tried to recall the circumstance to her, but she denied it vigorously, thought that I was making fun of her, and in the end, very nearly lost her temper.

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There! I have just come back, and I have not been able to eat any lunch, for this experiment has altogether upset me.

*July 19.* Many people to whom I have told the adventure, have laughed at me. I no longer know what to think. The wise man says: Perhaps?

*July 21.* I dined at Bougival, and then I spent the evening at a boatmen's ball. Decidedly everything depends on place and surroundings. It would be the height of folly to believe in the supernatural on the *île de la Grenouillère*<sup>[15]</sup> ... but on the top of Mont Saint-Michel?... and in India? We are terribly under the influence of our surroundings. I shall return home next week.

*July 30.* I came back to my own house yesterday. Everything is going on well.

*August 2.* Nothing new. It is splendid weather, and I spent my days in watching the Seine flow past.

*August 4.* Quarrels among my servants. They declare that the glasses are broken in the cupboards at night. The footman accuses the cook, who accuses the needle woman, who accuses the other two. Who is the culprit? A clever person, to be able to tell.

[Pg 246]

*August 6.* This time, I am not mad. I have seen ... I have seen ... I have seen!... I can doubt no longer ... I have seen it!...

I was walking at two o'clock among my rose trees, in the full sunlight ... in the walk bordered by autumn roses which are beginning to fall. As I stopped to look at a *Géant de Bataille*, which had three splendid blooms, I distinctly saw the stalk of one of the roses bend, close to me, as if an invisible hand had bent it, and then break, as if that hand had picked it! Then the flower raised itself, following the curve which a hand would have described in carrying it towards a mouth, and it remained suspended in the transparent air, all alone and motionless, a terrible red spot, three yards from my eyes. In desperation I rushed at it to take it! I found nothing; it had disappeared. Then I was seized with furious rage against myself, for it is not allowable for a reasonable and serious man to have such hallucinations.

But was it a hallucination? I turned round to look for the stalk, and I found it immediately under the bush, freshly broken, between two other roses which remained on the branch, and I returned home then, with a much disturbed mind; for I am certain now, as certain as I am of the alternation of day and night, that there exists close to me an invisible being that lives on milk and on water, which can touch objects, take them and change their places; which is, consequently, endowed with a material nature, although it is imperceptible to our senses, and which lives as I do, under my roof....

*August 7.* I slept tranquilly. He drank the water out of my decanter, but did not disturb my sleep.

I ask myself whether I am mad. As I was walking just now in the sun by the river side, doubts as to my own sanity arose in me; not vague doubts such as I have had hitherto, but precise and absolute doubts. I have seen mad people, and I have known some who have been quite intelligent, lucid, even clear-sighted in every concern of life, except on one point. They spoke clearly, readily, profoundly on everything, when suddenly their thoughts struck upon the breakers of their madness and broke to pieces there, and were dispersed and foundered in that furious and terrible sea, full of bounding waves, fogs and squalls, which is called *madness*.

[Pg 247]

I certainly should think that I was mad, absolutely mad, if I were not conscious, did not perfectly know my state, if I did not fathom it by analyzing it with the most complete lucidity. I should, in fact, be a reasonable man who was laboring under a hallucination. Some unknown disturbance must have been excited in my brain, one of those disturbances which physiologists of the present

day try to note and to fix precisely, and that disturbance must have caused a profound gulf in my mind and in the order and logic of my ideas. Similar phenomena occur in the dreams which lead us through the most unlikely phantasmagoria, without causing us any surprise, because our verifying apparatus and our sense of control has gone to sleep, while our imaginative faculty wakes and works. Is it not possible that one of the imperceptible keys of the cerebral finger-board has been paralyzed in me? Some men lose the recollection of proper names, or of verbs or of numbers or merely of dates, in consequence of an accident. The localization of all the particles of thought has been proved nowadays; what then would there be surprising in the fact that my faculty of controlling the unreality of certain hallucinations should be destroyed for the time being!

[Pg 248]

I thought of all this as I walked by the side of the water. The sun was shining brightly on the river and made earth delightful, while it filled my looks with love for life, for the swallows, whose agility is always delightful in my eyes, for the plants by the riverside, whose rustling is a pleasure to my ears.

By degrees, however, an inexplicable feeling of discomfort seized me. It seemed to me as if some unknown force were numbing and stopping me, were preventing me from going further and were calling me back. I felt that painful wish to return which oppresses you when you have left a beloved invalid at home, and when you are seized by a presentiment that he is worse.

I, therefore, returned in spite of myself, feeling certain that I should find some bad news awaiting me, a letter or a telegram. There was nothing, however, and I was more surprised and uneasy than if I had had another fantastic vision.

*August 8.* I spent a terrible evening, yesterday. He does not show himself any more, but I feel that he is near me, watching me, looking at me, penetrating me, dominating me and more redoubtable when he hides himself thus, than if he were to manifest his constant and invisible presence by supernatural phenomena. However, I slept.

*August 9.* Nothing, but I am afraid.

*August 10.* Nothing; what will happen to-morrow?

*August 11.* Still nothing; I cannot stop at home with this fear hanging over me and these thoughts in my mind; I shall go away.

[Pg 249]

*August 12.* Ten o'clock at night. All day long I have been trying to get away, and have not been able. I wished to accomplish this simple and easy act of liberty—go out—get into my carriage in order to go to Rouen—and I have not been able to do it. What is the reason?

*August 13.* When one is attacked by certain maladies, all the springs of our physical being appear to be broken, all our energies destroyed, all our muscles relaxed, our bones to have become as soft as our flesh, and our blood as liquid as water. I am experiencing that condition in my moral being in a strange and distressing manner. I have no longer any strength, any courage, any self-control, nor even any power to set my own will in motion. I have no power left to *will* anything, but some one does it for me and I obey.

*August 14.* I am lost! Somebody possesses my soul and governs it! Somebody orders all my acts, all my movements, all my thoughts. I am no longer anything in myself, nothing except an enslaved and terrified spectator of all the things which I do. I wish to go out; I cannot. He does not wish to, and so I remain, trembling and distracted in the armchair in which he keeps me sitting. I merely wish to get up and to rouse myself, so as to think that I am still master of myself: I cannot! I am riveted to my chair, and my chair adheres to the ground in such a manner that no force could move us.

Then suddenly, I must, I must go to the bottom of my garden to pick some strawberries and eat them, and I go there. I pick the strawberries and I eat them! Oh! my God! my God! Is there a God? If there be one, deliver me! save me! succor me! Pardon! Pity! Mercy! Save me! Oh! what sufferings! what torture! what horror!

[Pg 250]

*August 15.* Certainly this is the way in which my poor cousin was possessed and swayed, when she came to borrow five thousand francs of me. She was under the power of a strange will which had entered into her, like another soul, like another parasitic and ruling soul. Is the world coming to an end?

But who is he, this invisible being that rules me. This unknowable being, this rover of a supernatural race?

Invisible beings exist, then! How is it then that since the beginning of the world they have never manifested themselves in such a manner precisely as they do to me? I have never read anything which resembles what goes on in my house. Oh! If I could only leave it, if I could only go away and flee, so as never to return. I should be saved, but I cannot.

*August 16.* I managed to escape to-day for two hours, like a prisoner who finds the door of his dungeon accidentally open. I suddenly felt that I was free and that he was far away, and so I gave orders to put the horses in as quickly as possible, and I drove to Rouen. Oh! How delightful to be able to say to a man who obeyed you: "Go to Rouen!"

I made him pull up before the library, and I begged them to lend me Dr. Herrmann Herestauss's

treatise on the unknown inhabitants of the ancient and modern world.

Then, as I was getting into my carriage, I intended to say: "To the railway station!" but instead of this I shouted,—I did not say, but I shouted—in such a loud voice that all the passers-by turned round: "Home!" and I fell back onto the cushion of my carriage, overcome by mental agony. He had found me out and regained possession of me.

[Pg 251]

*August 17.* Oh! What a night! what a night! And yet it seems to me that I ought to rejoice. I read until one o'clock in the morning! Herestauss, Doctor of Philosophy and Theogony, wrote the history and the manifestations of all those invisible beings which hover around man, or of whom he dreams. He describes their origin, their domains, their power; but none of them resembles the one which haunts me. One might say that man, ever since he has thought, has had a foreboding of, and feared a new being, stronger than himself, his successor in this world, and that, feeling him near, and not being able to foretell the nature of that master, he has, in his terror, created the whole race of hidden beings, of vague phantoms born of fear.

Having, therefore, read until one o'clock in the morning, I went and sat down at the open window, in order to cool my forehead and my thoughts, in the calm night air. It was very pleasant and warm! How I should have enjoyed such a night formerly!

There was no moon, but the stars darted out their rays in the dark heavens. Who inhabits those worlds? What forms, what living beings, what animals are there yonder? What do those who are thinkers in those distant worlds, know more than we do? What can they do more than we can? What do they see which we do not know? Will not one of them, some day or other, traversing space, appear on our earth to conquer it, just as the Norsemen formerly crossed the sea in order to subjugate nations more feeble than themselves?

We are so weak, so unarmed, so ignorant, so small, we who live on this particle of mud which turns round in a drop of water.

[Pg 252]

I fell asleep, dreaming thus in the cool night air, and then, having slept for about three quarters of an hour, I opened my eyes without moving, awakened by I know not what confused and strange sensation. At first I saw nothing, and then suddenly it appeared to me as if a page of a book which had remained open on my table, turned over of its own accord. Not a breath of air had come in at my window, and I was surprised and waited. In about four minutes, I saw, I saw, yes I saw with my own eyes another page lift itself up and fall down on the others, as if a finger had turned it over. My armchair was empty, appeared empty, but I knew that he was there, he, and sitting in my place, and that he was reading. With a furious bound, the bound of an enraged wild beast that wishes to disembowel its tamer, I crossed my room to seize him, to strangle him, to kill him!... But before I could reach it, my chair fell over as if somebody had ran away from me ... my table rocked, my lamp fell and went out, and my window closed as if some thief had been surprised and had fled out into the night, shutting it behind him.

So he had run away: he had been afraid: he, afraid of me!

So ... so ... to-morrow ... or later ... some day or other ... I should be able to hold him in my clutches and crush him against the ground! Do not dogs occasionally bite and strangle their masters?

*August 18.* I have been thinking the whole day long. Oh! yes, I will obey him, follow his impulses, fulfill all his wishes, show myself humble, submissive, a coward. He is the stronger; but an hour will come....

[Pg 253]

*August 19.* I know, ... I know ... I know all! I have just read the following in the *Revue du Monde Scientifique*: "A curious piece of news comes to us from Rio de Janeiro. Madness, an epidemic of madness, which may be compared to that contagious madness which attacked the people of Europe in the Middle Ages, is at this moment raging in the Province of San-Paulo. The frightened inhabitants are leaving their houses, deserting their villages, abandoning their land, saying that they are pursued, possessed, governed like human cattle by invisible, though tangible beings, a species of vampire, which feed on their life while they are asleep, and who, besides, drink water and milk without appearing to touch any other nourishment."

"Professor Don Pedro Henriques, accompanied by several medical savants, has gone to the Province of San-Paulo, in order to study the origin and the manifestations of this surprising madness on the spot, and to propose such measures to the Emperor as may appear to him to be most fitted to restore the mad population to reason."

Ah! Ah! I remember now that fine Brazilian three-master which passed in front of my windows as it was going up the Seine, on the 8th of last May! I thought it looked so pretty, so white and bright! That Being was on board of her, coming from there, where its race sprang from. And it saw me! It saw my house which was also white, and he sprang from the ship onto the land. Oh! Good heavens!

[Pg 254]

Now I know, I can divine. The reign of man is over, and he has come. He whom disquieted priests exorcised, whom sorcerers evoked on dark nights, without yet seeing him appear, to whom the presentiments of the transient masters of the world lent all the monstrous or graceful forms of gnomes, spirits, genii, fairies and familiar spirits. After the coarse conceptions of primitive fear, more clear-sighted men foresaw it more clearly. Mesmer divined him, and ten years ago physicians accurately discovered the nature of his power, even before he exercised it himself.

They played with that weapon of their new Lord, the sway of a mysterious will over the human soul, which had become enslaved. They called it magnetism, hypnotism, suggestion ... what do I know? I have seen them amusing themselves like impudent children with this horrible power! Woe to us! Woe to man! He has come, the ... the ... what does he call himself ... the ... I fancy that he is shouting out his name to me and I do not hear him ... the ... yes ... he is shouting it out ... I am listening ... I cannot ... repeat ... it ... Horla ... I have heard ... the Horla, ... it is he ... the Horla ... he has come!

Ah! the vulture has eaten the pigeon, the wolf has eaten the lamb; the lion has devoured the buffalo with sharp horns; man has killed the lion with an arrow, with a sword, with gunpowder; but the Horla will make of man what we have made of the horse and of the ox: his chattel, his slave and his food, by the mere of his will. Woe to us!

[Pg 255]

But, nevertheless, the animal sometimes revolts and kills the man who has subjugated it.... I should also like ... I shall be able to ... but I must know him, touch him, see him! Learned men say that beasts' eyes, as they differ from ours, do not distinguish like ours do.... And my eye cannot distinguish this newcomer who is oppressing me.

Why? Oh! Now I remember the words of the monk at Mont Saint-Michel: "Can we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists? Look here; there is the wind which is the strongest force in nature, which knocks men, and blows down buildings, uproots trees, raises the sea into mountains of water, destroys cliffs and casts great ships onto the breakers; the wind which kills, which whistles, which sighs, which roars,—have you ever seen it, and can you see it? It exists for all that, however!"

And I went on thinking: my eyes are so weak, so imperfect, that they do not even distinguish hard bodies, if they are as transparent as glass!... If a glass without tinfoil behind it were to bar my way, I should run into it, just like a bird which has flown into a room breaks its head against the windowpanes. A thousand things, moreover, deceive him and lead him astray. How should it then be surprising that he cannot perceive a fresh body which is traversed by the light.

A new being! Why not? It was assuredly bound to come! Why should we be the last? We do not distinguish it, like all the others created before us? The reason is, that its nature is more perfect, its body finer and more finished than ours, that ours is so weak, so awkwardly conceived, encumbered with organs that are always tired, always on the strain like locks that are too complicated, which lives like a plant and like a beast, nourishing itself with difficulty on air, herbs and flesh, an animal machine, which is a prey to maladies, to malformations, to decay; broken-winded, badly regulated, simple and eccentric, ingeniously badly made, a coarse and a delicate work, the outline of a being which might become intelligent and grand.

[Pg 256]

We are only a few, so few in this world, from the oyster up to man. Why should there not be one more, when once that period is accomplished which separates the successive apparitions from all the different species?

Why not one more? Why not, also, other trees with immense, splendid flowers, perfuming whole regions? Why not other elements besides fire, air, earth and water? There are four, only four, those nursing fathers of various beings! What a pity! Why are they not forty, four hundred, four thousand! How poor everything is, how mean and wretched! grudgingly given, dryly invented, clumsily made! Ah! the elephant and the hippopotamus, what grace! And the camel, what elegance!

But, the butterfly you will say, a flying flower! I dream of one that should be as large as a hundred worlds, with wings whose shape, beauty, colors and motion I cannot even express. But I see it ... it flutters from star to star, refreshing them and perfuming them with the light and harmonious breath of its flight!... And the people up there look at it as it passes in an ecstasy of delight!...

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What is the matter with me? It is he, the Horla, who haunts me, and who makes me think of these foolish things! He is within me, he is becoming my soul; I shall kill him!

[Pg 257]

*August 19.* I shall kill him. I have seen him! Yesterday I sat down at my table and pretended to write very assiduously. I knew quite well that he would come prowling round me, quite close to me, so close that I might perhaps be able to touch him, to seize him. And then!... then I should have the strength of desperation; I should have my hands, my knees, my chest, my forehead, my teeth to strangle him, to crush him, to bite him, to tear him to pieces. And I watched for him with all my overexcited organs.

I had lighted my two lamps and the eight wax candles on my mantelpiece, as if, by this light, I could have discovered him.

My bed, my old oak bed with its columns was opposite to me; on my right was the fireplace; on my left the door, which was carefully closed, after I had left it open for some time, in order to attract him; behind me was a very high wardrobe with a looking-glass in it, which served me to dress by every day, and in which I was in the habit of looking at myself from head to foot every time I passed it.

So I pretended to be writing in order to deceive him, for he also was watching me, and suddenly I



felt, I was certain that he was reading over my shoulder, that he was there, almost touching my ear.

I got up so quickly, with my hands extended, that I almost fell. Eh! well?... It was as bright as at midday, but I did not see myself in the glass!... It was empty, clear, profound, full of light! But my figure was not reflected in it ... and I, I was opposite to it! I saw the large, clear glass from top to bottom, and I looked at it with unsteady eyes; and I did not dare to advance; I did not venture to make a movement, nevertheless, feeling perfectly that he was there, but that he would escape me again, he whose imperceptible body had absorbed my reflection.

[Pg 258]

How frightened I was! And then suddenly I began to see myself through a mist in the depths of the looking-glass, in a mist as it were through a sheet of water; and it seemed to me as if this water were flowing slowly from left to right, and making my figure clearer every moment. It was like the end of an eclipse. Whatever it was that hid me, did not appear to possess any clearly defined outlines, but a sort of opaque transparency, which gradually grew clearer.

At last I was able to distinguish myself completely, as I do every day when I look at myself.

I had seen it! And the horror of it remained with me, and makes me shudder even now.

*August 20.* How could I kill it, as I could not get hold of it? Poison? But it would see me mix it with the water; and then, would our poisons have any effect on its impalpable body? No ... no ... no doubt about the matter ... Then? ... then?...

*August 21.* I sent for a blacksmith from Rouen, and ordered iron shutters of him for my room, such as some private hotels in Paris have on the ground floor, for fear of thieves, and he is going to make me a similar door as well. I have made myself out as a coward, but I do not care about that!...

*September 10.* Rouen, Hotel Continental. It is done; ... it is done.... But is he dead? My mind is thoroughly upset by what I have seen.

[Pg 259]

Well, then, yesterday, the locksmith having put on the iron shutters and door, I left everything open until midnight, although it was getting cold.

Suddenly I felt that he was there, and joy, mad joy took possession of me. I got up softly, and I walked to the right and left for sometime, so that he might not guess anything; then I took off my boots and put on my slippers carelessly; then I fastened the iron shutters and going back to the door quickly I double-locked it with a padlock, putting the key into my pocket.

Suddenly I noticed that he was moving restlessly round me, that in his turn he was frightened and was ordering me to let him out. I nearly yielded, though I did not yet, but putting my back to the door, I half opened, just enough to allow me to go out backwards, and as I am very tall, my head touched the lintel. I was sure that he had not been able to escape, and I shut him up quite alone, quite alone. What happiness! I had him fast. Then I ran downstairs; in the drawing-room, which was under my bedroom, I took the two lamps and I poured all the oil onto the carpet, the furniture, everywhere; then I set the fire to it and made my escape, after having carefully double-locked the door.

I went and hid myself at the bottom of the garden, in a clump of laurel bushes. How long it was! how long it was! Everything was dark, silent, motionless, not a breath of air and not a star, but heavy banks of clouds which one could not see, but which weighed, oh! so heavily on my soul.

I looked at my house and waited. How long it was! I already began to think that the fire had gone out of its own accord, or that he had extinguished it, when one of the lower windows gave way under the violence of the flames, and a long, soft, caressing sheet of red flame mounted up the white wall, and kissed it as high as the roof. The light fell onto the trees, the branches, and the leaves, and a shiver of fear pervaded them also! The birds awoke; a dog began to howl, and it seemed to me as if the day were breaking! Almost immediately two other windows flew into fragments, and I saw that the whole of the lower part of my house was nothing but a terrible furnace. But a cry, a horrible, shrill, heartrending cry, a woman's cry, sounded through the night, and two garret windows were opened! I had forgotten the servants! I saw the terror-struck faces, and their frantically waving arms!...

[Pg 260]

Then, overwhelmed with horror, I set off to run to the village, shouting: "Help! help! fire! fire!" I met some people who were already coming onto the scene, and I went back with them to see!

By this time the house was nothing but a horrible and a magnificent funeral pile, a monstrous funeral pile which lit up the whole country, a funeral pile where men were burning, and where he was burning also, He, He, my prisoner, that new Being, the new master, the Horla!

Suddenly the whole roof fell in between the walls, and a volcano of flames darted up to the sky. Through all the windows which opened onto that furnace, I saw the flames darting, and I thought that he was there, in that kiln, dead.

Dead? perhaps?... His body? Was not his body, which was transparent, indestructible by such means as would kill ours?

[Pg 261]

If he was not dead?... Perhaps time alone has power over that Invisible and Redoubtable Being. Why this transparent, unrecognizable body, this body belonging to a spirit, if it also had to fear ills, infirmities and premature destruction?

Premature destruction? All human terror springs from that! After man the Horla. After him who can die every day, at any hour, at any moment, by any accident, he came who was only to die at his own proper hour and minute, because he had touched the limits of his existence!

No ... no ... without any doubt ... he is not dead.... Then ... then ... I suppose I must kill myself!...

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## LOVE.

### THREE PAGES FROM A SPORTSMAN'S BOOK

[Pg 262]

I have just read among the General News in one of the papers, a drama of passion. He killed her and then he killed himself, so he must have loved her. What matter He or She? Their love alone matters to me; and it does not interest me because it moves me or astonishes me, or because it softens me or makes me think, but because it recalls to my mind a remembrance of my youth, a strange recollection of a hunting adventure where Love appeared to me, as the Cross appeared to the early Christians, in the midst of the heavens.

I was born with all the instincts and the senses of primitive man, tempered by the arguments and the feelings of a civilized being. I am passionately fond of shooting, and the sight of the bleeding animal, with the blood on its feathers and on my hands, affect my heart so, as almost to make it stop.

That year the cold weather set in suddenly towards the end of autumn, and I was invited by one of my cousins, Karl de Rauville, to go with him and shoot ducks on the marshes, at daybreak.

My cousin, who was a jolly fellow of forty, with red hair, very stout and bearded, a country gentleman, an amiable semi-brute, of a happy disposition and endowed with that Gallic wit which makes even mediocrity agreeable, lived in a house, half farmhouse, half château, situated in a broad valley through which a river ran. The hills right and left were covered with woods, old seignorial woods where magnificent trees still remained, and where the rarest feathered game in that part of France was to be found. Eagles were shot there occasionally, and birds of passage, those which rarely come into our over-populated part of the country, almost infallibly stopped amid these branches, which were centuries old, as if they knew or recognized a little corner of a forest of ancient times which had remained there to serve them as a shelter during their short nocturnal halting place.

[Pg 263]

In the valley there were large meadows watered by trenches and separated by hedges; then, further on the river, which up to that point had been canalized, expanded into a vast marsh. That marsh, which was the best shooting ground which I ever saw, was my cousin's chief care, who kept it like a park. Among the number of rushes that covered it, and made it living, rustling and rough, narrow passages had been made, through which the flat-bottomed boats, which were impelled and steered by poles, passed along silently over the dead water, brushed up against the reeds and made the swift fish take refuge among the weeds, and the wild fowl dive, whose pointed, black heads disappeared suddenly.

I am passionately fond of the water; the sea, although it is too vast, too full of movement, impossible to hold, the rivers, which are so beautiful, but which pass on, flee away and go, and above all the marshes, where the whole unknown existence of aquatic animals palpitates. The marsh is an entire world to itself on earth, a different world which has its own life, its settled inhabitants and its passing travelers, its voices, its noises, and above all its mystery. Nothing is more disturbing, nothing, more disquieting, more terrifying occasionally, than a fen. Why should this terror hang over these low plains covered with water? Is it the vague rustling of the rushes, the strange Will-o'-the-wisps, the profound silence which envelops them on calm nights, or is it the strange mists, which hang over the rushes like a shroud; or else it is the imperceptible splashing, so slight and so gentle, and sometimes more terrifying than the cannons of men or the thunders of skies, which make these marshes resemble countries which none has dreamed of, terrible countries concealing an unknown and dangerous secret.

[Pg 264]

No, something else belongs to it, another mystery, more profound and graver floats amid these thick mists, perhaps the mystery of the creation itself! For was it not in stagnant and muddy water, amid the heavy humidity of moist land under the heat of the sun, that the first germ of life vibrated and expanded to the day?

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I arrived at my cousin's in the evening. It was freezing hard enough to split stones.

During dinner, in the large room whose sideboards, walls and ceilings were covered with stuffed birds, with extended wings or perched on branches to which they were nailed, hawks, herons, owls, nightjars, buzzards, tiercels, vultures, falcons, my cousin, who himself resembled some strange animal from a cold country, dressed in a sealskin jacket, told me what preparations he had made for that same night.

We were to start at half past three in the morning, so as to arrive at the place which he had chosen for our watching place at about half past four. On that spot a hut had been built of lumps

[Pg 265]

of ice, so as to shelter us somewhat from the terrible wind which precedes daybreak, that wind which is so cold that it tears the flesh as if with a saw, cuts it like the blade of a knife and pricks it like a poisoned sting, twists it like a pair of pincers, and burns it like fire.

My cousin rubbed his hands: "I have never known such a frost," he said; "it is already twelve degrees below zero at six o'clock in the evening."

I threw myself onto my bed immediately after we had finished our meal, and I went to sleep by the light of a bright fire burning in the grate.

At three o'clock he woke me. In my turn, I put on a sheepskin, and I found my cousin Karl covered with a bearskin. After having each of us swallowed two cups of scalding coffee, followed by glasses of liqueur brandy, we started, accompanied by a gamekeeper and our dogs, Plongeon and Pierrot.

From the first moment that I got outside, I felt chilled to the very marrow. It was one of those nights on which the earth seems dead with cold. The frozen air becomes resisting and palpable, such pain does it cause; no breath of wind moves it, it is fixed and motionless; it bites, pierces through you, dries, kills the trees, the plants, the insects, the small birds themselves that fall from the branches onto the hard ground, and become hard themselves under the grip of the cold.

The moon, which was in her last quarter and was inclining all to one side, seemed fainting in the midst of space, and so weak that she did not seem able to take her departure, and so she remained up yonder, also seized and paralyzed by the severity of the weather. She shed a cold, mournful light over the world, that dying and wan light which she gives us every month, at the end of her resurrection.

[Pg 266]

Karl and I went side by side, our backs bent, our hands in our pockets and our guns under our arms. Our boots, which were wrapped in wool, so that we might be able to walk without slipping on the frozen river, made no sound, and I looked at the white vapor which our dogs' breath made.

We were soon on the edge of the marsh, and we went into one of these lanes of dry rushes which ran through this low forest.

Our elbows, which touched the long, ribbonlike leaves, left a slight noise behind us, and I was seized, as I had never been before, by the powerful singular emotion which marshes cause in me. This one was dead, dead from cold, since we were walking on it, in the middle of its population of dried rushes.

Suddenly, at the turn of one of the lanes, I perceived the ice-hut which had been constructed to shelter us. I went in, and as we had nearly an hour to wait before the wandering birds would awake, I rolled myself up in my rug in order to try and get warm.

Then, lying on my back, I began to look at the misshapen moon, which had four horns, through the vaguely transparent walls of this polar house.

But the frost of the frozen marshes, the cold of these walls, the cold from the firmament penetrated me so terribly, that I began to cough.

My cousin Karl became uneasy. "So much the worse if we do not kill much to-day," he said, "I do not want you to catch cold; we will light a fire." And he told the gamekeeper to cut some rushes.

[Pg 267]

We made a pile in the middle of our hut, which had a hole in the middle of the roof to let out the smoke, and when the red flames rose up to the clear, crystal cloisons they began to melt, gently, imperceptibly, as if these stones of ice had sweated. Karl, who had remained outside, called out to me: "Come and look here!" I went out of the hut and remained, struck with astonishment. Our hut, in the shape of a cone, looked like an enormous diamond with a heart of fire, which had been suddenly planted there in the midst of the frozen water of the marsh. And inside we saw two fantastic forms, those of our dogs, who were warming themselves at the fire.

But a peculiar cry, a lost, a wandering cry, passed over our heads, and the light from our hearth showed us the wild birds. Nothing moves one so much as the first clamor of life which one does not see, and which is passing through the somber air so quickly and so far off, before the first streak of the winter's day appears on the horizon. It seems to me at this glacial hour of dawn, as if that passing cry which is carried away by the wings of a bird, is the sigh of a soul from the world!

"Put out the fire," Karl said. "It is getting daylight."

The sky was, in fact, beginning to grow pale, and the flights of ducks made long, rapid spots, which were soon obliterated, on the sky.

A stream of light burst out into the night; Karl had fired, and the two dogs ran forward.

And then, nearly every minute, now he, now I, aimed rapidly as soon as the shadow of a flying flock appeared above the rushes. And Pierrot and Plongeon, out of breath but happy, retrieved the bleeding birds for us, whose eyes still, occasionally, looked at us.

[Pg 268]

The sun had risen, and it was a bright day with a blue sky, and we were thinking of taking our departure, when two birds with extended necks and outstretched wings, glided rapidly over our heads. I fired, and one of them fell almost at my feet. It was a teal, with a silver breast, and then, in the blue space above me, I heard a voice, the voice of a bird. It was a short, repeated,

heartrending lament; and the bird, the little animal that had been spared began to turn round in the blue sky, over our heads, looking at its dead companion which I was holding in my hand.

Karl was on his knees, his gun to his shoulder watching it eagerly, until it should be within shot. "You have killed the duck," he said, "and the drake will not fly away."

He certainly did not fly away; he turned round over our heads continually, and continued his cries. Never have any groans of suffering pained me so much as that desolate appeal, as that lamentable reproach of this poor bird which was lost in space.

Occasionally he took a flight under the menace of the gun which followed his flight, and seemed ready to continue his flight alone, but as he could not make up his mind to this, he soon returned to find his mate.

"Leave her on the ground," Karl said to me, "he will come within shot by and by." And he did indeed come near us, careless of danger, infatuated by his animals' love, by his affection for that other animal which I had just killed.

Karl fired, and it was as if somebody had cut the string which held the bird suspended. I saw something black descend, and I heard the noise of a fall among the rushes. And Pierrot brought it to me. [Pg 269]

I put them—they were already cold—into the same bag, and I returned to Paris the same evening.

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## THE HOLE

[Pg 270]

CUTS AND WOUNDS WHICH CAUSED DEATH. That was the heading of the charge which brought Leopold Renard, upholsterer, before the Assize Court.

Round him were the principal witnesses, Madame Flamèche, widow of the victim, and Louis Ladureau, cabinetmaker, and Jean Durdent, plumber.

Near the criminal was his wife, dressed in black, a little ugly woman, who looked like a monkey dressed as a lady.

This is how Renard (Leopold) recounted the drama:

"Good heavens, it is a misfortune of which I was the first victim all the time, and with which my will has nothing to do. The facts are their own commentary, Monsieur le Président. I am an honest man, a hard working man, an upholsterer in the same street for the last sixteen years, known, liked, respected and esteemed by all, as my neighbors have testified, even the porter who is not *folâtre* every day. I am fond of work, I am fond of saving, I like honest men, and respectable pleasures. That is what has ruined me, so much the worse for me; but as my will had nothing to do with it, I continue to respect myself.

"Every Sunday for the last five years, my wife and I have been to spend the day at Passy. We get fresh air, without counting that we are fond of fishing. Oh! we are as fond of it as we are of small onions. Mélie inspired me with that passion, the jade, and she is more enthusiastic than I am, the scold, seeing that all the mischief in this business is her fault, as you will see immediately. [Pg 271]

"I am strong and mild-tempered, without a pennyworth of malice in me. But she! oh! la! la! she looks like nothing, she is short and thin; very well, she does more mischief than a weasel. I do not deny that she has some good qualities; she has some, and very important ones for a man in business. But her character! Just ask about it in the neighborhood, and even the porter's wife, who has just sent me about my business ... she will tell you something about it.

"Every day she used to find fault with my mild temper: 'I would not put up with this! I would not put up with that.' If I had listened to her, Monsieur le Président, I should have had at least three bouts of fisticuffs a month...."

Madame Renard interrupted him: "And for good reasons too; they laugh best who laugh last."

He turned towards her frankly: "Oh! very well, I can charge you, since you were the cause of it."

Then, facing the President again he said:

"I will continue. We used to go to Passy every Saturday evening, so as to be able to begin fishing at daybreak the next morning. It is a habit which has become a second nature with us, as the saying is. Three years ago this summer I discovered a place, oh! such a spot! Oh! there! in the shade, eight feet of water at least and perhaps ten, a hole with *retour* under the bank, a regular nest for fish and a paradise for the fisherman. I might look upon that hole as my property, Monsieur le Président, as I was its Christopher Columbus. Everybody in the neighborhood knew it, without making any opposition. They used to say: 'That is Renard's place;' and nobody would have gone to it, not even Monsieur Plumsay, who is well known, be it said without any offense, for boning other peoples' places. [Pg 272]

"Well, I returned to my place of which I felt certain, just as if I had owned it. I had scarcely got there on Saturday, when I got into *Delila*, with my wife. *Delila* is my Norwegian boat, which I had

built by Fourmaise, and which is light and safe. Well, as I said, we got into the boat and we were going to bait, and for baiting, there is nobody to be compared with me, and they all know it. You want to know with what I bait? I cannot answer that question; it has nothing to do with the accident; I cannot answer, that is my secret. There are more than three hundred people who have asked me; I have been offered glasses of brandy and liquors, fried fish, matelotes,<sup>[16]</sup> to make me tell! But just go and try whether the chub will come. Ah! they have patted my stomach to get at my secret, my recipe.... Only my wife knows ... and she will not tell it, any more than I shall!... Is not that so Mélie?"

The President of the Court interrupted him.

"Just get to the facts as soon as you can," and the accused continued: "I am getting to them; I am getting to them." Well, on Saturday July 8, we left by the twenty-five past five train, and before dinner we went to ground-bait as usual. The weather promised to keep fine, and I said to Mélie: 'All right for to-morrow!' And she replied: 'It looks like it.' We never talk more than that together.

[Pg 273]

"And then we returned to dinner. I was happy and thirsty, and that was the cause of everything. I said to Mélie: 'Look here Mélie, it is fine weather, so suppose I drink a bottle of *Casque à mèche*.' That is a little white wine which we have christened so, because if you drink too much of it it prevents you from sleeping and takes the place of a nightcap. Do you understand me?"

"She replied: 'You can do as you please, but you will be ill again, and I will not be able to get up to-morrow.' That was true, sensible and prudent, clear-sighted, I must confess. Nevertheless, I could not withstand it, and I drank my bottle. It all comes from that.

"Well, I could not sleep. By Jove! It kept me awake till two o'clock in the morning, and then I went to sleep so soundly that I should not have heard the angel shouting at the last Judgment.

"In short, my wife woke me at six o'clock, and I jumped out of bed, hastily put on my trousers and jersey, washed my face and jumped on board *Delila*. But it was too late, for when I arrived at my hole it was already taken! Such a thing had never happened to me in three years, and it made me feel as if I were being robbed under my own eyes. I said to myself, 'Confound it all! confound it!' And then my wife began to nag at me. 'Eh! What about your *Casque à mèche*! Get along, you drunkard! Are you satisfied, you great fool?' I could say nothing, because it was all quite true, and so I landed all the same near the spot and tried to profit by what was left. Perhaps after all the fellow might catch nothing, and go away.

[Pg 274]

"He was a little thin man, in white linen coat and waistcoat, and with a large straw hat, and his wife, a fat woman who was doing embroidery, was behind him.

"When she saw us take up our position close to their place, she murmured: 'I suppose there are no other places on the river!' And my wife, who was furious, replied: 'People who know how to behave, make inquiries about the habits of the neighborhood before occupying reserved spots.'

"As I did not want a fuss, I said to her: 'Hold your tongue, Mélie. Let them go on, let them go on; we shall see.'

"Well, we had fastened *Delila* under the willow trees, and had landed and were fishing side by side, Mélie and I, close to the two others; but here, Monsieur, I must enter into details.

"We had only been there about five minutes when our male neighbor's float began to go down two or three times, and then he pulled out a chub as thick as my thigh, rather less, perhaps, but nearly as big! My heart beat, and the perspiration stood on my forehead, and Mélie said to me: 'Well, you sot, did you see that?'

"Just then, Monsieur Bru, the grocer of Poissy, who is fond of gudgeon fishing, passed in a boat, and called out to me; 'So somebody has taken your usual place, Monsieur Renard?' And I replied: 'Yes, Monsieur Bru, there are some people in this world who do not know the usages of common politeness.'

"The little man in linen pretended not to hear, nor his fat lump of a wife, either."

[Pg 275]

Here the President interrupted him a second time: "Take care, you are insulting the widow, Madame Flamèche, who is present."

Renard made his excuses: "I beg your pardon, I beg pardon, my anger carried me away." Well, not a quarter of an hour had passed when the little man caught another chub and another almost immediately, and another five minutes later.

"The tears were in my eyes, and then I knew that Madame Renard was boiling with rage, for she kept on nagging at me: 'Oh! how horrid! Don't you see that he is robbing you of your fish? Do you think that you will catch anything? Not even a frog, nothing whatever. Why my hands are burning, just to think of it.'

"But I said to myself: 'Let us wait until twelve o'clock. Then this poaching fellow will go to lunch, and I shall get my place again.' As for me, Monsieur le Président, I lunch on the spot every Sunday; we bring our provisions in *Delila*. But there! At twelve o'clock, the wretch produced a fowl out of a newspaper, and while he was eating, actually he caught another chub!

"Mélie and I had a morsel also, just a thumb-piece, a mere nothing, for our heart was not in it.

"Then I took up my newspaper, to aid my digestion. Every Sunday I read the *Gil Blas* in the shade like that, by the side of the water. It is Columbine's day, you know, Columbine who writes the articles in the *Gil Blas*. I generally put Madame Renard into a passion by pretending to know this Columbine. It is not true, for I do not know her, and have never seen her, but that does not matter; she writes very well, and then she says things straight out for a woman. She suits me, and there are not many of her sort.

[Pg 276]

"Well, I began to tease my wife, but she got angry immediately, and very angry, and so I held my tongue, and at that moment our two witnesses who are present here, Monsieur Ladureau and Monsieur Durdent appeared on the other side of the river. We knew each other by sight. The little man began to fish again, and he caught so many that I trembled with vexation, and his wife said: 'It is an uncommonly good spot, and we will come here always Desiré.' As for me, a cold shiver ran down my back, and Madame Renard kept repeating: 'You are not a man; you have the blood of a chicken in your veins;' and suddenly I said to her: 'Look here, I would rather go away, or I shall only be doing something foolish.'

"And she whispered to me as if she had put a red-hot iron under my nose: 'You are not a man. Now you are going to run away, and surrender your place! Off you go, Bazaine!'

"Well, I felt that, but yet I did not move, while the other fellow pulled out a bream, oh! I never saw such a large one before, never! And then my wife began to talk aloud, as if she were thinking, and you can see her trickery. She said: 'That is what one might call stolen fish, seeing that we baited the place ourselves. At any rate, they ought to give us back the money we have spent on bait.'

"Then the fat woman in the cotton dress said in turn: 'Do you mean to call us thieves, Madame?' And they began to explain, and then they came to words. Oh! Lord! those creatures know some good ones. They shouted so loud, that our two witnesses, who were on the other bank, began to call out by way of a joke: 'Less noise over there; you will prevent your husbands from fishing.'

[Pg 277]

"The fact is that neither of us moved any more than if we had been two tree-stumps. We remained there, with our noses over the water, as if we had heard nothing, but by Jove, we heard all the same. 'You are a mere liar.—You are nothing better than a streetwalker.—You are only a trollop.—You are a regular strumpet.' And so on, and so on; a sailor could not have said more.

"Suddenly I heard a noise behind me, and turned round. It was the other one, the fat woman, who had fallen onto my wife with her parasol. *Whack! whack!* Mélie got two of them, but she was furious, and she hits hard when she is in a rage, so she caught the fat woman by the hair and then, *thump, thump*, and slaps in the face rained down like ripe plums. I should have let them go on; women among themselves; men among themselves; it does not do to mix the blows, but the little man in the linen jacket jumped up like a devil and was going to rush at my wife. Ah! no, no, not that my friend! I caught the gentleman with the end of my fist, and *crash, crash*, one on the nose, the other in the stomach. He threw up his arms and legs and fell on his back into the river, just into the hole.

"I should have fished him out most certainly, Monsieur le Président, if I had had the time. But unfortunately the fat woman got the better of it, and she was drubbing Mélie terribly. I know that I ought not to have assisted her while the man was drinking his fill, but I never thought that he would drown, and said to myself: 'Bah, it will cool him.'

[Pg 278]

"I therefore ran up to the women to separate them, and all I received was scratches and bites. Good Lord, what creatures! Well, it took me five minutes, and perhaps ten to separate those two viragoes, and when I turned round, there was nothing more to be seen, and the water was as smooth as a lake, while the others yonder kept shouting: 'Fish him out!' and though it was all very well to say that, I cannot swim and still less dive!

"At last the man from the dam came, and two gentlemen with boat hooks, but it had taken over a quarter of an hour. He was found at the bottom of the hole in eight feet of water, as I have said, but he had got it, the poor little man in his linen suit! There are the facts, such as I have sworn to. I am innocent, on my honor."

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The witnesses having deposed to the same effect, the accused was acquitted.

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## **SAVED**

[Pg 279]

The little Marquise de Rennedon came rushing in like a ball smashing a window, and she began to laugh before she spoke, to laugh until she cried, like she had done a month previously, when she had told her friend that she had betrayed the marquis in order to have her revenge, and only once, because he was really too stupid and too jealous.

The little Baroness de Grangerie had thrown the book which she was reading on the sofa, and looked at Annette curiously. She was already laughing herself, and at last she asked:



"What have you been doing now?" "Oh! ... my dear!... my dear! it is too funny ... too funny.... Just fancy ... I am saved!... saved!... saved!"... "How do you mean, saved!" "Yes, saved!" "From what?" "From my husband, my dear, saved! Delivered! free! free! free!" "How free? in what?" "In what? Divorce! Yes, a divorce! I have my divorce!" "You are divorced?" "No, not yet; how stupid you are! One does not get divorced in three hours! But I have my proofs that he has deceived me ... caught in the very act ... just think!... in the very act.... I have got him tight...." "Oh! do tell me all about it! So he deceived you?" "Yes, that is to say no ... yes and no ... I do not know. At any rate, I have proofs, and that is the chief thing." "How did you manage it?"

[Pg 280]

"How did I manage it?... This is how! I have been energetic, very energetic. For the last three months he has been odious, altogether odious, brutal, coarse, a despot, in one word, vile. So I said to myself: This cannot last, I must have a divorce! But how? for it is not very easy? I tried to make him beat me, but he would not. He put me out from morning till night, made me go out when I did not wish to, and to remain at home when I wanted to dine out; he made my life unbearable for me from one week's end to the other, but he never struck me.

"Then I tried to find out whether he had a mistress. Yes, he had one, but he took a thousand precautions in going to see her, and they could never be caught together. Guess what I did then?" "I cannot guess." "Oh! you could never guess. I asked my brother to procure me a photograph of the creature." "Of your husband's mistress?" "Yes. It cost Jacques fifteen louis, the price of an evening, from seven o'clock until midnight, including a dinner, at three louis an hour, and he obtained the photograph into the bargain." "It appears to me that he might have obtained it anyhow by means of some artifice and without ... without ... without being obliged to take the original at the same time." "Oh! she is pretty, and Jacques did not mind the least. And then, I wanted some details about her, physical details about her figure, her breast, her complexion, a thousand things, in fact."

"I do not understand you." "You shall see. When I had learned all that I wanted to know, I went to a ... how shall I put it ... to a man of business ... you know ... one of those men who transact business of all sorts ... agents of ... of ... of publicity and complicity ... one of those men ... well, you understand what I mean." "Pretty nearly, I think. And what did you say to him?" "I said to him, showing the photograph of Clarisse (her name is Clarisse): 'Monsieur, I want a lady's maid who resembles this photograph. I require one who is pretty, elegant, neat and sharp. I will pay her whatever is necessary, and if it costs me ten thousand francs so much the worse. I shall not require her for more than three months.'

[Pg 281]

"The man looked extremely astonished, and said: 'Do you require a maid of an irreproachable character, Madame?' I blushed, and stammered. 'Yes, of course, for honesty.' He continued: ... 'And ... then ... as regards morals....' I did not venture to reply, so I only made a sign with my head, which signified: *no*. Then suddenly, I comprehended that he had a horrible suspicion and losing my presence of mind, I exclaimed: 'Oh, Monsieur, ... it is for my husband, in order that I may surprise him....'

"Then the man began to laugh, and from his looks I gathered that I had regained his esteem. He even thought I was brave, and I would willingly have made a bet that at that moment he was longing to shake hands with me. However, he said to me: 'In a week, Madame, I shall have what you require; I will answer for my success, and you shall not pay me until I have succeeded. So this is a photograph of your husband's mistress?' 'Yes, Monsieur,' 'A handsome woman, and not too stout. And what scent?'

[Pg 282]

"I did not understand, and repeated: 'What scent?' He smiled: 'Yes, Madame, the perfume is essential to seduce a man, for it unconsciously brings to his mind certain reminiscences which dispose him to action; the perfume creates an obscure confusion in his mind, and disturbs and enervates him by recalling his pleasures to him. You must also try to find out what your husband is in the habit of eating when he dines with his lady, and you might give him the same dishes the day you catch him. Oh! we have got him, Madame, we have got him.'

"I went away delighted, for here I had lighted on a very intelligent man.

"Three days later, I saw a tall, dark girl arrive at my house; she was very handsome and her looks were modest and bold at the same time, the peculiar look of a female rake. She behaved very properly towards me, and as I did not exactly know what she was, I called her *Mademoiselle*, but she said immediately: 'Oh! pray, Madame, only call me Rose.' And she began to talk.

"Well, Rose, you know why you have come here?' 'I can guess it, Madame.' 'Very good, my girl ... and that will not ... be too much bother for you?' 'Oh! madame, this will be the eighth divorce that I shall have caused; I am used to it.' 'Why, that is capital. Will it take you long to succeed?' 'Oh! Madame, that depends entirely on Monsieur's temperament. When I have seen Monsieur for five minutes alone I shall be able to tell you exactly.' 'You will see him soon, my child, but I must tell you that he is not handsome.' 'That does not matter to me, Madame. I have already separated some very ugly ones. But I must ask you, Madame, whether you have discovered his favorite perfume?' 'Yes, Rose,—verbena.' 'So much the better, Madame, for I am also very fond of that scent! Can you also tell me, Madame, whether Monsieur's mistress wears silk underclothing and nightdresses?' 'No, my child, cambric and lace.' 'Oh! then she is altogether of superior station, for silk underclothing is getting quite common.' 'What you say is quite true!' 'Well, Madame, I will enter your service.' And so, as a matter of fact, she did immediately, and as if she had done nothing else all her life.

[Pg 283]

"An hour later my husband came home. Rose did not even raise her eyes to him, but he raised his eyes to her. She already smelt strongly of verbena, and in five minutes she left the room, and he immediately asked me: 'Who is that girl?' 'Why ... my new lady's maid.' 'Where did you pick her up?' 'Baroness de Grangerie got her for me with the best references.' 'Ah! she is rather pretty!' 'Do you think so?' 'Why, yes ... for a lady's maid.'

"I was delighted, for I felt that he was already biting, and that same evening Rose said to me: 'I can now promise you that it will not take more than a fortnight. Monsieur is very easily caught!' 'Ah! you have tried already?' 'No, Madame, he only asked what my name was ... so that he might hear what my voice was like.' 'Very well, my dear Rose. Get on as quick as you can.' 'Do not be alarmed, Madame; I shall only resist long enough not to make myself depreciated.'

[Pg 284]

"At the end of a week my husband scarcely ever went out; I saw him roaming about the house the whole afternoon, and what was most significant in the matter was, that he no longer prevented me from going out. And I, I was out of doors nearly the whole day long, ... in order ... in order to leave him at liberty.

"On the ninth day, while Rose was undressing me, she said to me with a timid air: 'It happened this morning, Madame.' I was rather surprised, or rather overcome even, not at the part itself, but at the way in which she told me, and I stammered out: 'And ... and ... it went off well?' 'Oh! yes, very well, Madame. For the last three days he has been pressing me, but I did not wish matters to proceed too quickly. You will tell me when you want us to be caught, Madame.' 'Yes, certainly. Here!... let us say Thursday.' 'Very well, Madame, I shall grant nothing more until then, so as to keep Monsieur on the alert.' 'You are sure not to fail?' 'Oh! quite sure, Madame. I will excite him, so as to make him be there at the very moment which you may appoint.' 'Let us say five o'clock, then.' 'Very well, Madame, and where?' 'Well ... in my bedroom.' 'Very good, Madame, in your bedroom.'

"You will understand what I did then, my dear. I went and fetched Mamma and Papa first of all, and then my uncle d'Orvelin, the President, and Monsieur Raplet, the Judge, my husband's friend. I had not told them what I was going to show them, but I made them all go on tiptoe as far as the door of my room. I waited until five o'clock exactly, and oh! how my heart beat! I had made the porter come upstairs as well, so as to have an additional witness! And then ... and then at the moment when the clock began to strike, I opened the door wide.... Ah! ah! ah! Here he was evidently, ... it was quite evident, my dear.... Oh! what a face!... if you had only seen his face!... And he turned round, the idiot! Oh! how funny he looked.... I laughed, I laughed.... And papa was angry and wanted to give my husband a beating.... And the porter, a good servant, helped him to dress himself ... before us ... before us.... He buttoned his braces for him ... what a joke it was!... As for Rose, she was perfect, absolutely perfect.... She cried ... oh! she cried very well. She is an invaluable girl.... If you ever want her, don't forget!

[Pg 285]

"And here I am.... I came immediately to tell you of the affair ... directly. I am free. Long live divorce!"

And she began to dance in the middle of the drawing-room, while the little baroness, who was thoughtful and vexed, said:

"Why did you not invite me to see it?"

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## **BELFLOWER<sup>[17]</sup>**

[Pg 286]

How strange those old recollections are which haunt us, without our being able to get rid of them!

This one is so very old that I cannot understand how it has clung so vividly and tenaciously to my memory. Since then I have seen so many sinister things, which were either affecting or terrible, that I am astonished at not being able to pass a single day without the face of Mother Bellflower recurring to my mind's eye, just as I knew her formerly, now so long ago, when I was ten or twelve years old.

She was an old seamstress, who came to my parents house once a week, every Thursday to mend the linen. My parents lived in one of those country houses called *châteaux*, and which are merely old houses with pointed roofs, which are surrounded by three or four farms.

The village, a large village, almost a small market town, was a few hundred yards off, and lay closely round the church, a red brick church, which had become black with age.

Well, every Thursday Mother Bellflower came between half-past six and seven in the morning, and went immediately into the linen-room and began to work. She was a tall, thin, bearded or rather hairy woman, for she had a beard all over her face, a surprising, an unexpected beard, growing in tufts, in curly bunches, which looked as if they had been sown by a madman over that great face of a gendarme in petticoats. She had them on her nose, under her nose, round her nose, on her chin, on her cheeks; and her eyebrows, which were extraordinarily thick and long, and quite gray, bushy and bristling, looked exactly like a pair of moustaches stuck on there by mistake.

[Pg 287]



She limped, but not like lame people generally do, but like a ship at anchor. When she planted her great, bony, swerving body on her sound leg, she seemed to be preparing to mount some enormous wave, and then suddenly she dipped as if to disappear in an abyss, and buried herself in the ground. Her walk reminded one of a storm, as she balanced herself at the same time, and her head, which was always covered with an enormous white cap, whose ribbons fluttered down her back, seemed to traverse the horizon from North to South and from South to North, at each of her movements.

I adored Mother Bellflower. As soon as I was up I went into the linen-room, where I found her installed at work, with a foot-warmer under her feet. As soon as I arrived, she made me take the foot-warmer and sit upon it, so that I might not catch cold in that large, chilly room under the roof.

She told me stories, while mending the linen with her long crooked nimble fingers; her eyes behind her magnifying spectacles, for age had impaired her sight, appeared enormous to me, strangely profound, double.

She had, as far as I can remember, the things which she told me and by which my childish heart was moved, the large heart of a poor woman. She told me what had happened in the village, how a cow had escaped from the cowhouse and had been found the next morning in front of Prosper Malet's mill, looking at the sails turning, or about a hen's egg, which had been found in the church belfry without anyone being able to understand what creature had been there to lay it, or the story of Jean-Jean Pila's dog, who had been ten leagues to bring back his master's breeches, which a tramp had stolen while they were hanging up to dry out of doors, after he had been in the rain. She told me these simple adventures in such a manner, that in my mind they assumed the proportions of never-to-be-forgotten dramas, of grand and mysterious poems; and the ingenious stories invented by the poets which my mother told me in the evening had none of the flavor, none of the fullness nor of the vigor of the peasant woman's narratives.

[Pg 288]

Well, one Thursday, when I had spent all the morning in listening to Mother Clochette, I wanted to go up stairs to her again during the day after picking hazelnuts with the manservant in the wood behind the farm. I remember it all as clearly as what happened only yesterday.

On opening the door of the linen-room, I saw the old seamstress lying on the ground by the side of her chair, with her face to the ground and her arms stretched out, but still holding her needle in one hand and one of my shirts in the other. One of her legs in a blue stocking, the longer one, no doubt, was extended under her chair, and her spectacles glistened against the wall, as they had rolled away from her.

I ran away uttering shrill cries. They all came running, and in a few minutes I was told that Mother Clochette was dead.

I cannot describe the profound, poignant, terrible emotion which stirred my childish heart. I went slowly down into the drawing-room and went and hid myself in a dark corner, in the depths of a great, old armchair, where I knelt and wept. I remained there for a long time no doubt, for night came on. Suddenly somebody came in with a lamp, without seeing me, however, and I heard my father and mother talking with the medical man, whose voice I recognized.

[Pg 289]

He had been sent for immediately, and he was explaining the causes of the accident, of which I understood nothing, however. Then he sat down and had a glass of liquor and biscuit.

He went on talking, and what he then said will remain engraved on my mind until I die! I think that I can give the exact words which he used.

"Ah!" said he, "the poor woman! She broke her leg the day of my arrival here, and I had only not even had time to wash my hands after getting off the diligence before I was sent for in all haste, for it was a bad case, very bad.

"She was seventeen, and a pretty girl, very pretty! Would any one believe it? I have never told her story before, and nobody except myself and one other person, who is no longer living in this part of the country, ever knew it. Now that she is dead, I may be less discreet.

"Just then a young assistant teacher came to live in the village; he was good-looking and had the bearing of a sub-officer. All the girls ran after him, and he acted the disdainful, and besides that, he was very much afraid of his superior, the schoolmaster, old Grabu, who occasionally got out of bed the wrong foot first.

"Old Grabu already employed pretty Hortense, who has just died here, and who was afterwards nicknamed Clochette. The assistant master singled out the pretty young girl, who was no doubt flattered at being chosen by this impregnable conqueror; at any rate, she fell in love with him, and he succeeded in persuading her to give him a first meeting in the hay-loft behind the school, at night, after she had done her day's sewing.

[Pg 290]

"She pretended to go home, but instead of going downstairs when she left the Grabu's, she went upstairs and hid among the hay, to wait for her lover. He soon joined her, and he was beginning to say pretty things to her, when the door of the hay-loft opened and the schoolmaster appeared, and asked: 'What are you doing up there, Sigisbert?' Feeling sure that he would be caught, the young schoolmaster lost his presence of mind and replied stupidly: 'I came up here to rest a little among the bundles of hay, Monsieur Grabu.'

"The loft was very large and absolutely dark, and Sigisbert pushed the frightened girl to the further end and said: 'Go there and hide yourself. I shall lose my situation, so get away and hide yourself.'

"When the schoolmaster heard the whispering, he continued: 'Why, you are not by yourself?' 'Yes, I am, Monsieur Grabu!' 'But you are not, for you are talking.' 'I swear I am, Monsieur Grabu.' 'I will soon find out,' the old man replied, and double-locking the door, he went down to get a light.

"Then the young man, who was a coward such as one frequently meets, lost his head, and he repeated, having grown furious all of a sudden: 'Hide yourself, so that he may not find you. You will deprive me of my bread for my whole life; you will ruin my whole career.... Do hide yourself!' They could hear the key turning in the lock again, and Hortense ran to the window, which looked out onto the street, opened it quickly, and then in a low and determined voice she said: 'You will come and pick me up when he is gone,' and she jumped out.

[Pg 291]

Old Grabu found nobody, and went down again in great surprise, and a quarter of an hour later Monsieur Sigisbert came to me and related his adventure. The girl had remained at the foot of the wall unable to get up, as she had fallen from the second story, and I went with him to fetch her. It was raining in torrents, and I brought the unfortunate girl home with me, for the right leg was broken in three places, and the bones had come out through the flesh. She did not complain, and merely said, with admirable resignation: 'I am punished, well punished!'

"I sent for assistance and for the workgirl's friends and told them a made-up story of a runaway carriage which had knocked her down and lamed her, outside my door. They believed me, and the gendarmes for a whole month tried in vain to find the author of this accident.

"That is all! And I say that this woman was a heroine, and belonged to the race of those who accomplished the grandest deeds in history.

"That was her only love affair, and she died a virgin. She was a martyr, a noble soul, a sublimely devoted woman! And if I did not absolutely admire her, I should not have told you this story, which I would never tell anyone during her life: you understand why."

The doctor ceased; Mamma cried and Papa said some words which I did not catch; then they left the room, and I remained on my knees in the armchair and sobbed, while I heard a strange noise of heavy footsteps and something knocking against the side of the staircase.

[Pg 292]

They were carrying away Clochette's body.

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## THE MARQUIS DE FUMEROL

[Pg 293]

Roger de Toumeville was sitting astride a chair in the midst of his friends and talking; he held a cigar in his hand, and from time to time took a whiff and blew out a small cloud of smoke.

"We were at dinner when a letter was brought in and my father opened it. You know my father, who thinks that he is king of France *ad interim*. I call him Don Quixote, because for twelve years he has been running a tilt against the windmill of the Republic, without quite knowing whether it was in the name of the Bourbons or of the Orleans. At present he is holding the lance in the name of the Orleans alone, because there is nobody else but them left. In any case, he thinks himself the first gentleman in France, the best known, the most influential, the head of the party; and as he is an irremovable senator, he thinks that the neighboring kings' thrones are very insecure.

"As for my mother, she is my father's soul, she is the soul of the kingdom and of religion, the right arm of God, and the scourge of evil-thinkers.

"Well, so a letter was brought in while we were at dinner, and my father opened and read it, and then he said to my mother: 'Your brother is dying.' She grew very pale. My uncle was scarcely ever mentioned in the house, and I did not know him at all; all I knew from public talk was, that he had led, and was still leading, the life of a buffoon. After having spent his fortune with an incalculable number of women, he had only retained two mistresses, with whom he was living in small apartments in the Rue des Martyrs.

[Pg 294]

"An ex-peer of France and ex-colonel of cavalry, it was said that he believed in neither God nor devil. Not believing, therefore, in a future life he had abused this present life in every way, and he had become the living wound of my mother's heart.

"Give me that letter, Paul,' she said, and when she had read it, I asked for it in my turn. Here it is.

*Monsieur le comte, I think I ought to let you know that your brother-law, count Fumeroll is going to dye. Perhapps you would make preparations and not forgett that I told you.*

*Your servant,*

MÉLANI.

"We must think,' papa murmured. 'In my position, I ought to watch over your brother's last moments.'

"Mamma continued: 'I will send for Abbé Poivron and ask his advice, and then I will go to my brother's with the abbé and Roger. Stop here Paul, for you must not compromise yourself, but a woman can, and ought to do these things. But for a politician in your position, it is another matter. It would be a fine thing for one of your opponents to be able to bring one of your most laudable actions up against you.' 'You are right,' my father said. 'Do as you think best, my dear wife.'

"A quarter of an hour later, the Abbé Poivron came into the drawing-room, and the situation was explained to him, analyzed and discussed in all its bearings. If the Marquis de Fumerol, one of the greatest names in France, were to die without the succor of religion, it would assuredly be a terrible blow for the nobility in general, and for the Count de Toumeville in particular, and the freethinkers would be triumphant. The evilly disposed newspapers would sing songs of victory for six months; my mother's name would be dragged through the mire and brought into the prose of Socialistic journals, and my father's would be bespattered. It was impossible that such a thing should occur.

[Pg 295]

"A crusade was therefore immediately decided upon, which was to be led by the Abbé Poivron, a little fat, clean, slightly scented priest, a true vicar of a large church in a noble and rich quarter.

"The landau was ordered and we started all three, my mother, the Curé and I, to administer the last sacraments to my uncle.

"It had been decided first of all we should see Madame Mélanie who had written the letter, and who was most likely the porter's wife, or my uncle's servant, and I got down as a scout in front of a seven-storied house and went into a dark passage, where I had great difficulty in finding the porter's den. He looked at me distrustfully, and said:

"'Madame Mélanie, if you please.' 'Don't know her!' 'But I have received a letter from her.' 'That may be, but don't know her. Are you asking for some kept woman?' 'No, a servant probably. She wrote me about a place.' 'A servant?... a servant?... Perhaps it is the Marquis's. Go and see, the fifth story on the left.'

"As soon as he found I was not asking for a kept woman, he became more friendly and came as far as the passage with me. He was a tall, thin man with white whiskers, the manners of a beadle and majestic movements.

[Pg 296]

"I climbed up a long spiral staircase, whose balusters I did not venture to touch, and I gave three discreet knocks at the left-hand door on the fifth story. It opened immediately, and an enormous dirty woman appeared before me, who barred the entrance with her open arms which she leant against the two doorposts, and grumbled:

"'What do you want?' 'Are you Madame Mélanie?' 'Yes.' 'I am the Viscountess de Toumeville.' 'Ah! All right! Come in.' 'Well, the fact is my mother is downstairs with a priest.' 'Oh! All right; go and bring them up; but take care of the porter.'

"I went downstairs and came up again with my mother, who was followed by the abbé, and I fancied that I heard other footsteps behind us. As soon as we were in the kitchen, Mélanie offered us chairs, and we all four sat down to deliberate.

"'Is he very ill?' my mother asked. 'Oh! yes, Madame; he will not be here long.' 'Does he seem disposed to receive a visit from a priest?' 'Oh! I do not think so.' 'Can I see him?' 'Well ... yes ... Madame ... only ... only ... those young ladies are with him.' 'What young ladies?' 'Why ... why ... his lady friends, of course.' 'Oh!' Mamma had grown scarlet, and the Abbé Poivron had lowered his eyes.

"The affair began to amuse me, and I said: 'Suppose I go in first? I shall see how he receives me, and perhaps I shall be able to prepare his heart for you.'

[Pg 297]

"My mother who did not suspect any trick, replied: 'Yes, go my dear.' But a woman's voice cried out: 'Mélanie!'

"The fat servant ran out and said: 'What do you want, Mademoiselle Claire?' 'The omelette, quickly.' 'In a minute, Mademoiselle.' And coming back to us, she explained this summons.

"'They ordered a cheese omelette at two o'clock as a slight collation.' And immediately she began to break the eggs into a salad bowl, and began to whip them vigorously, while I went out onto the landing and pulled the bell, so as to announce my official arrival. Mélanie opened the door to me, and made me sit down in an ante-room, while she went to tell my uncle, that I had come; then she came back and asked me to go in, while the Abbé hid behind the door, so that he might appear at the first sign.

"I was certainly very much surprised at seeing my uncle, for he was very handsome, very solemn and very elegant, was the old rake.

"Sitting, almost lying in a large armchair, his legs wrapped in blankets, with his hands, his long, white hands, over the arms of the chair, he was waiting death with Biblical dignity. His white beard fell onto his chest, and his hair, which was also white, mingled with it on his cheeks.

"Standing behind his armchair, as if to defend him against me, were two young women, two stout young women, who looked at me with the bold eyes of prostitutes. In their petticoats and morning wrappers, with bare arms, with coal black hair twisted up onto the nape of their neck,

with embroidered Oriental slippers which showed their ankles and silk stockings, they looked like the immoral figures of some symbolical painting, by the side of the dying man. Between the easy-chair and the bed, there was a table covered with a white cloth, on which two plates, two glasses, two forks and two knives, were waiting for the cheese omelette which had been ordered some time before of Mélanie.

[Pg 298]

"My uncle said in weak, almost breathless but clear voice: 'Good morning, my child: it is rather late in the day to come and see me; our acquaintance will not last long.' I stammered out: 'It was not my fault, uncle,' ... and he replied: 'No; I know that. It is your father and mother's fault more than yours.... How are they?' 'Pretty well, thank you. When they heard that you were ill, they sent me to ask after you.' 'Ah! Why did they not come themselves?'

"I looked up at the two girls and said gently: 'It is not their fault if they could not come, uncle. But it would be difficult for my father, and impossible for my mother to come in here....' The old man did not reply, but raised his hand towards mine, and I took the pale, cold hand and kept it in my own.

"The door opened, Mélanie came in with the omelette and put it on the table, and the two girls immediately sat down in front of their plates and began to eat without taking their eyes off me. Then I said: 'Uncle, it would be a great pleasure for my mother to embrace you.' 'I also ...' he murmured, 'should like....' He said no more, and I could think of nothing to propose to him, and nothing more was heard except the noise of the plates and that vague movement of eating mouths.

"Now the Abbé, who was listening behind the door, seeing our embarrassment, and thinking we had won the game, thought the time had come to interpose, and showed himself. My uncle was so stupefied at that apparition, that at first he remained motionless; but then he opened his mouth as if he meant to swallow up the priest, and shouted to him in a strong, deep, furious voice: 'What are you doing here?'

[Pg 299]

"The Abbé, who was used to difficult situations came further in the room, murmuring: 'I have come in your sister's name, Monsieur le Marquis; she has sent me.... She would be so happy, Monsieur....'

"But the Marquis was not listening. Raising one hand, he pointed to the door with a proud and tragic gesture, and he said angrily and gasping for breath: 'Leave this room ... go out ... robber of souls.... Go out from here, you violator of consciences.... Go out from here, you picklock of dying men's doors!'

"The Abbé went backwards, and I also went to the door, beating a retreat with the clergyman; and the two little women who were avenged got up, leaving their omelette only half eaten, and went and stood on either side of my uncle's armchair, putting their hands on his arms to calm him, and to protect him against the criminal enterprises of the Family and of Religion.

"The Abbé and I rejoined my mother in the kitchen, and Mélanie again offered us chairs, 'I knew quite well that it would not go of its own accord; we must try some other means, otherwise he will escape us.' And they began deliberating afresh, my mother being of one opinion and the Abbé of another, while I held a third.

"We had been discussing the matter in a low voice for half an hour, perhaps, when a great noise of furniture being moved and of cries uttered by my uncle, more vehement and terrible even, than the former had been, made us all four jump up.

[Pg 300]

"Through the doors and walls we could hear him shouting: 'Go out ... out ... rascals, ... humbugs, get out scoundrels ... get out ... get out!...'

"Mélanie rushed in, but came back immediately to call me to help her, and I hastened in. Opposite to my uncle who was terribly excited by anger, almost standing up and vociferating, two men, one behind the other, seemed to be waiting till he should be dead with rage.

"By his long, ridiculous coat, his long English shoes, by his manners of a tutor out of a situation, by his high collar, white necktie and straight hair, by his humble face of a priest, I immediately recognized the first as a Protestant minister.

"The second was the porter of the house, who belonged to the reformed religion and had followed us, and having seen our defeat had gone to fetch his own priest, in hopes of a better fate. My uncle seemed mad with rage! If the sight of the Catholic priest, of the priest of his ancestors, had irritated the Marquis de Fumerol, who had become a freethinker, the sight of his porter's minister made him altogether beside himself. I therefore took the two men by the arm and threw them out of the room so violently that they embraced each other twice, between the two doors which led to the staircase, and then I disappeared in my turn and returned to the kitchen, which was our headquarters, in order to take counsel with my mother and the Abbé.

[Pg 301]

"But Mélanie came back in terror, sobbing out: 'He is dying ... he is dying ... come immediately ... he is dying....'

"My mother rushed out. My uncle had fallen onto the ground, full length along the floor, and did not move. I fancy he was already dead. My mother was superb at that moment! She went straight up to the two girls who were kneeling by the body and trying to raise it up, and pointing to the door with irresistible authority, dignity and majesty, she said: 'Now it is for you to go out.'

"And they went out without a protest, and without saying a word. I must add, that I was getting ready to turn them out as unceremoniously as I had done the parson and the porter.

"Then the Abbé Poivron administered the last sacrament to my uncle with all the customary prayers and remitted all his sins, while my mother sobbed, kneeling near her brother. Suddenly, however, she exclaimed: 'He recognized me; he pressed my hand; I am sure he recognized me!!!... and that he thanked me! Oh, God, what happiness!'

"Poor Mamma! If she had known or guessed to whom those thanks ought to have been addressed!

"They laid my uncle on his bed; he was certainly dead that time.

"'Madame,' Mélanie said, 'we have no sheets to bury him in; all the linen belongs to those two young ladies,' and when I looked at the omelette which they had not finished, I felt inclined to laugh and to cry at the same time. There are some strange moments and some strange sensations in life, occasionally!

[Pg 302]

"We gave my uncle a magnificent funeral, with five speeches at the grave. Baron de Croiselles, the Senator, showed in admirable terms, that God always returns victorious into well-born souls which have gone astray for a moment. All the members of the Royalist and Catholic party followed the funeral procession with the enthusiasm of triumphers, speaking of that beautiful death, after a somewhat restless life."

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Viscount Roger ceased speaking, and those around him laughed. Then somebody said: "Bah! That is the story of conversions *in Extremis*."

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## THE SIGNAL

[Pg 303]

The little Marchioness de Rennedon was still asleep in her closed and perfumed bedroom, in her soft, low bed, between her sheets of delicate cambric, fine as lace and caressing as a kiss; she was sleeping alone and tranquil, the happy and profound sleep of divorced women.

She was awakened by loud voices in the little blue drawing-room, and she recognized her dear friend, the little Baroness de Grangerie, who was disputing with the lady's maid, because the latter would not allow her to go into her mistress' room. So the little Marchioness got up, opened the door, drew back the door-hangings and showed her head, nothing but her fair head, hidden under a cloud of hair.

"What is the matter with you, that you have come so early?" she asked. "It is not nine o'clock yet."

The little baroness who was very pale, nervous and feverish, replied: "I must speak to you. Something horrible has happened to me." "Come in, my dear."

She went in, they kissed each other, and the little Marchioness got back into her bed while the lady's maid opened the windows to let in light and air, and then when she had left the room, Madame de Rennedon went on: "Well, tell me what it is."

Madame de Grangerie began to cry, shedding those pretty, bright tears which make woman more charming, and she stammered without wiping her eyes, so as not to make them red: "Oh! my dear, what has happened to me is abominable, abominable. I have not slept all night, not a minute; do you hear, not a minute. Here, just feel my heart, how it is beating."

[Pg 304]

And, taking her friend's hand, she put it on her breast, on that firm, round covering of women's hearts which often suffices men, and prevents them from seeking beneath. But her breast was really beating violently.

She continued: "It happened to me yesterday during the day, at about four o'clock ... or half-past four; I cannot say exactly. You know my apartments, and you know that my little drawing-room, where I always sit, looks onto the Rue Saint-Lazare, and that I have a mania for sitting at the window to look at the people passing. The neighborhood of the railway station is very gay; so full of motion and lively.... Well, that is just what I like! So, yesterday, I was sitting in the low chair which I have placed in my window recess; the window was open and I was not thinking of anything; I was breathing the fresh air. You remember how fine it was yesterday!

"Suddenly, I remarked that there was also a woman sitting at the window, a woman in red; I was in mauve, you know, my pretty mauve costume. I did not know the woman, a new lodger, who had been there a month, and as it had been raining for a month, I had not yet seen her, but I saw immediately that she was a bad girl. At first I was very much shocked and disgusted that she should be at the window like I was; and then, by degrees, it amused me to examine her. She was resting her elbows on the window ledge, and looking at the men, and the men looked at her also, all or nearly all. One might have said that they were apprised beforehand by some means as they got near the house, which they scented as dogs scent game, for they suddenly raised their heads, and exchanged a swift look with her, a freemason's look. Hers said: 'Will you?'

[Pg 305]

"Theirs replied: 'I have no time,' or else: 'another day;' or else: 'I have not got a half penny;' or else: 'Will you hide yourself, you wretch!'

"You cannot imagine how funny it was to see her carrying on such a piece of work, though, after all, it is her regular business.

"Sometimes she shut the window suddenly, and I saw a gentleman go in. She had caught him like a fisherman hooks a gudgeon. Then I looked at my watch, and I found that they stopped from twelve to twenty minutes, never longer. In the end she really infatuated me, the spider! And then the creature is so ugly.

"I asked myself: How does she manage to make herself understood so quickly, so well and so completely? Does she add a sign of the head or a motion of the hands to her looks? And I took my opera-glasses to watch her proceedings. Oh! they were very simple: first of all a glance, then a smile, then a slight sign with the head, which meant: 'Are you coming up?' But it was so slight, so vague, so discreet, that it required a great deal of knack to succeed as she did. And I asked myself: 'I wonder if I could do that little movement, from below upwards, which was at the same time bold and pretty, as well as she does,' for her gesture was very pretty.

"I went and tried it before the looking-glass, and, my dear, I did it better than she, a great deal better! I was enchanted, and resumed my place at the window.

[Pg 306]

"She caught nobody more than, poor girl, nobody. She certainly had no luck. It must really be very terrible to earn one's bread in that way, terrible and amusing occasionally, for really some of these men one meets in the street are rather nice.

"After that they all came on my side of the road and none on hers; the sun had turned. They came one after the other, young, old, dark, fair, gray, white. I saw some who looked very nice, really very nice, my dear, far better than my husband or than yours, I mean than your late husband, as you have got a divorce. Now you can choose.

"I said to myself! If I give them the sign, will they understand me, who am a respectable woman? And I was seized with a mad longing to make that sign to them. I had a longing, the longing of a pregnant woman ... a terrible longing; you know, one of those longings which one cannot resist! I have some like that occasionally. How stupid such things are, don't you think so? I believe that we women have the souls of monkeys. I have been told (and it was a physician who told me) that the brain of a monkey was very like ours. Of course we must imitate some one or other. We imitate our husbands, when we love them, during the first months after our marriage, and then our lovers, our female friends, our confessors, when they are nice. We assume their ways of thought, their manners of speech, their words, their gestures, everything. It is very stupid.

"However, as for me, when I am too much tempted to do a thing I always do it, and so I said to myself: 'I will try it once, on one man only, just to see. What can happen to me? Nothing whatever! We shall exchange a smile and that will be all, and I shall deny it, most certainly.'

[Pg 307]

"So I began to make my choice. I wanted someone nice, very nice, and suddenly I saw a tall, fair, very good-looking fellow coming along. I like fair men, as you know. I looked at him, he looked at me; I smiled, he smiled; I made the movement; oh! but scarcely; he replied *yes* with his head, and there he was, my dear! He came in at the large door of the house.

"You cannot imagine what passed through my mind then! I thought I should go mad. Oh! how frightened I was. Just think, he will speak to the servants! To Joseph, who is devoted to my husband! Joseph would certainly think that I had known that gentleman for a long time.

"What could I do, just tell me? And he would ring in a moment. What could I do, tell me? I thought I would go and meet him, and tell him he had made a mistake, and beg him to go away. He would have pity on a woman, on a poor woman: So I rushed to the door and opened it, just at the moment when he was going to ring the bell, and I stammered out, quite stupidly: 'Go away, Monsieur, go away; you have made a mistake, a terrible mistake; I took you for one of my friends whom you are very like. Have pity on me, Monsieur.'

"But he only began to laugh, my dear, and replied: 'Good morning, my dear, I know all about your little story, you may be sure. You are married, and so you want forty francs instead of twenty, and you shall have them, so just show the way.'

"And he pushed me in, closed the door, and as I remained standing before him, horror-struck, he kissed me, put his arm round my waist and made me go back into the drawing-room, which had remained open. Then he began to look at everything, like an auctioneer, and continued: 'By Jove, it is very nice in your rooms, very well. You must be very down on your luck just now, to do the window business!'

[Pg 308]

"Then I began to beg him again: 'Oh! Monsieur, go away, please go away! My husband will be coming in soon, it is just his time. I swear that you have made a mistake!' But he answered quite coolly: 'Come, my beauty, I have had enough of this nonsense, and if your husband comes in, I will give him five francs to go and have a drink at the café opposite.' And then, seeing Raoul's photograph on the chimney-piece, he asked me: 'Is that your ... your husband?' 'Yes, that is he.' 'He looks a nice, disagreeable sort of fellow. And who is this? One of your friends?'

"It was your photograph, my dear, you know, the one in ball dress. I did not know any longer what I was saying, and I stammered: 'Yes, it is one of my friends.' 'She is very nice; you shall

introduce me to her.'

"Just then the clock struck five, and Raoul comes home every day at half past! Suppose he were to come home before the other had gone, just fancy what would have happened! Then ... then ... I completely lost my head ... altogether.... I thought ... I thought ... that ... that ... the best thing would be ... to get rid ... of ... of this man ... as quickly as possible.... The sooner it was over ... you understand ... and ... and there ... as it must be done ... and I was obliged, my dear ... he would not have gone away without it.... Well I ... I locked the drawing-room door.... There!"

[Pg 309]

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The little Marchioness de Rennedon had begun to laugh, to laugh madly, with her head buried in her pillow, so that the whole bed shook, and when she was a little calmer she asked: "And ... and ... was he good-looking?" "Yes." "And yet you complain?" "But ... but ... don't you see, my dear, he said ... he said ... he should come again to-morrow ... at the same time ... and I ... I am terribly frightened.... You have no idea how tenacious he is and obstinate.... What can I do ... tell me ... what can I do?"

The little Marchioness sat up in bed to reflect, and then she suddenly said: "Have him arrested!"

The little Baroness looked stupefied, and stammered out: "What do you say? What are you thinking of? Have him arrested? Under what pretext?" "That is very simple. Go to the Commissary of Police and say that a gentleman has been following you about for three months; that he had the insolence to go up to your apartments yesterday; that he has threatened you with another visit to-morrow, and that you demand the protection of the law, and they will give you two police officers, who will arrest him."

"But, my dear, suppose he tells...." "They will not believe him, you silly thing, if you have told your tale cleverly to the commissary, but they will believe you, who are an irreproachable woman, and in society." "Oh! I shall never dare to do it." "You must dare, my dear, or you are lost." "But think that he will ... he will insult me if he is arrested." "Very well, you will have witnesses, and he will be sentenced." "Sentenced to what?" "To pay damages. In such cases, one must be pitiless!" "Ah! speaking of damages.... There is one thing that worries me very much ... very much indeed.... He left me two twenty franc pieces on the mantelpiece." "Two twenty franc pieces?" "Yes." "No more?" "No." "That is very little. It would have humiliated me. Well?" "Well! What am I to do with that money?"

[Pg 310]

The little Marchioness hesitated for a few seconds, and then she replied in a serious voice:

"My dear ... you must make ... you must make your husband a little present with it.... That will be only fair!"

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## **THE DEVIL**

[Pg 311]

The peasant was standing opposite the doctor, by the bedside of the dying old woman, and she, calmly resigned and quite lucid, looked at them and listened to their talking. She was going to die, and she did not rebel at it, for her time was over, as she was ninety-two.

The July sun streamed in at the window and the open door and cast its hot flames onto the uneven brown clay floor, which had been stamped down by four generations of clod-hoppers. The smell of the fields came in also, driven by the sharp wind, and parched by the noontide heat. The grasshoppers chirped themselves hoarse, and filled the country with their shrill noise, which was like that of the wooden crickets which are sold to children at fair time.

The doctor raised his voice and said: "Honoré, you cannot leave your mother in this state; she may die at any moment." And the peasant, in great distress replied: "But I must get in my wheat, for it has been lying on the ground a long time, and the weather is just right for it; what do you say about it, mother?" And the dying old woman, still tormented by her Norman avariciousness, replied *yes* with her eyes and her forehead, and so urged her son to get in his wheat, and to leave her to die alone, but the doctor got angry, and stamping his foot, he said: "You are no better than a brute, do you hear, and I will not allow you to do it, do you understand? And if you must get in your wheat to-day, go and fetch Rapet's wife and make her look after your mother. I will have it, do you understand me? And if you do not obey me, I will let you die like a dog, when you are ill in your turn; do you hear me?"

[Pg 312]

The peasant, a tall, thin fellow with slow movements, who was tormented by indecision, by his fear of the doctor and his fierce love of saving, hesitated, calculated and stammered out: "How much does la Rapet charge for attending sick people?" "How should I know?" the doctor cried. "That depends upon how long she is wanted for. Settle it with her, by Jove! But I want her to be here within an hour, do you hear?"

So the man made up his mind: "I will go for her," he replied; "don't get angry, doctor." And the latter left, calling out as he went: "Take care, you know, for I do not joke when I am angry!" And as soon as they were alone, the peasant turned to his mother and said in a resigned voice: "I will go and fetch la Rapet, as the man will have it. Don't go off while I am away."



And he went out in his turn.

La Rapet, who was an old washerwoman, watched the dead and the dying of the neighborhood, and then, as soon as she had sown her customers into that linen cloth from which they would emerge no more, she went and took up her iron to smooth the linen of the living. Wrinkled like a last year's apple, spiteful, envious, avaricious with a phenomenal avarice, bent double, as if she had been broken in half across the loins, by the constant movement of the iron over the linen, one might have said that she had a kind of monstrous and cynical affection for a death struggle. She never spoke of anything but of the people she had seen die, of the various kinds of deaths at which she had been present, and she related with the greatest minuteness, details which were always the same, just like a sportsman recounts his shots.

[Pg 313]

When Honoré Bontemps entered her cottage, he found her preparing the starch for the collars of the village women, and he said: "Good evening; I hope you are pretty well, Mother Rapet?"

She turned her head round to look at him, and said: "Fairly well, fairly well, and you?" "Oh! as for me, I am as well as I could wish, but my mother is very poorly." "Your mother?" "Yes, my mother!" "What's the matter with her?" "She is going to turn up her toes, that's what's the matter with her!"

The old woman took her hands out of the water and asked with sudden sympathy: "Is she as bad as all that?" "The doctor says she will not last till morning." "Then she certainly is very bad!" Honoré hesitated, for he wanted to make a few preambulatory remarks before coming to his proposal, but as he could hit upon nothing, he made up his mind suddenly.

"How much are you going to ask to stop with her till the end? You know that I am not rich, and I cannot even afford to keep a servant-girl. It is just that which has brought my poor mother to this state, too much work and fatigue! She used to work for ten, in spite of her ninety-two years. You don't find any made of that stuff nowadays!..."

La Rapet answered gravely: "There are two prices: Forty sous by day and three francs by night for the rich, and twenty sous by day, and forty by night for the others. You shall pay me the twenty and forty." But the peasant reflected, for he knew his mother well. He knew how tenacious of life, vigorous and unyielding she was, and she might last another week, in spite of the doctor's opinion, and so he said resolutely: "No, I would rather you would fix a price until the end. I will take my chance, one way or the other. The doctor says she will die very soon. If that happens so much the better for you, and so much the worse for me, but if she holds out till tomorrow or longer, so much the better for me and so much the worse for you!"

[Pg 314]

The nurse looked at the man in astonishment, for she had never treated a death as a speculative job, and she hesitated, tempted by the idea of the possible gain, but almost immediately she suspected that he wanted to juggle her, "I can say nothing until I have seen your mother," she replied. "Then come with me and see her."

She washed her hands, and went with him immediately.

They did not speak on the road; she walked with short, hasty steps, while he strode on with his long legs, as if he were crossing a brook at every step.

The cows lying down in the fields, overcome by the heat, raised their heads heavily and lowed feebly at the two passers-by, as if to ask them for some green grass.

When they got near the house, Honoré Bontemps murmured: "Suppose it is all over?" And the unconscious wish which he had that it might be so, showed itself in the sound of his voice.

But the old woman was not dead. She was lying on her back, on her wretched bed, her hands covered with a pink cotton counterpane, horribly thin, knotty hands, like strange animals, like crabs, and closed by rheumatism, fatigue, and the work of nearly a century which she had accomplished.

[Pg 315]

La Rapet went up to the bed and looked at the dying woman, felt her pulse, tapped her on the chest, listened to her breathing, and asked her questions, so as to hear her speak: and then, having looked at her for some time longer, she went out of the room, followed by Honoré. Her decided opinion was that the old woman would not last out the night, and he asked: "Well?" And the sick-nurse replied: "Well, she may last two days, perhaps three. You will have to give me six francs, everything included."

"Six francs! six francs!" he shouted. "Are you out of your mind? I tell you that she cannot last more than five or six hours!" And they disputed angrily for some time, but as the nurse said she would go home, as the time was going by, and as his wheat would not come to the farmyard of its own accord, he agreed to her terms at last:

"Very well then, that is settled; six francs including everything, until the corpse is taken out." "That is settled, six francs."

And he went away, with long strides, to his wheat, which was lying on the ground under the hot sun, which ripens the grain, while the sick-nurse returned to the house.



She had brought some work with her, for she worked without stopping by the side of the dead and the dying, sometimes for herself, sometimes for the family which employed her as seamstress also, paying her rather more in that capacity. Suddenly she asked: "Have you received the last sacraments, Mother Bontemps?"

[Pg 316]

The old peasant woman said "no" with her head, and la Rapet, who was very devout, got up quickly: "Good heavens, is it possible? I will go and fetch the Curé;" and she rushed off to the parsonage so quickly, that the urchins in the street thought some accident had happened, when they saw her trotting off like that.

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The priest came immediately in his surplice, preceded by a choir-boy, who rang a bell, to announce the passage of the Host through the parched and quiet country. Some men, who were working at a distance, took off their large hats and remained motionless until the white vestment had disappeared behind some farm buildings; the women who were making up the sheaves, stood up to make the sign of the cross; the frightened black hens ran away along the ditch until they reached a well-known hole through which they suddenly disappeared, while a foal, which was tied up in a meadow, took fright at the sight of the surplice and began to turn round at the length of its rope, kicking violently. The choir-boy, in his red cassock, walked quickly, and the priest, with his head inclined towards one shoulder, and with his square biretta on his head, followed him, muttering some prayers, and last of all came la Rapet, bent almost double, as if she wished to prostrate herself as she walked with folded hands, as if she were in church.

Honoré saw them pass in the distance, and he asked: "Where is our priest going to?" And his man, who was more acute, replied: "He is taking the sacrament to your mother, of course!"

[Pg 317]

The peasant was not surprised, and said: "That is quite possible," and went on with his work.

Mother Bontemps confessed, received absolution and communion, and the priest took his departure, leaving the two women alone in the suffocating cottage, while la Rapet began to look at the dying woman, and to ask herself whether it could last much longer.

The day was on the wane, and a cooler air came in stronger puffs, and made a view of Epinal, which was fastened to the wall by two pins, flap up and down, the scanty window curtains, which had formerly been white, but were now yellow and covered with fly-specks, looked as if they were going to fly off and seemed to struggle to get away, like the old woman's soul.

She lying motionless, with her eyes open, seemed to await that death which was so near and which yet delayed its coming, with perfect indifference. Her short breath whistled in her tightening throat. It would stop altogether soon, and there would be one woman less in the world, whom nobody would regret.

At nightfall Honoré returned, and when he went up to the bed and saw that his mother was still alive, he asked: "How is she?" just as he had done formerly, when she had been unwell, and then he sent la Rapet away, saying to her: "To-morrow morning at five o'clock, without fail." And she replied: "To-morrow, at five o'clock."

She came at daybreak, and found Honoré eating his soup, which he had made himself, before going to work, and the sick-nurse asked him: "Well, is your mother dead?" "She is rather better, on the contrary," he replied, with a malignant look out of the corner of his eyes. And he went out.

[Pg 318]

La Rapet was seized with anxiety, and went up to the dying woman, who remained in the same state, lethargic and impassive, with her eyes open and her hands clutching the counterpane. The nurse perceived that this might go on thus for two days, four days, eight days, and her avaricious mind was seized with fear, while she was excited to furious rage against the cunning fellow who had tricked her, and against the woman, who would not die.

Nevertheless, she began to work and waited with her looks fixed on the wrinkled face of Mother Bontemps, and when Honoré returned to breakfast he seemed quite satisfied and even in a bantering humor, for he was decidedly carrying in his wheat under very favorable circumstances.

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La Rapet was getting exasperated; every minute passed now seemed to her so much time and money stolen from her. She felt a mad inclination to take this old ass, this headstrong old fool, this obstinate old wretch, and to stop that short, rapid breath, which was robbing her of her time and money, by squeezing her throat a little. But then, she reflected on the danger of doing so, and other thoughts came into her head, so she went up to the bed and said to her: "Have you ever seen the Devil?" Mother Bontemps whispered: "No."

Then the sick-nurse began to talk and to tell her tales which were likely to terrify her weak and dying mind. Some minutes before one died the Devil appeared, she said, to all who were in their death throes. He had a broom in his hand, a saucepan on his head, and he uttered loud cries. When anybody had seen him, all was over, and that person had only a few moments longer to live; and she enumerated all those to whom the Devil had appeared that year: Josephine Loisel, Eulalie Ratier, Sophie Padagnau, Séraphine Grospiéd.

[Pg 319]

Mother Bontemps, who was at last most disturbed in mind, moved about, wrung her hands, and tried to turn her head to look at the bottom of the room, and suddenly la Rapet disappeared at the foot of the bed. She took a sheet out of the cupboard and wrapped herself up in it; she put the iron pot onto her head, so that its three short bent feet rose up like horns, and she took a broom in her right hand and a tin pail in her left, which she threw up suddenly, so that it might fall to the ground noisily.

And certainly when it came down, it made a terrible noise; then, climbing onto a chair, the nurse lifted up the curtain which hung at the bottom of the bed, and showed herself, gesticulating and uttering shrill cries into the pot which covered her face, while she menaced the old peasant woman, who was nearly dead, with her broom.

Terrified, with a mad look on her face, the dying woman made a superhuman effort to get up and escape; she even got her shoulders and chest out of bed; then she fell back with a deep sigh. All was over, and la Rapet calmly put everything back into its place; the broom into the corner by the cupboard, the sheet inside it, the pot on the hearth, the pail on the floor and the chair against the wall. Then, with professional movements, she closed the dead woman's enormous eyes, put a plate on the bed and poured some holy water into it, dipped the twig of boxwood into it, and kneeling down, she fervently repeated the prayers for the dead, which she knew by heart, as a matter of business.

[Pg 320]

And when Honoré returned in the evening, he found her praying, and he calculated immediately that she had made twenty sous out of him, for she had only spent three days and one night there, which made five francs altogether, instead of the six which he owed her.

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## EPIPHANY

[Pg 321]

"Ah!" said Captain Count de Garens, "I should rather think that I do remember it, that supper of the Kings, during the war!

"I was at the time quarter-master of cavalry, and for a fortnight had been lurking about as a scout in front of the German advanced guard. The evening before we had cut down a few Uhlans and had lost three men, one of whom was that poor little Raudeville. You remember Joseph de Raudeville well, of course.

"Well, on that day my captain ordered me to take six troopers and to go and occupy the village of Porterin, where there had been five fights in three weeks, and to hold it all night. There were not twenty houses left standing, not a dozen houses in that wasp's nest. So I took ten troopers, and set out at about four o'clock and at five o'clock, while it was still pitch dark, we reached the first houses of Porterin. I halted and ordered Marchas, you know Pierre de Marchas, who afterwards married little Martel-Auvelin, the daughter of the Marquis de Martel-Auvelin, to go alone into the village, and to report to me what he saw.

"I had chosen nothing but volunteers, and all of good family. It is pleasant when on service not to be forced to be on intimate terms with unpleasant fellows. This Marchas was as sharp as possible, as cunning as a fox and as supple as a serpent. He could scent the Prussians as well as a dog can scent a hare, could find victuals where we should have died of hunger without him, and he obtained information from everybody, and information which was always reliable, with incredible cleverness.

[Pg 322]

"In ten minutes he returned. 'All right,' he said; 'there have been no Prussians here for three days. It is a sinister place, is this village. I have been talking to a Sister of Mercy, who is attending to four or five wounded men in an abandoned convent.'

"I ordered them to ride on, and we penetrated into the principal street. On the right and left we could vaguely see roofless walls, which were hardly visible in the profound darkness. Here and there a light was burning in a room; some family had remained to keep its house standing as much as they were able; a family of brave, or of poor, people. The rain had begun to fall, a fine, icy cold rain, which froze us before it wetted us through, by merely touching our cloaks. The horses stumbled against stones, against beams, against furniture. Marchas guided us, going before us on foot, and leading his horse by the bridle.

"'Where are you taking us to?' I asked him. And he replied: 'I have a place for us to lodge in, and a rare good one.' And soon we stopped before a small house, evidently belonging to some owner of the middle classes, quite enclosed, built near the street and with a garden in the rear.

"Marchas broke open the lock by means of a big stone which he picked up near the garden gate; then he mounted the steps, smashed in the front door with his feet and shoulders, lit a bit of wax candle, which he was never without, and went before us into the comfortable apartments of some rich private individual, guiding us with admirable assurance, as if he had lived in this house which he now saw for the first time.

[Pg 323]

"Two troopers remained outside to take care of our horses, and Marchas said to stout Ponderel, who followed him: 'The stables must be on the left; I saw that as we came in; go and put the animals up there, for we do not want them,' and then turning to me he said: 'Give your orders, confound it all!'

"This fellow always astonished me, and I replied with a laugh: 'I shall post my sentinels at the country approaches and I will return to you here?' 'How many man men are you going to take?' 'Five. The others will relieve them at five o'clock in the evening.' 'Very well. Leave me four to look after provisions, to do the cooking and to set the table. I will go and find out where the wine is hidden away.'

"I went off, to reconnoiter the deserted streets, until they ended in the open country, so as to post my sentries there.

"Half an hour later I was back, and I found Marchas lounging in a great armchair, the covering of which he had taken off, from love of luxury as he said. He was warming his feet at the fire, and smoking an excellent cigar, whose perfume filled the room. He was alone, his elbows resting on the arms of the chair, his shoulders, his cheeks flushed, his eyes bright, and looking delighted.

"I heard the noise of plates and dishes in the next room, and Marchas said to me, smiling in a beatific manner: 'This is famous; I found the champagne under the flight of steps outside, the brandy—fifty bottles of the very finest—in the kitchen garden under a pear tree, which did not look to me to be quite straight, when I looked at it by the light of my lantern. As for solids, we have two fowls, a goose, a duck and three pigeons. They are being cooked at this moment. It is a delightful part of the country.'

[Pg 324]

"I had sat down opposite to him, and the fire in the grate was burning my nose and cheeks. 'Where did you find this wood?' I asked. 'Splendid wood,' he replied. 'The owner's carriage. It is the paint which is causing all this flame, an essence of punch and varnish. A capital house!'

"I laughed for I found the creature was funny, and he went on: 'Fancy this being the Epiphany! I have had a bean put into the goose, but there is no queen; it is really very annoying!' And I repeated like an echo: 'It is annoying, but what do you want me to do in the matter?' 'To find some, of course. Some women,' 'Women?... you must be mad?' 'I managed to find the brandy under the pear tree, and the champagne under the steps; and yet there was nothing to guide me, while as for you, a petticoat is a sure sign. Go and look, old fellow.'

"He looked so grave, so convinced, that I could not tell whether he was joking or not, and so I replied: 'Look here, Marchas, are you having a joke with me?' 'I never joke on duty.' 'But where the devil do you expect me to find any women?' 'Where you like, there must be two or three remaining in the neighborhood, so ferret them out and bring them here.'

"I got up, for it was too hot in front of the fire, and Marchas went on: 'Do you want an idea?' 'Yes.' 'Go and see the priest.' 'The priest? What for?' 'Ask him to supper, and beg him to bring a woman with him.' 'The priest! A woman! Ha! ha! ha!'

[Pg 325]

"But Marchas continued with extraordinary gravity; 'I am not laughing, go and find the priest and tell him how we are situated, and, as his must be horribly dull, he will come. But tell him that we want one woman at least, a lady, of course, since we are all men of the world. He is sure to know his female parishioners on the tips of his fingers, and if there is one to suit us, and you manage it well, he will indicate her to you.'

"'Come, come, Marchas, what are you thinking of?' 'My dear Garens, you can do this quite well. It will even be very funny. We are well bred, by jove! and we will put on our most distinguished manners and our grandest style. Tell the Abbé who we are, make him laugh, soften him, seduce him and persuade him!' 'No, it is impossible.'

"He drew his chair close to mine, and as he knew my weak side, the scamp continued: 'Just think what a swaggering thing it will be to do, and how amusing to tell about; the whole army will talk about it, and it will give you a famous reputation.'

"I hesitated, for the adventure rather tempted me, and so he persisted: 'Come, my little Garens. You are the head of this detachment, and you alone can go and call on the head of the church in this neighborhood. I beg of you to go, and I promise you that after the war, I will relate the whole affair in verse in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. You owe this much to your men, for you have made them march enough during the last month.'

"I got up at last and asked: 'Where is the parsonage?' 'Take the second turning at the end of the street, you will see an avenue, and at the end of the avenue you will find the church. The parsonage is beside it.' As I went out, he called out: 'Tell him the bill of fare, to make him hungry!'

[Pg 326]

"I discovered the ecclesiastic's little house without any difficulty; it was by the side of a large, ugly, brick church. I knocked at the door with my fist, as there was neither bell nor knocker, and a loud voice from inside asked: 'Who is there?' To which I replied: 'A quarter-master of the hussars.'

"I heard the noise of bolts and of a key being turned, and I found myself face to face with a tall priest with a large stomach, the chest of a prize-fighter, formidable hands projecting from turned up sleeves, a red face and the looks of a kind man. I gave him a military salute and said: 'Good day, Monsieur le Curé.'

"He had feared a surprise, some marauders' ambush, and he smiled as he replied: 'Good day, my friend; come in.' I followed him into a small room with a red tiled floor, in which a small fire was burning, very different to Marchas' furnace, and he gave me a chair and said: 'What can I do for you?' 'Monsieur, allow me first of all to introduce myself;' and I gave him my card, which he took and read half aloud: *The Comte de Garens*.

"I continued: 'There are eleven of us here, Monsieur l'Abbé, five on grand guard, and six installed at the house of an unknown inhabitant. The names of the six are, Garens, (that is I), Pierre de Marchas, Ludovic de Ponderel, Baron d'Etreillis, Karl Massouligny, the painter's son and Joseph Herbon, a young musician. I have come to ask you, in their name and my own, to do us the honor of supping with us. It is an Epiphany supper, Monsieur le Curé, and we should like to make it a little cheerful.'

[Pg 327]

"The priest smiled and murmured: 'It seems to me to be hardly a suitable occasion for amusing oneself.' And I replied: 'We are fighting every day, Monsieur. Fourteen of our comrades have been killed in a month, and three fell, as late as yesterday. That is war. We stake our lives every moment, have we not, therefore, the right to amuse ourselves freely? We are Frenchmen, we like to laugh, and we can laugh everywhere. Our fathers laughed on the scaffold! This evening we should like to brighten ourselves up a little, like gentlemen, and not like soldiers; you understand me, I hope. Are we wrong?'

"He replied quickly: 'You are quite right, my friend, and I accept your invitation with great pleasure.' Then he called out: 'Hermance!'

"An old bent, wrinkled, horrible, peasant woman appeared and said: 'What do you want?' 'I shall not dine at home, my daughter.' 'Where are you going to dine then?' 'With some gentlemen, hussars.'

"I felt inclined to say: 'Bring your servant with you, just to see Marchas's face,' but I did not venture to, but continued: 'Do you know anyone among your parishioners, male or female, whom I could invite as well?' He hesitated, reflected, and then said: 'No, I do not know anybody!'

"I persisted: 'Nobody! Come, Monsieur, think; It would be very nice to have some ladies, I mean to say, some married couples! I know nothing about your parishioners. The baker and his wife, the grocer, the ... the ... the ... watchmaker ... the ... shoemaker ... the ... the chemist with Mrs. chemist.... We have a good spread, and plenty of wine, and we should be enchanted to leave pleasant recollections of ourselves behind us, with the people here.'

[Pg 328]

"The priest thought again for a long time, and then resolutely: 'No, there is nobody.' I began to laugh. 'By Jove, Monsieur le Curé, it is very vexing not to have an Epiphany queen, for we have the bean. Come, think. Is there not a married Mayor, or a married Deputy-Mayor, or a married Municipal Concilor or schoolmaster?' 'No, all the ladies have gone away.' 'What, is there not in the whole place some good tradesman's wife with her good tradesman, to whom we might give this pleasure, for it would be a pleasure to them, a great pleasure under present circumstances?'

"But suddenly the Curé began to laugh, and he laughed so violently that he fairly shook. And exclaimed: 'Ha! ha! ha! I have got what you want, yes. I have got what you want! Ha! ha! ha! We will laugh and enjoy ourselves, my children, we will have some fun. How pleased the ladies will be, I say, how delighted they will be. Ha! ha!... Where are you staying?'

"I described the house, and he understood where it was. 'Very good,' he said. 'It belongs to Monsieur Bertin Lavaille. I will be there in half an hour, with four ladies!!!!... Ha! ha! ha! four ladies!!!!...'

"He went out with me, still laughing, and left me, repeating; 'That is capital; in half an hour at Bertin-Lavaille's house.'

[Pg 329]

"I returned quickly, very much astonished and very much puzzled. 'Covers for how many?' Marchas asked, as soon as he saw me. 'Eleven. There are six of us hussars, besides the priest and four ladies.' He was thunderstruck, and I triumphant, and he repeated: 'Four ladies! Did you say, four ladies?' 'I said: four women.' 'Real women?' 'Real women.' 'Well accept my compliments!' 'I will, for I deserve them.'

"He got out of his armchair, opened the door and I saw a beautiful, white tablecloth on a long table, round which three hussars in blue aprons were setting out the plates and glasses. 'There are some women coming!' Marchas cried. And three men began to dance and to cheer with all their might.

"Everything was ready, and we were waiting. We waited for nearly an hour, while a delicious smell of roast poultry pervaded the whole house. At last, however, a knock against the shutters, made us all jump up at the same moment. Stout Ponderel ran to open the door, and in less than a minute a little Sister of Mercy appeared in the doorway. She was thin, wrinkled and timid, and successively saluted the four bewildered hussars who saw her enter. Behind her, the noise of sticks sounded on the tiled floor in the vestibule, and as soon as she had come into the drawing-room, I saw three old heads in white caps, following each other one by one, who came in balancing themselves with different movements, one canting to the right, while the other canted to the left. And three worthy women showed themselves, limping, dragging their legs behind them, crippled by illness and deformed through old age, three infirm old women, past service, the only three pensioners in the establishment which Sister Saint-Benedict managed, who were able

[Pg 330]

to walk.

"She had turned round to her invalids, full of anxiety for them, and then seeing my quarter-master's stripes, she said to me: 'I am much obliged to you for thinking of these poor women. They have very little pleasure in life, and you are at the same time giving them a great treat and doing them a great honor.'

"I saw the priest, who had remained in the obscurity of the passage, and who was laughing heartily, and I began to laugh in my turn, especially when I saw Marchas's face. Then motioning the nun to the seats I said: 'Sit down, Sister: we are very proud and very happy that you have accepted our unpretentious invitation.'

"She took three chairs which stood against the wall, set them before the fire, led her three old women to them, settled them on them, took their sticks and shawls which she put into a corner, and then, pointing to the first, a thin woman with an enormous stomach, who was evidently suffering from the dropsy, she said: 'This is Mother Paumelle, whose husband was killed by falling from a roof, and whose son died in Africa; she is sixty years old.' Then she pointed to another, a tall woman, whose head trembled unceasingly: 'This is Mother Jean-Jean, who is sixty-seven. She is nearly blind, for her face was terribly singed in a fire, and her right leg was half burnt off.'

"Then she pointed to the third, a sort of dwarf, with protruding, round, stupid eyes, which she rolled incessantly in all directions. 'This is la Putois, an idiot. She is only forty-four.'

"I bowed to the three women as if I were presented to some Royal Highness, and turning to the priest I said: 'You are an excellent man Monsieur l'Abbé, to whom all of us here owe a debt of gratitude.'

[Pg 331]

"Everybody was laughing, in fact, except Marchas, who seemed furious and just then Karl Massouligny cried: 'Sister Saint-Benedict, supper is on the table!'

"I made her go first with the priest, then I helped up Mother Paumelle, whose arm I took and dragged her into the next room, which was no easy task, for her swollen stomach seemed heavier than a lump of iron.

"Stout Ponderel gave her arm to Mother Jean-Jean, who bemoaned her crutch, and little Joseph Herbon took the idiot, la Putois to the dining-room, which was filled with the odor of the viands.

"As soon as we were opposite our plates, the Sister clapped her hands three times, and, with the precision of soldiers presenting arms, the women made a rapid sign of the cross, and then the priest slowly repeated the *Benedictus* in Latin. Then we sat down, and the two fowls appeared, brought in by Marchas, who chose to wait on them, as to sit down as a guest, to this ridiculous repast.

"But I cried: 'Bring the champagne at once!' and a cork flew out with the noise of a pistol, and in spite of the resistance of the priest and the kind Sister, the three hussars sitting by the side of the three invalids, emptied their three full glasses down their throats, by force.

"Massouligny, who possessed the faculty of making himself at home, and on being on good terms with everyone, wherever he was, made love to Mother Paumelle, in the drollest manner. The dropsical woman, who had retained her cheerfulness in spite of her misfortunes, answered him banteringly in a high falsetto voice which appeared as if it were put on, and she laughed so heartily at her neighbor's jokes, that her large stomach looked as if it were going to rise up and get onto the table. Little Herbon had seriously undertaken the task of making the idiot drunk, and Baron d'Etrelillis whose wits were not always particularly sharp, was questioning old Jean-Jean about the life, the habits, and the rules in the hospital.

[Pg 332]

"The nun said to Massouligny in consternation: 'Oh! oh! you will make her ill; pray do not make her laugh like that, Monsieur. Oh! Monsieur...' Then she got up and rushed at Herbon to take a full glass out of his hands which he was hastily emptying down la Putois' throat, while the priest shook with laughter, and said to the Sister: 'Never mind, just this once, it will not hurt her. Do leave them alone.'

"After the two fowls they ate the duck, which was flanked by the three pigeons and the blackbird, and then the goose appeared, smoking, golden-colored, and diffusing a warm odor of hot, browned fat meat. La Paumelle who was getting lively, clapped her hands; la Jean-Jean left off answering the Baron's numerous questions, and la Putois uttered grunts of pleasure, half cries and half sighs, like little children do when one shows them sweets. 'Allow me to take charge of this animal,' the *Curé* said. 'I understand these sort of operations better than most people.' 'Certainly, Monsieur l'Abbé,' and the Sister said: 'How would it be to open the window a little; they are too warm, and I am afraid they will be ill.'

"I turned to Marchas: 'Open the window for a minute.' He did so, the cold outer air as it came in, made the candles flare, and the smoke from the goose, which the *Curé* was scientifically carving, with a table napkin round his neck, whirl about. We watched him doing it, without speaking now, for we were interested in his attractive handiwork, and seized with renewed appetite at the sight of that enormous golden-colored bird, whose limbs fell one after another into the brown gravy at the bottom of the dish. And at that moment, in the midst of that greedy silence which kept us all attentive, the distant report of a shot came in at the open window.

[Pg 333]

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"I started to my feet so quickly, that my chair fell down behind me, and I shouted: 'Mount, all of you! You, Marchas, will take two men and go and see what it is. I shall expect you back here in five minutes.' And while the three riders went off at full gallop through the night, I got into the saddle with my three remaining hussars, in front of the steps of the villa, while the *Curé*, the Sister and the three old women showed their frightened faces at the window.

"We heard nothing more, except the barking of a dog in the distance. The rain had ceased, and it was cold, very cold, and soon I heard the gallop of a horse, of a single horse, coming back. It was Marchas, and I called out to him: 'Well?' 'It is nothing; François has wounded an old peasant who refused to answer his challenge: "Who goes there?" and who continued to advance, in spite of the order to keep off; but they are bringing him here, and we shall see what is the matter.'

"I gave orders for the horses to be put back into the stable, and I sent my two soldiers to meet the others, and returned to the house. Then the *Curé*, Marchas and I took a mattress into the room to put the wounded man on; the Sister tore up a table napkin, in order to make lint, while the three frightened women remained huddled up in a corner.

[Pg 334]

"Soon I heard the rattle of sabres on the road, and I took a candle to show a light to the men who were returning; and they soon appeared, carrying that inert, soft, long and sinister object which a human body becomes when life no longer sustains it.

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"They put the wounded man on the mattress that had been prepared for him, and I saw at the first glance that he was dying. He had the death rattle and was spitting up blood, which ran out of the corners of his mouth, forced out of his mouth by his gasps. The man was covered with it! His cheeks, his beard, his hair, his neck and his clothes seemed to have been rubbed, to have been dipped in a red tub; and that blood stuck to him, and had become a dull color, which was horrible to look at.

"The old man, wrapped up in a large shepherd's cloak, occasionally opened his dull, vacant eyes, which seemed stupid with astonishment, like those of animals which a sportsman kills, and which fall at his feet, more than half dead already, stupefied with fear and astonishment.

"The *Curé* exclaimed: 'Ah! there is old Placide, the shepherd, from les Marlins. He is deaf, poor man, and heard nothing. Ah! Oh God! they have killed the unhappy man!' The Sister had opened his blouse and shirt, and was looking at a little blue hole in the middle of his chest, which was not bleeding any more. 'There is nothing to be done,' she said.

[Pg 335]

"The shepherd was gasping terribly and bringing up blood with every last breath, and in his throat, to the very depth of his lungs, they could hear an ominous and continued gurgling. The *Curé*, standing in front of him, raised his right hand, made the sign of the cross, and in a slow and solemn voice pronounced the Latin words which purify men's souls, but before they were finished the old man was shaken by a rapid shock, as if something had broken inside him; he no longer breathed. He was dead.

"When I turned round, I saw a sight which was even more horrible than the death struggle of this unfortunate man; the three old women were standing up huddled close together; hideous, and grimacing with fear and horror. I went up to them, and they began to utter shrill screams, while la Jean-Jean, whose leg had been burnt, and could not longer support her, fell to the ground at full length.

"Sister Saint-Benedict left the dead man, ran up to her infirm old women, and without a word or a look for me, wrapped their shawls round them, gave them their crutches, pushed them to the door, made them go out, and disappeared with them into the dark night.

"I saw that I could not even let a hussar accompany them, for the mere rattle of a sword would have sent them mad with fear.

"The *Curé* was still looking at the dead man; but at last he turned round to me and said:

"'Oh! What a horrible thing!'"

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## **IN THE WOOD**

[Pg 336]

The Mayor was just going to sit down to breakfast, when he was told that the rural policeman was waiting for him at the Mansion-house with two prisoners, and he went there immediately, and found old Hochedur standing up and watching a middle-class couple of mature years, with a severe look.

The man, a fat old fellow with a red nose and white hair, seemed utterly dejected; while the woman, a little roundabout, fat woman, with shining cheeks, looked at the agent of the authorities who had arrested them, with defiant eyes.

"What is it? What is it? Hochedur?"

The rural policeman made his deposition: He had gone out that morning at his usual time, in order to go on his beat from the forest of Champieux as far as the boundaries of Argenteuil. He had not noticed anything unusual in the country except that it was a fine day, and that the wheat was doing well, when the son of old Bredel, who was going over his vines a second time, called out to him: "Here, Daddy Hochedur, go and have a look into the skirts of the wood, in the first thicket, and you will catch a pair of pigeons there that must be a hundred and thirty years old between them!"

He went in the direction that had been indicated to him, and had gone into the thicket, and there he heard words and gasps, which made him suspect a flagrant breach of morality. Advancing, therefore, on his hands and knees, as if to surprise a poacher, he had arrested the couple who were there present, at the very moment when they were going to abandon themselves to their natural instincts.

[Pg 337]

The Mayor looked at the culprits in astonishment, for the man was certainly sixty, and the woman fifty-five at least, and so he began to question them, beginning with the man, who replied in such a weak voice that he could scarcely be heard.

"What is your name?" "Nicolas Beaurain." "Your occupation?" "Haberdasher, in the Rue des Martyrs, in Paris." "What were you doing in the wood?" The haberdasher remained silent, with his eyes on his fat stomach; and his hand resting on his thighs, and the Mayor continued: "Do you deny what the officer of the municipal authorities states?" "No, Monsieur." "So you confess it?" "Yes, Monsieur." "What have you to say in your defense?" "Nothing, Monsieur." "Where did you meet the partner in your misdemeanor?" "She is my wife, Monsieur." "Your wife?" "Yes, Monsieur." "Then ... then ... you do not live together ... in Paris?" "I beg your pardon, Monsieur, but we are living together!" "But in that case ... you must be mad, altogether mad, my dear sir, to get caught like that, in the country at ten o'clock in the morning."

The haberdasher seemed ready to cry with shame, and he murmured: "It was she who enticed me! I told her it was very stupid, but when a woman has got a thing into her head ... you know ... you cannot get it out of it."

[Pg 338]

The Mayor, who liked open speaking, smiled and replied: "In your case, the contrary ought to have happened. You would not be here, if she had had the idea only in her head!" Then Monsieur Beaurain was seized with rage, and turning to his wife, he said: "Do you see to what you have brought us with your poetry? And now we shall have to go before the Courts, at our age, for a breach of morals! And we shall have to shut up the shop, sell our good will and go to some other neighborhood! That's what it has come to!"

Madame Beaurain got up, and without looking at her husband, she explained herself without any embarrassment, without useless modesty, and almost without hesitation.

"Of course, Monsieur, I know that we have made ourselves ridiculous. Will you allow me to plead my cause like an advocate; or rather like a poor woman; and I hope that you will be kind enough to send us home, and to spare us the disgrace of a prosecution.

"Years ago, when I was young, I made Monsieur Beaurain's acquaintance on Sunday in this neighborhood. He was employed in a draper's shop, and I was a young lady in a ready made clothing establishment. I remember it, as if it were yesterday. I used to come and spend Sundays here occasionally with a friend of mine, Rose Levéque, with whom I lived in the Rue Pigalle, and Rose had a sweetheart, while I had not. He used to bring us here, and one Saturday, he told me, laughing, that he should bring a friend with him the next day. I quite understood what he meant, but I replied that it would be no good; for I was virtuous, Monsieur.

[Pg 339]

"The next day we met Monsieur Beaurain at the railway station, and in those days he was good-looking, but I had made up my mind not to yield to him, and I did not yield. Well, we arrived at Bezons. It was a lovely day, the sort of day that tickles your heart. When it is fine, even now, just as it used to be formerly, I grow quite foolish, and when I am in the country I utterly lose my head. The verdure, the swallows flying so swiftly, the smell of the grass, the scarlet poppies, the daisies, all that makes me quite excited! It is like champagne when one is not used to it!

"Well, it was lovely weather, warm and bright, and it seemed to penetrate into your body by your eyes when you looked, and by your mouth when you breathed. Rose and Simon hugged and kissed each other every minute, and that gave me something to look at! Monsieur Beaurain and I walked behind them, without speaking much, for when people do not know each other they do not find anything to talk about. He looked timid, and I liked to see his embarrassment. At last we got to the little wood; it was as cool as in a bath there, and we all four sat down. Rose and her lover joked me because I looked rather stern, but you will understand that could not be otherwise. And then they began to kiss and hug again, without putting any more restraint upon themselves than if we had not been there; and then they whispered together, and then got up and went off among the trees, without saying a word. You may fancy what I looked like, alone with this young fellow, whom I saw for the first time. I felt so confused at seeing them go that it gave me courage and I began to talk. I asked him what his business was, and he said he was a linen draper's assistant, as I told you just now. We talked for a few minutes and that made him bold, and he wanted to take liberties with me, but I told him sharply to keep his own place. Is not that true, Monsieur Beaurain?"

[Pg 340]



Monsieur Beaurain, who was looking at his feet in confusion, did not reply, and she continued: "Then he saw that I was virtuous, and he began to make love to me nicely, like an honorable man, and from that time he came every Sunday, for he was very much in love with me. I was very fond of him also, very fond of him! He was a good-looking fellow, formerly, and in short he married me the next September, and we started in business in the Rue des Martyrs.

"It was a hard struggle for some years, Monsieur. Business did not prosper, and we could not afford many country excursions, and then we had grown unaccustomed to them. One has other things in one's head, and thinks more of the cash box than of pretty speeches, when one is in business. We were growing old by degrees without perceiving it, like quiet people who do not think much about love. One does not regret anything as long as one does not notice what one has lost.

"And after that, Monsieur, business went better, and we became tranquil as to the future! Then, you see, I do not exactly know what passed within me, no, I really do not know, but I began to dream like a little boarding-school girl. The sight of the little carts full of flowers which are drawn about the streets, made me cry; the smell of violets sought me out in my easy-chair, behind my cash box, and made my heart beat! Then I used to get up and go onto the doorstep to look at the blue sky between the roofs. When one looks at the sky from a street, it looks like a river which descends on Paris, winding as it flows, and the swallows pass to and fro in it like fish. This sort of things is very stupid at my age! But what can one do, Monsieur? when one has worked all one's life? A moment comes in which one perceives that one could have done something else, and then, one regrets, oh! yes, one feels great regret! Just think that for twenty years I might have gone and had kisses in the woods, like other women. I used to think how delightful it would be to lie under the trees, loving some one! And I thought of it everyday and every night! I dreamt of the moonlight on the water, until I felt inclined to drown myself.

[Pg 341]

"I did not venture to speak to Monsieur Beaurain about this at first. I knew that he would make fun of me, and send me back to sell my needles and cotton! And then, to speak the truth, Monsieur Beaurain never said much to me, but when I looked in the glass, I also understood quite well, that I also no longer appealed to anyone!

"Well, I made up my mind, and I proposed an excursion into the country to him, to the place where we had first become acquainted. He agreed without any distrust, and we arrived here this morning, about nine o'clock.

"I felt quite young again when I got among the corn, for a woman's heart never grows old! And really, I no longer saw my husband as he is at present, but just like he was formerly! That I will swear to you, Monsieur. As true as I am standing here, I was intoxicated. I began to kiss him, and he was more surprised than if I had tried to murder him. He kept saying to me: 'Why, you must be mad! You are mad this morning! What is the matter with you?...' I did not listen to him, I only listened to my own heart, and I made him come into the woods with me.... There it is.... I have spoken the truth, Monsieur le Maire, the whole truth."

[Pg 342]

The Mayor was a sensible man. He rose from his chair, smiled, and said: "Go in peace, Madame, and sin no more ... under the trees."

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## A FAMILY

[Pg 343]

I was going to see my friend Simon Radevin once more, whom I had not had a sight of for fifteen years. Formerly he used to be my most intimate friend, and I used to spend long, quiet and happy evenings with him; he was one of those men to whom one tells one's most intimate affairs of the heart, for whom one finds, when conversing tranquilly, rare, clever, ingenious and refined thoughts, which excite the mind and put it at its ease.

For years we had scarcely been separated; we had lived, traveled, thought and dreamt together; had liked the same things with the same liking, had admired the same books, comprehended the same works, shivered with the same sensations, and very often laughed at the same individuals, whom we understood completely, by merely exchanging a glance.

Then he married; quite unexpectedly he married a little girl from the provinces, who had come to Paris in search of a husband. How ever could that little, thin, insipidly fair girl, with her weak hands, her light, vacant eyes, and her clear silly voice, who was exactly like a hundred thousand marriageable dolls, have picked up that intelligent, clever young fellow? Can anyone understand these things? No doubt he had hoped for happiness, simple, quiet and long-enduring happiness, in the arms of a good, tender and faithful woman; he had seen all that in the transparent looks of that school girl with light hair.

[Pg 344]

He had not dreamt of the fact that an active, living and vibrating man grows tired as soon as he has comprehended the stupid reality, unless indeed, he becomes so brutalized that he understands nothing more whatever.

What would he be like when I met him again? Still lively, witty, light hearted and enthusiastic, or in a state of mental torpor through provincial life? A man can change a great deal in the course of fifteen years!



The train stopped at a small station, and as I got out of the carriage, a stout, a very stout man with red cheeks and a big stomach rushed up to me with open arms, exclaiming: "George!" I embraced him, but I had not recognized him, and then I said, in astonishment: "By Jove! You have not grown thin!" And he replied with a laugh: "What did you expect? Good living, a good table and good nights! Eating and sleeping, that is my existence!"

I looked at him closely, trying to find the features I held so dear in that broad face. His eyes alone had not altered, but I no longer saw the same looks in them, and I said to myself: "If the looks be the reflection of the mind, the thoughts in that head are not what they used to be formerly; those thoughts which I knew so well."

Yet his eyes were bright, full of pleasure and friendship, but they had not that clear, intelligent expression, which expresses as much as words do, the value of the mind. Suddenly he said to me: "Here are my two eldest children." A girl of fourteen, who was almost a woman, and a boy of thirteen, in the dress of a boy from a *Lycée*, came forward in a hesitating and awkward manner, and I said in a low voice: "Are they yours?" "Of course they are," he replied laughing. "How many have you?" "Five! There are three more indoors."

[Pg 345]

He said that in a proud, self-satisfied, almost triumphant manner, and I felt profound pity, mingled with a feeling of vague contempt for this vainglorious and simple reproducer of his species, who spent his nights in his country house in making children.

I got into a carriage, which he drove himself, and we set off through the town, a dull, sleepy, gloomy town, where nothing was moving in the streets except a few dogs and two or three maidservants. Here and there a shopkeeper standing at his door took off his hat, and Simon returned his salute and told me the man's name; no doubt to show me that he knew all the inhabitants personally, and the thought struck me that he was thinking of becoming a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies, that dream of all who have buried themselves in the provinces.

We were soon out of the town, and the carriage turned into a garden, which had some pretensions to being a park, and stopped in front of a turretted house, which tried to pass for a château.

"That is my den," Simon said, so that he might be complimented on it, and I replied that it was delightful.

A lady appeared on the steps, dressed up for a visitor, her hair done for a visitor, and with phrases ready prepared for a visitor. She was no longer the light haired, insipid girl I had seen in church fifteen years previously, but a stout lady in curls and flounces, one of those ladies without any fixed age, without intellect, without any of those things which constitute a woman. In short, she was a mother, a stout, commonplace mother, the human layer and brood mare, that machine of flesh which procreates without any other mental preoccupation, except her children and her housekeeping book.

[Pg 346]

She welcomed me, and I went into the hall, where three children, ranged according to their height, seemed set out for review, like firemen before a mayor, and I said: "Ah! ah! so these are the others?" And Simon, who was radiant with pleasure, named them: "Jean, Sophie and Gontran."

The door of the drawing-room was open. I went in and in the depths of an easy-chair I saw something trembling, a man, an old, paralyzed man. Madame Radevin came forward and said: "This is my grandfather, Monsieur; he is eighty-seven." And then she shouted into the shaking old man's ears: "This is a friend of Simon's, papa." The old gentleman tried to say "good day" to me, and he muttered: "Oua, oua, oua," and waved his hand, and I took a seat, saying: "You are very kind, Monsieur."

Simon had just come in, and he said with a laugh: "So! You have made grandpapa's acquaintance. He is priceless, is that old man; he is the delight of the children, and he is so greedy that he almost kills himself at every meal; you have no idea what he would eat if he were allowed to do as he pleased. But you will see, you will see. He likes all the sweets as if they were so many girls. You have never seen anything funnier; you will see it presently."

I was then shown to my room to change my dress for dinner, and hearing a great clatter behind me on the stairs, I turned round and saw that all the children were following me behind their father; to do me honor, no doubt.

[Pg 347]

My windows looked out onto a plain, bare, interminable plain, an ocean of grass, of wheat, and of oats, without a clump of trees or any rising ground, a striking and melancholy picture of the life which they must be leading in that house.

A bell rang; it was for dinner, and so I went downstairs. Madame Radevin took my arm in a ceremonious manner, and we went into the dining-room. A footman wheeled in the old man's armchair, who gave a greedy and curious look at the dessert, as he with difficulty turned his shaking head from one dish to the other.

Simon rubbed his hands: "You will be amused," he said; and all the children understood that I was going to be indulged with the sight of their greedy grandfather, and they began to laugh accordingly, while their mother merely smiled and shrugged her shoulders, and Simon, making a

speaking trumpet of his hands, shouted at the old man: "This evening there is sweet rice cream," and the wrinkled face of the grandfather brightened, and he trembled more violently all over, showing that he had understood and was very pleased. The dinner began.

"Just look!" Simon whispered. The grandfather did not like the soup, and he refused to eat it; but he was made to, on account of his health, and the footman forced the spoon into his mouth, while the old man blew energetically, so as not to swallow the soup, which was thus scattered like a stream of water onto the table and over his neighbors. The children shook with delight at the spectacle, while their father, who was also amused, said: "Is not the old man funny?"

[Pg 348]

During the whole meal, they were all taken up solely with him. He devoured the dishes which were put on the table, with his eyes, and he tried to seize them and pull them to himself with his trembling hands. They put them almost within his reach, to see his useless efforts, his trembling clutches at them, the piteous appeal of his whole nature, of his eyes, of his mouth and of his nose as he smelt them, and he slobbered onto his table napkin with eagerness, while uttering inarticulate grunts. And the whole family was highly amused at this horrible and grotesque scene.

Then they put a tiny morsel onto his plate, which he ate with feverish gluttony, in order to get something more as soon as possible, and when the rice-cream was brought in, he nearly had a fit, and groaned with greediness, and Gontran called out to him: "You have eaten too much already; you will have no more." And they pretended not to give him any. Then he began to cry; he cried and trembled more violently than ever, while all the children laughed. At last, however, they gave him his helping, a very small piece; and as he ate the first mouthful of the pudding, he made a comical and greedy noise in his throat, and a movement with his neck like ducks do when they swallow too large a morsel, and then, when he had done, he began to stamp his feet, so as to get more.

I was seized with pity for this saddening and ridiculous Tantalus, and I interposed on his behalf: "Please, will you not give him a little more rice?" But Simon replied: "Oh! no, my dear fellow, if he were to eat too much, it might harm him, at his age."

[Pg 349]

I held my tongue, and thought over these words. Oh! ethics! Oh! logic! Oh! wisdom! At his age! So they deprived him of his only remaining pleasure out of regard for his health! His health! What would he do with it, inert and trembling wreck that he was? They were taking care of his life, so they said. His life? How many days? Ten, twenty, fifty, or a hundred? Why? For his own sake? Or to preserve for some time longer the spectacle of his impotent greediness in the family.

There was nothing left for him to do in this life, nothing whatever. He had one single wish left, one sole pleasure; why not grant him that last solace constantly, until he died?

After playing cards for a long time, I went up to my room and to bed; I was low-spirited and sad, sad, sad! I sat at my window, but I heard nothing but the beautiful warbling of a bird in a tree, somewhere in the distance. No doubt the bird was singing thus in a low voice during the night, and to lull his mate, who was sleeping on her eggs.

And I thought of my poor friend's five children, and pictured him to myself, snoring by the side of his ugly wife.

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## JOSEPH

[Pg 350]

They were both of them drunk, quite drunk, little Baroness Andrée de la Fraisières and little Countess Noemi de Gardens. They had been dining alone together, in the large room which faced the sea. The soft breeze of a summer evening blew in at the open window, soft and fresh at the same time, a breeze that smelt of the sea. The two young women, extended in their lounging chairs, sipped their Chartreuse from time to time, as they smoked their cigarettes, and they were talking most confidentially, telling each other details which nothing but this charming intoxication could have induced their pretty lips to utter.

Their husbands had returned to Paris that afternoon, and had left them alone on that little deserted beach, which they had chosen so as to avoid those gallant marauders who are constantly met with in fashionable watering places. As they were absent for five days in the week, they objected to country excursions, luncheons on the grass, swimming lessons and those sudden familiarities which spring up in the idle life of watering places. Dieppe, Etratat, Trouville seemed to them to be places to be avoided, and they had rented a house which had been built and abandoned by an eccentric individual in the valley of Roqueville, near Fécamp, and there they buried their wives for the whole summer.

They were drunk. Not knowing what to hit upon to amuse themselves, the little Baroness had suggested a good dinner and champagne. To begin with, they had found great amusement in cooking this dinner themselves, and then they had eaten it merrily, and had drunk freely, in order to allay the thirst which the heat of the fire had excited. Now they were chatting and talking nonsense, while gently gargling their throats with Chartreuse. In fact they did not in the least know any longer what they were saying.

[Pg 351]

The Countess, with her legs in the air on the back of a chair, was further gone than her friend.

"To complete an evening like this," she said, "we ought to have a lover apiece. If I had foreseen this some time ago, I would have sent for a couple from Paris, and I would have let you have one...." "I can always find one," the other replied; "I could have one this very evening, if I wished." "What nonsense! At Roqueville, my dear? It would have to be some peasant, then." "No, not altogether." "Well, tell me all about it." "What do you want me to tell you?" "About your lover." "My dear, I do not want to live without being loved, for I should fancy I was dead if I were not loved." "So should I." "Is not that so?" "Yes. Men cannot understand it! And especially our husbands!" "No, not in the least. How can you expect it to be different? The love which we want is made up of being spoiled, of gallantries and of pretty words and actions. That is the nourishment of our hearts; it is indispensable to our life, indispensable, indispensable...." "Indispensable."

"I must feel that somebody is thinking of me, always, everywhere. When I go to sleep and when I wake up, I must know that somebody loves me somewhere, that I am being dreamt of, longed for. Without that, I should be wretched, wretched! Oh! yes, unhappy enough to do nothing but cry." "I am just the same."

[Pg 352]

"You must remember that anything else is impossible. When a husband has been nice for six months, or a year, or two years, he necessarily becomes a brute, yes, a regular brute.... He does not put himself out for anything, but shows himself just as he is, and makes a scene on the slightest provocation, or without any provocation whatever. One cannot love a man with whom one lives constantly." "That is quite true." "Isn't it?... What was I saying? I cannot the least remember?" "You were saying that all husbands are brutes!" "Yes, brutes ... all of them." "That is quite true." "And then?" "What do you mean?" "What was I saying just then?" "I don't know because you did not say it!" "But I had something to tell you." "Oh! yes, that is true; well?..." "Oh! I have got it...." "Well, I am listening." "I was telling you that I can find lovers everywhere." "How do you manage it?" "Like this. Now follow me carefully. When I get to some fresh place, I take notes and make my choice." "You make your choice?" "Yes, of course I do. First of all, I take notes. I ask questions. Above all, a man must be discreet, rich and generous; is not that so?" "It is quite true!" "And then he must please me, as a man." "Of course." "Then I bait the hook for him." "You bait the hook?" "Yes, just as one does to catch fish. Have you never fished with a hook and line?" "No, never." "You are wrong; it is very amusing, and besides that, it is instructive. Well then, I bait the hook...." "How do you do it?" "How stupid you are. Does not one catch the man one wants to catch, without their having any choice? And they really think that they choose ... the fools ... but it is we who choose ... always.... Just think, when one is not ugly, nor stupid, as is the case with us, all men aspire to us, all ... without exception. We look them over from morning till night, and when we have selected one, we fish for him...." "But that does not tell me how you do it?" "How I do it?... Why, I do nothing; I allow myself to be looked at, that is all." "You allow yourself to be looked at?..." "Why yes; that is quite enough. When one has allowed oneself to be looked at several times following, a man immediately thinks you the most lovely, most seductive of women, and then he begins to make love to you. I give him to understand that he is not so bad looking, without saying anything to him, of course, and he falls in love, like a dog. I have him fast, and it lasts a longer or a shorter time, according to his qualities."

[Pg 353]

"And do you catch all whom you please, like that?" "Nearly all." "Oh! So there are some who resist?" "Sometimes." "Why?" "Oh! Why? A man is a Joseph for three reasons. Because he is in love with another woman. Because he is excessively timid, or because he is ... how shall I say it? ... incapable of carrying out the conquest of a woman to the end...." "Oh! my dear!... Do you really believe?..." "I am sure of it.... There are many of this latter class, many, many ... many more than people think. Oh! they look just like everybody else ... they strut like peacocks.... No, when I said peacocks ... I made a mistake, for they could not display themselves." "Oh! my dear...." "As to the timid, they are sometimes unspeakably stupid. They are the sort of men, who ought not to undress themselves, even when they are going to bed alone, when there is a looking-glass in their room. With them, one must be energetic, make use of looks, and squeeze their hands, and even that is useless sometimes. They never know how or where to begin. When one faints in their presence ... as a last resource ... they try to bring you round ... and if you do not recover your senses immediately ... they go and get assistance."

[Pg 354]

"Those whom I prefer myself, are other women's lovers. I carry them by assault ... at ... at ... at the point of the bayonet, my dear!" "That is all very well, but when there are no men, like here, for instance?" "I find them!" "You find them. But where?" "Everywhere. But that reminds me of my story."

"Now listen. Just two years ago, my husband made me pass the summer on his estate at Bougrolles. There was nothing there ... you know what I mean, nothing, nothing, nothing, whatever! In the neighboring country houses there were a few disgusting boors, who cared for nothing but shooting, and who lived in country houses which had not even a bathroom, men who perspire, go to bed covered with perspiration, and whom it would be impossible to improve, because their principles of life are dirty. Now just guess what I did!" "I cannot possibly." "Ha! ha! ha! I had just been reading a number of George Sand's novels which exalt the man of the people, novels in which the workmen are sublime, and all the men of the world are criminals. In addition to this I had seen Ruy Blas the winter before, and it had struck me very much. Well, one of our farmers had a son, a good-looking young fellow of two and twenty who had studied for a priest, but had left the seminary in disgust. Well, I took him as footman!" "Oh!... And then?... What afterwards?"

[Pg 355]

"Then ... then, my dear, I treated him very haughtily, and showed him a good deal of my person. I did not entice this rustic on, I simply inflamed him!..." "Oh! Andrée!" "Yes, and I enjoyed the fun"

very much. People say that servants count for nothing! Well he did not count for much. I used to ring to give him his orders every morning while my maid was dressing me, and every evening as well, while she was undressing me." "Oh! Andrée!"

"My dear he caught fire like a thatched roof. Then, at meals, I used continually to talk about cleanliness, about taking care of one's person, about baths and shower baths, until at the end of a fortnight he bathed in the river morning and night, and used to scent himself enough to poison the whole château. I was even obliged to forbid him to use perfumes, telling him, with furious looks, that men ought never to use scent except Eau de Cologne."

"Oh! Andrée!"

"Then, I took it into my head to get together a library suitable to the country. I sent for a few hundred moral novels, which I lent to all our peasants, and all my servants. A few books ... a few ... poetical books ... such as excite the mind of ... schoolboys and schoolgirls ... had found their way into my collection ... and I gave them to my footman. That taught him life ... a funny sort of life." "Oh! Andrée!"

[Pg 356]

"Then I grew familiar with him, and used to say thou<sup>[18]</sup> to him. I had given him the name of Joseph. And, my dear, he was in a state ... in a terrible state.... He got as thin as ... as a barn-door cock ... and rolled his eyes like an idiot. I was extremely amused; it was one of the most delightful summers I ever spent...." "And then?..." "Then?... Oh! yes.... Well, one day when my husband was away from home, I told him to order the basket carriage and to drive me into the woods. It was warm, very warm.... There!" "Oh Andrée, do tell me all about it.... It is so amusing...." "Here have a glass of Chartreuse, otherwise I shall empty the decanter myself. Well, I felt ill, on the road." "How?" "You are very stupid. I told him that I was not feeling well, and that he must lay me on the grass, and when I was lying there, I told him I was choking, and that he must unlace me. And then, when I was unlaced, I fainted." "Did you go right off?" "Oh! dear no, not the least." "Well?"

"Well, I was obliged to remain unconscious for nearly an hour, as he could find no means of bringing me round. But I was very patient, and did not open my eyes."

[Pg 357]

"Oh! Andrée!... And what did you say to him?" "I? Nothing at all! How was I to know anything, as I was unconscious? I thanked him, and told him to help me into the carriage, and he drove me back to the Château; but he nearly upset us in turning into the gate!" "Oh! Andrée! And is that all?..." "That is all...." "You did not faint more than that once?" "Only once, of course! I did not want to take such a fellow for my lover." "Did you keep him long after that?" "Yes, of course. I have him still. Why should I have sent him away? I had nothing to complain of." "Oh! Andrée! And is he in love with you still?" "Of course he is." "Where is he?"

The little Baroness put out her hand to the wall and touched the electric bell, and the door opened almost immediately, and a tall footman came in who diffused a scent of Eau de Cologne all round him. "Joseph," she said to him, "I am afraid I am going to faint; send my lady's maid to me."

The man stood motionless, like a soldier before his officer, and fixed an ardent look on his mistress, who continued: "Go quickly, you great idiot, we are not in the wood to-day, and Rosalie will attend to me better than you would." He turned on his heels and went, and the little Baroness asked nervously: "But what shall you say to your maid?" "I shall tell her what we have been doing! No, I shall merely get her to unlace me; it will relieve my chest, for I can scarcely breathe. I am drunk ... my dear ... so drunk that I should fall, if I were to get up from my chair."

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## THE INN

[Pg 358]

Like all the wooden inns in the higher Alps, which are situated in the rocky and bare gorges which intersect the white summits of the mountains, the inn of Schwarenbach stands as a refuge for travelers who are crossing the Gemmi.

It remains open for six months in the year, and is inhabited by the family of Jean Hauser; then, as soon as the snow begins to fall, and fills the valley so as to make the road down to Loèche impassable, the father and his three sons go away, and leave the house in charge of the old guide, Gaspard Hari, with the young guide, Ulrich Kunzi, and Sam, the great mountain dog.

The two men and the dog remained till the spring in their snowy prison, with nothing before their eyes except the immense, white slopes of the Balmhorn; they were surrounded by light, glistening summits, and shut up, blocked up and buried by the snow which rose around them, and which enveloped, bound and crushed the little house, which lay piled on the roof, reached to the windows and blocked up the door.

It was the day on which the Hauser family were going to return to Loèche, as winter was approaching, and the descent was becoming dangerous. Three mules started first, laden with baggage and led by the three sons. Then the mother, Jean Hauser and her daughter Louise mounted a fourth mule, and set off in their turn, and the father followed them, accompanied by the two men in charge, who were to escort the family as far as the brow of the descent. First of all they passed round the small lake, which was now frozen over, at the bottom of the mass of

[Pg 359]

rocks which stretched in front of the inn, and then they followed the valley, which was dominated on all sides by the snow covered summits.

A ray of sunlight fell into that little white, glistening, frozen desert, and illuminated it with a cold and dazzling flame; no living thing appeared among this ocean of hills; there was nothing more in this immeasurable solitude, and no noise disturbed the profound silence.

By degrees the young guide Ulrich Kunzi, a tall, long legged Swiss, left daddy Hauser and old Gaspard behind, in order to catch up to the mule, which carried the two women. The younger one looked at him as he approached, and appeared to be calling him, with her sad eyes. She was a young, light haired peasant girl, whose milk white cheeks and pale hair looked as if they had lost their color by their long abode amidst the ice. When he had got up with the animal which carried them, he put his hand on the crupper, and relaxed his speed. Mother Hauser began to talk to him, and enumerated with the minutest details all that he would have to attend to during the winter. It was the first time that he was going to stop up there, while old Hari had already spent fourteen winters amidst the snow, at the inn of Schwarenbach.

Ulrich Kunzi listened, without appearing to understand, and looked incessantly at the girl. From time to time he replied: "Yes, Madame Hauser;" but his thoughts seemed far away, and his calm features remained unmoved.

[Pg 360]

They reached Lake Daube, whose broad, frozen surface extended to the bottom of the valley. On the right, the Daubenhorn showed its black rocks, rising up in a peak above the enormous moraines of the Lömmeon glacier, which rose above the Wildstrubel. As they approached the neck of the Gemmi, where the descent to Loèche begins, they suddenly beheld the immense horizon of the Alps of the Valais, from which the broad, deep valley of the Rhone separated them.

In the distance, there was a group of white, unequal flat or pointed mountain summits, which glistened in the sun; the Mischabel with its two peaks, the huge group of the Weisshorn, the heavy Bruneggorn, the lofty and formidable pyramid of Mont Cervin, that slayer of men, and the Dent-Blanche, that terrible coquette.

Then, beneath them, in a tremendous hole, at the bottom of a terrible abyss, they perceived Loèche, where houses looked as grains of sand which had been thrown in that enormous crevice, which finishes and closes the Gemmi, and which opens, down below, onto the Rhone.

The mule stopped at the edge of the path, which goes turning and twisting continually, and which comes back fantastically and strangely, along the side of the mountain, as far as the almost invisible little village at its feet. The women jumped into the snow, and the two old men joined them. "Well," father Hauser said, "good-bye, and keep up your spirits till next year, my friends," and old Hari replied: "Till next year."

They embraced each other, and then Madame Hauser in her turn, offered her cheek, and the girl did the same.

[Pg 361]

When Ulrich Kunzi's turn came, he whispered in Louise's ear: "Do not forget those up yonder," and she replied: "no," in such a low voice, that he guessed what she had said, without hearing it. "Well, adieu," Jean Hauser repeated, "and don't fall ill." And going before the two women, he commenced the descent, and soon all three disappeared at the first turn in the road, while the two men returned to the inn at Schwarenbach.

They walked slowly, side by side, without speaking. It was over, and they would be alone together for four or five months. Then Gaspard Bari began to relate his life last winter. He had remained with Michael Canol, who was too old now to stand it; for an accident might happen during that long solitude. They had not been dull, however; the only thing was to make up one's mind to it from the first, and in the end one would find plenty of distraction, games and other means of whiling away the time.

Ulrich Kunzi listened to him with his eyes on the ground, for in his thoughts he was following those who were descending to the village. They soon came in sight of the inn, which was, however, scarcely visible, so small did it look, a black speck at the foot of that enormous billow of snow, and when they opened the door, Sam, the great curly dog, began to romp round them.

"Come, my boy," old Gaspard said, "we have no women now, so we must get our own dinner ready. Go and peel the potatoes." And they both sat down on wooden stools, and began to put the bread into the soup.

The next morning seemed very long to Kunzi. Old Hari smoked and spat onto the hearth, while the young man looked out of the window at the snow-covered mountain opposite the house.

[Pg 362]

In the afternoon he went out, and going over yesterday's ground again, he looked for the traces of the mule that had carried the two women; then when he had reached the neck of the Gemmi, he laid himself down on his stomach and looked at Loèche.

The village, in its rocky pit, was not yet buried under the snow, although it came quite close to it, but it was stopped short by the pine woods which protected it. Its low houses looked like paving stones in a large meadow, from up there. Hauser's little daughter was there now, in one of those gray colored houses. In which? Ulrich Kunzi was too far away to be able to make them out separately. How he would have liked to go down, while he was yet able!

But the sun had disappeared behind the lofty crest of the Wildstrubel, and the young man returned to the chalet. Daddy Hari was smoking, and when he saw his mate come in, he proposed a game of cards to him, and they sat down opposite each other, on either side of the table. They played for a long time, a simple game called *brisque*, and then they had supper and went to bed.

The following days were like the first, bright and cold, without any more snow. Old Gaspard spent his afternoons in watching the eagles and other rare birds which ventured onto those frozen heights, while Ulrich returned regularly to the neck of the Gemmi to look at the village. Then they played at cards, dice or dominoes, and lost and won a trifle, just to create an interest in the game.

One morning Hari, who was up first, called his companion. A moving deep and light cloud of white spray was falling on them noiselessly, and was by degrees burying them under a thick, dark coverlet of foam, and that lasted four days and four nights. It was necessary to free the door and the windows, to dig out a passage and to cut steps to get over this frozen powder, which a twelve hours frost had made as hard as the granite of the moraines.

[Pg 363]

They lived like prisoners, and did not venture outside their abode. They had divided their duties, which they performed regularly. Ulrich Kunzi undertook the scouring, washing, and everything that belonged to cleanliness. He also chopped up the wood, while Gaspard Hari did the cooking and attended to the fire. Their regular and monotonous work was interrupted by long games at cards or dice, and they never quarreled, but were always calm and placid. They were never even impatient or ill-humored, nor did they ever use hard words, for they had laid in a stock of patience for their wintering on the top of the mountain.

Sometimes old Gaspard took his rifle and went after chamois, and occasionally he killed one. Then there was a feast in the inn at Schwarenbach, and they reveled in fresh meat. One morning he went out as usual. The thermometer outside marked eighteen degrees of frost, and as the sun had not yet risen, the hunter hoped to surprise the animals at the approaches to the Wildstrubel, and Ulrich, being alone, remained in bed until ten o'clock. He was of a sleepy nature, but he would not have dared to give way like that to his inclination in the presence of the old guide, who was ever an early riser. He breakfasted leisurely with Sam, who also spent his days and nights in sleeping in front of the fire; then he felt low-spirited and even frightened at the solitude, and was seized by a longing for his daily game of cards, as one is by the desire of an invincible habit, and so he went out to meet his companion, who was to return at four o'clock.

[Pg 364]

The snow had leveled the whole deep valley, filled up the *crevasses*, obliterated all signs of the two lakes and covered the rocks, so that between the high summits there was nothing but an immense, white, regular, dazzling and frozen surface. For three weeks, Ulrich had not been to the edge of the precipice, from which he had looked down onto the village, and he wanted to go there before climbing the slopes which led to Wildstrubel. Loèche was now also covered by the snow, and the houses could scarcely be distinguished, covered as they were by that white cloak.

Then turning to the right, he reached the Lämmern glacier. He went along with a mountaineer's long strides, striking the snow, which was as hard as a rock, with his iron-shod stick, and with his piercing eyes, he looked for the little black, moving speck in the distance, on that enormous, white expanse.

When he reached the end of the glacier he stopped and asked himself whether the old man had taken that road, and then he began to walk along the moraines with rapid and uneasy steps. The day was declining; the snow was assuming a rosy tint, and a dry, frozen wind blew in rough gusts over its crystal surface. Ulrich uttered a long, shrill, vibrating call; his voice sped through the deathlike silence in which the mountains were sleeping; it reached the distance, over profound and motionless waves of glacial foam, like the cry of a bird over the waves of the sea; then it died away and nothing answered him.

[Pg 365]

He set to walk again. The sun had sunk yonder behind the mountain tops, which were still purple with the reflection from the sky; but the depths of the valley were becoming gray, and suddenly the young man felt frightened. It seemed to him as if the silence, the cold, the solitude, the winter death of these mountains were taking possession of him, were going to stop and to freeze his blood, to make his limbs grow stiff, and to turn him into a motionless and frozen object; and he set off running, fleeing towards his dwelling. The old man, he thought, would have returned during his absence. He had taken another road; he would, no doubt, be sitting before the fire, with a dead chamois at his feet.

He soon came in sight of the inn, but no smoke rose from it. Ulrich walked faster and opened the door; Sam ran up to him to greet him, but Gaspard Hari had not returned. Kunzi, in his alarm, turned round suddenly, as if he had expected to find his comrade hidden in a corner. Then he re-lighted the fire and made the soup; hoping every moment to see the old man come in. From time to time he went out, to see if he were not coming in. It was quite night now, that wan night of the mountains, a livid night, with the crescent moon, yellow and dim and just disappearing behind the mountain tops, lit up on the edge of the horizon.

Then the young man went in and sat down to warm his hands and his feet, while he pictured to himself every possible accident. Gaspard might have broken a leg, have fallen into a crevasse, taken a false step and dislocated his ankle. And perhaps he was lying on the snow, overcome and stiff with the cold, in agony of mind, lost and perhaps shouting for help, calling with all his might, in the silence of the night.

[Pg 366]

But where? The mountain was so vast, so rugged, so dangerous in places, especially at that time of the year, that it would have required ten or twenty guides to walk for a week in all directions, to find a man in that immense space. Ulrich Kunzi, however, made up his mind to set out with Sam, if Gaspard did not return by one in the morning; and he made his preparations.

He put provisions for two days into a bag, took his steel climbing irons, tied a long, thin, strong rope round his waist and looked to see that his iron-shod stick and his axe, which served to cut steps in the ice, were in order. Then he waited. The fire was burning on the hearth and the great dog was snoring in front of it, and the clock was ticking as regularly as a heart beating, in its case of resounding wood.

He waited, with his ears on the alert for distant sounds, and he shivered when the wind blew against the roof and the walls. It struck twelve, and he trembled. Then, as he felt frightened and shuddering, he put some water on the fire, so that he might have some hot coffee before starting, and when the clock struck one he got up, woke Sam, opened the door and went off in the direction of the Wildstrubel. For five hours he mounted, scaling the rocks by means of his climbing irons, cutting into the ice, advancing continually and occasionally hauling up the dog, who remained below at the foot of some slope that was too steep for him, by means of the rope. It was about six o'clock when he reached one of the summits to which old Gaspard often came after chamois, and he waited till it should be daylight.

[Pg 367]

The sky was growing pale over head, and suddenly a strange light, springing, nobody could tell whence, illuminated the immense ocean of pale mountain summits, which stretched for a thousand leagues around him. One might have said that this vague brightness arose from the snow itself, in order to spread itself into space. By degrees the highest, distant summits assumed a delicate, fleshlike rose color, and the red sun appeared behind the ponderous giants of the Bernese Alps.

Ulrich Kunzi set off again, walking like a hunter, bent and looking for any traces, and saying to his dog: "Seek, old fellow, seek!"

He was descending the mountain now, scanning the depths closely, and from time to time shouting, uttering a loud, prolonged cry, which soon died away in that silent vastness. Then, he put his ear to the ground, to listen; he thought he could distinguish a voice, and so he began to run, and shouted again, but he heard nothing more and sat down, worn out and in despair. Towards midday, he breakfasted and gave Sam, who was as tired as himself, something to eat also, and then he recommenced his search.

When evening came he was still walking, and he had walked more than thirty miles over the mountains. As he was too far away to return home, and too tired to drag himself along any further, he dug a hole in the snow and crouched in it with his dog, under a blanket which he had brought with him. And the man and the dog lay side by side, warming themselves one against the other, but frozen to the marrow, nevertheless. Ulrich scarcely slept, his mind haunted by visions and his limbs shaking with cold.

[Pg 368]

Day was breaking when he got up. His legs were as stiff as iron bars, and his spirits so low that he was ready to cry with grief, while his heart was beating so that he almost fell with excitement, when he thought he heard a noise.

Suddenly he imagined that he also was going to die of cold in the midst of this vast solitude, and the terror of such a death roused his energies and gave him renewed vigor. He was descending towards the inn, falling down and getting up again, and followed at a distance by Sam, who was limping on three legs, and they did not reach Schwarenbach until four o'clock in the afternoon. The house was empty, and the young man made a fire, had something to eat and went to sleep, so worn out that he did not think of anything more.

He slept for a long time, for a very long time, an unconquerable sleep. But suddenly a voice, a cry, a name: "Ulrich," aroused him from his profound torpor and made him sit up in bed. Had he been dreaming? Was it one of those strange appeals which cross the dreams of disquieted minds? No, he heard it still, that reverberating cry,—which had entered at his ears and remained in his flesh,—to the tips of his sinewy fingers. Certainly, somebody had cried out, and called: "Ulrich!" There was somebody there, near the house, there could be no doubt of that, and he opened the door and shouted: "Is it you, Gaspard?" with all the strength of his lungs. But there was no reply, no murmur, no groan, nothing. It was quite dark, and the snow looked wan.

[Pg 369]

The wind had risen, that icy wind that cracks the rocks, and leaves nothing alive on those deserted heights, and it came in sudden gusts, which were more parching and more deadly than the burning wind of the desert, and again Ulrich shouted: "Gaspard! Gaspard! Gaspard!" And then he waited again. Everything was silent on the mountain! Then he shook with terror and with a bound he was inside the inn, when he shut and bolted the door, and then he fell into a chair, trembling all over, for he felt certain that his comrade had called him, at the moment he was expiring.

He was sure of that, as sure as one is of being alive, or of eating a piece of bread. Old Gaspard Hari had been dying for two days and three nights somewhere, in some hole, in one of those deep, untrodden ravines whose whiteness is more sinister than subterranean darkness. He had been dying for two days and three nights and he had just then died, thinking of his comrade. His soul, almost before it was released, had taken its flight to the inn where Ulrich was sleeping, and it had called him by that terrible and mysterious power which the spirits of the dead have, to



haunt the living. That voiceless soul had cried to the wornout soul of the sleeper; it had uttered its last farewell, or its reproach, or its curse on the man who had not searched carefully enough.

And Ulrich felt that it was there, quite close to him, behind the wall, behind the door which he had just fastened. It was wandering about, like a night bird, which lightly touches a lighted window with his wings, and the terrified young man was ready to scream with horror. He wanted to run away, but did not dare to go out; he did not dare, and he should never dare to do it in the future, for that phantom would remain there day and night, round the inn, as long as the old man's body was not recovered and had not been deposited in the consecrated earth of a churchyard.

[Pg 370]

When it was daylight, Kunzi recovered some of his courage at the return of the bright sun. He prepared his meal, gave his dog some food, and then remained motionless on a chair, tortured at heart as he thought of the old man lying on the snow, and then, as soon as night once more covered the mountains, new terrors assailed him. He now walked up and down the dark kitchen, which was scarcely lighted by the flame of one candle, and he walked from one end of it to the other with great strides, listening, listening whether the terrible cry of the other night would again break the dreary silence outside. He felt himself alone, unhappy man, as no man had ever been alone before! He was alone in this immense desert of snow, alone five thousand feet above the inhabited earth, above human habitations, above that stirring, noisy, palpitating life, alone under an icy sky! A mad longing impelled him to run away, no matter where, to get down to Loëche by flinging himself over the precipice; but he did not even dare to open the door, as he felt sure that the other, the dead man, would bar his road, so that he might not be obliged to remain up there alone.

Towards midnight, tired with walking, wornout by grief and fear, he at last fell into a doze in his chair, for he was as afraid of his bed, as one is of a haunted spot. But suddenly the strident cry of the other evening pierced his ears, and it was so shrill that Ulrich stretched out his arms to repulse the ghost, and he fell onto his back with his chair.

[Pg 371]

Sam, who was awakened by the noise, began to howl, like frightened dogs do howl, and he walked all about the house, trying to find out where the danger came from; but when he got to the door, he sniffed beneath it, smelling vigorously, with his coat bristling and his tail stiff, while he growled angrily. Kunzi, who was terrified, jumped up, and holding his chair by one leg, he cried: "Don't come in, don't come in, or I shall kill you." And the dog, excited by this threat, barked angrily at that invisible enemy who defied his master's voice. By degrees, however, he quieted down and came back and stretched himself in front of the fire, but he was uneasy, and kept his head up, and growled between his teeth.

Ulrich, in turn, recovered his senses, but as he felt faint with terror, he went and got a bottle of brandy out of the sideboard, and he drank off several glasses, one after another, at a gulp. His ideas became vague, his courage revived, and a feverish glow ran through his veins.

He ate scarcely anything the next day, and limited himself to alcohol, and so he lived for several days, like a drunken brute. As soon as he thought of Gaspard Hari, he began to drink again, and went on drinking until he fell onto the ground, overcome by intoxication. And there he remained on his face, dead drunk, his limbs benumbed, and snoring, with his face to the ground. But scarcely had he digested the maddening and burning liquor, than the same cry, "Ulrich," woke him like a bullet piercing his brain, and he got up, still staggering, stretching out his hands to save himself from falling, and calling to Sam to help him. And the dog, who appeared to be going mad, like his master, rushed to the door, scratched it with his claws, and gnawed it with his long white teeth, while the young man, with his neck thrown back, and his head in the air, drank the brandy in draughts, as if it had been cold water, so that it might by and by send his thoughts, his frantic terror and his memory, to sleep again.

[Pg 372]

In three weeks he had consumed all his stock of ardent spirits, but his continual drunkenness only lulled his terror, which awoke more furiously than ever, as soon as it was impossible for him to calm it. His fixed idea then, which had been intensified by a month of drunkenness, and which was continually increasing in his absolute solitude, penetrated him like a gimlet. He now walked about his house like a wild beast in its cage, putting his ear to the door to listen if the other were there, and defying him through the wall. Then, as soon as he dozed, overcome by fatigue, he heard the voice which made him leap to his feet.

At last one night, like cowards do when driven to extremities, he sprang to the door and opened it, to see who was calling him, and to force him to keep quiet, but such a gust of cold wind blew into his face that it chilled him to the bone, and he closed and bolted the door again immediately, without noticing that Sam had rushed out. Then, as he was shivering with cold, he threw some wood on the fire, and sat down in front of it to warm himself, but suddenly he started, for somebody was scratching at the wall, and crying. In desperation he called out: "Go away!" but was answered by another long, sorrowful wail.

[Pg 373]

Then, all his remaining senses forsook him, from sheer fright. He repeated: "Go away!" and turned round to try to find some corner in which to hide, while the other person went round the house, still crying and rubbing against the wall. Ulrich went to the oak sideboard, which was full of plates and dishes and of provisions, and lifting it up with superhuman strength, he dragged it to the door, so as to form a barricade. Then piling up all the rest of the furniture, the mattresses, palliasses and chairs, he stopped up the windows like one does when assailed by an enemy.



But the person outside now uttered long, plaintive, mournful groans, to which the young man replied by similar groans, and thus days and nights passed, without their ceasing to howl at each other. The one was continually walking round the house, and scraped the walls with his nails so vigorously that it seemed as if he wished to destroy them, while the other, inside, followed all his movements, stooping down, and holding his ear to the walls, and replying to all his appeals with terrible cries. One evening, however, Ulrich heard nothing more, and he sat down, so overcome by fatigue, that he went to sleep immediately, and awoke in the morning without a thought, without any recollection of what had happened, just as if his head had been emptied during his heavy sleep, but he felt hungry, and he ate.

The winter was over, and the Gemmi pass was practicable again, so the Hauser family started off to return to their inn. As soon as they had reached the top of the ascent, the women mounted their mule, and spoke about the two men who they would meet again shortly. They were, indeed, rather surprised that neither of them had come down a few days before, as soon as the road became usable, in order to tell them all about their long winter sojourn. At last, however, they saw the inn, still covered with snow, like a quilt. The door and the window were closed, but a little smoke was coming out of the chimney, which reassured old Hauser; on going up to the door, however, he saw the skeleton of an animal which had been torn to pieces by the eagles, a large skeleton lying on its side.

[Pg 374]

They all looked closely at it, and the mother said: "That must be Sam," and then she shouted: "Hi! Gaspard!" A cry from the interior of the house answered her, and a sharp cry, that one might have thought some animal had uttered it. Old Hauser repeated: "Hi! Gaspard!" and they heard another cry, similar to the first.

Then the three men, the father and the two sons, tried to open the door, but it resisted their efforts. From the empty cow-stall they took a beam to serve as a battering-ram, and hurled it against the door with all their might. The wood gave way, and the boards flew into splinters; then the house was shaken by a loud voice, and inside, behind the sideboard, which was overturned, they saw a man standing upright, with his hair falling onto his shoulders, and a beard descending to his breast, with shining eyes and nothing but rags to cover him. They did not recognize him, but Louise Hauser exclaimed: "It is Ulrich, mother." And her mother declared that it was Ulrich, although his hair was white.

He allowed them to go up to him, and to touch him, but he did not reply to any of their questions, and they were obliged to take him to Loèche, where the doctors found that he was mad, and nobody ever knew what had become of his companion.

[Pg 375]

Little Louise Hauser nearly died that summer of decline, which the medical men attributed to the cold air of the mountains.

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## UGLY

[Pg 376]

Certainly, at this blessed epoch of Equality of mediocrity, of rectangular abomination, as Edgar Poe says, at this delightful period, when everybody dreams of resembling everybody else, so that it has become impossible to tell the President of the Republic from a waiter; in these days, which are the forerunners of that promising, blissful day, when everything in this world will be of a dully, neuter uniformity, certainly at such an epoch, one has the right, or rather it is one's duty, to be ugly.

He, however, assuredly, exercised that right with the most cruel vigor, and he fulfilled that duty with the fiercest heroism, and to make matters worse, the mysterious irony of fate had caused him to be born with the name of Lebeau, while an ingenious godfather, the unconscious accomplice of the pranks of destiny, had given him the Christian name of Antinous.<sup>[19]</sup>

Even among our contemporaries, who were already on the high road to the coming ideal of universal ugliness, Antinous Lebeau was remarkable for his ugliness, and one might have said that he positively threw zeal, too much zeal, into the matter, though he was not hideous like Mirabeau, who made the people exclaim: "Oh! the beautiful monster!"

[Pg 377]

Alas! No. He was without any beauty, even without the beauty of ugliness. He was ugly, that was all; nothing more nor less; in short, he was uglily ugly. He was not humpbacked, nor knock-kneed, nor pot-bellied; his legs were not like a pair of tongs, and his arms were neither too long nor too short, and yet, there was an utter lack of uniformity about him, not only in painters' eyes, but also in everybody's, for nobody could meet him in the street without turning to look after him, and thinking: "Good heavens! What an object."

His hair was of no particular color; a light chestnut, mixed with yellow. There was not much of it, but still, he was not absolutely bald, but quite bald enough to allow his butter-colored pate to show. Butter-colored? Hardly! The color of margarine would be more applicable, and such pale margarine.

His face was also like margarine, but of adulterated margarine, certainly. By the side of it, his *cranium*, the color of unadulterated margarine, looked almost like butter, by comparison.

There was very little to say about his mouth! Less than little; the sum total was—nothing. It was a chimerical mouth.

But take it, that I have said nothing about him, and let us replace this vain description by the useful formula: *Impossible to describe him*. But you must not forget that Antinous Lebeau was ugly, that the fact impressed everybody as soon as they saw him, and that nobody remembered ever having seen an uglier person; and let us add, that as the climax of his misfortune, he thought so himself.

From this you will see that he was not a fool, but, then, he was not ill-natured, either; but, of course, he was unhappy. An unhappy man thinks only of his wretchedness, and people take his night cap for a fool's cap, while, on the other hand, goodness is only esteemed when it is cheerful. Consequently, Antinous Lebeau passed for a fool, and an ill-tempered fool, and he was not even pitied because he was so ugly.

[Pg 378]

He had only one pleasure in life, and that was to go and roam about the darkest streets on dark nights, and to hear the street-walkers say:

"Come home with me, you handsome, dark man!"

It was, alas! a furtive pleasure, and he knew that it was not true. For, occasionally, when the woman was old or drunk and he profited by the invitation, as soon as the candle was lighted in the garret, they no longer murmured the fallacious: *handsome, dark man*; and when they saw him, the old women grew still older, and the drunken women got sober. And more than one, although hardened against disgust, and ready for all risks, said to him, and in spite of his liberal payment:

"My little man, you are most confoundedly ugly, I must say."

At last, however, he renounced even that lamentable pleasure, when he heard the still more lamentable words which a wretched woman could not help uttering when he went home with her:

"Well, he must have been very hungry!"

Alas! He was hungry, unhappy man; hungry for love, for something that should resemble love, were it ever so little; he longed not to live like a pariah any more, not to be exiled and proscribed in his ugliness. And the ugliest, the most repugnant woman would have appeared beautiful to him, if she would only have not consented to think him ugly, or, at any rate, not to tell him so, and not to let him see that she felt horror at him on that account.

[Pg 379]

The consequence was, that, when he one day met a poor, blear-eyed creature, with her face covered with scabs, and bearing evident signs of alcoholism, with a driveling mouth, and ragged and filthy petticoats, to whom he gave liberal alms, for which she kissed his hand, he took her home with him, had her clean dressed and taken care of, made her his servant, and then his housekeeper. Next he raised her to the rank of his mistress, and, finally, of course, he married her.

She was almost as ugly as he was! She really was; but only, almost. Almost, but certainly not quite; for she was hideous, and her hideousness had its charm and its beauty, no doubt; that something by which a woman can attract a man. And she had proved that by deceiving him, and she let him see it better still, by seducing another man.

That other was actually uglier than he was.

He was certainly uglier, that collection of every physical and moral ugliness, that companion of beggars whom she had picked up among her former vagrant associates, that jailbird, that dealer in little girls, that vagabond covered with filth, with legs like a toad's, with a mouth like a lamprey, and a death's head, in which the nose had been replaced by two holes.

"And you have wronged me with a wretch like that," the poor cuckold said. "And in my own house! and in such a manner that I might catch you in the very act! And why, why, you wretch? Why, seeing that he is uglier than I am?"

"Oh! no," she exclaimed. "You may say what you like, but do not say that he is uglier than you are."

[Pg 380]

And the unhappy man stood there, vanquished and overcome by her last words, which she uttered without understanding all the horror which he would feel at them.

"Because, you see, he has his own particular ugliness, while you are merely ugly like everybody else is."

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## FOOTNOTES:

[1] Literally, "The bird flies"—a pun on the verb *voler*, which means both "to fly" and "to steal."

[2] Nickname for Napoleon III.

- [3] *Jevôdre voir vô comment vô faites le peinture? Velé vô? Je été très curieux.*
- [4] *J'été joujours avec vô la même qu-autre fois.*
- [5] Munich beer—often brewed in France!—which is much affected by the Parisians in summer.
- [6] I do not understand.
- [7] What does it matter to me?
- [8] Not at all.
- [9] Hall-porter.
- [10] Woman is a perpetual child.
- [11] Woman, a sick child and twelve times impure.
- [12] Porter who opens the front door, which is common to all the lodgers, and is closed at night.
- [13] The old name, still applied locally to a five-franc piece.
- [14] Maitre (Master) is the official title of French lawyers.
- [15] Frog-island.
- [16] A preparation of several kinds of fish, with a sharp sauce.—TRANSLATOR.
- [17] Clochette.
- [18] The second person singular is used in French—as in German—amongst relations and intimate friends, and to servants.—TRANSLATOR.
- [19] A youth of extraordinary beauty, page to the Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-138), and the object of his extravagant affection. He was drowned in the Nile, whether accidentally, or whether he drowned himself to escape from the life he was leading, is uncertain.—TRANSLATOR.

#### **Transcriber's Notes:**

- Missing full stops have been added for ease of reading.
- Discrepancies in spelling have been standardized across stories.
- Unusual spellings have been retained.
- The book is titled “Illustrated”, but there are no illustrations for this edition.
- The Short Story “The Accursed Bread” has a subsection marked “II”, but there is no subsection “I”.
- The Table of Contents in the book lists the story, “Love” at Page 263, however the text shows it starting on page 262. The Table of Contents has been adjusted accordingly.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WORKS OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT, VOL.  
1 \*\*\*

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