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Author: Edmond de Goncourt

Author: Jules de Goncourt

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**CHEFS D'ŒUVRE**  
**DU**  
**ROMAN CONTEMPORAIN**  
—  
**REALISTS**



**Chapter XXF**

*Jupillon was a true*

*Parisian: he loved  
to fish with a pole  
and line.*

*And when summer  
came they stayed  
there all day, at  
the foot of the  
garden, on the  
bank of the stream  
—Jupillon on a  
laundry board  
resting on two  
stakes, pole in  
hand, and  
Germinie sitting,  
with the child in  
her skirts, under  
the medlar tree  
that overhung the  
stream.*

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**BIBLIOTHÈQUE  
DES CHEFS-D'ŒUVRE  
DU ROMAN  
CONTEMPORAIN**

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***GERMINIE LACERTEUX***

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**EDMOND AND JULES DE GONCOURT**

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**GERMINIE LACERTEUX**

**PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION**

We must ask pardon of the public for offering it this book, and give it due warning of what it will find therein.

The public loves fictitious novels! this is a true novel.

It loves books which make a pretence of introducing their readers to fashionable society: this book deals with the life of the street.

It loves little indecent books, memoirs of courtesans, alcove confessions, erotic obscenity, the scandal tucked away in pictures in a bookseller's shop window: that which is contained in the following pages is rigidly clean and pure. Do not expect the photograph of Pleasure *décolletée*:

the following study is the clinic of Love.

Again, the public loves to read pleasant, soothing stories, adventures that end happily, imaginative works that disturb neither its digestion nor its peace of mind: this book furnishes entertainment of a melancholy, violent sort calculated to disarrange the habits and injure the health of the public.

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Why then have we written it? For no other purpose than to annoy the public and offend its tastes?

By no means.

Living as we do in the nineteenth century, in an age of universal suffrage, of democracy, of liberalism, we asked ourselves the question whether what are called "the lower classes" had no rights in the novel; if that world beneath a world, the common people, must needs remain subject to the literary interdict, and helpless against the contempt of authors who have hitherto said no word to imply that the common people possess a heart and soul. We asked ourselves whether, in these days of equality in which we live, there are classes unworthy the notice of the author and the reader, misfortunes too lowly, dramas too foul-mouthed, catastrophes too commonplace in the terror they inspire. We were curious to know if that conventional symbol of a forgotten literature, of a vanished society, Tragedy, is definitely dead; if, in a country where castes no longer exist and aristocracy has no legal status, the miseries of the lowly and the poor would appeal to public interest, emotion, compassion, as forcibly as the miseries of the great and the rich; if, in a word, the tears that are shed in low life have the same power to cause tears to flow as the tears shed in high life.

These thoughts led us to venture upon the humble tale, *Sœur Philomène*, in 1861; they lead us to put forth *Germinie Lacerteux* to-day.

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Now, let the book be spoken slightly of; it matters little. At this day, when the sphere of the Novel is broadening and expanding, when it is beginning to be the serious, impassioned, living form of literary study and social investigation, when it is becoming, by virtue of analysis and psychological research, the true History of contemporary morals, when the novel has taken its place among the necessary elements of knowledge, it may properly demand its liberty and freedom of speech. And to encourage it in the search for Art and Truth, to authorize it to disclose misery and suffering which it is not well for the fortunate people of Paris to forget, and to show to people of fashion what the Sisters of Charity have the courage to see for themselves, what the queens of old compelled their children to touch with their eyes in the hospitals: the visible, palpitating human suffering that teaches charity; to confirm the novel in the practice of that religion which the last century called by the vast and far-reaching name, *Humanity*:—it needs no other warrant than the consciousness that that is its right.

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*Paris, October, 1864.*

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## SECOND PREFACE

### PREPARED FOR A POSTHUMOUS EDITION OF GERMINIE LACERTEUX

*July 22, 1862.*—The disease is gradually doing its work of destruction in our poor Rose. It is as if the immaterial manifestations of life that formerly emanated from her body were dying one by one. Her face is entirely changed. Her expression is not the same, her gestures are not the same; and she seems to me as if she were putting off every day more and more of that something, humanly speaking indefinable, which makes the personality of a living being. Disease, before making an end of its victim, introduces into his body something strange, unfamiliar, something that is *not he*, makes of him a new being, so to speak, in whom we must seek to find the former being—he, whose joyous, affectionate features have already ceased to exist.

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*July 31.*—Doctor Simon is to tell me very soon whether our dear old Rose will live or die. I am waiting to hear his ring, which to me, is equivalent to that of a jury at the assizes, announcing their return to the court room with their verdict. "It is all over, there is no hope, it is simply a question of time. The disease has progressed very rapidly. One lung is entirely gone and the other substantially." And we must return to the invalid, restore her serenity with a smile, give her reason to hope for convalescence in every line of our faces. Then we feel an unconquerable longing to rush from the room and from the poor creature. We leave the house, we wander at random through the streets; at last, overdone with fatigue, we sit down at a table in a café. We mechanically take up a copy of *L'Illustration* and our eyes fall at once upon the solution of its last riddle: *Against death, there is no appeal!*

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*Monday, August 11.*—The disease of the lungs is complicated with peritonitis. She has terrible pains in the bowels, she cannot move without assistance, she cannot lie on her back or her left

side. In God's name, is not death enough? must she also endure suffering, aye, torture, as the final implacable breaking-up of the human organism? And she suffers thus, poor wretch! in one of the servant's rooms, where the sun, shining in through a window in the sloping roof, makes the air as stifling as in a hothouse, and where there is so little room that the doctor has to put his hat on the bed. We struggled to the last to keep her, but finally we had to make up our minds to let her go away. She was unwilling to go to Maison Dubois, where we proposed to take her; it seems that twenty-five years ago, when she first came to us, she went there to see the nurse in charge of Edmond, who died there, and so that particular hospital represents to her the place where people die. I am waiting for Simon who is to bring her a permit to go to Lariboisière. She passed almost a good night. She is all ready, in high spirits, in fact. We have covered everything up from her as well as we could. She longs to be gone. She is in a great hurry. She feels that she is going to get well there. At two o'clock Simon arrives: "Here it is, all right." She refuses to have a litter: "I should think I was dead!" she says. She is dressed. As soon as she leaves her bed, all the signs of life to be seen upon her face disappear. It is as if the earth had risen under her skin. She comes down into our apartments. Sitting in the dining-room, with a trembling hand, the knuckles of which knock against one another, she draws her stockings on over a pair of legs like broomsticks, consumptive legs. Then, for a long moment, she looks about at the familiar objects with dying eyes that seem desirous to take away with them the memory of the places they are leaving—and the door of the apartment closes upon her with a noise as of farewell. She reaches the foot of the stairs, where she rests for an instant on a chair. The concierge, in a bantering tone, assures her that she will be well in six weeks. She bows and says "yes," an inaudible "yes." The cab drives up to the door. She rests her hand on the concierge's wife. I hold her against the pillow she has behind her back. With wide open, vacant eyes she vaguely watches the houses pass, but she does not speak. At the door of the hospital she tries to alight without assistance. "Can you walk so far?" the concierge asks. She makes an affirmative gesture and walks on. Really I cannot imagine where she procured the strength to walk as she does. Here we are at last in the great hall, a high, cold, bare, clean place with a litter standing, all ready for use, in the centre. I seat her in a straw armchair by a door with a glazed wicket. A young man opens the wicket, asks my name and age and writes busily for quarter of an hour, covering ten or more sheets of paper with a religious figure at the head. At last, everything is ready, and I embrace her. A boy takes one arm, the housekeeper the other.—After that, I saw nothing more.

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*Thursday, August 14.*—We have been to Lariboisière. We found Rose quiet, hopeful, talking of her approaching discharge—in three weeks at most,—and so free from all thought of death that she told us of a furious love scene that took place yesterday between a woman in the bed next hers and a brother of the Christian schools, who was there again to-day. Poor Rose is death, but death engrossed with life. Near her bed was a young woman, whose husband, a mechanic, had come to see her. "You see, as soon as I can walk, I shall walk about the garden so much that they'll have to send me home!" she said. And the mother in her added: "Does the child ask for me sometimes?"

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"Sometimes, oh! yes," the man replied.

*Saturday, August 16.*—This morning, at ten o'clock, someone rings the bell. I hear a colloquy at the door between the housekeeper and the concierge. The door opens, the concierge enters with a letter. I take the letter; it bears the stamp of Lariboisière. Rose died this morning at seven o'clock.

Poor girl! So it is all over! I knew that she was doomed; but she was so animated, so cheerful, almost happy, when we saw her Thursday! And here we are both walking up and down the salon, filled with the thought that a fellow-creature's death inspires: We shall never see her again!—an instinctive thought that recurs incessantly within you. What a void! what a gap in our household! A habit, an attachment of twenty-five years growth, a girl who knew our whole lives and opened our letters in our absence, and to whom we told all our business. When I was a bit of a boy I trundled my hoop with her, and she bought me apple-tarts with her own money, when we went to walk. She would sit up for Edmond till morning, to open the door for him, when he went to the Bal de l'Opéra without our mother's knowledge. She was the woman, the excellent nurse, whose hands mother placed in ours when she was dying. She had the keys to everything, she managed everything, she did everything for our comfort. For twenty-five years she tucked us up in bed every night, and every night there were the same never-ending jokes about her ugliness and her disgraceful physique. Sorrows and joys alike she shared with us. She was one of those devoted creatures upon whose solicitude you rely to close your eyes. Our bodies, when we were ill or indisposed, were accustomed to her attentions. She was familiar with all our hobbies. She had known all our mistresses. She was a piece of our life, part of the furniture of our apartment, a stray memory of our youth, at once loving and scolding and care-taking, like a watchdog whom we were accustomed to having always beside us and about us, and who ought to last as long as ourselves. And we shall never see her again! It is not she moving about the rooms; she will never again come to our rooms to bid us good-morning! It is a great wrench, a great change in our lives, which seems to us, I cannot say why, like one of those solemn breaks in one's existence, when, as Byron says, destiny changes horses.

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*Sunday, August 17.*—This morning we are to perform all the last sad duties. We must return to the hospital, enter once more the reception hall, where I seem to see again, in the armchair against the wicket, the ghost of the emaciated creature I seated there less than a week ago. "Will you identify the body?" the attendant hurls the question at me in a harsh voice. We go to the further end of the hospital, to a high yellow door, upon which is written in great black letters:

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*Amphitheatre.* The attendant knocks. After some moments the door is partly opened, and a head like a butcher's boy's appears, with a short pipe in its mouth: a head which suggests the gladiator and the grave-digger. I fancied that I was at the circus, and that he was the slave who received the gladiators' bodies; and he does receive the slain in that great circus, society. They made us wait a long while before opening another door, and during those moments of suspense, all our courage oozed away, as the blood of a wounded man who is forced to remain standing oozes away, drop by drop. The mystery of what we were about to see, the horror of a sight that rends your heart, the search for the one body amid other bodies, the scrutiny and recognition of that poor face, disfigured doubtless—the thought of all this made us as timid as children. We were at the end of our strength, at the end of our will-power, at the end of our nervous tension, and, when the door opened, we said: "We will send some one," and fled. From there we went to the mayor's office, riding in a cab that jolted us and shook our heads about like empty things. And an indefinable horror seized upon us of death in a hospital, which seems to be only an administrative formality. One would say that in that abode of agony, everything is so well administered, regulated, reduced to system, that death opens it as if it were an administrative bureau.

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While we were having the death registered,—*Mon Dieu!* the paper, all covered with writing and flourishes for a poor woman's death!—a man rushed out of an adjoining room, in joyous exultation, and looked at the almanac hanging on the wall to find the name of the saint of the day and give it to his child. As he passed, the skirt of the happy father's coat swept the sheet on which the death was registered from the desk to the floor.

When we returned home, we must look through her papers, get her clothes together, sort out the clutter of phials, bandages and innumerable things that sickness collects—jostle death about, in short. It was a ghastly thing to enter that attic, where the crumbs of bread from her last meal were still lying in the folds of the bedclothes. I threw the coverlid up over the bolster, like a sheet over the ghost of a dead man.

*Monday, August 18.*—The chapel is beside the amphitheatre. In the hospital God and the dead body are neighbors. At the mass said for the poor woman beside her coffin, two or three others were placed near by to reap the benefit of the service. There was an unpleasant promiscuousness of salvation in that performance: it resembled the common grave in the prayer. Behind me, in the chapel, Rose's niece was weeping—the little girl she had at our house for a short time, who is now a young woman of nineteen, a pupil at the convent of the Sisters of Saint-Laurent: a poor, weazened, pale, stunted creature, rickety from starvation, with a head too heavy for her body, back bent double, and the air of a Mayeux—the last sad remnant of that consumption-ridden family, awaited by Death and with his hand even now heavy upon her,—in her soft eyes there is already a gleam of the life beyond.

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Then from the chapel to the extreme end of the Montmartre cemetery,—vast as a necropolis and occupying a whole quarter of the city,—walking at slow steps through mud that never ends. Lastly the intoning of the priests, and the coffin laboriously lowered by the gravediggers' arms to the ends of the ropes, as a cask of wine is lowered into a cellar.

*Wednesday, August 20.*—Once more I must return to the hospital. For since the visit I paid Rose on Thursday and her sudden death the next day, there has existed for me a mystery which I force from my thoughts, but which constantly returns; the mystery of that agony of which I know nothing, of that sudden end. I long to know and I dread to learn. It does not seem to me as if she were dead; I think of her simply as of a person who has disappeared. My imagination returns to her last hours, gropes for them in the darkness and reconstructs them, and they torture me with their veiled horrors! I need to have my doubts resolved. At last, this morning, I took my courage in both hands. Again I see the hospital, again I see the red-faced, obese concierge, reeking with life as one reeks with wine, and the corridors where the morning light falls upon the pale faces of smiling convalescents.

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In a distant corner, I rang at a door with little white curtains. It was opened and I found myself in a parlor where a Virgin stood upon a sort of altar between two windows. On the northern wall of the room, the cold, bare room, there are—why, I cannot explain—two framed views of Vesuvius, wretched water-colors which seem to shiver and to be entirely expatriated there. Through an open door behind me, from a small room in which the sun shines brightly, I hear the chattering of sisters and children, childish joys, pretty little bursts of laughter, all sorts of fresh, clear vocal notes: a sound as from a dove-cote bathed in the sun. Sisters in white with black caps pass and repass; one stops in front of my chair. She is short, badly developed, with an ugly, sweet face, a poor face by the grace of God. She is the mother of the Salle Saint-Joseph. She tells me how Rose died, in hardly any pain, feeling that she was improving, almost well, overflowing with encouragement and hope. In the morning, after her bed was made, without any suspicion that death was near, suddenly she was taken with a hemorrhage, which lasted some few seconds. I came away, much comforted, delivered from the thought that she had had the anticipatory taste of death, the horror of its approach.

*Thursday, October 21.*

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In the midst of our dinner, which was rendered melancholy enough by the constant hovering of the conversation around the subject of death, Maria, who came to dinner to-night, cried out, after

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two or three nervous blows with her fingers upon her fluffy blonde locks:—"My friends, while the poor girl was alive, I kept the professional secret of my trade. But, now that she is under ground, you must know the truth."

And thereupon we learned things concerning the unhappy creature that took away our appetites, leaving in our mouths the bitter taste of fruit cut with a steel knife. And a whole strange, hateful, repugnant, deplorable existence was revealed to us. The notes she signed, the debts she has left behind her at all the dealers, have the most unforeseen, the most amazing, the most incredible basis. She kept men: the milkwoman's son, for whom she furnished a chamber; another to whom she carried our wine, chickens, food of all sorts. A secret life of nocturnal orgies, of nights passed abroad, of fierce nymphomania, that made her lovers say: "Either she or I will stay on the field!" A passion, passions with her whole head and heart and all her senses at once, and complicated by all the wretched creatures' diseases, consumption which adds frenzy to pleasure, hysteria, the beginning of insanity. She had two children by the milkwoman's son, one of whom lived six months. Some years ago, when she told us that she was going on a visit to her province, it was to lie in. And, with regard to these men, her passion was so extravagant, so unhealthy, so insane, that she, who was formerly honesty personified, actually stole from us, took twenty franc pieces out of rolls of a hundred francs, so that the lovers she paid might not leave her. Now, after these involuntarily dishonest acts, these petty crimes extorted from her upright nature, she plunged into such depths of self-reproach, remorse, melancholy, such black despair, that in that hell in which she rolled on from sin to sin, desperate and unsatisfied, she had taken to drinking to escape herself, to save herself from the present, to drown herself and founder for a few moments in the heavy slumber, the lethargic torpor in which she would lie wallowing across her bed for a whole day, just as she fell when she tried to make it. The miserable creature! how great an incentive, how many motives and reasons she found for devouring her suffering, and bleeding internally: in the first place the rejection at intervals of religious ideas by the terrors of a hell of fire and brimstone; then jealousy, that characteristic jealousy of everything and everybody that poisoned her life; then, then—then the disgust which these men, after a time, brutally expressed for her ugliness, and which drove her deeper and deeper into sottishness,—caused her one day to have a miscarriage, and she fell half dead on the floor. Such a frightful tearing away of the veil we have worn over our eyes is like the examination of a pocketful of horrible things in a dead body suddenly opened. From what we have heard I suddenly seem to realize what she must have suffered for ten years past: the dread of an anonymous letter to us or of a denunciation from some dealer; and the constant trepidation on the subject of the money that was demanded of her, and that she could not pay; and the shame felt by that proud creature, perverted by the vile Quartier Saint-Georges, because of her intimacy with low wretches whom she despised; and the lamentable consciousness of the premature senility caused by drunkenness; and the inhuman exactions and brutality of the Alphonses of the gutter; and the temptations to suicide which caused me to pull her away from a window one day, when I found her leaning far out—and lastly all the tears that we believed to be without cause—all these things mingled with a very deep and heartfelt affection for us, and with a vehement, feverish devotion when either of us was ill. And this woman possessed an energetic character, a force of will, a skill in mystification, to which nothing can be compared. Yes, yes, all those frightful secrets kept under lock and key, hidden, buried deep in her own heart, so that neither our eyes, nor our ears, nor our powers of observation ever detected aught amiss, even in her hysterical attacks, when nothing escaped her but groans: a mystery preserved until her death, and which she must have believed would be buried with her. And of what did she die? She died, because, all through one rainy winter's night, eight months ago, at Montmartre, she spied upon the milkwoman's son, who had turned her away, in order to find out with what woman he had filled her place; a whole night leaning against a ground-floor window, as a result of which she was drenched to the bones with deadly pleurisy!

Poor creature, we forgive her; indeed, a vast compassion for her fills our hearts, as we reflect upon all that she has suffered. But we have become suspicious, for our lives, of the whole female sex, and of women above us as well as of women below us in station. We are terror-stricken at the double lining of their hearts, at the marvelous faculty, the science, the consummate genius of falsehood with which their whole being is instinct.

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The above extracts are from our journal: JOURNAL DES GONCOURTS—*Mémoires de la Vie Littéraire*; they are the documentary foundation upon which, two years later, my brother and I composed GERMINIE LACERTEUX, whom we made a study of and taught when she was in the service of our venerable cousin, Mademoiselle de C——t, of whom we were writing a veracious biography, after the style of a biography of modern history.

EDMOND DE GONCOURT.

*Auteuil, April, 1886.*

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"Saved! so you are really out of danger, mademoiselle!" exclaimed the maid with a cry of joy, as she closed the door upon the doctor, and, rushing to the bed on which her mistress lay, she began, in a frenzy of happiness and with a shower of kisses to embrace, together with the bed covers, the old woman's poor, emaciated body, which seemed, in the huge bed, as small as a child's. [23]

The old woman took her head, silently, in both hands, pressed it against her heart, heaved a sigh, and muttered: "Ah, well! so I must live on!"

This took place in a small room, through the window of which could be seen a small patch of sky cut by three black iron pipes, various neighboring roofs, and in the distance, between two houses that almost touched, the leafless branch of a tree, whose trunk was invisible.

On the mantelpiece, in a mahogany box, was a square clock with a large dial, huge figures and bulky hands. Beside it, under glass covers, were two candlesticks formed by three silver swans twisting their necks around a golden quiver. Near the fireplace an easy chair *à la Voltaire*, covered with one of the pieces of tapestry of checker-board pattern, which little girls and old women make, extended its empty arms. Two little Italian landscapes, a flower piece in water-colors after Bertin, with a date in red ink at the bottom, and a few miniatures hung on the walls. [24]

Upon the mahogany commode of an Empire pattern, a statue of Time in black bronze, running with his scythe in rest, served as a watch stand for a small watch with a monogram in diamonds upon blue enamel, surrounded with pearls. The floor was covered with a bright carpet with black and green stripes. The curtains at the bed and the window were of old-fashioned chintz with red figures upon a chocolate ground.

At the head of the bed, a portrait inclined over the invalid and seemed to gaze sternly at her. It represented a man with harsh features, whose face emerged from the high collar of a green satin coat, and a muslin cravat, with waving ends, tied loosely around the neck, in the style of the early years of the Revolution. The old woman in the bed resembled the portrait. She had the same bushy, commanding black eyebrows, the same aquiline nose, the same clearly marked lines of will, resolution and energy. The portrait seemed to cast a reflection upon her, as a father's face is reflected in his child's. But in hers the harshness of the features was softened by a gleam of rough kindness, by an undefinable flame of sturdy devotion and masculine charity. [25]

The light in the room was the light of an evening in early spring, about five o'clock, a light as clear as crystal and as white as silver, the cold, chaste, soft light, which fades away in the flush of the sunset passing into twilight. The sky was filled with that light of a new life, adorably melancholy, like the still naked earth, and so replete with pathos that it moves happy souls to tears.

"Well, well! my silly Germinie, weeping?" said the old woman, a moment later, withdrawing her hands which were moist with her maid's kisses.

"Oh! my dear, kind mademoiselle, I would like to weep like this all the time! it's so good! it brings my poor mother back before my eyes—and everything!—if you only knew!"

"Go on, go on," said her mistress, closing her eyes to listen, "tell me about it."

"Oh! my poor mother!" The maid paused a moment. Then, with the flood of words that gushes forth with tears of joy, she continued, as if, in the emotion and outpouring of her happiness, her whole childhood flowed back into her heart! "Poor woman! I can see her now the last time she went out to take me to mass, one 21st of January, I remember. In those days they read from the king's Testament. Ah! she suffered enough on my account, did mamma! She was forty-two years old, when I was born—papa made her cry a good deal! There were three of us before and there wasn't any too much bread in the house. And then he was proud as anything. If we'd had only a handful of peas in the house he would never have gone to the curé for help. Ah! we didn't eat bacon every day at our house. Never mind; for all that mamma loved me a little more and she always found a little fat or cheese in some corner to put on my bread. I wasn't five when she died. That was a bad thing for us all. I had a tall brother, who was white as a sheet, with a yellow beard—and good! you have no idea. Everybody loved him. They gave him all sorts of names. Some called him Boda—why, I don't know. Others called him Jesus Christ. Ah! he was a worker, he was! It didn't make any difference to him that his health was good for nothing; at daybreak he was always at his loom—for we were weavers, you must know—and he never put his shuttle down till night. And honest, too, if you knew! People came from all about to bring him their yarn, and without weighing it, too. He was a great friend of the schoolmaster, and he used to write the *mottoes* for the carnival. My father, he was a different sort: he'd work for a moment, or an hour, you know, and then he'd go off into the fields—and when he came home he'd beat us, and beat us hard. He was like a madman; they said it was because he was consumptive. It was lucky my brother was there: he used to prevent my second sister from pulling my hair and hurting me, because she was jealous. He always took me by the hand to go and see them play skittles. In fact, he supported the family all alone. For my first communion he had the bells rung! Ah! he did a heap of work so that I should be like the others, in a little white dress with flounces and a little bag in my hand, such as they used to carry in those days. I didn't have any cap: I remember making myself a pretty little wreath of ribbons and the white pith you pull off when you strip [26]

reeds; there was lots of it in the places where we used to put the hemp to soak. That was one of my great days—that and the drawing lots for the pigs at Christmas—and the days when I went to help them tie up the vines; that was in June, you know. We had a little vineyard near Saint Hilaire. There was one very hard year in those days—do you remember it, mademoiselle?—the long frost of 1828 that ruined everything. It extended as far as Dijon and farther, too—people had to make bread from bran. My brother nearly killed himself with work. Father, who was always out of doors tramping about the fields, sometimes brought home a few mushrooms. It was pretty bad, all the same; we were hungry oftener than anything else. When I was out in the fields myself, I'd look around to see if anyone could see me, and then I'd crawl along softly on my knees, and when I was under a cow, I'd take off one of my sabots and begin to milk her. Bless me! I came near being caught at it! My oldest sister was out at service with the Mayor of Lenclos, and she sent home her wages—twenty-four francs—it was always as much as that. The second worked at dressmaking in bourgeois families; but they didn't pay the prices then that they do to-day; she worked from six in the morning till dark for eight sous. Out of that she wanted to put some by for a dress for the fête on Saint-Remi's day.—Ah! that's the way it is with us: there are many who live on two potatoes a day for six months so as to have a new dress for that day. Bad luck fell on us on all sides. My father died. We had to sell a small field, and a bit of a vineyard that yielded a cask of wine every year. The notaries don't work for nothing. When my brother was sick there was nothing to give him to drink but *lees* that we'd been putting water to for a year. And there wasn't any change of linen for him; all the sheets in the wardrobe, which had a golden cross on top of it in mother's time, had gone—and the cross too. More than that, before he was sick this time, my brother goes off to the fête at Clefmont. He hears someone say that my sister had gone wrong with the mayor she worked for; he falls on the men who said it, but he wasn't very strong. They were, though, and they threw him down, and when he was down, they kicked him with their wooden shoes, in the pit of the stomach. He was brought home to us for dead. The doctor put him on his feet again, though, and told us he was cured. But he could just drag himself along. I could see that he was going when he kissed me. When he was dead, poor dear boy, Cadet Ballard had to use all his strength to take me away from the body. The whole village, mayor and all, went to his funeral. As my sister couldn't keep her place with the mayor on account of the things he said to her, and had gone to Paris to find a place, my other sister went after her. I was left all alone. One of my mother's cousins then took me with her to Damblin; but I was all upset there; I cried all night long, and whenever I could run away I always went back to our house. Just to see the old vine at our door, from the end of the street, did me good! it put strength into my legs. The good people who had bought the house would keep me till someone came for me! they were always sure to find me there. At last they wrote to my sister in Paris that, if she didn't send for me to come and live with her, I wasn't likely to live long. It's a fact that I was just like wax. They put me in charge of the driver of a small wagon that went from Langres to Paris every month, and that's how I came to Paris. I was fourteen years old, then. I remember that I went to bed all dressed all the way, because they made me sleep in the common room. When I arrived I was covered with lice."

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## II

The old woman said nothing: she was comparing her own life with her servant's.

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Mademoiselle de Varandeuil was born in 1782. She first saw the light in a mansion on Rue Royale and Mesdames de France were her sponsors in baptism. Her father was a close friend of the Comte d'Artois, in whose household he held an important post. He joined in all his hunting-parties, and was one of the few familiar spirits, in whose presence, at the mass preceding the hunt, he who was one day to be King Charles X. used to hurry the officiating priest by saying in an undertone: "Psit! psit! curé, swallow your *Good Lord* quickly!"

Monsieur de Varandeuil had made one of those marriages which were customary enough in his day: he had espoused a sort of actress, a singer, who, although she had no great talent, had made a success at the *Concert Spirituel*, beside Madame Todi, Madame Ponteuil and Madame Saint-Huberty. The little girl born of this marriage in 1782 was sickly and delicate, ugly of feature, with a nose even then large enough to be absurd, her father's nose in a face as thin as a man's wrist. She had nothing of what her parents' vanity would have liked her to have. After making a fiasco on the piano at the age of five, at a concert given by her mother in her salon, she was relegated to the society of the servants. Except for a moment in the morning, she never went near her mother, who always made her kiss her under the chin, so that she might not disturb her rouge. When the Revolution arrived, Monsieur de Varandeuil, thanks to the Comte d'Artois' patronage, was disburser of pensions. Madame de Varandeuil was traveling in Italy, whither she had ordered her physician to send her on the pretext of ill health, leaving her daughter and an infant son in her husband's charge. The absorbing anxiety of the times, the tempests threatening wealth and the families that handled wealth—Monsieur de Varandeuil's brother was a Farmer-General—left

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that very selfish and unloving father but little leisure to attend to the wants of his children. Thereupon, he began to be somewhat embarrassed pecuniarily. He left Rue Royale and took up his abode at the Hôtel du Petit-Charolais, belonging to his mother, who allowed him to install himself there. Events moved rapidly; one evening, in the early days of the guillotine, as he was walking along Rue Saint-Antoine, he heard a hawker in front of him, crying the journal: *Aux Voleurs! Aux Voleurs!* According to the usual custom of those days, he gave a list of the articles contained in the number he had for sale: Monsieur de Varandeuil heard his own name mingled with oaths and obscenity. He bought the paper and read therein a revolutionary denunciation of himself. [33]

Some time after, his brother was arrested and detained at Hôtel Talaru with the other Farmers-General. His mother, in a paroxysm of terror, had foolishly sold the Hôtel du Petit-Charolais, where he was living, for the value of the mirrors: she was paid in *assignats*, and died of despair over the constant depreciation of the paper. Luckily Monsieur de Varandeuil obtained from the purchasers, who could find no tenants, leave to occupy the rooms formerly used by the stableboys. He took refuge there, among the outbuildings of the mansion, stripped himself of his name and posted at the door, as he was ordered to do, his family name of Roulot, under which he buried the *De Varandeuil* and the former courtier of the Comte d'Artois. He lived there alone, buried, forgotten, hiding his head, never going out, cowering in his hole, without servants, waited upon by his daughter, to whom he left everything. The Terror was to them a period of shuddering suspense, the breathless excitement of impending death. Every evening, the little girl went and listened at a grated window to the day's crop of condemnations, the *List of Prize Winners in the Lottery of Saint Guillotine*. She answered every knock at the door, thinking that they had come to take her father to the Place de la Révolution, whither her uncle had already been taken. The moment came when money, the money that was so scarce, no longer procured bread. It was necessary to go and get it, almost by force, at the doors of the bakeries; it was necessary to earn it by standing for hours in the cold, biting night air, in the crushing pressure of crowds of people; to stand in line from three o'clock in the morning. The father did not care to venture into that mass of humanity. He was afraid of being recognized, of compromising himself by one of those outbursts to which his impetuous nature would have given vent, no matter where he might be. Then, too, he recoiled from the fatigue and severity of the task. The little boy was still too small; he would have been crushed; so the duty of obtaining bread for three mouths each day fell to the daughter. She obtained it. With her little thin body, fairly lost in her father's knitted jacket, a cotton cap pulled down over her eyes, her limbs all huddled together to retain a little warmth, she would wait, shivering, her eyes aching with cold, amid the pushing and buffeting, until the baker's wife on Rue des Francs-Bourgeois placed in her hands a loaf which her little fingers, stiff with cold, could hardly hold. At last, this poor little creature, who returned day after day, with her pinched face and her emaciated, trembling body, moved the baker's wife to pity. With the kindness of heart of a woman of the people, she would send the coveted loaf to the little one by her boy as soon as she appeared in the long line. But one day, just as she put out her hand to take it, a woman, whose jealousy was aroused by this mark of favor and preference, dealt the child a kick with her wooden shoe which kept her in bed almost a month. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil bore the marks of the blow all her life. [34]

During that month, the whole family would have died of starvation, had it not been for a supply of rice, which one of their acquaintances, the Comtesse d'Auteuil, had had the forethought to lay aside, and which she consented to share with the father and the two children. [35]

Thus, Monsieur de Varandeuil escaped the Revolutionary Tribunal by burying himself in obscurity. He escaped it also by reason of the fact that the accounts of his administration of his office were still unsettled, as he had had the good fortune to procure the postponement of the settlement from month to month. Then, too, he kept suspicion at bay by his personal animosity toward some great personages at court, and by the hatred of the queen which many retainers of the king's brothers had conceived. Whenever he had occasion to speak of that wretched woman, he used violent, bitter, insulting words, uttered in such a passionate, sincere tone that they almost made him appear as an enemy of the royal family; so that those to whom he was simply Citizen Roulot looked upon him as a good patriot, and those who knew his former name almost excused him for having been what he had been: a noble, the friend of a prince of the blood, and a place holder. [36]

The Republic had reached the epoch of patriotic suppers, those repasts of a whole street in the street; Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, in her confused, terrified reminiscences of those days, could still see the tables on Rue Pavée, with their legs in the streams of the blood of September flowing from La Force! It was at one of these suppers that Monsieur de Varandeuil conceived a scheme that completely assured his immunity. He informed two of his neighbors at table, devoted patriots both, one of whom was on intimate terms with Chaumette, that he was in great embarrassment because his daughter had been privately baptized only, so that she had no civil status, and said that he would be very happy if Chaumette would have her entered on the registers of the municipality and honor her with a name selected by him from the Republican calendar of Greece or Rome. Chaumette at once arranged a meeting with this father, *who had reached so high a level*, as they said in those days. During the interview Mademoiselle de Varandeuil was taken into a closet where she found two women who were instructed to satisfy themselves as to her sex, and she showed them her breast. They then escorted her to the great Salle des Déclarations, and there, after a metaphorical allocution, Chaumette baptized her *Sempronie*; a name which habit was destined to fasten upon Mademoiselle de Varandeuil and which she never abandoned. [37]

Somewhat protected and reassured by that episode, the family passed through the terrible days preceding the fall of Robespierre. At last came the ninth Thermidor and deliverance. But poverty was none the less a pressing fact in the Varandeuil household. They had not lived through the bitter days of the Revolution, they were not to live through the wretched days of the Directory without unhopèd-for succor, money sent by Providence by the hand of Folly. The father and the two children could hardly have existed without the income from four shares in the *Vaudeville*, an investment which Monsieur de Varandeuil was happily inspired to make in 1791, and which proved to be the best of all possible investments in those years of death, when people felt the need of forgetting death every evening—in those days of supreme agony, when everyone wished to laugh his last laugh at the latest song. Soon these shares, added to the amount of some outstanding claims that were paid, provided the family with something more than bread. They thereupon left the eaves of the Hôtel du Petit-Charolais and took a small suite in the Marais, on Rue du Chaume.

No change took place, however, in the habits of the household. The daughter continued to wait upon her father and brother. Monsieur de Varandeuil had gradually become accustomed to see in her only the woman indicated by her costume and by the work that she did. The father's eyes did not care to recognize a daughter in that servant's garb and in her performance of menial occupations. She was no longer a person with his blood in her veins or who had the honor to belong to him: she was a servant; and his selfishness confirmed him so fully in that idea and in his harsh treatment of her, he found that filial, affectionate, respectful service,—which cost nothing at all, by the way,—so convenient, that it cost him a bitter pang to give it up later, when a little more money mended the family fortunes: battles had to be fought to induce him to take a maid to fill his child's place and to relieve the girl from the most humiliating domestic labor.

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They were without information concerning Madame de Varandeuil, who had refused to join her husband at Paris during the early years of the Revolution; at last they learned that she had married again in Germany, producing, as a certificate of her husband's death, the death certificate of his guillotined brother, the baptismal name having been changed. The girl grew up, therefore, abandoned, without affection, with no mother except a woman dead to her family, whom her father taught her to despise. Her childhood was passed in constant anxiety, in the privations that wear life away, in the fatigue resulting from labor that exhausted the strength of a sickly child, in an expectation of death that became, at last, an impatient longing to die: there had been hours when that girl of thirteen was tempted to do as many women did in those days—to open the door and rush into the street, crying: *Vive le roi!* in order to end it all. Her girlhood was a continuation of her childhood with less tragic motives of weariness. She had to submit to the ill humor, the exactions, the bitter moods, the tempestuous outbreaks of her father, which had been hitherto somewhat curbed and restrained by the great tempest of the time. She was still doomed to undergo the fatigues and humiliations of a servant. She remained alone with her father, kept down and humbled, shut out from his arms and his kisses, her heart heavy with grief because she longed to love and had nothing to love. She was beginning to suffer from the cold void that is formed about a woman by an unattractive, un fascinating girlhood, by a girlhood devoid of beauty and sympathetic charm. She could see that she aroused a sort of compassion with her long nose, her yellow complexion, her angular figure, her thin body. She felt that she was ugly, and that her ugliness was made repulsive by her miserable costumes, her dismal, woolen dresses which she made herself, her father paying for the material only after much grumbling: she could not induce him to make her a small allowance for her toilet until she was thirty-five.

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How sad and bitter and lonely for her was her life with that morose, sour old man, who was always scolding and complaining at home, affable only in society, and who left her every evening to go to the great houses that were reopened under the Directory and at the beginning of the Empire! Only at very long intervals did he take her out, and when he did, it was always to that everlasting *Vaudeville*, where he had boxes. Even on those rare occasions, his daughter was terrified. She trembled all the time that she was with him; she was afraid of his violent disposition, of the tone of the old régime that his outbreaks of wrath had retained, of the facility with which he would raise his cane at an insolent remark from the *canaille*. On almost every occasion there were scenes with the manager, wordy disputes with people in the pit, and threats of personal violence to which she put an end by lowering the curtain of the box. The same thing was kept up in the street, even in the cab, with the driver, who would refuse to carry them at Monsieur de Varandeuil's price and would keep them waiting one hour, two hours without moving; sometimes would unharness his horse in his wrath and leave him in the vehicle with his daughter who would vainly implore him to submit and pay the price demanded.

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Considering that these diversions should suffice for Sempronie, and having, moreover, a jealous desire to have her all to himself and always under his hand, Monsieur de Varandeuil allowed her to form no intimacies with anybody. He did not take her into society; he did not take her to the houses of their kinsfolk who returned after the emigration, except on days of formal receptions or family gatherings. He kept her closely confined to the house: not until she was forty did he consider that she was old enough to be allowed to go out alone. Thus, the girl had no friendship, no connection of any sort to lean upon; indeed, she no longer had her younger brother with her, as he had gone to the United States and enlisted in the American navy.

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She was forbidden by her father to marry, he did not admit that she would allow herself even to think of marrying and deserting him; all the suitors who might have come forward he fought and rejected in advance, in order not to leave his daughter the courage to speak to him on the subject, if the occasion should ever arise.

Meanwhile our victories were stripping Italy of her treasures. The masterpieces of Rome, Florence and Venice were hurrying to Paris. Italian art was at a premium. Collectors no longer took pride in any paintings but those of the Italian school. Monsieur de Varandeuil saw an opening for a fortune in this change of taste. He, also, had fallen a victim to the artistic dilettantism which was one of the refined passions of the nobility before the Revolution. He had lived in the society of artists and collectors; he admired pictures. It occurred to him to collect a gallery of Italian works and then to sell them. Paris was still overrun with the objects of art sold and scattered under the Terror. Monsieur de Varandeuil began to walk back and forth through the streets—they were the markets for large canvases in those days,—and at every step he made a discovery; every day he purchased something. Soon the small apartment was crowded with old, black paintings, so large for the most part that the walls would not hold them with their frames, with the result that there was no room for the furniture. These were christened Raphael, Vinci, or Andrea del Sarto; there were none but *chefs d'œuvre*, and the father would keep his daughter standing in front of them hours at a time, forcing his admiration upon her, wearying her with his ecstatic flights. He would ascend from epithet to epithet, would work himself into a state of intoxication, of delirium, and would end by thinking that he was negotiating with an imaginary purchaser, would dispute with him over the price of a masterpiece, and would cry out: "A hundred thousand francs for my Rosso! yes, monsieur, a hundred thousand francs!" His daughter, dismayed by the large amount of money that those great, ugly things, in which there were so many nude men, deducted from the housekeeping supply, ventured upon remonstrance and tried to check such ruinous extravagance. Monsieur de Varandeuil lost his temper, waxed wroth like a man who was ashamed to find one of his blood so deficient in taste, and told her that that was her fortune and that she would see later if he was an old fool. At last she induced him to realize. The sale took place; it was a failure, one of the most complete shipwrecks of illusions that the glazed hall of the Hôtel Bullion has ever seen. Stung to the quick, furious with rage at this blow, which not only involved pecuniary loss and a serious inroad upon his little fortune, but was also a direct denial of his claims to connoisseurship, a slap at his knowledge of art delivered upon the cheek of his Raphaels, Monsieur de Varandeuil informed his daughter that they were too poor to remain in Paris and that they must go into the provinces to live. Having been cradled and reared in an epoch little adapted to inspire a love of country life in women, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil tried vainly to combat her father's resolution: she was obliged to go with him wherever he chose to go, and, by leaving Paris, to lose the society and friendship of two young kinswomen, to whom, in their too infrequent interviews, she had partly given her confidence, and whose hearts she had felt reaching out to her as to an older sister.

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Monsieur de Varandeuil hired a small house at L'Isle-Adam. There he was near familiar scenes, in the atmosphere of what was formerly a little court, close at hand to two or three châteaux, whose owners he knew, and which were beginning to throw open their doors once more. Then, too, since the Revolution a little community of well-to-do bourgeois, rich shopkeepers, had settled upon this territory which once belonged to the Contis. The name of Monsieur de Varandeuil sounded very grand in the ears of all those good people. They bowed very low to him, they contended for the honor of entertaining him, they listened respectfully, almost devoutly, to the stories he told of society as it was. And thus, flattered, caressed, honored as a relic of Versailles, he had the place of honor and the prestige of a lord among them. When he dined with Madame Mutel, a former baker, who had forty thousand francs a year, the hostess left the table, silk dress and all, to go and fry the oyster plants herself: Monsieur de Varandeuil did not like them except as she cooked them. But Monsieur de Varandeuil's decision to go into retirement at L'Isle-Adam was mainly due, not to the pleasant surroundings there, but to a project that he had formed. He had gone thither to obtain leisure for a monumental work. That which he had been unable to do for the honor and glory of Italian art by his collection, he proposed to do by his pen. He had learned a little Italian with his wife; he took it into his head to present Vasari's *Lives of the Painters* to the French public, to translate it with the assistance of his daughter, who, when she was very small, had heard her mother's maid speak Italian and had retained a few words. He plunged the girl into Vasari, he locked up her time and her thoughts in grammars, dictionaries, commentaries, all the works of all the scholiasts of Italian art, kept her bending double over the ungrateful toil, the *ennui* and labor of translating Italian words, groping in the darkness of her imperfect knowledge. The whole burden of the book fell upon her; when he had laid out her task, he would leave her tête-à-tête with the volumes bound in white vellum, to go and ramble about the neighborhood, paying visits, gambling at some château or dining among the bourgeois of his acquaintance, to whom he would complain pathetically of the laborious effort that the vast undertaking of his translation entailed upon him. He would return home, listen to the reading of the translation made during the day, make comments and critical remarks, and upset a sentence to give it a different meaning, which his daughter would eliminate again when he had gone; then he would resume his walks and jaunts, like a man who has well earned his leisure, walking very erect, with his hat under his arm and dainty pumps on his feet, enjoying himself, the sky and the trees and Rousseau's God, gentle to all nature and loving to the plants. From time to time fits of impatience, common to children and old men, would overtake him; he would demand a certain number of pages for the next day, and would compel his daughter to sit up half the night.

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Two or three years passed in this labor, in which Sempronie's eyes were ruined at last. She lived entombed in her father's Vasari, more entirely alone than ever, holding aloof through innate, haughty repugnance from the bourgeois ladies of L'Isle-Adam and their manners *à la Madame Angot*, and too poorly clad to visit at the châteaux. For her, there was no pleasure, no diversion, which was not made wretched and poisoned by her father's eccentricities and fretful humor. He tore up the flowers that she planted secretly in the garden. He would have nothing there but

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vegetables and he cultivated them himself, putting forth grand utilitarian theories, arguments which might have induced the Convention to convert the Tuileries into a potato field. Her only enjoyment was when her father, at very long intervals, allowed her to entertain one of her two young friends for a week—a week which would have been seven days of paradise to Sempronie, had not her father embittered its joys, its diversions, its fêtes, with his always threatening outbreaks, his ill-humor always armed and alert, and his constant fault-finding about trifles—a bottle of eau de Cologne that Sempronie asked for to place in her friend's room, a dish for her dinner, or a place to which she wished to take her.

At L'Isle-Adam Monsieur de Varandeuil had hired a servant, who almost immediately became his mistress. A child was born of this connection, and the father, in his cynical indifference, was shameless enough to have it brought up under his daughter's eyes. As the years rolled on the woman acquired a firm foothold in the house. She ended by ruling the household, father and daughter alike. The day came when Monsieur de Varandeuil chose to have her sit at his table and be served by Sempronie. That was too much. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil rebelled under the insult, and drew herself up to the full height of her indignation. Secretly, silently, in misery and isolation, harshly treated by the people and the things about her, the girl had built up a resolute, straightforward character; tears had tempered instead of softening it. Beneath filial docility and humility, beneath passive obedience, beneath apparent gentleness of disposition, she concealed a character of iron, a man's strength of will, one of those hearts which nothing bends and which never bend themselves. When her father demanded that she lower herself to that extent, she reminded him that she was his daughter, she reviewed her whole life, cast, in a flood of words, the shame and the reproach of it in his face, and concluded by informing him that if that woman did not leave the house that very evening, she would leave it, and that she should have no difficulty in living, thank God! wherever she might go, with the simple tastes he had forced upon her. The father, thunderstruck and bewildered by this revolt, yielded and dismissed the servant; but he retained a dastardly sort of rancor against his daughter on account of the sacrifice she had extorted from him. His spleen betrayed itself in sharp, aggressive words, ironical thanks and bitter smiles. Sempronie's only revenge was to attend to his wants more thoroughly, more gently, more patiently than ever. Her devotion was destined to be subjected to one final test; the old man had a stroke of apoplexy which left him with one whole side of his body stiff and dead, lame in one leg, and asleep so far as his intelligence was concerned, although keenly conscious of his misfortune and of his dependence upon his daughter. Thereupon, all the evil that lay dormant in the depths of his nature was aroused and let loose. His selfishness amounted to ferocity. Under the torment of his suffering and his weakness, he became a sort of malevolent madman. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil devoted her days and her nights to the invalid, who seemed to hate her for her attentions, to be humiliated by her care as if it implied generosity and forgiveness, to suffer torments at seeing always by his side, indefatigable and kindly, that image of duty. But what a life it was! She had to contend against the miserable man's incurable *ennui*, to be always ready to bear him company, to lead him about and support him all day long. She must play cards with him when he was at home, and not let him win or lose too much. She must combat his wishes, his gormandizing tendencies, take dishes away from him, and, in connection with everything that he wanted, endure complaints, reproaches, insults, tears, mad despair, and the outbursts of childish anger in which helpless old men indulge. And this lasted ten years! ten years, during which Mademoiselle de Varandeuil had no other recreation, no other consolation than to pour out all the tenderness and warmth of a maternal affection upon one of her two young friends, recently married,—her *chick*, as she called her. It was Mademoiselle de Varandeuil's delight to go and pass a short time every fortnight in that happy household. She would kiss the pretty child, already in its cradle and asleep for the night when she arrived; she would dine at racing speed; at dessert she would send for a carriage and would hasten away like a tardy schoolboy. But in the last years of her father's life she could not even obtain permission to dine out: the old man would no longer sanction such a long absence and kept her almost constantly beside him, repeating again and again that he was well aware that it was not amusing to take care of an infirm old man like himself, but that she would soon be rid of him. He died in 1818, and, before his death, could find no words but these for her who had been his daughter nearly forty years: "I know that you never loved me!"

Two years before her father's death, Sempronie's brother had returned from America. He brought with him a colored woman who had nursed him through the yellow fever, and two girls, already grown up, whom he had had by the woman before marrying her. Although she was imbued with the ideas of the old régime as to the blacks, and although she looked upon that ignorant creature, with her negro jargon, her grin like a wild beast's and her skin that left grease stains upon her clothing, as no better than a monkey, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil combated her father's horror and unwillingness to receive his daughter-in-law; and she it was who induced him, in the last days of his life, to allow her brother to present his wife to him. When her father was dead she reflected that her brother's household was all that remained of the family.

Monsieur de Varandeuil, to whom the Comte d'Artois had caused the arrears of salary of his office to be paid at the return of the Bourbons, left about ten thousand francs a year to his children. The brother had, before that inheritance, only a pension of fifteen hundred francs from the United States. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil considered that five or six thousand francs a year would hardly suffice for the comfortable support of that family, in which there were two children, and it at once occurred to her to add to it her share in the inheritance. She suggested this contribution in the most natural and simple way imaginable. Her brother accepted it, and she went with him to live in a pretty little apartment at the upper end of Rue de Clichy, on the fourth floor of one of the first houses built in that neighborhood, then hardly known, where the fresh

country air blew briskly through the framework of the white buildings. She continued there her modest life, her humble manner of dressing, her economical habits, content with the least desirable room in the suite, and spending upon herself no more than eighteen hundred to two thousand francs a year. But, soon, a brooding jealousy, slowly gathering strength, took possession of the mulatress. She took offence at the fraternal affection which seemed to be taking her husband from her arms. She suffered because of the communion of speech and thought and reminiscences between them; she suffered because of the conversations in which she could take no part, because of what she heard in their voices, but could not understand. The consciousness of her inferiority kindled in her heart the fires of wrath and hatred that burn fiercely in the tropics. She had recourse to her children for her revenge; she urged them on, excited them, aroused their evil passions against her sister-in-law. She encouraged them to laugh at her, to make sport of her. She applauded the manifestations of the mischievous intelligence characteristic of children, in whom observation begins with naughtiness. Once she had let them loose upon their aunt, she allowed them to laugh at all her absurdities, her figure, her nose, her dresses, whose meanness, nevertheless, provided their own elegant attire. Thus incited and upheld, the little ones soon arrived at insolence. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil had the quick temper that accompanies kindness of heart. With her the hand, as well as the heart, had a part in the first impulse. And then she shared the prevalent opinion of her time as to the proper way of bringing up children. She endured two or three impertinent sallies without a word; but at the fourth she seized the mocking child, took down her skirts, and administered to her, notwithstanding her twelve years, the soundest whipping she had ever received. The mulatress made a great outcry and told her sister-in-law, that she had always detested her children and that she wanted to kill them. The brother interposed between the two women and succeeded in reconciling them after a fashion. But new scenes took place, when the little ones, inflamed against the woman who made their mother weep, assailed their aunt with the refined tortures of misbehaved children, mingled with the fiendish cruelty of little savages. After several patched-up truces it became necessary to part. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil decided to leave her brother, for she saw how unhappy he was amid this daily wrenching of his dearest affections. She left him to his wife and his children. This separation was one of the great sorrows of her life. She who was so strong against emotion and so self-contained, and who seemed to take pride in suffering, as it were, almost broke down when she had to leave the apartment, where she had dreamed of enjoying a little happiness in her corner, looking on at the happiness of others: her last tears mounted to her eyes.

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She did not go too far away, so that she might be at hand to nurse her brother if he were ill, and to see him and meet him sometimes. But there was a great void in her heart and in her life. She had begun to visit her kinsfolk since her father's death: she drew nearer to them; she allowed the relatives whom the Restoration had placed in a lofty and powerful position to come to her, and sought out those whom the new order of things left in obscurity and poverty. But she returned to her dear *chick* first of all, and to another distant cousin, also married, who had become the *chick's* sister-in-law. Her relations with her kinsfolk soon assumed remarkable regularity. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil never went into society, to an evening party, or to the play. It required Mademoiselle Rachel's brilliant success to persuade her to step inside a theatre; she ventured there but twice. She never accepted an invitation to a large dinner-party. But there were two or three houses where, as at the *chick's*, she would invite herself to dine, unexpectedly, when there were no guests. "My love," she would say without ceremony, "are you and your husband doing nothing this evening? Then I will stay and eat some of your ragoût." At eight o'clock regularly she rose to go, and when the husband took his hat to escort her home, she would knock it out of his hands with a: "Nonsense! an old nanny-goat like me! Why, I frighten men in the street!" And then ten days or a fortnight would pass, during which they would not see her. But if anything went wrong, if there was a death or sickness in the house, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil always heard of it at once, no one knew how; she would come, in spite of everything—the weather or the hour—would give a loud ring at the bell in her own way—they finally called it *cousin's ring*—and a moment later, relieved of her umbrella, which never left her, and of her pattens, her hat tossed upon a chair, she was at the service of those who needed her. She listened, talked, restored their courage with an indescribable martial accent, with language as energetic as a soldier might use to console a wounded comrade, and stimulating as a cordial. If it was a child that was out of sorts, she would go straight to the bed, laugh at the little one, whose fear vanished at once, order the father and mother about, run hither and thither, assume the management of everything, apply the leeches, arrange the cataplasms, and bring back hope, joy and health at the double quick. In all branches of the family the old maid appeared thus providentially, without warning, on days of sorrow, *ennui* and suffering. She was never seen except when her hands were needed to heal, her devoted friendship to console. She was, so to speak, an impersonal creature, because of her great heart; a woman who did not belong to herself: God seemed to have made her only to give her to others. Her everlasting black dress which she persisted in wearing, her worn, dyed shawl, her absurd hat, her impoverished appearance, were, in her eyes, the means of being rich enough to help others with her little fortune; she was extravagant in almsgiving, and her pockets were always filled with gifts for the poor; not of money, for she feared the wineshop, but of four-pound loaves which she bought for them at the baker's. And then, too, by dint of living in poverty, she was able to give herself what was to her the greatest of all luxuries: the joy of her friends' children whom she overwhelmed with New Year's and other gifts, with surprises and pleasures of all sorts. For instance, suppose that one of them had been left by his mother, who was absent from Paris, to pass a lovely summer Sunday at his boarding school, and the little rascal, out of spite, had misbehaved so that he was not allowed to go out. How surprised he would be, as the clock struck nine, to see his old cousin

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appear in the courtyard, just buttoning the last button of her dress, she had come in such haste. And what a feeling of desolation at the sight! "Cousin," he would say piteously, in one of those fits of passion in which at the same moment you long to cry and to kill your *tyrant*, "I—I am kept in, and—" "Kept in? Oh! yes, kept in! And do you suppose I've taken all this trouble—Is your schoolmaster poking fun at me? Where is the puppy, that I may have a word with him? You go and dress yourself meanwhile. Off with you!" And the child, not daring to hope that a woman so shabbily dressed would have the power to raise the embargo, would suddenly feel a hand upon his arm, and the cousin would carry him off, toss him into a cab, all bewildered and dumfounded with joy, and take him to the Bois de Boulogne. She would let him ride a donkey all day long, urging the beast on with a broken branch, and crying: "Get up!" And then, after a good dinner at Borne's, she would take him back to school, and, under the porte-cochère, as she kissed him she would slip a big hundred-sou piece into his hand.

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Strange old maid. The bitter experiences of her whole existence, the struggle to live, the never-ending physical suffering, the long-continued bodily and mental torture had, as it were, cut her loose from life and placed her above it. Her education, the things she had seen, the spectacle of what seemed the end of everything, the Revolution, had so formed her character as to lead her to disdain human suffering. And this old woman, who had nothing left of life save breath, had risen to a serene philosophy, to a virile, haughty, almost satirical stoicism. Sometimes she would begin to declaim against a sorrow that seemed a little too keen; but, in the midst of her tirade, she would suddenly hurl an angry, mocking word at herself, upon which her face would at once become calm. She was cheerful with the cheerfulness of a deep, bubbling spring, the cheerfulness of devoted hearts that have seen everything, of the old soldier or the old hospital nurse. Kind-hearted to admiration she was, and yet something was lacking in her kindness of heart: forgiveness. Hitherto, she had never succeeded in moving or bending her character. A slight, an unkind action, a trifle, if it touched her heart, wounded her forever. She forgot nothing. Time, death itself, did not disarm her memory.

Of religion, she had none. Born at a period when women did without it, she had grown to womanhood at a time when there were no churches. Mass did not exist when she was a young maid. There had been nothing to accustom her to the thought of God or to make her feel the need of Him, and she had retained a sort of shrinking hatred for priests, which must have been connected with some family secret of which she never spoke. Her faith, her strength, her piety, all consisted in the pride of her conscience; she considered that if she retained her own esteem, she could be sure of acting rightly and of never failing in her duty. She was thus singularly constituted by the two epochs in which she had lived, a compound of the two, dipped in the opposing currents of the old régime and the Revolution. After Louis XVI. failed to take horse on the Tenth of August, she lost her regard for kings; but she detested the mob. She desired equality and she held parvenus in horror. She was a republican and an aristocrat, combined scepticism with prejudice, the horrors of '93, which she saw, with the vague and noble theories of humanity which surrounded her cradle.

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Her external qualities were altogether masculine. She had the sharp voice, the freedom of speech, the unruly tongue of the old woman of the eighteenth century, heightened by an accent suggestive of the common people, a mannish, highly colored style of elocution peculiar to herself, rising above modesty in the choice of words and fearless in calling things baldly by their plain names.

Meanwhile, the years rolled on, sweeping away the Restoration and the monarchy of Louis-Philippe. She saw all those whom she had loved go from her one by one, all her family take the road to the cemetery. She was left quite alone, and she marveled and was grieved that death should forget her, who would have offered so little resistance, for she was already leaning over the grave and was obliged to force her heart down to the level of the little children brought to her by the sons and daughters of the friends whom she had lost. Her brother was dead. Her dear *chick* was no more. The *chick's* sister-in-law alone was left to her. But hers was a life that hung trembling in the balance, ready to fly away. Crushed by the death of a child for whom she had waited for years, the poor woman was dying of consumption. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil was in her bedroom every day, from noon until six o'clock, for four years. She lived by her side all that time, in the close atmosphere and the odor of constant fumigations. She did not allow herself to be kept away for one hour by her own gout and rheumatism, but gave her time and her life to the peaceful last hours of that dying woman, whose eyes were fixed upon heaven, where her dead children awaited her. And when, in the cemetery, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil had turned aside the shroud to kiss the dead face for the last time, it seemed to her as if there were no one near to her, as if she were all alone upon the earth.

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Thenceforth, yielding to the infirmities which she had no further reason to shake off, she began to live the narrow, confined life of old people who wear out their carpet in one spot only—never leaving her room, reading but little because it tired her eyes, and passing most of her time buried in her easy-chair, reviewing the past and living it over again. She would sit in the same position for days, her eyes wide open and dreaming, her thoughts far from herself, far from the room in which she sat, journeying whither her memories led her, to distant faces, dearly loved, pallid faces, to vanished regions—lost in a profound lethargy which Germinie was careful not to disturb, saying to herself: "Madame is in her meditations—"

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One day in every week, however, she went abroad. Indeed it was with that weekly excursion in view, in order to be nearer the spot to which she wished to go on that one day, that she left her apartments on Rue Taitbout and took up her abode on Rue de Laval. One day in every week,

deterred by nothing, not even by illness, she repaired to the Montmartre Cemetery, where her father and her brother rested, and the women whose loss she regretted, all those whose sufferings had come to an end before hers. For the dead and for Death she displayed a veneration almost equal to that of the ancients. To her, the grave was sacred, and a dear friend. She loved to visit the land of hope and deliverance where her dear ones were sleeping, there to await death and to be ready with her body. On that day, she would start early in the morning, leaning on the arm of her maid, who carried a folding-stool. As she drew near the cemetery, she would enter the shop of a dealer in wreaths, who had known her for many years, and who, in winter, loaned her a foot-warmer. There she would rest a few moments; then, loading Germinie down with wreaths of immortelles, she would pass through the cemetery gate, take the path to the left of the cedar at the entrance, and make her pilgrimage slowly from tomb to tomb. She would throw away the withered flowers, sweep up the dead leaves, tie the wreaths together, and, sitting down upon her folding-chair, would gaze and dream, and absent-mindedly remove a bit of moss from the flat stone with the end of her umbrella. Then she would rise, turn as if to say *au revoir* to the tomb she was leaving, walk away, stop once more, and talk in an undertone, as she had done before, with that part of her that was sleeping under the stone; and having thus paid a visit to all the dead who lived in her affections, she would return home slowly and reverentially, enveloping herself in silence as if she were afraid to speak.

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### III

In the course of her reverie, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil had closed her eyes.

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The maid's story ceased, and the remainder of the history of her life, which was upon her lips that evening, was once more buried in her heart.

The conclusion of her story was as follows:

When little Germinie Lacerteux arrived in Paris, being then less than fifteen years old, her sister, desirous to have her begin to earn her living at once, and to help to put bread in her hand, obtained a place for her in a small café on the boulevard, where she performed the double duties of lady's maid to the mistress of the café and assistant to the waiters in carrying on the main business of the establishment. The child, just from her village and dropped suddenly in that place, was completely bewildered and terrified by her surroundings and her duties. She had the first instinctive feeling of wounded modesty and, foreshadowing the woman she was destined to become, she shuddered at the perpetual contact with the other sex, working, eating, passing her whole time with men; and whenever she had an opportunity to go out, and went to her sisters, there were tearful, despairing scenes, when, without actually complaining of anything, she manifested a sort of dread to return, saying that she did not want to stay there, that they were not satisfied with her, that she preferred to return to them. They would reply that it had already cost them enough to bring her to Paris, that it was a silly whim on her part and that she was very well off where she was, and they would send her back to the café in tears. She dared not tell all that she suffered in the company of the waiters in the café, insolent, boasting, cynical fellows, fed on the remains of debauches, tainted with all the vices to which they ministered, and corrupt to the core with putrefying odds and ends of obscenity. At every turn, she had to submit to the dastardly jests, the cruel mystifications, the malicious tricks of these scoundrels, who were only too happy to make a little martyr of the poor unsophisticated child, ignorant of everything, with the crushed and sickly air, timid and sullen, thin and pale, and pitifully clad in her wretched, countrified gowns. Bewildered, overwhelmed, so to speak, by this hourly torture, she became their drudge. They made sport of her ignorance, they deceived her and abused her credulity by absurd fables, they overburdened her with fatiguing tasks, they assailed her with incessant, pitiless ridicule, which well-nigh drove her benumbed intellect to imbecility. In addition, they made her blush at the things they said to her, which made her feel ashamed, although she did not understand them. They soiled the artlessness of her fourteen years with filthy veiled allusions. And they found amusement in putting the eyes of her childish curiosity to the keyholes of the private supper-rooms.

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The little one longed to confide in her sisters, but she dared not. When, with nourishing food, her body took on a little flesh, her cheeks a little color and she began to have something of the aspect of a woman, they took great liberties with her and grew bolder. There were attempts at familiarity, significant gestures, advances, which she eluded, and from which she escaped unscathed, but which assailed her purity by breathing upon her innocence. Roughly treated, scolded, reviled by the master of the establishment, who was accustomed to abuse his maidservants and who bore her a grudge because she was not old enough or of the right sort for a mistress, she found no support, no touch of humanity, except in his wife. She began to love that woman with a sort of animal devotion, and to obey her with the docility of a dog. She did all her errands without thought or reflection. She carried her letters to her lovers and was very clever about delivering them. She became very active and agile and ingenuously sly in passing in and out, evading the awakened suspicions of the husband; and without any clear idea of what she was doing or of what she was concealing, she felt a mischievous delight, such as children and

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monkeys feel, in telling herself vaguely that she was causing some little suffering to that man and that house, which caused her so much. There was among her comrades an old waiter, named Joseph, who defended her, warned her of the cruel plots concocted against her, and, when she was present, put a stop to conversation that was too free, with the authority of his white hairs and his paternal interest in the girl. Meanwhile Germinie's horror of the house increased every day. One week her sisters were compelled to take her back to the café by force.

A few days later, there was a great review on the Champ de Mars, and the waiters had leave of absence for the day. Only Germinie and old Joseph remained in the house. Joseph was at work sorting soiled linen in a small, dark room. He told Germinie to come and help him. She entered the room; she cried out, fell to the floor, wept, implored, struggled, called desperately for help. The empty house was deaf.

When she recovered consciousness, Germinie ran and shut herself up in her chamber. She was not seen again that day. On the following day, when Joseph walked toward her and attempted to speak to her, she recoiled from him in dismay, with the gesture of a woman mad with fear. For a long time, whenever a man approached her, her first involuntary impulse was to draw back suddenly, trembling and nervous, like a terrified, bewildered beast, looking about for means of flight. Joseph, who feared that she would denounce him, allowed her to keep him at a distance, and respected the horrible repugnance she exhibited for him. [65]

She became *enceinte*. One Sunday she had been to pass the evening with her sister, the concierge; she had an attack of vomiting, followed by severe pain. A physician who occupied an apartment in the house, came to the lodge for his key, and the sisters learned from him the secret of their younger sister's condition. The brutal, intractable pride of the common people in their honor, the implacable severity of rigid piety, flew to arms in the two women and found vent in fierce indignation. Their bewilderment changed to fury. Germinie recovered consciousness under their blows, their insults, the wounds inflicted by their hands, the harsh words that came from their mouths. Her brother-in-law was there, who had never forgiven her the cost of her journey; he glanced at her with a bantering expression, with the cunning, ferocious joy of an Auvergnat, with a sneering laugh that dyed the girl's cheeks a deeper red than her sisters' blows.

She received the blows, she did not repel the insults. She sought neither to defend nor to excuse herself. She did not tell what had taken place and how little her own desires had had to do with her misfortune. She was dumb: she had a vague hope that they would kill her. When her older sister asked her if there had been no violence, and reminded her that there were police officers and courts, she closed her eyes at the thought of publishing her shame. For one instant only, when her mother's memory was cast in her face, she emitted a glance, a lightning flash from her eyes, by which the two women felt their consciences pierced; they remembered that they were the ones who had placed her and kept her in that den, and had exposed her to the danger, nay, had almost forced her into her misfortune. [66]

That same evening, the younger of Germinie's sisters took her to the Rue Saint-Martin, to the house of a repairer of cashmere shawls, with whom she lodged, and who, being almost daft on the subject of religion, was banner-bearer in a sisterhood of the Virgin. She made her lie beside her on a mattress on the floor, and having her there under her hand all night, she vented upon her all her long-standing, venomous jealousy, her bitter resentment at the preference, the caresses given Germinie by her father and mother. It was a long succession of petty tortures, brutal or hypocritical exhibitions of spite, kicks that bruised her legs, and progressive movements of the body by which she gradually forced her companion out of bed—it was a cold winter's night—to the floor of the fireless room. During the day, the seamstress took Germinie in hand, catechized her, preached at her, and by detailing the tortures of the other life, inspired in her mind a horrible fear of the hell whose flames she caused her to feel.

She lived there four months, in close confinement, and was never allowed to leave the house. At the end of four months she gave birth to a dead child. When her health was restored, she entered the service of a depilator on Rue Laffitte, and for the first few days she had the joyful feeling of having been released from prison. Two or three times, in her walks, she met old Joseph who ran after her and wanted to marry her; but she escaped him and the old man never knew that he had been a father. [67]

But soon Germinie began to pine away in her new place. The house where she had taken service as a maid of all work was what servants call "a barrack." A spendthrift and glutton, devoid of order as of money, as is often the case with women engaged in the occupations that depend upon chance, and in the problematical methods of gaining a livelihood in vogue in Paris, the depilator, who was almost always involved in a lawsuit of some sort, paid but little heed to her small servant's nourishment. She often went away for the whole day without leaving her any dinner. The little one would satisfy her appetite as well as she could with some kind of uncooked food, salads, vinegary things that deceive a young woman's appetite, even charcoal, which she would nibble with the depraved taste and capricious stomach of her age and sex. This diet, just after recovering from her confinement, her health being but partially restored and greatly in need of stimulants, exhausted the young woman's strength, reduced her flesh and undermined her constitution. She had a terrifying aspect. Her complexion changed to that dead white that looks green in the daylight. Her swollen eyes were surrounded with a great, bluish shadow. Her discolored lips assumed the hue of faded violets. Her breath failed her at the slightest ascent, and the incessant vibrating sound that came from the arteries of her throat was painful to those near her. With heavy feet and enfeebled body, she dragged herself along, as if life were too heavy a [68]



burden for her. Her faculties and her senses were so torpid that she swooned for no cause at all, for so small a matter as the fatigue of combing her mistress's hair.

She was silently drooping there when her sister found her another place, with a former actor, a retired comedian, living upon the money that the laughter of all Paris had brought him. The good man was old and had never had any children. He took pity on the wretched girl, interested himself in her welfare, took care of her and made much of her. He took her into the country. He walked with her on the boulevards in the sunlight, and enjoyed the warmth the more for leaning on her arm. It delighted him to see her in good spirits. Often, to amuse her, he would take down a moth-eaten costume from his wardrobe and try to remember a fragment of some part that had gone from his memory. The mere sight of this little maid and her white cap was like a ray of returning youth to him. In his old age, Jocrisse leaned upon her with the good-fellowship, the pleasures and the childish fancies of a grandfather's heart. But he died after a few months, and Germinie had fallen back into the service of kept mistresses, boarding-house keepers, and passageway tradesmen, when the sudden death of a maidservant gave her an opportunity to enter the service of Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, then living on Rue Taitbout, in the house of which her sister was concierge.

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## IV

Those people who look for the death of the Catholic religion in our day, do not realize by what an infinite number of sturdy roots it still retains its hold upon the hearts of the people. They do not realize the secret, delicate fascination it has for the woman of the people. They do not realize what confession and the confessor are to the impoverished souls of those poor women. In the priest who listens and whose voice falls softly on her ear, the woman of toil and suffering sees not so much the minister of God, the judge of her sins, the arbiter of her welfare, as the confidant of her sorrows and the friend of her misery. However coarse she may be, there is always a little of the true woman in her, a feverish, trembling, sensitive, wounded something, a restlessness and, as it were, the sighing of an invalid who craves caressing words, even as a child's trifling ailments require the nurse's droning lullaby. She, as well as the woman of the world, must have the consolation of pouring out her heart, of confiding her troubles to a sympathetic ear. For it is the nature of her sex to seek an outlet for the emotions and an arm to lean upon. There are in her mind things that she must tell, and concerning which she would like to be questioned, pitied and comforted. She dreams of a compassionate interest, a tender sympathy for hidden feelings of which she is ashamed. Her masters may be the kindest, the most friendly, the most approachable of masters to the woman in their employ: their kindness to her will still be of the same sort that they bestow upon a domestic animal. They will be uneasy concerning her appetite and her health; they will look carefully after the animal part of her, and that will be all. It will not occur to them that she can suffer elsewhere than in her body, and they will not dream that she can have the heartache, the sadness and immaterial pain for which they seek relief by confiding in those of their own station. In their eyes, the woman who sweeps and does the cooking, has no ideas that can cause her to be sad or thoughtful, and they never speak to her of her thoughts. To whom, then, shall she carry them? To the priest who is waiting for them, asks for them, welcomes them, to the churchman who is also a man of the world, a superior creature, a well-educated gentleman, who knows everything, speaks well, is always accessible, gentle, patient, attentive, and seems to feel no scorn for the most humble soul, the most shabbily dressed penitent. The priest alone listens to the woman in a cap. He alone takes an interest in her secret sufferings, in the things that disturb and agitate her and that bring to a maid, as well as to her mistress, the sudden longing to weep, or excite a tempest within her. There is none but he to encourage her outpourings, to draw from her those things which the irony of her daily life holds back, to look to the state of her moral health; none but he to raise her above her material life, none but he to cheer her with moving words of charity and hope,—such divine words as she has never heard from the mouths of the men of her family and of her class.

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After entering the service of Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, Germinie became profoundly religious and cared for nothing but the church. She abandoned herself little by little to the sweet delight of confession, to the priest's smooth, tranquil bass voice that came to her from the darkness, to the conversations which resembled the touch of soothing words, and from which she went forth refreshed, light of heart, free from care, and happy with a delightful sense of relief, as if a balm had been applied to all the tender, suffering, fettered portions of her being.

She did not, could not, open her heart elsewhere. Her mistress had a certain masculine roughness of demeanor which repelled expansiveness. She had an abrupt, exclamatory way of speaking that forced back all that Germinie would have liked to confide to her. It was in her nature to be brutal in her treatment of all lamentations that were not caused by pain or disappointment. Her virile kindness had no pity to spare for diseases of the imagination, for the suffering that is created by the thought, for the weariness of spirit that flows from a woman's nerves and from the disordered condition of her mental organism. Germinie often found her unfeeling; the old woman had simply been hardened by the times in which she had lived and by the circumstances of her life. The shell of her heart was as hard as her body. Never complaining

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herself, she did not like to hear complaints about her. And by the right of all the tears she had not shed, she detested childish tears in grown persons.

Soon the confessional became a sort of sacred, idolized rendezvous for Germinie's thoughts. Every day it was her first idea, the theme of her first prayer. Throughout the day, she was kneeling there as in a dream; and while she was about her work it was constantly before her eyes, with its oaken frame with fillets of gold, its pediment in the shape of a winged angel's head, its green curtain with the motionless folds, and the mysterious darkness on both sides. It seemed to her that now her whole life centred there, and that every hour tended thither. She lived through the week looking forward to that longed-for, prayed-for, promised day. On Thursday, she began to be impatient; she felt, in the redoubling of her blissful agony, the material drawing near, as it were, of the blessed Saturday evening; and when Saturday came and mademoiselle's dinner had been hastily served and her work done, she would make her escape and run to Notre-Dame de Lorette, hurrying to the penitential stool as to a lover's rendezvous. Her fingers dipped in holy water and a genuflexion duly made, she would glide over the flags, between the rows of chairs, as softly as a cat steals across a carpeted floor. With bent head, almost crawling, she would go noiselessly forward in the shadow of the side aisles, until she reached the mysterious, veiled confessional, where she would pause and await her turn, absorbed in the emotion of suspense.

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The young priest who confessed her, encouraged her frequent confessions. He was not sparing of time or attention or charity. He allowed her to talk at great length and tell him, with many words, of all her petty troubles. He was indulgent to the diffuseness of a suffering soul, and permitted her to pour out freely her most trivial afflictions. He listened while she set forth her anxieties, her longings, her troubles; he did not repel or treat with scorn any portion of the confidences of a servant who spoke to him of all the most delicate, secret concerns of her existence, as one would speak to a mother and a physician.

This priest was young. He was kind-hearted. He had lived in the world. A great sorrow had impelled him, crushed and broken, to assume the gown wherein he wore mourning for his heart. There remained something of the man in the depths of his being, and he listened, with melancholy compassion, to the outpouring of this maidservant's suffering heart. He understood that Germinie needed him, that he sustained and strengthened her, that he saved her from herself and removed her from the temptations to which her nature exposed her. He was conscious of a sad sympathy for that heart overflowing with affection, for the ardent, yet tractable girl, for the unhappy creature who knew nothing of her own nature, who was promised to passion by every impulse of her heart, by her whole body, and who betrayed in every detail of her person the vocation of her temperament. Enlightened by his past experience, he was amazed and terrified sometimes by the gleams that emanated from her, by the flame that shot from her eyes at the outburst of love in a prayer, by the evident tendency of her confessions, by her constantly recurring to that scene of violence, that scene in which her perfectly sincere purpose to resist seemed to the priest to have been betrayed by a convulsion of the senses that was stronger than she.

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This fever of religion lasted several years, during which Germinie lived a concentrated, silent, happy life, entirely devoted to God's service—at least she thought so. Her confessor, however, had come gradually to the conclusion that all her adoration tended toward himself. By her glances, by her blushes, by the words she no longer said to him, and by others which she made bold to say to him for the first time, he realized that his penitent's devotion was going astray and becoming unduly fervent, deceiving itself as to its object. She watched for him when the services were at an end, followed him into the sacristy, hung on his skirts, ran into the church after his cassock. The confessor tried to warn her, to divert her amorous fervor from himself. He became more reserved and assumed a cold demeanor. In despair at this change, at his apparent indifference, Germinie, feeling bitter and hurt, confessed to him one day, in the confessional, the hatred that had taken possession of her for two young girls, who were his favorite penitents. Thereupon the priest dismissed her, without discussion, and sent her to another confessor. Germinie went once or twice to confess to this other confessor; then she ceased to go; soon she ceased even to think of going, and of all her religion naught remained in her mind but a certain far-off sweetness, like the faint odor of burned-out incense.

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Affairs had reached that point when mademoiselle fell ill. Throughout her illness, as Germinie did not want to leave her, she did not attend mass. And on the first Sunday—when mademoiselle, being fully recovered, did not require her care, she was greatly surprised to find that "her devotee" remained at home and did not run away to church.

"Oho!" said she, "so you don't go and see your curés nowadays? What have they done to you, eh?"

"Nothing," said Germinie.

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## V

"There, mademoiselle!—Look at me," said Germinie.

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It was a few months later. She had asked her mistress's permission to go that evening to the wedding ball of her grocer's sister, who had chosen her for her maid-of-honor, and she had come to exhibit herself *en grande toilette*, in her low-necked muslin dress.

Mademoiselle raised her eyes from the old volume, printed in large type, which she was reading, removed her spectacles, placed them in the book to mark her place, and exclaimed:

"What, my little bigot, you at a ball! Do you know, my girl, this seems to me downright nonsense! You and the hornpipe! Faith, all you need now is to want to get married! A deuce of a want, that! But if you marry, I warn you that I won't keep you—mind that! I've no desire to wait on your brats! Come a little nearer—Oho! why—bless my soul! Mademoiselle Show-all! We're getting to be a bit of a flirt lately, I find—"

"Why no, mademoiselle," Germinie tried to say.

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"And then," continued Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, following out her thought, "among you people, the men are such sweet creatures! They'll spend all you have—to say nothing of the blows. But marriage—I am sure that that nonsensical idea of getting married buzzes around in your head when you see the others. That's what gives you that simper, I'll wager. *Bon Dieu de Dieu!* Now turn a bit, so that I can see you," said Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, with an abrupt change of tone to one that was almost caressing; and placing her thin hands on the arms of her easy-chair, crossing her legs and moving her foot back and forth, she set about inspecting Germinie and her toilet.

"What the devil!" said she, after a few moments of silent scrutiny, "what! is it really you?—Then I have never used my eyes to look at you.—Good God, yes!—But—but—" She mumbled more vague exclamations between her teeth.—"Where the deuce did you get that mug like an amorous cat's?" she said at last, and continued to gaze at her.

Germinie was ugly. Her hair, of so dark a chestnut that it seemed black, curled and twisted in unruly waves, in little stiff, rebellious locks, which escaped and stood up all over her head, despite the pomade upon her shiny *bandeaux*. Her smooth, narrow, swelling brow protruded above the shadow of the deep sockets in which her eyes were buried and sunken to such a depth as almost to denote disease; small, bright, sparkling eyes they were, made to seem smaller and brighter by a constant girlish twinkle that softened and lighted up their laughter. They were neither brown eyes nor blue eyes, but were of an undefinable, changing gray, a gray that was not a color, but a light! Emotion found expression therein in the flame of fever, pleasure in the flashing rays of a sort of intoxication, passion in phosphorescence. Her short, turned-up nose, with large, dilated, palpitating nostrils, was one of those noses of which the common people say that it rains inside: upon one side, at the corner of the eye was a thick, swollen blue vein. The square head of the Lorraine race was emphasized in her broad, high, prominent cheek-bones, which were well-covered with the traces of small-pox. The most noticeable defect in her face was the too great distance between the nose and mouth. This lack of proportion gave an almost apish character to the lower part of the head, where the expansive mouth, with white teeth and full lips that looked as if they had been crushed, they were so flat, smiled at you with a strange, vaguely irritating smile.

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Her *décolleté* dress disclosed her neck, the upper part of her breast, her shoulders and her white back, presenting a striking contrast to her swarthy face. It was a lymphatic sort of whiteness, the whiteness, at once unhealthy and angelic, of flesh in which there is no life. She had let her arms fall by her sides—round, smooth arms with a pretty dimple at the elbow. Her wrists were delicate; her hands, which did not betray the servant, were embellished with a lady's fingernails. And lazily, with graceful sloth, she allowed her indolent figure to curve and sway;—a figure that a garter might span, and that was made even more slender to the eye by the projection of the hips and the curve of the hoops that gave the balloon-like roundness to her skirt;—an impossible waist, absurdly small but adorable, like everything in woman that offends one's sense of proportion by its diminutiveness.

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From this ugly woman emanated a piquant, mysterious charm. Light and shadow, jostling and intercepting each other on her face on which hollows and protuberances abounded, imparted to it that suggestion of libertinism which the painter of love scenes gives to the rough sketch of his mistress. Everything about her,—her mouth, her eyes, her very plainness—was instinct with allurements and solicitation. Her person exhaled an aphrodisiac charm, which challenged and laid fast hold of the other sex. It unloosed desire, and caused an electric shock. Sensual thoughts were naturally and involuntarily aroused by her, by her gestures, her gait, her slightest movement—even by the air in which her body had left one of its undulations. Beside her, one felt as if he were near one of those disturbing, disquieting creatures, burning with the love disease and communicating it to others, whose face appears to man in his restless hours, torments his listless noonday thoughts, haunts his nights and trespasses upon his dreams.

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In the midst of Mademoiselle de Varandeuil's scrutiny, Germinie stooped over her, and covered her hand with hurried kisses.

"There—there—enough of that," said Mademoiselle. "You would soon wear out the skin—with your way of kissing. Come, run along, enjoy yourself, and try not to stay out too late. Don't get all tired out."

Mademoiselle de Varandeuil was left alone. She placed her elbows on her knees, stared at the fire and stirred the burning wood with the tongs. Then, as she was accustomed to do when deeply

preoccupied, she struck herself two or three sharp little blows on the neck with the flat of her hand, and thereby set her black cap all awry.

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## VI

When she mentioned the subject of marriage to Germinie, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil touched upon the real cause of her trouble. She placed her hand upon the seat of her *ennui*. Her maid's uneven temper, her distaste for life, the languor, the emptiness, the discontent of her existence, arose from that disease which medical science calls the *melancholia of virgins*. The torment of her twenty-four years was the ardent, excited, poignant longing for marriage, for that state which was too holy and honorable for her, and which seemed impossible of attainment in face of the confession her womanly probity would insist upon making of her fall and her unworthiness. Family losses and misfortunes forcibly diverted her mind from her own troubles.

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Her brother-in-law, her sister the concierge's husband, had dreamed the dream of all Auvergnats: he had undertaken to increase his earnings as concierge by the profits of a dealer in bric-à-brac. He had begun modestly with a stall in the street, at the doors of the marts where executors' sales are held; and there you could see, set out upon blue paper, plated candlesticks, ivory napkin rings, colored lithographs with frames of gold lace on a black ground, and three or four odd volumes of Buffon. His profit on the plated candlesticks intoxicated him. He hired a dark shop on a passage way, opposite an umbrella mender's, and began to trade upon the credulity that goes in and out of the lower rooms in the Auction Exchange. He sold *assiettes à coq*, pieces of Jean Jacques Rousseau's wooden shoe, and water-colors by Ballue, signed Watteau. In that business he threw away what he had made, and ran in debt to the amount of several thousand francs. His wife, in order to straighten matters out a little and to try and get out of debt, asked for and obtained a place as box-opener at the *Théâtre-Historique*. She hired her sister the dressmaker to watch the door in the evening, went to bed at one o'clock and was astir again at five. After a few months she caught cold in the corridors of the theatre, and an attack of pleurisy laid her low and carried her off in six weeks. The poor woman left a little girl three years old, who was taken down with the measles; the disease assumed its most malignant form in the foul stench of the loft, where the child had breathed for more than a month air poisoned by the breath of her dying mother. The father had gone into the country to try and borrow money. He married again there. Nothing more was heard of him.

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When returning from her sister's burial Germinie ran to the house of an old woman who made a living in those curious industries which prevent poverty from absolutely starving to death in Paris. This old woman carried on several trades. Sometimes she cut bristles into equal lengths for brushes, sometimes she sorted out bits of gingerbread. When those industries failed, she did cooking and washed the faces of pedlars' children. In Lent she rose at four o'clock in the morning, went and took possession of a chair at Notre-Dame, and sold it for ten or twelve sous when the crowd arrived. In order to procure fuel to warm herself, in the den where she lived on Rue Saint-Victor, she would go, at nightfall, to the Luxembourg and peel the bark off the trees. Germinie, who knew her from having given her the crusts from the kitchen every week, hired a servant's room on the sixth floor of the house, and took up her abode there with the little one. She did it on the impulse of the moment, without reflection. She did not remember her sister's harsh treatment of her when she was *enceinte*, so that she had no need to forgive it.

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Thenceforth Germinie had but one thought, her niece. She determined to rescue her from death and restore her to life by dint of careful nursing. She would rush away from Mademoiselle at every moment, run up the stairs to the sixth floor four at a time, kiss the child, give her her draught, arrange her comfortably in bed, look at her, and rush down again, all out of breath and red with pleasure. Care, caresses, the breath from the heart with which we revive a tiny flame on the point of dying out, consultations, doctor's visits, costly medicines, the remedies of the wealthy,—Germinie spared nothing for the little one and gave her everything. Her wages flowed through that channel. For almost a year she gave her beef juice every morning: sleepyhead that she was, she left her bed at five o'clock in the morning to prepare it, and awoke without being called, as mothers do. The child was out of danger at last, when Germinie received a visit one morning from her sister the dressmaker, who had been married two or three years to a machinist, and who came now to bid her adieu: her husband was going to accompany some fellow-workmen who had been hired to go to Africa. She was going with him and she proposed to Germinie that they should take the little one with them as a playmate for their own child. They offered to take her off her hands. Germinie, they said, would have to pay only for the journey. It was a separation she would have to make up her mind to sooner or later on account of her mistress. And then, said the sister, she was the child's aunt too. And she heaped words upon words to induce Germinie to give them the child, with whom she and her husband expected, after their arrival in Africa, to move Germinie to pity, to get possession of her wages, to play upon her heart and her purse.

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It cost Germinie very dear to part with her niece. She had staked a portion of her existence upon the child. She was attached to her by her anxiety and her sacrifices. She had disputed possession

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of her with disease and had won the day; the girl's life was her miracle. And yet she realized that she could never take her to mademoiselle's apartments; that mademoiselle, at her age, with the burden of her years, and an aged person's need of tranquillity, could never endure the constant noise and movement of a child. And then, the little girl's presence in the house would cause idle gossip and set the whole street agog: people would say she was her child. Germinie made a confidante of her mistress. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil knew the whole story. She knew that she had taken charge of her niece, although she had pretended not to know it; she had chosen to see nothing in order to permit everything. She advised Germinie to entrust her niece to her sister, pointing out to her all the difficulties in the way of keeping her herself, and she gave her money to pay for the journey of the whole family.

The parting was a heart-breaking thing to Germinie. She found herself left alone and without occupation. Not having the child, she knew not what to love; her heart was weary, and she had such a feeling of the emptiness of life without the little one, that she turned once more to religion and transferred her affections to the church.

Three months had passed when she received news of her sister's death. The husband, who was one of the whining, lachrymose breed of mechanics, gave her in his letter, mingled with labored, moving phrases, and threads of pathos, a despairing picture of his position, with the burial to pay for, attacks of fever that prevented him from working, two young children, without counting the little girl, and a household with no wife to heat the soup. Germinie wept over the letter; then her thoughts turned to living in that house, beside that poor man, among the poor children, in that horrible Africa; and a vague longing to sacrifice herself began to awaken within her. Other letters followed, in which, while thanking her for her assistance, her brother-in-law gave to his poverty, to his desolate plight, to the misery that enveloped him, a still more dramatic coloring—the coloring that the common people impart to trifles, with its memories of the Boulevard du Crime and its fragments of vile books. Once caught by the *blague* of this misery, Germinie could not cut loose from it. She fancied she could hear the cries of the children calling her. She became completely absorbed, buried in the project and resolution of going to them. She was haunted by the idea and by the word Africa, which she turned over and over incessantly in the depths of her mind, without a word. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, noticing her thoughtfulness and melancholy, asked her what the matter was, but in vain: Germinie did not speak. She was pulled this way and that, tormented between what seemed to her a duty and what seemed to her ingratitude, between her mistress and her sisters' blood. She thought that she could not leave mademoiselle. And again she said to herself that God did not wish her to abandon her family. She would look about the apartment and mutter: "And yet I must go!" Then she would fear that mademoiselle might be sick when she was not there. Another maid! At that thought she was seized with jealousy and fancied that she could already see someone stealing her mistress. At other moments, when her religious ideas impelled her to thoughts of self-sacrifice, she was all ready to devote her existence to this brother-in-law. She determined to go and live with this man, whom she detested, with whom she had always been on the worst of terms, who had almost killed her sister with grief, whom she knew to be a brutish, drunken sot; and all that she anticipated, all that she dreaded, the certainty of all she would have to suffer and her shrinking fear of it, served to exalt and inflame her imagination, to urge her on to the sacrifice with the greater impatience and ardor. Often the whole scheme fell to the ground in an instant: at a word, at a gesture from mademoiselle, Germinie would become herself once more, and would fail to recognize herself. She felt that she was bound to her mistress absolutely and forever, and she had a thrill of horror at having so much as thought of detaching her own life from hers. She struggled thus for two years. Then she learned one fine day, by chance, that her niece had died a few weeks after her sister: her brother-in-law had concealed the child's death in order to maintain his hold upon her, and to lure her to him in Africa, with her few sous. Germinie's illusions being wholly dispelled by that revelation, she was cured on the spot. She hardly remembered that she had ever thought of going away.

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## VII

About this time a small creamery at the end of the street, with few customers, changed hands, as a result of the sale of the real estate by order of court. The shop was renovated and repainted. The front windows were embellished with inscriptions in yellow letters. Pyramids of chocolate from the Compagnie Coloniale, and coffee-cups filled with flowers, alternating with small liqueur glasses, were displayed upon the shelves. At the door glistened the sign—a copper milk jug divided in the middle.

The woman who thus endeavored to re-establish the concern, the new *crémère*, was a person of about fifty years of age, whose corpulence passed all bounds, and who still retained some *débris* of beauty, half submerged in fat. It was said in the quarter that she had set herself up in business with the money of an old gentleman, whose servant she had been until his death, in her native province, near Langres; for it happened that she was a countrywoman of Germinie, not from the same village, but from a small place near by; and although she and mademoiselle's maid had never met nor seen each other in the country, they knew each other by name and were drawn

together by the fact that they had acquaintances in common and could compare memories of the same places. The stout woman was a flattering, affected, fawning creature. She said: "My love" to everybody, talked in a piping voice, and played the child with the querulous languor of corpulent persons. She detested vulgar remarks and would blush and take alarm at trifles. She adored secrets, twisted everything into a confidential communication, invented stories and always whispered in your ear. Her life was passed in gossiping and groaning. She pitied others and she pitied herself; she lamented her ill fortune and her stomach. When she had eaten too much she would say dramatically: "I am dying!" and nothing ever was so pathetic as her indigestion. She was constantly moved to tears: she wept indiscriminately for a maltreated horse, for someone who had died, for milk that had curdled. She wept over the various items in the newspapers, she wept for the sake of weeping.

Germinie was very soon ensnared and moved to pity by this wheedling, talkative *crémère*, who was always in a state of intense emotion, calling upon others to open their hearts to her, and apparently so affectionate. After three months hardly anything passed mademoiselle's doors that did not come from Mère Jupillon. Germinie procured everything, or almost everything there. She passed hours in the shop. Once there it was hard work for her to leave; she remained there, unable to rise from her chair. A sort of instinctive cowardice detained her. At the door she would stop and talk on, in order to delay her departure. She felt bound to the *crémère* by the invisible charm of familiar places to which you constantly return, and which end by embracing you like things that would love you. And then, too, in her eyes the shop meant Madame Jupillon's three dogs, three wretched curs; she always had them on her knees, she scolded them and kissed them and talked to them; and when she was warm with their warmth, she would feel in the depths of her heart the contentment of a beast rubbing against her little ones. Again, the shop to her meant all the gossip of the quarter, the rendezvous of all the scandals,—how this one had failed to pay her note and that one had received a carriage load of flowers; it meant a place that was on the watch for everything, even to the lace *peignoir* going to town on the maid's arm.

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In a word everything tended to attach her to the place. Her intimacy with the *crémère* was strengthened by all the mysterious bonds of friendship between women of the people, by the continual chatter, the daily exchange of the trivial affairs of life, the conversation for the sake of conversing, the repetition of the same *bonjour* and the same *bonsoir*, the division of caresses among the same animals, the naps side by side and chair against chair. The shop at last became her regular place for idling away her time, a place where her thoughts, her words, her body and her very limbs were marvelously at ease. There came a time when her happiness consisted in sitting drowsily of an evening in a straw arm-chair, beside Mère Jupillon—sound asleep with her spectacles on her nose—and holding the dogs rolled in a ball in the skirt of her dress; and while the lamp, almost dying, burned pale upon the counter, she would sit idly there, letting her glance lose itself at the back of the shop, and gradually grow dim, with her ideas, as her eyes rested vaguely upon a triumphal arch of snail shells joined together with old moss, beneath which stood a little copper Napoléon, with his hands behind his back.

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## VIII

Madame Jupillon, who claimed to have been married and signed herself *Widow Jupillon*, had a son. He was still a child. She had placed him at Saint-Nicholas, the great religious establishment where, for thirty francs a month, rudimentary instruction and a trade are furnished to the children of the common people, and to many natural children. Germinie fell into the way of accompanying Madame Jupillon when she went to see *Bibi* on Thursdays. This visit became a means of distraction to her, something to look forward to. She would urge the mother to hurry, would always arrive first at the omnibus office, and was content to sit with her arms resting on a huge basket of provisions all the way.

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It happened that Mère Jupillon had trouble with her leg—a carbuncle that prevented her from walking for nearly eighteen months. Germinie went alone to Saint-Nicholas, and as she was promptly and easily led to devote herself to others, she took as deep an interest in that child as if he were connected with her in some way. She did not miss a single Thursday and always arrived with her hands full of the last week's desserts, and with cakes and fruit and sweetmeats she had bought. She would kiss the urchin, inquire for his health, and feel to see if he had his knitted vest under his blouse; she would notice how flushed he was from running, would wipe his face with her handkerchief and make him show her the soles of his shoes so that she could see if there were any holes in them. She would ask if his teachers were satisfied with him, if he attended to his duties and if he had had many good marks. She would talk to him of his mother and bid him love the good Lord, and until the clock struck two she would walk with him in the courtyard: the child would offer her his arm, as proud as you please to be with a woman much better dressed than the majority of those who came there—with a woman in silk. He was anxious to learn the flageolet. It cost only five francs a month, but his mother would not give them. Germinie carried him the hundred sous every month, on the sly. It was a humiliating thing to him to wear the little uniform blouse when he went out to walk, and on the two or three occasions during the year when he went to see his mother. On his birthday, one year, Germinie unfolded a large parcel

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before him: she had had a tunic made for him; it is doubtful if twenty of his comrades in the whole school belonged to families in sufficiently easy circumstances to wear such garments.

She spoiled him thus for several years, not allowing him to suffer with a longing for anything, encouraging the caprices and the pride of wealthy children in the poor child, softening for him the privations and hardships of that trade school, where children were formed for a laboring life, wore blouses and ate off plates of brown earthenware; a school that by its toilsome apprenticeship hardened the children of the people to lives of toil. Meanwhile the boy was growing fast. Germinie did not notice it: in her eyes he was still the child he had always been. From habit she always stooped to kiss him. One day she was summoned before the abbé who was at the head of the school. He spoke to her of expelling Jupillon. Obscene books had been found in his possession. Germinie, trembling at the thought of the blows that awaited the child at his mother's hands, prayed and begged and implored; she succeeded at last in inducing the abbé to forgive the culprit. When she went down into the courtyard again she attempted to scold him; but at the first word of her moral lecture, Bibi suddenly cast in her face a glance and smile in which there was no trace of the child that he was the day before. She lowered her eyes, and she was the one to blush. A fortnight passed before she went again to Saint-Nicholas.

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## IX

About the time that young Jupillon left the boarding-school, a maid in the service of a kept woman who lived on the floor below mademoiselle sometimes passed the evening with Germinie at Madame Jupillon's. A native of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, which supplies Paris with coupé drivers and lorettes' waiting-maids, this girl was what is called in vulgar parlance: "a great *bringue*;" she was an awkward, wild-eyed creature, with the eyebrows of a water carrier. She soon fell into the habit of going there every evening. She treated everybody to cakes and liquors, amused herself by showing off little Jupillon, playing pat-a-cake with him, sitting on his knee, telling him to his face that he was a beauty, treating him like a child, playing the wanton with him and joking him because he was not a man. The boy, happy and proud of these attentions from the first woman who had ever taken notice of him, manifested before long his preference for Adèle: so was the new-comer called.

Germinie was passionately jealous. Jealousy was the foundation of her nature; it was the dregs of her affection and gave it its bitter taste. Those whom she loved she wished to have entirely to herself, to possess them absolutely. She demanded that they should love no one but her. She could not permit them to take from her and bestow upon others the slightest fragment of their affection: as she had earned it, it no longer belonged to them; they were no longer entitled to dispose of it. She detested the people whom her mistress seemed to welcome more cordially than others, and with whom she was on most intimate terms. By her ill-humor and her sullen manner she had offended, had almost driven from the house, two or three of mademoiselle's old friends, whose visits wounded her; as if the old ladies came there for the purpose of abstracting something from the rooms, of taking a little of her mistress from her. People of whom she had once been fond became odious to her: she did not consider that they were fond enough of her; she hated them for all the love she wanted from them. Her heart was despotic and exacting in everything. As it gave all, it demanded all in return. At the least sign of coldness, at the slightest indication that she had a rival, she would fly into a rage, tear her hair, pass her nights in weeping, and execrate the whole world.

Seeing that other woman make herself at home in the shop and adopt a tone of familiarity with the young man, all Germinie's jealous instincts were aroused and changed to furious rage. Her hatred flew to arms and rebelled, with her disgust, against the shameless, brazen-faced creature, who could be seen on Sunday sitting at table on the outer boulevards with soldiers, and who had blue marks on her face on Monday. She did her utmost to induce Madame Jupillon to turn her away; but she was one of the best customers of the creamery, and the *crémière* mildly refused to close her doors upon her. Germinie had recourse to the son and told him that she was a miserable creature. But that only served to attach the young man the closer to the vile woman, whose evil reputation delighted him. Moreover, he had the cruel mischievous instinct of youth, and he redoubled his attentions to her simply to see "the nose" that Germinie made and to enjoy her despair. Soon Germinie discovered that the woman's intentions were more serious than she had at first supposed: she began to understand what she wanted of the child,—for the tall youth of seventeen was still a child in her eyes. Thenceforward she hung upon their steps; she was always beside them, never left them alone for a moment, made one at all their parties, at the theatre or in the country, joined them in all their walks, was always at hand and in the way, seeking to hold Adèle back, and to restore her sense of decency by a word in an undertone: "A mere boy! ain't you ashamed?" she would say to her. And the other would laugh aloud, as if it were a good joke.

When they left the theatre, enlivened and heated by the feverish excitement of the performance and the place; when they returned from an excursion to the country, laden with a long day's sunshine, intoxicated with the blue sky and the pure air, excited by the wine imbibed at dinner,

amid the sportive liberties in which the woman of the people, drunk with enjoyment and with the delights of unlimited good cheer, and with the senses keyed up to the highest pitch of joviality, makes bold to indulge at night, Germinie tried to be always between the maid and Jupillon. She never relaxed her efforts to break the lovers' hold upon each other's arms, to unbind them, to uncouple them. Never wearying of the task, she was forever separating them, luring them away from each other. She placed her body between those bodies that were groping for each other. She glided between the hands outstretched to touch each other; she glided between the lips that were put forth in search of other proffered lips. But of all this that she prevented she felt the breath and the shock. She felt the pressure of the hands she held apart, the caresses that she caught on the wing and that missed their mark and went astray upon her. The hot breath of the kisses she intercepted blew upon her cheek. Involuntarily, and with a feeling of horror, she became a party to the embracing, she was infected with the desires aroused by this constant friction and struggling, which diminished day by day the young man's restraint and respect for her person.

It happened one day that she was less strong against herself than she had previously been. On that occasion she did not elude his advances so abruptly as usual. Jupillon felt that she stopped short. Germinie felt it even more keenly than he; but she was at the end of her efforts, exhausted with the torture she had undergone. The love which, coming from another, she had turned aside from Jupillon, had slowly taken full possession of her own heart. Now it was firmly rooted there, and, bleeding with jealousy, she found that she was incapable of resistance, weak and fainting, like a person fatally wounded, in presence of the joy that had come to her.

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She repelled the young man's audacious attempts, however, without a word. She did not dream of belonging to him otherwise than as a friend, or giving way farther than she had done. She lived upon the thought of love, believing that she could live upon it always. And in the ecstatic exaltation of her thoughts, she put aside all memory of her fall, and repressed her desires. She remained shuddering and pure, lost and suspended in abysses of affection, neither enjoying nor wishing for aught from the lover but a caress, as if her heart were made only for the joy of kissing.

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## X

This happy though unsatisfied love produced a strange physiological phenomenon in Germinie's physical being. One would have said that the passion that was alive within her renewed and transformed her lymphatic temperament. She did not seem, as before, to extract her life, drop by drop, from a penurious spring; it flowed through her arteries in a full, generous stream; she felt the tingling sensation of rich blood over her whole body. She seemed to be filled with the warm glow of health, and the joy of living beat its wings in her breast like a bird in the sunlight.

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A marvelous animation had come to her. The miserable nervous energy that once sustained her had given place to healthy activity, to bustling, restless, overflowing gayety. She had no trace now of the weakness, the dejection, the prostration, the supineness, the sluggishness that formerly distinguished her. The heavy, drowsy feeling in the morning was a thing of the past; she awoke feeling fresh and bright, and alive in an instant to the cheer of the new day. She dressed in haste, playfully; her agile fingers moved of themselves, and she was amazed to be so bright and full of activity during the hours of faintness before breakfast, when she had so often felt her heart upon her lips. And throughout the day she had the same consciousness of physical well-being, the same briskness of movement. She must be always on the move, walking, running, doing something, expending her strength. At times all that she had lived through seemed to have no existence; the sensations of living that she had hitherto experienced seemed to her like a far-off dream, or as if dimly seen in the background of a sleeping memory. The past lay behind her, as if she had traversed it, covered with a veil like one in a swoon, or with the unconsciousness of a somnambulist. It was the first time that she had experienced the feeling, the impression, at once bitter and sweet, violent and celestial, of the game of life brilliant in its plenitude, its regularity and its power.

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She ran up and downstairs for a nothing. At a word from mademoiselle she would trip down the whole five flights. When she was seated, her feet danced on the floor. She brushed and scrubbed and beat and shook and washed and set to rights, without rest or reprieve, always at work, filling the apartment with her goings and comings, and the incessant bustle that followed her about.—"Mon Dieu!" her mistress would say, stunned by the uproar she made, just like a child,—"you're turning things upside down, Germinie! that will do for that!"

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One day, when she went into Germinie's kitchen, mademoiselle saw a little earth in a cigar box on the leads.—"What's that?" she asked.—"That's grass—that I planted—to look at," said Germinie.—"So you're in love with grass now, eh? All you need now is to have canaries!"

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## XI

In the course of a few months, Germinie's life, her whole life belonged to the *crémière*. Mademoiselle's service was not exacting and took but little time. A whiting or a cutlet—that was all the cooking there was to be done. Mademoiselle might have kept her with her in the evening for company: she preferred, however, to send her away, to drive her out of doors, to force her to take a little air and diversion. She asked only that she would return at ten o'clock to help her to bed; and yet when Germinie was a little late, mademoiselle undressed herself and went to bed alone very comfortably. Every hour that her mistress left her at leisure, Germinie passed in the shop. She fell into the habit of going down to the creamery in the morning, when the shutters were removed, and generally carried them inside; she would take her *café au lait* there and remain until nine o'clock, when she would go back and give mademoiselle her chocolate; and between breakfast and dinner she found excuses for returning two or three times, delaying and chattering in the back-shop on the slightest pretext. "What a magpie you are getting to be!" mademoiselle would say, in a scolding voice, but with a smiling face.

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At half past five, when her mistress's little dinner was cleared away, she would run down the stairs four at a time, install herself at Mère Jupillon's, wait until ten o'clock, clamber up the five flights, and in five minutes undress her mistress, who submitted unresistingly, albeit she was somewhat astonished that Germinie should be in such haste to go to bed; she remembered the time when she had a mania for moving her sleepy body from one easy-chair to another, and was never willing to go up to her room. While the candle was still smoking on mademoiselle's night table, Germinie would be back at the creamery, this time to remain until midnight, until one o'clock; often she did not go until a policeman, noticing the light, tapped on the shutters and made them close up.

In order to be always there and to have the right to be always there, to make herself a part of the shop, to keep her eyes constantly upon the man she loved, to hover about him, to keep him, to be always brushing against him, she had become the servant of the establishment. She swept the shop, she prepared the old woman's meals and the food for the dogs. She waited upon the son; she made his bed, she brushed his clothes, she waxed his boots, happy and proud to touch what he touched, thrilling with pleasure when she placed her hand where he placed his body, and ready to kiss the mud upon the leather of his boots, because it was his!

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She did the menial work, she kept the shop, she served the customers. Madame Jupillon rested everything upon her shoulders; and while the good-natured girl was working and perspiring, the bulky matron, assuming the majestic, leisurely air of an annuitant, anchored upon a chair in the middle of the sidewalk and inhaling the fresh air of the street, fingered and rattled the precious coin in the capacious pocket beneath her apron—the coin that rings so sweetly in the ears of the petty tradesmen of Paris, that the retired shopkeeper is melancholy beyond words at first, because he no longer has the chinking and the tinkling under his hand.

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## XII

When the spring came, Germinie said to Jupillon almost every evening: "Suppose we go as far as the beginning of the fields?"

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Jupillon would put on his flannel shirt with red and black squares, and his black velvet cap; and they would start for what the people of the quarter call "the beginning of the fields."

They would go up the Chaussée Clignancourt, and, with the flood of Parisians from the faubourg hurrying to drink a little fresh air, would walk on toward the great patch of sky that rose straight from the pavements, at the top of the ascent, between the two lines of houses, unobstructed except by an occasional omnibus. The air was growing cooler and the sun shone only upon the roofs of the houses and the chimneys. As from a great door opening into the country, there came from the end of the street and from the sky beyond, a breath of boundless space and liberty.

At the Château-Rouge they found the first tree, the first foliage. Then, at Rue du Château, the horizon opened before them in dazzling beauty. The fields stretched away in the distance, glistening vaguely in the powdery, golden haze of seven o'clock. All nature trembled in the daylight dust that the day leaves in its wake, upon the verdure it blots from sight and the houses it suffuses with pink.

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Frequently they descended the footpath covered with the figures of the game of hop-scotch marked out in charcoal, by long walls with an occasional overhanging branch, by lines of detached houses with gardens between. At their left rose tree-tops filled with light, clustering foliage pierced by the beams of the setting sun, which cast lines of fire across the bars of the iron gateways. After the gardens came hedgerows, estates for sale, unfinished buildings erected upon the line of projected streets and stretching out their jagged walls into empty space, with heaps of broken bottles at their feet; large, low, plastered houses, with windows filled with bird-cages and

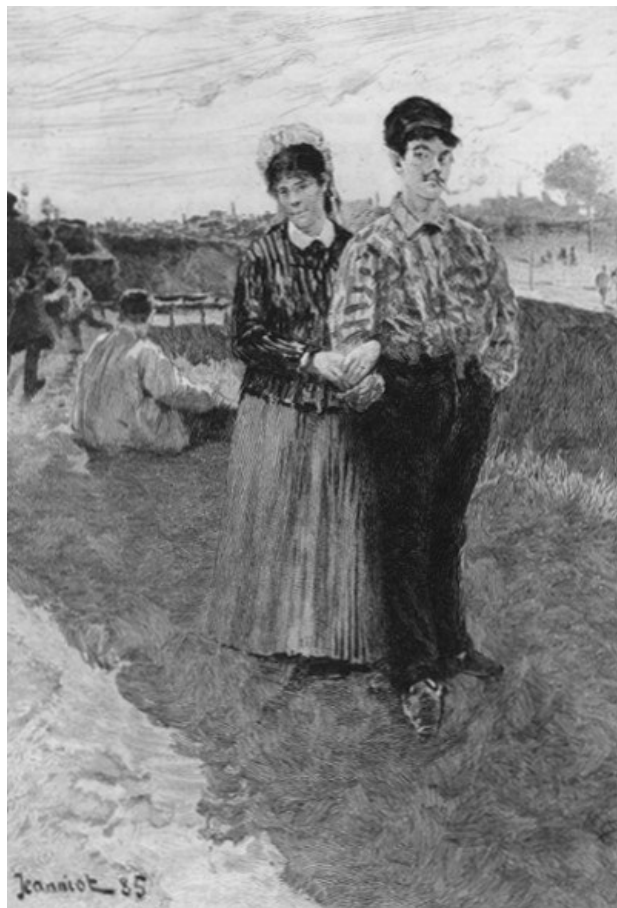
cloths, and with the Y of the sink-pipes at every floor; and openings into enclosures that resembled barnyards, studded with little mounds on which goats were browsing.

They would stop here and there and smell the flowers, inhale the perfume of a meagre lilac growing in a narrow lane. Germinie would pluck a leaf in passing and nibble at it.

Flocks of joyous swallows flew wildly about in circles and in fantastic figures over her head. The birds called. The sky answered the cages. She heard everything about her singing, and glanced with a glad eye at the women in chemisettes at the windows, the men in their shirt sleeves in the little gardens, the mothers on the doorsteps with their little ones between their legs.

## Chapter XII

*But at the  
fortifications her  
pleasure returned.  
She would go with  
Jupillon and sit  
upon the slope of  
the embankment.  
Beside her were  
families  
innumerable,  
workmen lying flat  
upon their faces,  
small annuitants  
gazing at the  
horizon through  
spy-glasses,  
philosophers of  
want, bent double,  
with their hands  
upon their knees,  
the greasy coats  
characteristic of  
old men, and black  
hats worn as red  
as their red  
beards.*



At the foot of the slope the pavement came to an end. The street was succeeded by a broad, white, chalky, dusty road, made of débris, old pieces of plaster, crumbs of lime and bricks; a sunken road, with deep ruts, polished on the edges, made by the iron tires of the huge great wheels of carts laden with hewn stone. At that point began the things that collect where Paris ends, the things that grow where grass does not grow, one of those arid landscapes that large cities create around them, the first zone of suburbs *intra muros* where nature is exhausted, the soil used up, the fields sown with oyster shells. Beyond was a wilderness of half-enclosed yards displaying numbers of carts and trucks with their shafts in the air against the sky, stone-cutters' sheds, factories built of boards, unfinished workmen's houses, full of gaps and open to the light, and bearing the mason's flag, wastes of gray and white sand, kitchen gardens marked out with cords, and, on the lower level, bogs to which the embankment of the road slopes down in oceans of small stones.

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Soon they would reach the last lantern hanging on a green post. People were still coming and going about them. The road was alive and amused the eyes. They met women carrying their husband's canes, lorettes in silk dresses leaning on the arms of their blouse-clad brothers, old women in bright-colored gingham walking about with folded arms, enjoying a moment's rest from labor. Workmen were drawing their children in little wagons, urchins returning with their rods from fishing at Saint-Ouen, and men and women dragging branches of flowering acacia at the ends of sticks.

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Sometimes a pregnant woman would pass, holding out her arms to a yet small child, and casting the shadow of her pregnancy upon the wall.

And everyone moved tranquilly, blissfully, at a pace that told of the wish to delay, with the awkward ease and the happy indolence of those who walk for pleasure. No one was in a hurry, and against the unbroken horizon line, crossed from time to time by the white smoke of a railroad train, the groups of promenaders were like black spots, almost motionless, in the distance.

Behind Montmartre, they came to those great moats, as it were, those sloping squares, where narrow, gray, much-trodden paths cross and recross. A few blades of shriveled, yellow grass grew thereabout, softened by the rays of the setting sun, which they could see, all ablaze, between the houses. And Germinie loved to watch the wool-combers at work there, the quarry horses at pasture in the bare fields, the madder-red trousers of the soldiers who were playing at bowls, the children flying kites that made black spots in the clear air. Passing all these, they turned to cross the bridge over the railroad by the wretched settlement of ragpickers, the stonemasons' quarter at the foot of Clignancourt hill. They would walk quickly by those houses built of materials stolen from demolished buildings, and exuding the horrors they conceal; the wretched structures, half cabin, half burrow, caused Germinie a vague feeling of terror: it seemed to her as if all the crimes of Night were lurking there.

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But at the fortifications her pleasure returned. She would go with Jupillon and sit upon the slope of the embankment. Beside her were families innumerable, workmen lying flat upon their faces, small annuitants gazing at the horizon through spy-glasses, philosophers of want, bent double, with their hands upon their knees, the greasy coats characteristic of old men, and black hats worn as red as their red beards. The air was full of rich harmonies. Below her, in the moat, a musical society was playing at each corner. Before her eyes was a multi-colored crowd, white blouses, children in blue aprons running around, a game of riding at the ring in progress, wine shops, cake shops, fried fish stalls, and shooting galleries half hidden in clumps of verdure, from which arose staves bearing the tricolor; and farther away, in a bluish haze, a line of tree tops marked the location of a road. To the right she could see Saint-Denis and the towering basilica; at her left, above a line of houses that were becoming indistinct, the sun was setting over Saint-Ouen in a disk of cherry-colored flame, and projecting upon the gray horizon shafts of light like red pillars that seemed to support it tremblingly. Often a child's balloon would pass swiftly across the dazzling expanse of sky.

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They would go down, pass through the gate, walk along by the Lorraine sausage shops, the dealers in honeycomb, the board *cabarets*, the verdureless, still unpainted arbors, where a noisy multitude of men and women and children were eating fried potatoes, mussels and prawns, until they reached the first field, the first living grass: on the edge of the grass there was a handcart laden with gingerbread and peppermint lozenges, and a woman selling hot cocoa on a table in the furrow. A strange country, where everything was mingled—the smoke from the frying-pan and the evening vapor, the noise of quoits on the head of a cask and the silence shed from the sky, the city barrier and the idyllic rural scene, the odor of manure and the fresh smell of green wheat, the great human Fair and Nature! Germinie enjoyed it, however; and, urging Jupillon to go farther, walking on the very edge of the road, she would constantly step in among the grain to enjoy the fresh, cool sensation of the stalks against her stockings. When they returned she always wanted to go upon the slope once more. The sun had by that time disappeared and the sky was gray below, pink in the centre and blue above. The horizon grew dark; from green the trees became a dark brown and melted into the sky; the zinc roofs of the wine shops looked as if the moon were shining upon them, fires began to appear in the darkness, the crowd became gray, and the white linen took on a bluish tinge. Little by little everything would fade away, be blotted out, lose its form and color in a dying remnant of colorless daylight, and through the increasing darkness the voices of a class whose life begins at night, and the voice of the wine beginning to sing, would arise, mingled with the din of the rattles. Upon the slope the tops of the tall grass waved to and fro in the gentle breeze. Germinie would make up her mind to go. She would wend her way homeward, filled with the influence of the falling night, abandoning herself to the

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uncertain vision of things half-seen, passing the dark houses, and finding that everything along her road had turned paler, as it were—wearied by the long walk over rough roads, and content to be weary and slow and half-fainting, and with a feeling of peace at her heart.

At the first lighted lanterns on Rue du Château, she would fall from her dream to the pavement.

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### XIII

Madame Jupillon's face always wore a pleased expression when Germinie appeared; when she kissed her she was very effusive, when she spoke to her her voice was caressing, when she looked at her her glance was most amiable. The huge creature's kind heart seemed, when with her, to abandon itself to the emotion, the affection, the trustfulness of a sort of maternal tenderness. She took Germinie into her confidence as to her business, as to her woman's secrets, as to the most private affairs of her life. She seemed to open her heart to her as to a person of her own blood, whom she desired to make familiar with matters of interest to the family. When she spoke of the future, she always referred to Germinie as one from whom she was never to be separated, and who formed a part of the household. Often she allowed certain discreet, mysterious smiles to escape her, smiles which made it appear that she saw all that was going on and was not angry. Sometimes, too, when her son was sitting by Germinie's side, she would let her eyes, moist with a mother's tears, rest upon them, and would embrace them with a glance that seemed to unite her two children and call down a blessing on their heads.

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Without speaking, without ever uttering a word that could be construed as an engagement, without divulging her thoughts or binding herself in any way, and all the time repeating that her son was still very young to think of being married, she encouraged Germinie's hopes and illusions by her whole bearing, her airs of secret indulgence and of complicity, so far as her heart was concerned; by those meaning silences when she seemed to open to her a mother-in-law's arms. And displaying all her talents in the way of hypocrisy, drawing upon her hidden mines of sentiment, her good-natured shrewdness, and the consummate, intricate cunning that fat people possess, the corpulent matron succeeded in vanquishing Germinie's last resistance by dint of this tacit assurance and promise of marriage; and she finally allowed the young man's ardor to extort from her what she believed that she was giving in advance to the husband.

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### XIV

As Germinie was going down the servant's staircase one day, she heard Adèle's voice calling her over the banister and telling her to bring her two sous' worth of butter and ten of absinthe.

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"Oh! you can sit down a minute, you know you can," said Adèle, when she brought her the absinthe and the butter. "I never see you now, you'll never come in. Come! you have plenty of time to be with your old woman. For my part, I couldn't live with an Antichrist's face like hers! So stay. This is the house without work to-day. There isn't a sou—madame's abed. Whenever there's no money, she goes to bed, does madame; she stays in bed all day, reading novels. Have some of this?"—And she offered her her glass of absinthe.—"No? oh! no, you don't drink. You're very foolish. It's a funny thing not to drink. Say, it would be very nice of you to write me a little line for my dearie. Hard work, you know. I have told you about it. See, here's madame's pen—and her paper—it smells good. Are you ready? He's a good fellow, my dear, and no mistake! He's in the butcher line as I told you. Ah! my word! I mustn't rub him the wrong way! When he's had a glass of blood after killing his beasts, he's like a madman—and if you're obstinate with him—Dame! why then he thumps you! But what would you have? He does that to make him strong. If you could see him thump himself on the breast—blows that would kill an ox, and say: 'That's a wall, that is!' Ah! he's a gentleman, I tell you! Are you thinking about the letter, eh? Make it one of the fetching kind. Say nice things to him, you know—and a little sad—he adores that. At the theatre he doesn't like anything that doesn't make him cry. Look here! Imagine that you're writing to a lover of your own."

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Germinie began to write.

"Say, Germinie! Have you heard? Madame's taken a strange idea into her head. It's a funny thing about women like her, who can hold their heads up with the greatest of 'em, who can have everything, hobnob with kings if they choose! And there's nothing to be said—when one is like madame, you know, when one has such a body as that! And then the way they load themselves down with finery, with their tralala of dresses and lace everywhere and everything else—how do you suppose anyone can resist them? And if it isn't a gentleman, if it's someone like us—you can see how much more all that will catch him; a woman in velvet goes to his brain. Yes, my dear, just

fancy, here's madame gone daft on that *gamin* of a Jupillon! That's all we needed to make us die of hunger here!"

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Germinie, with her pen in the air over the letter she had begun, looked up at Adèle, devouring her with her eyes.

"That brings you to a standstill, doesn't it?" said Adèle, sipping her absinthe, her face lighted up with joy at sight of Germinie's discomposed features. "Oh! it is too absurd, really; but it's true, 'pon my word it's true. She noticed the *gamin* on the steps of the shop the other day, coming home from the races. She's been there two or three times on the pretence of buying something. She'll probably have some perfumery sent from there—to-morrow, I think.—Bah! it's sickening, isn't it? It's their affair. Well! what about my letter? Is it what I told you that makes you so stupid? You played the prude—I didn't know—Oh! yes, yes, now I remember; that's what it is—What was it you said to me about the little one? I believe you didn't want anyone to touch him! Idiot!"

At a gesture of denial from Germinie, she continued:

"Nonsense, nonsense! What do I care? The kind of a child that, if you blew his nose, milk would come out! Thanks! that's not my style. However, that's your business. Come, now for my letter, eh?"

Germinie leaned over the sheet of paper. But she was burning up with fever; the quill cracked in her nervous fingers. "There," she said, throwing it down after a few seconds, "I don't know what's the matter with me to-day. I'll write it for you another time."

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"As you like, little one—but I rely on you. Come to-morrow, then.—I'll tell you some of madame's nonsense. We'll have a good laugh at her!"

And, when the door was closed, Adèle began to roar with laughter: it had cost her only a little *blague* to unearth Germinie's secret.

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## XV

So far as young Jupillon was concerned, love was simply the satisfaction of a certain evil curiosity, which sought, in the knowledge and possession of a woman, the privilege and the pleasure of despising her. Just emerging from boyhood, the young man had brought to his first *liaison* no other ardor, no other flame than the cold instincts of rascality awakened in boys by vile books, the confidences of their comrades, boarding-school conversation, the first breath of impurity which debauches desire. The sentiment with which the young man usually regards the woman who yields to him, the caresses, the loving words, the affectionate attentions with which he envelops her—nothing of all that existed in Jupillon's case. Woman was to him simply an obscene image; and a passion for a woman seemed to him desirable as being prohibited, illicit, vulgar, cynical and amusing—an excellent opportunity for trickery and sarcasm.

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Sarcasm—the low, cowardly, despicable sarcasm of the dregs of the people—was the beginning and the end of this youth. He was a perfect type of those Parisians who bear upon their faces the mocking scepticism of the great city of *blague* in which they are born. The smile, the shrewdness and the mischief of the Parisian physiognomy were always mocking and impertinent in him. Jupillon's smile had the jovial expression imparted by a wicked mouth, a mouth that was almost cruel at the corners of the lips, which curled upward and were always twitching nervously. His face was pale with the pallor that nitric acid strong enough to eat copper gives to the complexion, and in his sharp, pert, bold features were mingled bravado, energy, recklessness, intelligence, impudence and all sorts of rascally expressions, softened, at certain times, by a cat-like, wheedling air. His trade of glove-cutter—he had taken up with that trade after two or three unsuccessful trials as an apprentice in other crafts—the habit of working in the shop-windows, of being on exhibition to the passers-by, had given to his whole person the self-assurance and the dandified airs of a *poseur*. Sitting in the work-shop on the street, with his white shirt, his little black cravat à la *Colin*, and his skin-tight pantaloons, he had adopted an awkward air of nonchalance, the pretentious carriage and *canaille* affectations of the workman who knows he is being stared at. And various little refinements of doubtful taste, the parting of the hair in the middle and brushing it down over the temples, the low shirt collars that left the whole neck bare, the striving after the coquettish effects that properly belong to the other sex, gave him an uncertain appearance, which was made even more ambiguous by his beardless face, marred only by a faint suggestion of a moustache, and his sexless features to which passion and ill-temper imparted all the evil quality of a shrewish woman's face. But in Germinie's eyes all these airs and this Jupillon style were of the highest distinction.

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Thus constituted, with nothing lovable about him and incapable of a genuine attachment even through his passions, Jupillon was greatly embarrassed and bored by this adoration which became intoxicated with itself, and waxed greater day by day. Germinie wearied him to death. She seemed to him absurd in her humiliation, and laughable in her devotion. He was weary,

disgusted, worn out with her. He had had enough of her love, enough of her person. And he had no hesitation about cutting loose from her, without charity or pity. He ran away from her. He failed to keep the appointments she made. He pretended that he was kept away by accident, by errands to be done, by a pressure of work. At night, she waited for him and he did not come; she supposed that he was detained by business: in fact he was at some low billiard hall, or at some ball at the barrier.

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## XVI

There was a ball at the *Boule-Noire* one Thursday. The dancing was in full blast.

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The ball-room had the ordinary appearance of modern places of amusement for the people. It was brilliant with false richness and tawdry splendor. There were paintings there, and tables at which wine was sold, gilded chandeliers and glasses that held a quatern of brandy, velvet hangings and wooden benches, the shabbiness and rusticity of an ale-house with the decorations of a cardboard palace.

Garnet velvet lambrequins with a fringe of gold lace hung at the windows and were economically copied in paint beneath the mirrors, which were lighted by three-branched candelabra. On the walls, in large white panels, pastoral scenes by Boucher, surrounded with painted frames, alternated with Prud'hon's *Seasons*, which were much astonished to find themselves in such a place; and above the windows and doors dropsical Loves gamboled among five roses protruding from a pomade jar of the sort used by suburban hair-dressers. Square pillars, embellished with meagre arabesques, supported the ceiling in the centre of the hall, where there was a small octagonal stand containing the orchestra. An oaken rail, waist high, which served as a back to a cheap red bench, enclosed the dancers. And against this rail, on the outside, were tables painted green and two rows of benches, surrounding the dance with a café.

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In the dancers' enclosure, beneath the fierce glare and the intense heat of the gas, were women of all sorts, dressed in dark, worn, rumpled woolens, women in black tulle caps, women in black *palelots*, women in *caracos* worn shiny at the seams, women in fur tippetts bought of open-air dealers and in shops in dark alleys. And in the whole assemblage not one of the youthful faces was set off by a collar, not a glimpse of a white skirt could be seen among the whirling dancers, not a glimmer of white about these women, who were all dressed in gloomy colors, the colors of want, to the ends of their unpolished shoes. This absence of linen gave to the ball an aspect as of poverty in mourning; it imparted to all the faces a touch of gloom and uncleanness, of lifelessness and earthiness—a vaguely forbidding aspect, in which there was a suggestion of the Hôtel-Dieu and the Mont-de-Piété!

An old woman in a wig with the hair parted at the side passed in front of the tables, with a basket filled with pieces of Savoy cake and red apples.

From time to time the dance, in its twisting and turning, disclosed a soiled stocking, the typical Jewish features of a street pedlar of sponges, red fingers protruding from black mitts, a swarthy moustached face, an under-petticoat soiled with the mud of night before last, a second-hand-skirt, stiff and crumpled, of flowered calico, the cast-off finery of some kept mistress.

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The men wore *palelots*, small, soft caps pulled down over their ears, and woolen comforters untied and hanging down their backs. They invited the women to dance by pulling them by the cap ribbons that fluttered behind them. Some few, in hats and frockcoats and colored shirts, had an insolent air of domesticity and a swagger befitting grooms in some great family.

Everybody was jumping and bustling about. The women frisked and capered and gamboled, excited and stimulated by the spur of bestial pleasure. And in the evolutions of the contra-dance, one could hear brothel addresses given: *Impasse du Dépotoir*.

Germinie entered the hall just at the conclusion of a quadrille to the air of *La Casquette du père Bugeaud*, in which the cymbals, the sleigh-bells and the drum had infected the dancers with the giddiness and madness of their uproar. At a glance she embraced the whole room, all the men leading their partners back to the places marked by their caps: she had been misled; *he* was not there, she could not see him. However, she waited. She entered the dancers' enclosure and sat down on the end of a bench, trying not to seem too much embarrassed. From their linen caps she judged that the women seated in line beside her were servants like herself: comrades of her own class alarmed her less than the little brazen-faced hussies, with their hair in nets and their hands in the pockets of their *palelots*, who strolled humming about the room. But soon she aroused hostile attention, even on her bench. Her hat—only about a dozen women at the ball wore hats—her flounced skirt, the white hem of which could be seen under her dress, the gold brooch that secured her shawl awakened malevolent curiosity all about her. Glances and smiles were bestowed upon her that boded her no good. All the women seemed to be asking one another where this new arrival had come from, and to be saying to one another that she would take their lovers from them. Young women who were walking about the hall in pairs, with their arms about one another's waists as if for a waltz, made her lower her eyes as they passed in front of her, and

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then went on with a contemptuous shrug, turning their heads to look back at her.

She changed her place: she was met with the same smiles, the same whispering, the same hostility. She went to the further end of the hall; all the women looked after her; she felt as if she were enveloped in malicious, envious glances, from the hem of her dress to the flowers on her hat. Her face flushed. At times she feared that she should weep. She longed to leave the place, but she lacked courage to walk the length of the hall all alone. [137]

She began mechanically to watch an old woman who was slowly making the circuit of the hall with a noiseless step, like a bird of night flying in a circle. A black hat, of the hue of charred paper, confined her *bandeaux* of grizzled hair. From her square, high masculine shoulders, hung a sombre-hued Scotch tartan. When she reached the door, she cast a last glance about the hall, that embraced everyone therein, with the eye of a vulture seeking in vain for food.

Suddenly there was an outcry: a police officer was ejecting a diminutive youth who tried to bite his hands and clung to the tables, against which, as he was dragged along, he struck with a noise like breaking furniture.

As Germinie turned her head she spied Jupillon: he was sitting between two women at a green table in a window-recess, smoking. One of the two was a tall blonde with a small quantity of frizzled flaxen hair, a flat, stupid face and round eyes. A red flannel chemise lay in folds on her back, and she had both hands in the pockets of a black apron which she was flapping up and down on her dark red skirt. The other, a short, dark creature, whose face was still red from having been scrubbed with soap, was enveloped as to her head, with the coquetry of a fishwoman, in a white knitted hood with a blue border.

Jupillon had recognized Germinie. When he saw her rise and approach him, with her eyes fixed upon his face, he whispered something to the woman in the hood, rested his elbows defiantly on the table and waited. [138]

"Hallo! you here," he exclaimed when Germinie stood before him, erect, motionless and mute. "This is a surprise!—Waiter! another bowl!"

And, emptying the bowl of sweetened wine into the two women's glasses, he continued: "Come, don't make up faces—sit down there."

And, as Germinie did not budge: "Go on! These ladies are friends of mine—ask them!"

"Mélie," said the woman in the hood to the other woman, in a voice like a diseased crow's, "don't you see? She's monsieur's mother. Make room for the lady if she'd like to drink with us."

Germinie cast a murderous glance at the woman.

"Well! what's the matter?" the woman continued; "that don't suit you, madame, eh? Excuse me! you ought to have told me beforehand. How old do you suppose she is, Mélie, eh? *Sapristi!* You select young ones, my boy, you don't put yourself out!"

Jupillon smiled internally, and simpered and sneered externally. His whole manner displayed the cowardly delight that evil-minded persons take in watching the suffering of those who suffer because of loving them.

"I have something to say to you—to you!—not here—outside," said Germinie.

"Much joy to you! Coming, Mélie?" said the woman in the hood, lighting the stub of a cigar that Jupillon had left on the table beside a piece of lemon. [139]

"What do you want?" said Jupillon, impressed, in spite of himself, by Germinie's tone.

"Come!"

And she walked on ahead of him. As she passed, the people crowded about her, laughing. She heard voices, broken sentences, subdued hooting. [140]

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## XVII

Jupillon promised Germinie not to go to the ball again. But he was just beginning to make a name for himself at La Brididi, among the low haunts near the barrier, the *Boule-Noire*, the *Reine-Blanche* and the *Ermitage*. He had become one of the dancers who make the guests leave their seats, who keep a whole roomful of people hanging on the soles of their boots as they toss them two inches above their heads, and whom the fair dancers of the locality invite to dance with them and sometimes pay for their refreshment to that end. The ball to him was not a ball simply; it was a stage, an audience, popularity, applause, the flattering murmur of his name among the groups of people, an ovation accorded to saltatory glory in the glare of the reverberators. [141]

On Sunday he did not go to the *Boule-Noire*; but on the following Thursday he went there again; and Germinie, seeing plainly enough that she could not prevent him from going, decided to follow

him and to stay there as long as he did. Sitting at a table in the background, in the least brilliantly lighted corner of the ball-room, she would follow him eagerly with her eyes throughout the whole contra-dance; and when it was at an end, if he held back, she would go and seize him, take him almost by force from the hands and caresses of the women who persisted in trying to pull him back, to detain him by wicked wiles.

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As they soon came to know her, the insulting remarks in her neighborhood ceased to be vague and indistinct and muttered under the breath, as at the first ball. The words were thrown in her face, the laughter spoke aloud. She was obliged to pass her three hours amid a chorus of derision that pointed its finger at her, called her by name and cast her age in her face. At every turn she was forced to submit to the appellation of: *old woman!* which the young hussies spat at her over their shoulders as they passed. But they did at least look at her; often, however, dancing women invited by Jupillon to drink, and brought by him to the table at which Germinie was, would sit with their elbows on the table and their cheeks resting on their hands, drinking the bowl of mulled wine for which she paid, apparently unaware that there was another woman there, crowding into her place as if it were unoccupied, and making no reply when she spoke to them. Germinie could have killed these creatures whom Jupillon forced her to entertain and who despised her so utterly that they did not even notice her presence.

The time arrived, when, having endured all she could endure and being sickened by the humiliation she was forced to swallow, she conceived the idea of dancing herself. She saw no other way to avoid leaving her lover to others, to keep him by her all the evening, and perhaps to bind him more closely to her by her success, if she had any chance of succeeding. Throughout a whole month she worked, in secret, to learn to dance. She rehearsed the figures and the steps. She forced her body into unnatural attitudes, she wore herself out trying to master the contortions and the manipulations of the skirt that she saw were applauded. At the end of the month she made the venture; but everything tended to disconcert her and added to her awkwardness; the hostility that she could feel in the atmosphere, the smiles of astonishment and pity that played about the lips of the spectators when she took her place in the dancers' enclosure. She was so absurd and so laughed at, that she had not the courage to make a second attempt. She buried herself gloomily in her dark corner, only leaving it to hunt up Jupillon and carry him off, with the mute violence of a wife dragging her husband out of the wineshop and leading him home by the arm.

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It was soon rumored in the street that Germinie went to these balls, that she never missed one of them. The fruit woman, at whose shop Adèle had already held forth, sent her son "to see;" he returned with a confirmation of the rumor, and told of all the petty annoyances to which Germinie was subjected, but which did not keep her from returning. Thereafter there was no more doubt in the quarter as to the relations between mademoiselle's servant and Jupillon—relations which some charitable souls had hitherto persisted in denying. The scandal burst out, and in a week the poor girl, berated by all the slanderous tongues in the quarter, baptized and saluted by the vilest names in the language of the streets, fell at a blow from the most emphatically expressed esteem to the most brutally advertised contempt.

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Thus far her pride—and it was very great—had procured for her the respect and consideration which is bestowed, in the lorette quarters, upon a servant who honestly serves a virtuous mistress. She had become accustomed to respect and deference and attention. She stood apart from her comrades. Her unassailable probity, her conduct, as to which not a word could be said, her confidential relations with mademoiselle, which caused her mistress's honorable character to be reflected upon her, led the shopkeeper to treat her on a different footing from the other maids. They addressed her, cap in hand; they always called her *Mademoiselle Germinie*. They hurried to wait upon her; they offered her the only chair in the shop when she had to wait. Even when she contended over prices they were still polite with her and never called her *haggler*. Jests that were somewhat too broad were cut short when she appeared. She was invited to the great banquets, to family parties, and consulted upon business matters.

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Everything changed as soon as her relations with Jupillon and her assiduous attendance at the *Boule-Noire* were known. The quarter took its revenge for having respected her. The brazen-faced maids in the house accosted her as one of their own kind. One, whose lover was at Mazas, called her: "My dear." The men accosted her familiarly, and with all the intimacy of thee and thou in glance and gesture and tone and touch. The very children on the sidewalk, who were formerly trained to courtesy politely to her, ran away from her as from a person of whom they had been told to be afraid. She felt that she was being maligned behind her back, handed over to the devil. She could not take a step without walking through scorn and receiving a blow from her shame upon the cheek.

It was a horrible affliction to her. She suffered as if her honor were being torn from her, shred by shred, and dragged in the gutter. But the more she suffered, the closer she pressed her love to her heart and clung to him. She bore him no ill-will, she uttered no word of reproach to him. She attached herself to him by all the tears he caused her pride to shed. And now, in the street through which she passed but a short time ago, proudly and with head erect, she could be seen, bent double as if crouching over her fault, hurrying furtively along, with oblique glances, dreading to be recognized, quickening her pace in front of the shops that swept their slanders out upon her heels.

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Jupillon was constantly complaining that he was tired of working for others, that he could not set up for himself, that he could not find fifteen or eighteen hundred francs in his mother's purse. He needed no more than that, he said, to hire a couple of rooms on the ground floor and set up as a glover in a small way. Indeed he was already dreaming of what he might do and laying out his plans: he would open a shop in the quarter, an excellent quarter for his business, as it was full of purchasers, and of makers of wretched gloves at five francs. He would soon add a line of perfumery and cravats to his gloves; and then, when he had made a tidy sum, he would sell out and take a fine shop on Rue de Richelieu. [147]

Whenever he mentioned the subject Germinie asked him innumerable questions. She wanted to know everything that was necessary to start in business. She made him tell her the names of the tools and appurtenances, give her an idea of their prices and where they could be bought. She questioned him as to his trade and the details of his work so inquisitively and persistently that Jupillon lost his patience at last and said to her: [148]

"What's all this to you? The work sickens me enough now; don't mention it to me!"

One Sunday she walked toward Montmartre with him. Instead of taking Rue Frochot she turned into Rue Pigalle.

"Why, this ain't the way, is it?" said Jupillon.

"I know what I'm about," said she, "come on."

She had taken his arm, and she walked on, turning her head slightly away from him so that he could not see what was taking place on her face. Half way along Rue Fontaine Saint-Georges, she halted abruptly in front of two windows on the ground floor of a house, and said to him: "Look!"

She was trembling with joy.

Jupillon looked; he saw between the two windows, on a glistening copper plate:

*Magasin de Ganterie.*

JUPILLON.

He saw white curtains at the first window. Through the glass in the other he saw pigeon-holes and boxes, and, near the window, the little glover's cutting board, with the great shears, the jar for clippings, and the knife to make holes in the skins in order to stretch them.

"The concierge has your key," she said.

They entered the first room, the shop.

She at once set about showing him everything. She opened the boxes and laughed. Then she pushed open the door into the other room. "There, you won't be stifled there as you are in the loft at your mother's. Do you like it? Oh! it isn't handsome, but it's clean. I'd have liked to give you mahogany. Do you like that little rug by the bed? And the paper—I didn't think of that——" She put a receipt for the rent in his hand. "See! this is for six months. Dame! you must go to work right off and earn some money. The few sous I had laid by are all gone. Oh! let me sit down. You look so pleased—it gives me a turn—it makes my head spin. I haven't any legs." [149]

And she sank into a chair. Jupillon stooped over her to kiss her.

"Ah! yes, they're not there any longer," she said, seeing that he was looking for her earrings. "They've gone like my rings. D'ye see, all gone——"

And she showed him her hands, bare of the paltry gems she had worked so long to buy.

"They all went for the easy-chair, you see—but it's all horsehair."

As Jupillon stood in front of her with an embarrassed air, as if he were trying to find words with which to thank her, she continued:

"Why, you're a funny fellow. What's the matter with you? Ah! it's on that account, is it?" And she pointed to the bedroom. "You're a stupid! I love you, don't I? Well then?"

Germinie said the words simply, as the heart says sublime things. [150]

At first she doubted, she dared not believe it. But when she was certain of the fact, she was filled with immeasurable joy, a joy that overflowed her heart. Her happiness was so great and so overpowering that it stifled at a single stroke the anguish, the fear, the inward trembling that ordinarily disturb the maternity of unmarried women and poisons their anticipations of childbirth, the divine hope that lives and moves within them. The thought of the scandal caused by the discovery of her *liaison*, of the outcry in the quarter, the idea of the abominable thing that had always made her think of suicide: dishonor,—even the fear of being detected by mademoiselle and dismissed by her—nothing of all this could cast a shadow on her felicity. The child that she expected allowed her to see nothing but it, as if she had it already in her arms before her; and, hardly attempting to conceal her condition, she bore her woman's shame almost proudly through the streets, exulting and radiant in the thought that she was to be a mother.

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She was unhappy only because she had spent all her savings, and was not only without money but had been paid several months' wages in advance by her mistress. She bitterly deplored having to receive her child in a poor way. Often, as she passed through Rue Saint-Lazare, she would stop in front of a linen-draper's, in whose windows were displayed stores of rich baby-linen. She would devour with her eyes the pretty, dainty flowered garments, the piqué bibs, the long short-waisted dresses trimmed with English embroidery, the whole doll-like cherub's costume. A terrible longing,—the longing of a pregnant woman,—to break the glass and steal it all, would come upon her: the clerks standing behind the display framework became accustomed to seeing her take up her station there and would laughingly point her out to one another.

Again, at intervals, amid the happiness that overflowed her heart, amid the ecstasy that exalted her being, another disturbing thought passed through her mind. She would ask herself how the father would welcome his child. Two or three times she had attempted to tell him of her condition but had not dared. At last, one day, seeing that his face wore the expression she had awaited so long as a preliminary to telling him everything, an expression in which there was a touch of affection, she confessed to him, blushing hotly and as if asking his forgiveness, what it was that made her so happy.

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"That's all imagination!" said Jupillon.

And when she had assured him that it was not imagination and that she was positively five months advanced in pregnancy: "Just my luck!" the young man rejoined. "Thanks!" And he swore. "Would you mind telling me who's going to feed the sparrow?"

"Oh! never you fear! it sha'n't suffer, I'll look out for that. And then it'll be so pretty! Don't be afraid, no one shall know anything about it. I'll fix myself up. See! the last part of the time I'll walk like this, with my head back—I won't wear any petticoats, and I'll pull myself in—you'll see! Nobody shall notice anything, I tell you. Just think of it! a little child of our own!"

"Well, as long as it's so, it's so, eh?" said the young man.

"Say," ventured Germinie, timidly, "suppose you should tell your mother?"

"Ma? Oh! no, I rather think not. You must lie in first. After that we'll take the brat to the house. It will give her a start, and perhaps she'll consent without meaning to."

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## XX

Twelfth Night arrived. It was the day on which Mademoiselle de Varandeuil gave a grand dinner-party regularly every year. She invited all the children of her own family or her old friends' families, great and small. The small suite would hardly hold them all. They were obliged to put part of the furniture on the landing, and a table was set in each of the two rooms which formed mademoiselle's whole suite. For the children, that day was a great festival to which they looked forward for a week. They came running up the stairway behind the pastry-cook's men. At table they ate too much without being scolded. At night, they were unwilling to go to bed, they climbed on the chairs and made a racket that always gave Mademoiselle de Varandeuil a sick headache the next day; but she bore them no grudge therefor: she had had the full enjoyment of a genuine grandmother's fête, in listening to them, looking at them, tying around their necks the white napkins that made them look so rosy. And not for anything in the world would she have failed to give this dinner-party, which filled her old maid's apartments with the fair-haired little imps of Satan, and brought thither, in a single day, an atmosphere of activity and youth and laughter that lasted a whole year.

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Germinie was preparing the dinner. She was whipping cream in an earthen bowl on her knees, when suddenly she felt the first pains. She looked at her face in the bit of a broken mirror that she had above her kitchen dresser, and saw that she was pale. She went down to Adèle: "Give me your mistress's rouge," she said. And she put some on her cheeks. Then she went up again, and, refusing to listen to the voice of her suffering, finished cooking the dinner. It had to be served, and she served it. At dessert, she leaned against the furniture and grasped the backs of chairs as

she passed the plates, hiding her torture with the ghastly set smile of people whose entrails are writhing.

"How's this, are you sick?" said her mistress, looking sharply at her.

"Yes, mademoiselle, a little—it may be the charcoal or the hot kitchen."

"Go to bed—we don't need you any more, and you can clean up to-morrow."

She went down to Adèle once more.

"It's come," she said; "call a cab quick. It was Rue de la Huchette where you said your midwife lives, wasn't it? opposite a copper planer's? Haven't you a pen and paper?"

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And she sat down to write a line to her mistress. She told her that she was too ill to work, that she had gone to the hospital, but would not tell her where, because she would fatigue herself coming to see her; that she would come back within a week.

"There you are!" said Adèle, all out of breath, giving her the number of the cab.

"I can stay there," said Germinie; "not a word to mademoiselle. That's all. Swear you won't say a word to her!"

She was descending the stairs when she met Jupillon.

"Hallo!" said he, "where are you going? going out?"

"I am going to lie in—it took me during the day. There was a great dinner-party here—Oh! but it was hard work! Why do you come here? I told you never to come; I don't want you to!"

"Because—I'll tell you—because just now I absolutely must have forty francs. 'Pon my word, I must."

"Forty francs! Why I have just that for the midwife!"

"That's hard luck—look out! What do you want to do?" And he offered his arm to assist her. "*Cristi!* I'm going to have hard work to get 'em all the same."

He had opened the carriage door.

"Where do you want him to take you?"

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"To La Bourbe," said Germinie. And she slipped the forty francs into his hand.

"No, no," said Jupillon.

"Oh! nonsense—there or somewhere else! Besides, I have seven francs left."

The cab started away.

Jupillon stood for a moment motionless on the sidewalk, looking at the two napoleons in his hand. Then he ran after the cab, stopped it, and said to Germinie through the window:

"At least, I can go with you?"

"No, I am in too much pain, I'd rather be alone," she replied, writhing on the cushions of the cab.

After an endless half hour, the cab stopped on Rue de Port-Royal, in front of a black door surmounted by a violet lantern, which announced to such medical students as happened to pass through the street that there was that night, and at that moment, the curious and interesting spectacle of a difficult labor in progress at La Maternité.

The driver descended from his box and rang. The concierge, assisted by a female attendant, took Germinie's arms and led her up-stairs to one of the four beds in the *salle d'accouchement*. Once in bed, her pains became somewhat less excruciating. She looked about her, saw the other beds, all empty, and, at the end of the immense room, a huge country-house fireplace in which a bright fire was blazing, and in front of which, hanging upon iron bars, sheets and cloths and bandages were drying.

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Half an hour later, Germinie gave birth to a little girl. Her bed was moved into another room. She had been there several hours, lost in the blissful after-delivery weakness which follows the frightful agony of childbirth, happy and amazed to find that she was still alive, swimming in a sea of blessed relief and deeply penetrated with the joy of having created. Suddenly a loud cry: "I am dying!" caused her to turn her eyes in the direction from which it came: she saw one of her neighbors throw her arms around the neck of one of the assistant nurses, fall back almost instantly, move a moment under the clothes, then lie perfectly still. Almost at the same instant, another shriek arose from a bed on the other side, a horrible, piercing, terrified shriek, as of one who sees death approaching: it was a woman calling the young assistant, with desperate gestures; the assistant ran to her, leaned over her, and fell in a dead faint upon the floor.

Thereupon silence reigned once more; but between the two dead bodies and the half-dead assistant, whom the cold floor did not restore to consciousness for more than an hour, Germinie and the other women who were still alive in the room lay quiet, not daring even to ring the bell that hung beside each bed to call for help.

Thereafter La Maternité was the scene of one of those terrible puerperal epidemics which breathe death upon human fecundity, of one of those cases of atmospheric poisoning which empty, in a twinkling and by whole rows, the beds of women lately delivered, and which once caused the closing of La Clinique. They believed that it was a visitation of the plague, a plague that turns the face black in a few hours, carries all before it and snatches up the youngest and the strongest, a plague that issues from the cradle—the Black Plague of mothers! All about Germinie, at all hours, especially at night, women were dying such deaths as the milk-fever causes, deaths that seemed to violate all nature's laws, agonizing deaths, accompanied by wild shrieks and troubled by hallucinations and delirium, death agonies that compelled the application of the strait-waistcoat, death agonies that caused the victims to leap suddenly from their beds, carrying the clothes with them, and causing the whole room to shudder at the thought that they were dead bodies from the amphitheatre! Life departed as if it were torn from the body. The very disease assumed a ghastly shape and monstrous aspect. The bedclothes were lifted in the centre by the swelling caused by peritonitis, producing a vague, horrifying effect in the lamplight.

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For five days Germinie, lying swathed and bandaged in her bed, closing her eyes and ears as best she could, had the strength to combat all these horrors, and yielded to them only at long intervals. She was determined to live, and she clung to her strength by thinking of her child and of mademoiselle. But, on the sixth day, her energy was exhausted, her courage forsook her. A cold wave flowed into her heart. She said to herself that it was all over. The hand that death lays upon one's shoulder, the presentiment of death, was already touching her. She felt the first breath of the epidemic, the belief that she was its destined victim, and the impression that she was already half-possessed by it. Although unresigned, she succumbed. Her life, vanquished beforehand, hardly made an effort to struggle. At that crisis a head bent over her pillow, like a ray of light.

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It was the head of the youngest of the pupil-assistants, a fair head, with long golden locks and blue eyes so soft and sweet that the dying saw heaven opening its gates therein. When they saw her, delirious women said: "Look! the Blessed Virgin!"

"My child," she said to Germinie, "you must ask for your discharge at once. You must go away from here. You must dress warmly. You must wrap up well. As soon as you're at home and in bed, you must take a hot draught of something or other. You must try to take a sweat. Then, it won't do you any harm. But go away from here. It wouldn't be healthy for you here to-night," she said, glancing around at the beds. "Don't say that I told you to go: you would get me discharged if you should."

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## XXI

Germinie recovered in a few days. The joy and pride of having given birth to a tiny creature in whom her flesh was mingled with the flesh of the man she loved, the bliss of being a mother, saved her from the natural results of a confinement in which she did not receive proper care. She was restored to health and had an apparent pleasure in living that her mistress had never before seen her manifest.

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Every Sunday, no matter what the weather might be, she left the house about eleven o'clock; mademoiselle believed that she went to see a friend in the country, and was delighted that her maid derived so much benefit from these days passed in the open air. Germinie would capture Jupillon, who allowed himself to be taken in tow without too much resistance, and they would start for Pommeuse where the child was, and where a good breakfast ordered by the mother awaited them. Once in the carriage on the Mulhouse railway, Germinie would not speak or reply when spoken to. She would lean out of the window, and all her thoughts seemed to be upon what lay before her. She gazed, as if her longing were striving to outrun the steam. The train would hardly have stopped before she had leaped out, tossed her ticket to the ticket-taker, and started at a run on the Pommeuse road, leaving Jupillon behind. She drew nearer and nearer, she could see the house, she was there: yes, there was the child! She would pounce upon her, snatch her from the nurse's arms with jealous hands—a mother's hands!—hug her, strain her to her heart, kiss her, devour her with kisses and looks and smiles! She would gaze admiringly at her for an instant and then, distraught with joy, mad with love, would cover her with kisses to the tips of her little bare toes. Breakfast would be served. She would sit at the table with the child on her knees and eat nothing: she had kissed her so much that she had not yet looked at her, and she would begin to seek out points of resemblance to themselves in the little one. One feature was his, another hers:—"She has your nose and my eyes. Her hair will be like yours in time. It will curl! Look, those are your hands—she is all you." And for hours she would continue the inexhaustible and charming prattle of a woman who is determined to give a man his share of their daughter. Jupillon submitted to it all with reasonably good grace, thanks to divers three-sou cigars Germinie always produced from her pocket and gave to him one by one. Then he had found a means of diversion; the Morin flowed at the foot of the garden. Jupillon was a true Parisian: he loved to fish with a pole and line.

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And when summer came they stayed there all day, at the foot of the garden, on the bank of the

stream—Jupillon on a laundry board resting on two stakes, pole in hand, and Germinie sitting, with the child in her skirts, under the medlar tree that overhung the stream. On pleasant days, the sun poured down upon the broad sparkling current, from which beams of light arose as from a mirror. It was like a display of fireworks from the sky and the stream, amid which Germinie would hold the little girl upon her feet and let her trample upon her with her little bare pink legs, in her short baby dress, her skin shimmering in spots in the sunlight, her flesh mottled with sunbeams like the flesh of angels Germinie had seen in pictures. She had a divinely sweet sensation when the little one, with the active hands of children that cannot talk, touched her chin and mouth and cheeks, persisted in putting her fingers in her eyes, rested them playfully on the lids, and kept them moving over her whole face, tickling and tormenting her with the dear little digits that seem to grope in the dark for a mother's features: it was as if her child's life and warmth were wandering over her face. From time to time she would bestow half of her smile on Jupillon over the little one's head, and would call to him: "Do look at her!"

Then the child would fall asleep with the open mouth that laughs in sleep. Germinie would lean over her and listen to her breathing in repose. And, soothed by the peaceful respiration, she would gradually forget herself as she gazed dreamily at the poor abode of her happiness, the rustic garden, the apple-trees with their leaves covered with little yellow snails and the red-cheeked apples on the southern limbs, the poles, at whose feet the beanstalks, twisted and parched, were beginning to climb, the square of cabbages, the four sunflowers in the little circle in the centre of the path; and, close beside her, on the edge of the stream, the patches of grass covered with dog's mercury, the white heads of the nettles against the wall, the washerwomen's boxes, the bottles of lye and the bundle of straw scattered about by the antics of a puppy just out of the water. She gazed and dreamed. She thought of the past, having her future on her knees. With the grass and the trees and the river that were before her eyes, she reconstructed, in memory, the rustic garden of her rustic childhood. She saw again the two stones reaching down to the water, from which her mother, when she was a little child, used to wash her feet before putting her to bed in summertime.

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"Look you, Père Remalard," said Jupillon from his board, on one of the hottest days in August, to the peasant who was watching him,—*"do you know they won't bite at the red worm worth a sou?"*

"You must try the gentle," rejoined the peasant sententiously.

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"All right, I'll have my revenge with the gentle! Père Remalard, you must get some calf's lights Thursday. You hang 'em up in that tree, and Sunday we'll see."

On the Sunday Jupillon had miraculous success with his fishing, and Germinie heard the first syllable issue from her daughter's mouth.

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## XXII

On Wednesday morning, when she came downstairs, Germinie found a letter for herself. In that letter, written on the back of a laundry receipt, the Remalard woman informed her that her child had fallen sick almost immediately after her departure; that she had grown steadily worse; that she had consulted the doctor; that he said some insect had stung the child; that she had been to him a second time; that she did not know what more to do; that she had had pilgrimages made for her. The letter concluded thus: "If you could see how troubled I am for your little one—if you could see how good she is when she isn't suffering!"

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This letter produced upon Germinie the effect of a push from behind. She went out and instinctively walked toward the railroad that would take her to her little one. Her hair was uncombed and she was in her slippers, but she did not think of that. She must see her child, she must see her instantly. Then she would come back. She thought of mademoiselle's breakfast for a moment, then forgot it. Suddenly, half-way to the station, she saw a clock at a cab office and noticed the hour: she remembered that there was no train at that time. She retraced her steps, saying to herself that she would hurry the breakfast and then make some excuse to be given her liberty for the rest of the day. But when the breakfast was served she could find none: her mind was so full of her child that she could not invent a falsehood; her imagination was benumbed. And then, if she had spoken, if she had made the request, she would have betrayed herself; she could feel the words upon her lips: "I want to go and see my child!" At night she dared not make her escape; mademoiselle had been a little indisposed the night before; she was afraid that she might need her.

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The next morning when she entered mademoiselle's room with a fable she had invented during the night, all ready to ask for leave of absence, mademoiselle said to her, looking up from a letter that had just been sent up to her from the lodge: "Ah! my old friend De Belleuse wants you for the whole day to-day, to help her with her preserves. Come, give me my two eggs, post-haste, and off with you. Eh? what! doesn't that suit you? What's the matter?"

"With me? why nothing at all!" Germinie found strength to say.

All that endless day she passed standing over hot stewpans and sealing up jars, in the torture known only to those whom the chances of life detain at a distance from the sick bed of those dear to them. She suffered such heart-rending agony as those unhappy creatures suffer who cannot go where their anxiety calls them, and who, in the extremity of despair caused by separation and uncertainty, constantly imagine that death will come in their absence.

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As she received no letter Thursday evening and none Friday morning, she took courage. If the little one were growing worse the nurse would have written her. The little one was better: she imagined her saved, cured. Children are forever coming near dying, and they get well so quickly! And then hers was strong. She decided to wait, to be patient until Sunday, which was only forty-eight hours away, deceiving the remainder of her fears with the superstitions that say yes to hope, persuading herself that her daughter had "escaped," because the first person she met in the morning was a man, because she had seen a red horse in the street, because she had guessed that a certain person would turn into a certain street, because she had ascended a flight of stairs in so many strides.

On Saturday, in the morning, when she entered Mère Jupillon's shop, she found her weeping hot tears over a lump of butter that she was covering with a moist cloth.

"Ah! it's you, is it?" said Mère Jupillon. "That poor charcoal woman! See, I'm actually crying over her! She just went away from here. You don't know—they can't get their faces clean in their trade with anything but butter. And here's her love of a daughter—she's at death's door, you know, the dear child. That's the way it is with us! Ah! *mon Dieu*, yes!—Well, as I was saying, she said to her just now like this: 'Mamma, I want you to wash my face in butter right away—for the good God.'"

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And Mère Jupillon began to sob.

Germinie had fled. All that day she was unable to keep still. Again and again she went up to her chamber to prepare the few things she proposed to take to her little one the next day, to dress her cleanly, to make a little special toilet for her in honor of her recovery. As she went down in the evening to put Mademoiselle to bed, Adèle handed her a letter that she had found for her below.

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## XXIII

Mademoiselle had begun to undress, when Germinie entered her bedroom, walked a few steps, dropped upon a chair, and almost immediately, after two or three long-drawn, deep, heart-breaking sighs, mademoiselle saw her throw herself backward, wringing her hands, and at last roll from the chair to the floor. She tried to lift her up, but Germinie was shaken by such violent convulsions that the old woman was obliged to let the frantic body fall again upon the floor; for all the limbs, which were for a moment contracted and rigid, lashed out to right and left, at random, with the sharp report of the trigger of a rifle, and threw down whatever they came in contact with. At mademoiselle's shrieks on the landing, a maid ran to a doctor's office near by but did not find him; four other women employed in the house assisted mademoiselle to lift Germinie up and carry her to the bed in her mistress's room, on which they laid her after cutting her corset lacings.

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The terrible convulsions, the nervous contortions of the limbs, the snapping of the tendons had ceased; but her neck and her breast, which was uncovered where her dress was unbuttoned, moved up and down as if waves were rising and falling under the skin, and the rustling of the skirts showed that the movement extended to her feet. Her head thrown back, her face flushed, her eyes full of melancholy tenderness, of the patient agony we see in the eyes of the wounded, the great veins clearly marked under her chin, Germinie, breathing hard and paying no heed to questions, raised her hands to her neck and throat and clawed at them; she seemed to be trying to tear out the sensation of something rising and falling within her. In vain did they make her inhale ether and drink orange-flower water; the waves of grief that flowed through her body did not cease their action; and her face continued to wear the same expression of gentle melancholy and sentimental anxiety, which seemed to place the suffering of the heart above the suffering of the flesh in every feature. For a long time everything seemed to wound her senses and to produce a painful effect upon them—the bright light, the sound of voices, the odor of the things about her. At last, after an hour or more, a deluge of tears suddenly poured from her eyes and put an end to the terrible crisis. After that there was nothing more than an occasional convulsive shudder in the overburdened body, soon quieted by weariness and by general prostration. It was possible to carry Germinie to her own room.

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The letter Adèle handed her contained the news of her daughter's death.

As a result of this crisis, Germinie fell into a state of dumb, brutish sorrow. For months she was insensible to everything; for months, completely possessed and absorbed by the thought of the little creature that was no more, she carried her child's death in her entrails as she had carried her life. Every evening, when she went up to her chamber, she took the poor darling's little cap and dress from the trunk at the foot of her bed. She would gaze at them and touch them; she would lay them out on the bed; she would sit for hours weeping over them, kissing them, talking to them, saying the things that a mother's bitter sorrow is wont to say to a little daughter's ghost. [175]

While weeping for her daughter the unhappy creature wept for herself as well. A voice whispered to her that she was saved had the child lived; that to have that child to love was her Providence; that all that she dreaded in herself would be expended upon that dear head and be sanctified there—her affections, her unreasoning impulses, her ardor, all the passions of her nature. It seemed to her that she had felt her mother's heart soothing and purifying her woman's heart. In her daughter she saw a sort of celestial vision that would redeem her and make her whole, a little angel of deliverance as it were, issuing from her errors to fight for her and rescue her from the evil influences which pursued her and by which she sometimes thought that she was possessed. [176]

When she began to recover from the first prostration of despair, when, as the consciousness of life and the perception of objects returned to her, she looked about her with eyes that saw, she was aroused from her grief by a more poignant cause of bitterness of spirit.

Madame Jupillon, who had become too stout and too heavy to do what it was necessary for her to do at the creamery, notwithstanding all the assistance rendered by Germinie, had sent to her province for a niece of hers. She was the embodiment of the blooming youth of the country, a woman in whom there was still something of the child, active and vivacious, with black eyes full of sunlight, lips as round and red as cherries, the summer heat of her province in her complexion, the warmth of perfect health in her blood. Impulsive and ingenuous as she was, the girl had, at first, drawn near to her cousin, simply and naturally, obeying the law of attraction that draws the young toward the young. She had met his friendly advances with the immodesty of innocence, artless effrontery, the liberties taught by life in the country, the happy folly of a nature abounding in high spirits, and with all sorts of ignorant hardihood, unblushing ingenuousness and rustic coquetry, against which her cousin's vanity was without means of defence. The child's presence deprived Germinie of all hope of repose. Mere girl as she was, she wounded her every minute in the day by her presence, her touch, her caresses, everything in her amorous body that spoke of love. Her preoccupation with Jupillon, the work that kept them constantly together, the provincial wonderment that she constantly exhibited, the half-confidences she allowed to come to her lips when the young man had gone, her gayety, her jests, her healthy good-humor—everything helped to exasperate Germinie and to arouse a sullen wrath within her; everything wounded that jealous heart, so jealous that the very animals caused it a bitter pang by seeming to love someone whom it loved. [177]

She dared not speak to Mère Jupillon and denounce the little one to her, for fear of betraying herself; but whenever she found herself alone with Jupillon she vented her feelings in recriminations, complaints and quarrels. She would remind him of an incident, a word, something he had done or said, some answer he had made, a trifle forgotten by him but still bleeding in her heart.

"Are you mad?" Jupillon would say to her; "a slip of a girl!"—"A slip of a girl, eh? nonsense!—when she has such eyes that all the men stare at her in the street! I went out with her the other day—I was ashamed—I don't know how she did it, but we were followed by a gentleman all the time."—"Well, what if you were? She's a pretty girl, you know!"—"Pretty! pretty!" And at that word Germinie would hurl herself, figuratively speaking, at the girl's face, and claw it to pieces with frantic words. [178]

Often she would end by saying to Jupillon: "Look here! you love her!"—"Well! what then?" he would retort, highly entertained by these disputes, by the opportunity to watch the antics of this fierce wrath which he fanned with pretended sulkiness, and by the excitement of trifling with the woman, whom he saw to be half insane under his sarcasms and his indifference, stumbling wildly about and running her head against stone walls in the first paroxysms of madness.

As a result of these scenes, repeated almost every day, a revolution took place in that excitable, extreme character, which knew no middle course, in that heart in which the most violent passions were constantly clashing. Love, in which poison had long been at work, became decomposed and changed to hate. Germinie began to detest her lover and to seek out every possible pretext for hating him more. And her thoughts recurred to her daughter, to the loss of her child, to the cause of her death, and she persuaded herself that he had killed her. She looked upon him as an assassin. She conceived a horror of him, she avoided him, fled from him as from the evil genius of her life, with the terror that one has of a person who is one's Bane!

## XXV

One morning, after a night passed by her in turning over and over in her mind all her despairing, hate-ridden thoughts, Germinie went to the creamery for her four sous' worth of milk and found in the back-shop three or four maids from the neighborhood engaged in "taking an eye-opener." They were seated at a table, gossiping and sipping liqueurs. [179]

"Aha!" said Adèle, striking the table with her glass; "you here already, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil?"

"What's this?" said Germinie, taking Adèle's glass; "I'd like some myself."

"Are you so thirsty as all that this morning? Brandy and absinthe, that's all!—my soldier boy's *tap*, you know,—he never drank anything else. It's a little stiff, eh?"

"Ah! yes," said Germinie, contracting her lips and winking like a child who is given a glass of liqueur with the dessert at a grand dinner-party.

"It's good, all the same." Her spirits rose. "Madame Jupillon, let's have the bottle—I'll pay." [180]

And she tossed money on the table. After the third glass, she cried: "I am *tight*!" And she roared with laughter.

Mademoiselle de Varandeuil had gone out that morning to collect her half-yearly income. When she returned at eleven o'clock, she rang once, twice! no one came. "Ah!" she said to herself, "she must have gone down." She opened the door with her key, went to her bedroom and looked in: the mattress and bedclothes lay in a heap on two chairs, and Germinie was stretched out across the straw under-mattress, sleeping heavily, like a log, in the utterly relaxed condition following a sudden attack of lethargy.

At the noise made by mademoiselle, Germinie sprang to her feet and passed her hand over her eyes.—"Yes?" she said, as if some one had called her; her eyes were wandering.

"What's happened?" said Mademoiselle de Varandeuil in alarm; "did you fall? Is anything the matter with you?"

"With me? no," Germinie replied; "I fell asleep. What time is it? Nothing's the matter. Ah! what a fool!"

And she began to shake the mattress, turning her back to her mistress to hide the flush of intoxication on her face.

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## XXVI

One Sunday morning Jupillon was dressing in the room Germinie had furnished for him. His mother was sitting by, gazing at him with the wondering pride expressed in the eyes of mothers among the common people in presence of a son who dresses like a *monsieur*. [181]

"You're dressed up like the young man on the first floor!" she said. "I should think it was his coat. I don't mean to say fine things don't look well on you, too—"

Jupillon, intent upon tying his cravat, made no reply.

"You'll play the deuce with the poor girls to-day!" continued Mère Jupillon, giving to her voice an accent of insinuating sweetness: "Look you, bibi, let me tell you this, you great bad boy: if a young woman goes wrong, so much the worse for her! that's their look-out. You're a man, aren't you? you've got the age and the figure and everything. I can't always keep you in leading-strings. So, I said to myself, as well one as another. That one will do. And I fixed her so that she wouldn't see anything. Yes, Germinie would do, as you seemed to like her. That prevented you from wasting your money on bad women—and then I didn't see anything out of the way in the girl till now. But now it won't do at all. They're telling stories in the quarter—a heap of horrible things about us. A pack of vipers! We're above all that, I know. When one has been an honest woman all her life, thank God! But you never know what will happen—mademoiselle would only have to put the end of her nose into her maid's affairs. Why there's the law—the bare idea gives me a turn. What do you say to that, bibi, eh?" [182]

"*Dame*, mamma,—whatever you please."

"Ah! I knew you loved your dear darling mamma!" exclaimed the monstrous creature embracing him. "Well! invite her to dinner to-night. You can get up two bottles of our Lunel—at two francs—the heady kind. And be sure she comes. Make eyes at her, so that she'll think to-day's the great day. Put on your fine gloves: they'll make you look more dignified."

Germinie arrived at seven o'clock, happy and bright and hopeful, her head filled with blissful



dreams by the mysterious air with which Jupillon delivered his mother's invitation. They dined and drank and made merry. Mère Jupillon began to cast glances expressive of deep emotion, drowned in tears, upon the couple sitting opposite her. When the coffee was served, she said, as if for the purpose of being left alone with Germinie: "Bibi, you know you have an errand to do this evening."

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Jupillon went out. Madame Jupillon, as she sipped her coffee, turned to Germinie the face of a mother seeking to learn her daughter's secret, and, in her indulgence, forgiving her in advance of her confession. For a moment the two women sat thus, silent, one waiting for the other to speak, the other with the cry of her heart on her lips. Suddenly Germinie rushed from her chair into the stout woman's arms.

"If you knew, Madame Jupillon!"

She talked and wept and embraced her all at once. "Oh! you won't be angry with me! Well! yes, I love him—I've had a child by him. It's true, I love him. Three years ago——"

At every word Madame Jupillon's face became sterner and more icy. She coldly pushed Germinie away, and in her most doleful voice, with an accent of lamentation and hopeless desolation, she began, like a person who is suffocating: "Oh! my God—you!—tell me such things as that!—me!—his mother!—to my face! My God, must it be? My son—a child—an innocent child! You've had the face to ruin him for me! And now you tell me that you did it! No, it ain't possible, my God! And I had such confidence. There's nothing worth living for. There's no trusting anybody in this world! All the same, mademoiselle, I wouldn't ever 'a' believed it of you. *Dame!* such things give me a turn. Ah! this upsets me completely. I know myself, and I'm quite likely to be sick after this——"

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"Madame Jupillon! Madame Jupillon!" Germinie murmured in an imploring tone, half dead with shame and grief on the chair on which she had fallen. "I beg you to forgive me. It was stronger than I was. And then I thought—I believed——"

"You believed! Oh! my God; you believed! What did you believe? That you'd be my son's wife, eh? Ah! Lord God! is it possible, my poor child?"

And adopting a more and more plaintive and lamentable tone as the words she hurled at Germinie cut deeper and deeper, Mère Jupillon continued: "But, my poor girl, you must have a reason, let's hear it. What did I always tell you? That it would be all right if you'd been born ten years earlier. Let's see, your date was 1820, you told me, and now it's '49. You're getting on toward thirty, you see, my dear child. I say! it makes me feel bad to say that to you—I'd so much rather not hurt you. But a body only has to look at you, my poor young lady. What can I do? It's your age—your hair—I can lay my finger in the place where you part it."

"But," said Germinie, in whose heart black wrath was beginning to rumble, "what about what your son owes me? My money? The money I took out of the savings bank, the money I borrowed for him, the money I——"

"Money? he owes you money? Oh! yes, what you lent him to begin business with. Well! what about it? Do you think we're thieves? Does anyone want to cheat you out of your old money, although there wasn't any paper—I know it because the other day—it just occurs to me—that honest man of a child of mine wanted to write it down for fear he might die. But the next minute we're pickpockets, as glib as you please! Oh! my God, it's hardly worth while living in such times as these! Ah! I'm well paid for getting attached to you! But I see through it now. You're a politician, you are! You wanted to pay yourself with my son, for his whole life! Excuse me! No, thank you! It costs less to give back your money! A café waiter's leavings! my poor dear boy! God preserve him from it!"

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Germinie had snatched her shawl and hat from the hook and was out of doors.

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## XXVII

Mademoiselle was sitting in her large armchair at the corner of the fireplace, where a few live embers were still sleeping under the ashes. Her black cap was pulled down over her wrinkled forehead almost to her eyes. Her black dress, cut in the shape of a child's frock, was draped in scanty folds about her scanty body, showing the location of every bone, and fell straight from her knees to the floor. She wore a small black shawl crossed on her breast and tied behind her back, as they are worn by little girls. Her half-open hands were resting on her hips, with the palms turned outward—thin, old woman's hands, awkward and stiff, and swollen with gout at the knuckles and finger joints. Sitting in the huddled, crouching posture that compels old people to raise their heads to look at you and speak to you, she seemed to be buried in all that mass of black, whence nothing emerged but her face, to which preponderance of bile had imparted the yellow hue of old ivory, and the flashing glance of her brown eyes. One who saw her thus, her bright, sparkling eyes, the meagre body, the garb of poverty and the noble air with which she bore all the burdens of age, might well have fancied that he was looking at a fairy on the stage of the *Petits-Ménages*.

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Germinie was by her side. The old lady began:

"The list is still under the door, eh, Germinie?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Do you know, my girl," Mademoiselle de Varandeuil resumed, after a pause, "do you know that when one is born in one of the finest houses on Rue Royale—when one has been in a fair way to own the Grand and Petit-Charolais—when one has almost had the Château of Clichy-la-Garenne for a country house—and when it took two servants to carry the silver platter on which the joint was served at your grandmother's—do you know that it takes no small amount of philosophy"—and mademoiselle with difficulty raised a hand to her shoulder—"to see yourself end like this, in this devilish nest of rheumatism, where, in spite of all the list in the world, you can't keep out of draughts.—That's it, stir up the fire a little."

She put out her feet toward Germinie, who was kneeling in front of the fireplace, and laughingly placed them under her nose: "Do you know that that takes no small amount of philosophy—to wear stockings out at heel! Simpleton! I'm not scolding you; I know well enough that you can't do everything. So you might as well have a woman come to do the mending. That's not very much to do. Why don't you speak to that little girl that came here last year? She had a face that I remember."

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"Oh! she's black as a mole, mademoiselle."

"Bah! I knew it. In the first place you never think well of anybody. That isn't true, you say? Why, wasn't she a niece of Mère Jupillon's? We might take her for one or two days a week."

"That hussy shall never set foot here."

"Nonsense, more fables! You're a most astonishing creature, to adore people and then not want to see them again. What has she done to you?"

"She's a lost creature, I tell you!"

"Bah! what does my linen care for that?"

"But, mademoiselle."

"All right! find me someone else then. I don't care about her particularly. But find me someone."

"Oh! the women that come in like that don't do any work. I'll mend your clothes. You don't need any one."

"You!—Oh! if we have to rely on your needle!" said mademoiselle jocosely; "and then, will Mère Jupillon ever give you the time?"

"Madame Jupillon? Oh! for all the dust I shall ever leave in her house again!"

"Hoity-toity! What's that? She too! so she's on your black books, is she? Oho! hurry up and make another acquaintance, or else, *bon Dieu de Dieu!* we shall have some bad days here!"

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## XXVIII

The winter of that year should certainly have assured Mademoiselle de Varandeuil a share of paradise hereafter. She had to undergo the reflex action of her maid's chagrin, her nervous irritability, the vengeance of her embittered, contradictory moods, which the approaching spring would ere long infect with that species of malignant madness which the critical season, the travail of nature and the restless, disturbing fructification of the summer cause in unhealthy sensitive organizations.

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Germinie was forever wiping eyes which no longer wept, but which had once wept copiously. She was always ready with an everlasting: "Nothing's the matter, mademoiselle!" uttered in the tone that covers a secret. She adopted dumb, despairing, funereal attitudes, the airs by which a woman's body diffuses melancholy and makes her very shadow a bore. With her face, her glance, her mouth, the folds of her dress, her presence, the noise she made at work in the adjoining room, even with her silence, she enveloped mademoiselle in the despair that exhaled from her person. At the slightest word she would bristle up. Mademoiselle could not address an observation to her, ask her the most trivial question, give her an order or express a wish: everything was taken by her as a reproach. And thereupon she would act like a madwoman. She would wipe her eyes and grumble: "Oh! I am very unfortunate! I can see that mademoiselle doesn't care for me any more!" Her spite against various people vented itself in sublimely ingenious complaints. "That woman always comes when it rains!" she would say, upon discovering a bit of mud that Madame de Belleuse had left on the carpet. During the week following New Year's Day, the week when all of Mademoiselle de Varandeuil's remaining relatives and friends, rich and poor alike, climbed the five flights and waited on the landing at her

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door for their turns to occupy the six chairs in her bedroom, Germinie redoubled her ill-humor, her impertinent remarks, her sulky muttering. Inventing grievances against her mistress, she punished her constantly by a persistent silence, which it was impossible to break. Then there would be periods of frenzied industry. Mademoiselle would hear through the partitions on all sides furious manipulation of the broom and duster, the sharp, vicious scrubbing and slamming of the servant whom one imagines muttering to herself as she maltreats the furniture: "Oh! yes, I'll do your work for you!"

Old people are patient with servants who have been long in their service. Long habit, the weakening will-power, the horror of change, the dread of new faces,—everything disposes them to weakness and cowardly concessions. Notwithstanding her quick temper, her promptness to lose her head, to fly into a rage, to breathe fire and flame, mademoiselle said nothing. She acted as if she saw nothing. She pretended to be reading when Germinie entered the room. She waited, curled up in her easy-chair, until the maid's ill-humor had blown over or burst. She bent her back before the storm; she said no word, had no thought of bitterness against her. She simply pitied her for causing herself so much suffering.

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In truth Germinie was not Mademoiselle de Varandeuil's maid; she was Devotion, waiting to close her eyes. The solitary old woman, overlooked by death, alone at the end of her life, dragging her affections from grave to grave, had found her last friend in her servant. She had rested her heart upon her as upon an adopted daughter, and she was especially unhappy because she was powerless to comfort her. Moreover, at intervals, Germinie returned to her from the depths of her brooding melancholy and her savage humor, and threw herself on her knees before her kind heart. Suddenly, at a ray of sunlight, a beggar's song, or any one of the nothings that float in the air and expand the heart, she would burst into tears and demonstrations of affection; her heart would overflow with burning emotions, she would seem to feel a pleasure in embracing her mistress, as if the joy of living again had effaced everything. At other times some trifling ailment of mademoiselle's would bring about the change; a smile would come to the old servant's face and gentleness to her hands. Sometimes, at such moments, mademoiselle would say: "Come, my girl—something's the matter. Tell me what it is." And Germinie would reply: "No, mademoiselle, it's the weather."—"The weather!" mademoiselle would repeat with a doubtful air, "the weather!"

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## XXIX

One evening in March the Jupillons, mother and son, were talking together by the stove in their back-shop.

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Jupillon had been drafted. The money his mother had put aside to purchase his release had been used up as a result of six months of poor business and by credits given to certain *lorettes* on the street, who had left the key under their door-mat one fine morning. He had not prospered, in a business way, himself, and his stock in trade had been taken on execution. He had been that day to ask a former employer to advance him the money to purchase a substitute. But the old perfumer had not forgiven him for leaving him and setting up for himself, and he refused point-blank.

Mère Jupillon, in despair, was complaining tearfully. She repeated the number drawn by her son: "Twenty-two! twenty-two!" And she said: "And yet I sewed a black spider into your *paletot* with his web; a *velvety* fellow he was! Oh, dear! I ought to have done as they told me and made you wear the cap you were baptized in. Ah! the good God ain't fair! There's the fruit woman's son drew a lucky number! That comes of being honest! And those two sluts at number eighteen must go and hook it with my money! I might have known they meant something by the way they shook hands. They did me out of more than seven hundred francs, did you know it? And the black creature opposite—and that infernal girl as had the face to eat pots of strawberries at twenty francs! they might as well have taken me too, the hussies! But you haven't gone yet all the same. I'd rather sell the creamery—I'll go out to work again, do cooking or housekeeping,—anything! Why, I'd draw money from a stone for you!"

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Jupillon smoked and let his mother do the talking. When she had finished, he said: "That'll do for talk, mamma!—all that's nothing but words. You'll spoil your digestion and it ain't worth while. You needn't sell anything—you needn't strain yourself at all—I'll buy my substitute and it sha'n't cost you a sou;—do you want to bet on it?"

"Jesus!" ejaculated Madame Jupillon.

"I have an idea."

After a pause, Jupillon continued: "I didn't want to make trouble with you on account of Germinie—you know, at the time the stories about us were going round; you thought it was time for me to break with her—that she would be in our way—and you kicked her out of the house, stiff. That wasn't my idea—I didn't think she was so bad as all that for the family butter. But, however, you thought best to do it. And perhaps, after all, you did the best thing; instead of cooling her off, you warmed her up for me—yes, warmed her up—I've met her once or twice—and she's changed, I

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tell you. Gad! how she's drying up!"

"But you know very well she hasn't got a sou."

"I don't say she has, of her own. But what's that got to do with it? She'll find it somewhere. She's good for twenty-three hundred shiners yet!"

"But suppose you get mixed up in it?"

"Oh! she won't steal 'em——"

"The deuce she won't!"

"Well! if she does, it won't be from anyone but her mistress. Do you suppose her mademoiselle would have her pinched for that? She'll turn her off, and that'll be the end of it. We'll advise her to try the air in another quarter—off she goes!—and we sha'n't see her again. But it would be too stupid for her to steal. She'll arrange it somehow, she'll hunt round and turn things over. I don't know how, not I! but that's her affair, you understand. This is the time for her to show her talents. By the way, perhaps you don't know, they say her old woman's sick. If the dear lady should happen to step out and leave her all the stuff, as the story goes in the quarter—why, it wouldn't be a bad thing to have played see-saw with her, eh, mamma? We must put on gloves, you see, mamma, when we're dealing with people who may have four or five thousand a year come tumbling into their aprons."

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"Oh! my God! what are you talking about? But after the way I treated her—oh! no, she'll never come back here."

"Well! I tell you I'll bring her back—and to-night at the latest," said Jupillon, rising, and rolling a cigarette between his fingers. "No excuses, you know," he said to his mother, "they won't do any good—and be cold to her. Act as if you received her only on my account, because you are weak. No one knows what may happen, we must always keep an anchor to windward."

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### XXX

Jupillon was walking back and forth on the sidewalk in front of Germinie's house when she came out.

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"Good-evening, Germinie," he said, behind her.

She turned as if she had been struck, and, without answering his greeting, instinctively moved on a few steps as if to fly from him.

"Germinie!"

Jupillon said nothing more than that; he did not follow her, he did not move. She came back to him like a trained beast when his rope is taken off.

"What is it?" said she. "Do you want more money? or do you want to tell me some of your mother's foolish remarks?"

"No, but I am going away," said Jupillon, with a serious face. "I am drafted—and I am going away."

"You are going away?" said she. She seemed as if her mind was not awake.

"Look here, Germinie," Jupillon continued. "I have made you unhappy. I haven't been very kind to you, I know. My cousin's been a little to blame. What do you want?"

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"You're going away?" rejoined Germinie, taking his arm. "Don't lie to me—are you going away?"

"I tell you, yes—and it's true. I'm only waiting for marching orders. You have to pay more than two thousand francs for a substitute this year. They say there's going to be a war: however, there's a chance."

As he spoke he was leading Germinie down the street.

"Where are you taking me?" said she.

"To mother's, of course—so that you two can make up and put an end to all this nonsense."

"After what she said to me? Never!"

And Germinie pushed Jupillon's arm away.

"Well, if that's the way it is, good-bye."

And Jupillon raised his cap.

"Shall I write to you from the regiment?"

Germinie was silent, hesitating, for a moment. Then she said, abruptly: "Come on!" and, motioning to Jupillon to walk beside her, she turned back up the street.

And so they walked along, side by side, without a word. They reached a paved road that stretched out as far as the eye could see, between two lines of lanterns, between two rows of gnarled trees that held aloft handfuls of bare branches and cast their slender, motionless shadows on high blank walls. There, in the keen air, chilled by the evaporation of the snow, they walked on and on for a long time, burying themselves in the vague, infinite, unfamiliar depths of a street that follows the same wall, the same trees, the same lanterns, and leads on to the same darkness beyond. The damp, heavy air that they breathed smelt of sugar and tallow and carrion. From time to time a vivid flash passed before their eyes: it was the lantern of a butcher's cart that shone upon slaughtered cattle and huge pieces of bleeding meat thrown upon the back of a white horse; the light upon the flesh, amid the darkness, resembled a purple conflagration, a furnace of blood.

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"Well! have you reflected?" said Jupillon. "This little Avenue Trudaine isn't a very cheerful place, do you know?"

"Come on," Germinie replied.

And, without another word, she set out again at the same fierce, jerky gait, agitated by all the tumult raging in her heart. Her thoughts were expressed in her gestures. Her feet went astray, madness attacked her hands. At times her shadow, seen from behind, reminded one of a woman from La Salpêtrière. Two or three passers-by stopped for a moment and looked after her; then, remembering that they were in Paris, passed on.

Suddenly she stopped, and with the gesture of one who has made a desperate resolution, she said: "Ah! my God! another pin in the cushion!—Let us go!"

And she took Jupillon's arm.

"Oh! I know very well," said Jupillon, when they were near the creamery, "my mother wasn't fair to you. You see, the woman has been too virtuous all her life. She don't know, she don't understand. And then, d'ye see, I'll tell you the whole secret: she loves me so much she's jealous of any woman who loves me. So go in, do!"

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And he pushed her into the arms of Madame Jupillon, who kissed her, mumbled a few words of regret, and made haste to weep in order to relieve her own embarrassment and make the scene more affecting.

Throughout the evening Germinie sat with her eyes fixed on Jupillon, almost terrifying him with her expression.

"Come, come," he said, as he walked home with her, "don't be so down in the mouth as all this. We must have a little philosophy in this world. Well! here I am a soldier—that's all! To be sure they don't all come back. But then—look here! I propose that we enjoy ourselves for the fortnight that's left, because it will be so much gained—and if I don't come back—Well, at all events, I shall leave you a pleasant memory of me."

Germinie made no reply.

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## XXXI

For a whole week Germinie did not set foot in the shop again.

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The Jupillons, when she did not return, began to despair. At last, one evening about half past ten, she pushed the door open, entered the shop without a word of greeting, walked up to the little table where the mother and son were sitting half asleep, and placed upon it, beneath her hand which was closed like a claw, an old piece of cloth that gave forth a ringing sound.

"There it is!" said she.

And, letting go the corners of the cloth, she emptied its contents on the table: forth came greasy bank-notes, patched on the back, fastened together with pins, old tarnished louis d'or, black hundred-sou pieces, forty-sou pieces, ten-sou pieces, the money of the poor, the money of toil, money from Christmas-boxes, money soiled by dirty hands, worn out in leather purses, rubbed smooth in the cash drawer filled with sous—money with a flavor of perspiration.

For a moment she gazed at the display as if to assure her own eyes; then she said to Madame Jupillon in a sad voice, the voice of her sacrifice:

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"There it is—There's the two thousand three hundred francs for him to buy a substitute."

"Oh! my dear Germinie!" said the stout woman, almost suffocated by emotion; and she threw herself upon Germinie's neck, who submitted to be embraced. "Oh! you must take something with us—a cup of coffee—"

"No, thank you," said Germinie; "I am done up. *Dame!* I've had to fly around, you know, to get them. I'm going to bed now. Some other time."

And she went away.

She had had to "fly around," as she said, to scrape together such a sum, to accomplish that impossibility: to raise two thousand three hundred francs—two thousand three hundred francs, of which she had not the first five! She had collected them, begged them, extorted them piece by piece, almost sou by sou. She had picked them up, scraped them together here and there, from this one and from that one, by loans of two hundred, one hundred, fifty, twenty francs, or whatever sum anyone would lend. She had borrowed from her concierge, her grocer, her fruit woman, her poulterer, her laundress; she had borrowed from all the dealers in the quarter, and from the dealers in the quarters where she had previously lived with mademoiselle. She had made up the amount with money drawn from every source, even from her poor miserable water-carrier. She had gone a-begging everywhere, importuned humbly, prayed, implored, invented fables, swallowed the shame of lying and of seeing that she was not believed. The humiliation of confessing that she had no money laid by, as was supposed, and as, through pride, she had encouraged people to suppose, the sympathy of people she despised, the refusals, the alms, she had undergone everything, endured what she would not have endured to procure bread for herself, and not once only, with a single person, but with thirty, forty, all those who had given her something or from whom she had hoped for something.

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## Chapter XXXI

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*At last, one evening about half past ten, she pushed the door open, entered the shop without a word of greeting, walked up to the little table where the mother and son were sitting half asleep, and placed upon it, beneath her hand which was closed like a claw, an old piece of cloth that gave forth a ringing sound.*

*"There it is!" said she.*



At last she had succeeded in collecting the money; but it was her master and had possession of her forever. Her life thenceforth belonged to the obligations she had entered into with all these people, to the service her dealers had rendered her, knowing very well what they were doing. She belonged to her debt, to the sum she would have to pay every year. She knew it; she knew that all her wages would go in that way; that with the rates of interest, which she had left entirely at the discretion of her creditors, and the written obligations demanded by them, mademoiselle's three hundred francs would hardly suffice to pay the interest on the twenty-three hundred she had borrowed. She knew that she was in debt, that she should be in debt forever, that she was doomed forever to privation and embarrassment, to the strictest economy in her manner of living and her dress. She had hardly any more illusions as to the Jupillons than as to her own future. She had a presentiment that her money was lost so far as they were concerned. She had not even based any hopes on the possibility that this sacrifice would touch the young man. She had acted on the impulse of the moment. If she had been told to die to prevent his going, she would have died. The idea of seeing him a soldier, the idea of the battlefield, the cannon, the wounded, in presence of which a woman shuts her eyes in terror, had led her to do something more than die; to sell her life for that man, to consign herself to everlasting poverty.

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## XXXII

Disorders of the nervous system frequently result in disarranging the natural sequence of human joys and sorrows, in destroying their proportion and equilibrium, and in carrying them to the greatest possible excess. It seems that, under the influence of this disease of sensitiveness, the sharpened, refined, spiritualized sensations exceed their natural measure and limits, reach a point beyond themselves, and, as it were, make the enjoyment and suffering of the individual infinite. So the infrequent joys that Germinie still knew were insane joys, from which she emerged drunk, and with the physical symptoms of drunkenness.—"Why, my girl," mademoiselle sometimes could not forbear saying, "anyone would think you were tipsy."—"Mademoiselle makes you pay dear for a little amusement once in a while!" Germinie would reply. And when she relapsed into her sorrowful, disappointed, restless condition, her desolation was more intense, more frantic and delirious than her gayety.

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The moment had arrived when the terrible truth, which she had suspected before, at last became clear to her. She saw that she had failed to lay hold of Jupillon by the devotion her love had manifested, by stripping herself of all she possessed, by all the pecuniary sacrifices which involved her life in the toils and embarrassment of a debt it was impossible for her to pay. She

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felt that he gave her his love grudgingly, a love to which he imparted all the humiliation of an act of charity. When she told him that she was again *enceinte*, the man whom she was about to make a father once more said to her: "Well, women like you are amusing creatures! always full or just empty!" She conceived the ideas, the suspicions that come to genuine love when it is betrayed, the presentiments of the heart that tell women they are no longer in undisputed possession of their lovers, and that there is another because there is likely to be another.

She complained no more, she wept no more, she indulged no more in recrimination. She abandoned the struggle with this man, armed with indifference, who, with the cold-blooded sarcasm of the vulgar cad, was so expert in insulting her passion, her unreasoning impulses, her wild outbursts of affection. And so, in agonizing resignation, she set herself the task of waiting—for what? She did not know: perhaps until he would have no more of her.

Heart-broken and silent, she kept watch upon Jupillon; she followed him about and never lost sight of him; she tried to make him speak by interjecting remarks in his fits of distraction. She hovered about him, but she saw nothing wrong, she could lay hold of nothing, detect nothing; and yet she was convinced that there was something and that what she feared was true; she felt a woman's presence in the air. [209]

One morning, as she went down the street rather earlier than usual, she spied him a few yards before her on the sidewalk. He was dressed up, and constantly looked himself over as he walked along. From time to time he raised his trouser leg a little to see the polish on his boots. She followed him. He went straight on without looking back. She was not far behind him when he reached Place Bréda. There was a woman walking on the square beside the cabstand. Germinie could see nothing of her but her back. Jupillon went up to her and she turned: it was his cousin. They began to walk side by side, up and down the square; then they started through Rue Bréda toward Rue de Navarin. There the girl took Jupillon's arm; she did not lean on it at first, but little by little, as they proceeded, she leaned toward him, with the movement of a branch when it is bent, and drew closer and closer. They walked slowly, so slowly that at times Germinie was obliged to stop in order to keep at a safe distance from them. They ascended Rue des Martyrs, passed through Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne, and went down Rue Montholon. Jupillon was talking earnestly; the cousin said nothing, but listened to Jupillon, and walked on with the absent-minded air of a woman smelling of a bouquet, now and then darting a little vague glance on one side or the other—the glance of a frightened child. [210]

When they reached Rue Lamartine, opposite the Passage des Deux-Sœurs, they turned. Germinie had barely time to throw herself in at a hall door. They passed without seeing her. The little one was very serious and walked slowly. Jupillon was talking into her ear. They stopped for a moment; Jupillon gesticulated earnestly; the girl stared fixedly at the pavement. Germinie thought they were about to part; but they resumed their walk together and made four or five turns, passing back and forth by the end of the passage. At last they turned in; Germinie darted from her hiding-place and rushed after them. From the gateway of the passage she saw the skirt of a dress disappear through the door of a small furnished lodging-house, beside a wine shop. She ran to the door, looked into the hall and could see nothing. Thereupon all her blood rushed to her head, with one thought, a single thought that her lips kept repeating like an idiot: "Vitriol! vitriol! vitriol!" And as her thoughts were instantly transformed into the act of which she thought, and her delirium transported her abruptly to the crime she contemplated, she said to herself that she would go up the stairs with the bottle well hidden under her shawl; she would knock at the door very loud and continuously. He would come at last and would open the door a crack. She would say nothing to him, not her name even. She would go in without heeding him. She was strong enough to kill him! and she would go to the bed, to *her*! She would take her by the arm and say: "Yes it's me—this is for your life!" And over her face, her throat, her skin, over everything about her that was youthful and attractive and that invited love, Germinie watched the vitriol sear and seam and burn and hiss, transforming her into a horrible object that filled Germinie's heart to overflowing with joy! The bottle was empty, and she laughed! And, in her frightful dream, her body also dreaming, her feet began to move. She walked unconsciously down the passage, into the street and to a grocer's shop. Ten minutes she stood motionless at the counter, with eyes that did not see, the vacant, wandering eyes of one who has murder in his heart. [211]

"Well, well, what do you want?" said the grocer's wife testily, almost frightened by the bearing of this woman who did not stir.

"What do I want?" said Germinie. She was so filled, so possessed with the thought of what she wanted that she believed she had asked for vitriol. "What do I want?"—She passed her hand across her forehead.—"Ah! I don't know now."

And she left the shop, stumbling as she went. [212]

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### XXXIII

In the torment of the life she was leading, in which she suffered the horrors of death and of [213]



unsatisfied passion, Germinie, seeking to deaden her ghastly thoughts, had remembered the glass she had taken from Adèle's hand one morning, which gave her a whole day of oblivion. From that day she had taken to drink. She had begun with the little morning draughts to which the maids of kept women are addicted. She had drunk with this one and with that one. She had drunk with men who came to breakfast at the creamery; she had drunk with Adèle, who drank like a man and who took a base delight in seeing this virtuous woman's maid descend as low as herself.

At first she had needed excitement, company, the clinking of glasses, the encouragement of speech, the inspiration of the challenge, in order to arouse the desire to drink; but she had soon reached the point where she drank alone. Then it was that she began to carry home a half-filled glass under her apron and hide it in a corner of the kitchen; that she had taken to drinking those mixtures of white wine and brandy, of which she would take draught upon draught until she had found that for which she thirsted—sleep. For what she craved was not the fevered brain, the happy confusion, the living folly, the delirious, waking dream of drunkenness; what she needed, what she sought was the negative joy of sleep, Lethean, dreamless sleep, a leaden sleep falling upon her like the blow of the sledge upon the ox's head: and she found it in those compounds which struck her down and stretched her out face downward on the waxed cover of the kitchen table.

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To sleep that overpowering sleep, to wallow, by day, in that midnight darkness, had come to mean to her a truce, deliverance from an existence that she had not the courage to continue or to end. An overwhelming longing for oblivion was all she felt when she awoke. The hours of her life that she passed in possession of her faculties, contemplating herself, examining her conscience, looking on at her own shame, seemed to her so execrable! She preferred to kill them. There was nothing in the world but sleep to make her forget everything—the congested sleep of intoxication, which lulls its victim with the arms of Death.

In that glass, from which she forced herself to drink, and which she emptied in a sort of frenzy, her sufferings, her sorrows, all her horrible present would be drowned and disappear. In a half hour, her mind would have ceased to think, her life would have ceased to exist; nothing of her surroundings would have any being for her, there would be no more time even, so far as she was concerned. "I drink away my troubles!" she said to a woman who told her that she would wreck her health by drinking. And as, in the periods of reaction that followed her debauches, there came to her a more painful feeling of her own shame, a greater sense of desolation and a fiercer detestation of her mistakes and her sins, she sought stronger decoctions of alcohol, more fiery brandy, and even drank pure absinthe, in order to produce a more deathly lethargy, and to make her more utterly oblivious to everything.

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She ended by attaining in this way whole half days of unconsciousness, from which she emerged only half awake, with benumbed intelligence, blunted perceptions, hands that did things by force of habit, the motions of a somnambulist, a body and a mind in which thought, will, memory seemed still to retain the drowsiness and vagueness of the confused waking hours of the morning.

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## XXXIV

Half an hour after the horrible meeting when—her mind having dabbled in crime as if with her fingers—she had determined to disfigure her rival with vitriol and had believed that she had done so, Germinie returned to Rue de Laval with a bottle of brandy procured at the grocer's.

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For two weeks she had been mistress of the apartment, free to indulge her brutish appetite. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, who as a general rule hardly stirred from her chair, had gone, strangely enough, to pass six weeks with an old friend in the country; and she decided not to take Germinie with her for fear of setting a bad example to the other servants, and arousing their jealousy of a maid who was accustomed to very light duties and was treated on a different footing from themselves.

Germinie went into mademoiselle's bedroom and took no more time than was necessary to throw her shawl and hat on the floor before she began to drink, with the neck of the bottle between her teeth, pouring down the liquid hurriedly until everything in the room was whirling around her, and she remembered nothing of the day. Thereupon, staggering, feeling that she was about to fall, she tried to throw herself on her mistress's bed to sleep; but her dizziness threw her against the night table. From that she fell to the floor and lay without moving; she simply snored. But the blow was so violent that during the night she had a miscarriage, followed by one of those hemorrhages in which the life often ebbs away. She tried to rise and go out on the landing to call; she tried to stand up: she could not. She felt that she was gliding on to death, entering its portals and descending with gentle moderation. At last, summoning all her strength for a final effort, she dragged herself as far as the hall door; but it was impossible for her to lift her head to the keyhole, impossible to cry out. And she would have died where she lay had not Adèle, as she was passing in the morning, heard a groan, and, in her alarm, fetched a locksmith to open the door,

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and afterward a midwife to attend to the dying woman.

When mademoiselle returned a month later, she found Germinie up and about, but so weak that she was constantly obliged to sit down, and so pale that she seemed to have no blood left in her body. They told her that she had had a hemorrhage of which she nearly died: mademoiselle suspected nothing.

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## XXXV

Germinie welcomed mademoiselle's return with melting caresses, wet with tears. Her affectionate manner was like a sick child's; she had the same clinging gentleness, the imploring expression, the melancholy of timid, frightened suffering. She sought excuses for touching her mistress with her white blue-veined hands. She approached her with a sort of trembling and fervent humility. Very often, as she sat facing her upon a stool, and looked up at her with eyes like a dog's, she would rise and go and kiss some part of her dress, then resume her seat, and in a moment begin again. [219]

There was heart-rending entreaty in these caresses, these kisses of Germinie's. Death, whose footsteps she had heard approaching her as if it were a living person; the hours of utter prostration, when, as she lay in her bed, alone with herself, she had reviewed her whole past life; the consciousness of the shame of all she had concealed from Mademoiselle de Varandeuil; the fear of a judgment of God, rising from the depths of her former religious ideas; all the reproaches, all the apprehensions that whisper in the ear of a dying agony had aroused a horrible dread in her conscience; and remorse,—the remorse that she had never been able to put down,—was now alive and crying aloud in her enfeebled, broken body, as yet but partially restored to life, as yet scarcely firm in the persuasion that it was alive. [220]

Germinie's was not one of those fortunate natures that do wrong and leave the memory of it behind them, and never feel a twinge of regret. She had not, like Adèle, one of those vulgar material organizations, which never allow themselves to be affected by any but animal impulses. She was not blessed with one of those consciences which escape suffering by virtue of mere brutishness, or of that dense stupidity in which a woman vegetates, sinning because she knows no better. In her case, an unhealthy sensitiveness, a sort of cerebral excitement, a disposition on the part of the brain to be always on the alert, to work itself into a frenzy of bitterness, anxiety and discontent with itself, a moral sense that stood erect, as it were, after every one of her backslidings, all the characteristics of a sensitive mind, predestined to misfortune, united to torture her, and to renew day after day, more openly and more cruelly in her despair, the agony due to acts that would hardly have caused such long-continued suffering in many women in her station.

Germinie yielded to the impulse of passion; but as soon as she had yielded to it she despised herself. Even in the excitement of pleasure she could not entirely forget and lose herself. The image of mademoiselle always arose before her, with her stern, motherly face. Germinie did not become immodest in the same degree that she abandoned herself to her passions and sank lower and lower in vice. The degrading depths to which she descended did not fortify her against her disgust and horror of herself. Habit did not harden her. Her defiled conscience rejected its defilement, struggled fiercely in its shame, rent itself in its repentance and did not for one second permit itself the full enjoyment of vice, was never completely stunned by its fall. [221]

And so when mademoiselle, forgetting that she was a servant, leaned over to her with the brusque familiarity of tone and gesture that went straight to her heart, Germinie, confused and overcome with blushing timidity, was speechless and seemed bereft of sense under the horrible torture caused by the consciousness of her own unworthiness. She would fly from the room, she would invent some pretext to escape from that affection which she so shamefully betrayed, and which, when it touched her, stirred her remorse to shuddering activity. [222]

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## XXXVI

The miraculous part of this disorderly, abandoned life, this life of shame and misery, was that it did not become known. Germinie allowed no trace of anything to appear outside; she allowed nothing to rise to her lips, nothing to be seen in her face, nothing to be noticed in her manner, and the accursed background of her existence remained hidden from her mistress. [223]

It had, indeed, sometimes occurred to mademoiselle in a vague way that her maid had some secret, something that she was concealing from her, something that was obscure in her life. She had had moments of doubt, of suspicion, an instinctive feeling of uneasiness, confused glimpses

of something wrong, a faint scent that eluded her and vanished in the gloom. She had thought at times that she had stumbled upon sealed, unresponsive recesses in the girl's heart, upon a mystery, upon some unlighted passage of her life. Again, at times it had seemed to her that her maid's eyes did not say what her mouth said. Involuntarily, she had remembered a phrase that Germinie often repeated: "A sin hidden, a sin half forgiven." But the thing that filled her thoughts above all else was amazement that Germinie, despite the increase in her wages and the little gifts that she gave her almost every day, never purchased anything for her toilet, had no new dresses or linen. Where did her money go? She had almost admitted having withdrawn her eighteen hundred francs from the savings bank. Mademoiselle ruminated over it, then said to herself that that was the whole of her maid's mystery; it was about money, she was short of funds, doubtless on account of some obligations she had entered into long ago for her family, and perhaps she had been sending more money to "her *canaille* of a brother-in-law." She was so kind-hearted and had so little system! She had so little idea of the value of a hundred-sou piece! That was all there was to it: mademoiselle was sure of it; and as she knew the girl's obstinate nature and had no hope of inducing her to change her mind, she said nothing to her. If this explanation did not fully satisfy mademoiselle, she attributed what there was strange and mysterious in her maid's behavior to her somewhat secretive nature, which retained something of the characteristic distrust of the peasant, who is jealous of her own petty affairs and takes delight in burying a corner of her life away down in her heart, as the villager hoards his sous in a woolen stocking. Or else she persuaded herself that it was her ill health, her state of continual suffering that was responsible for her whims and her habit of dissimulation. And her mind, in its interested search for motives, stopped at that point, with the indolence and a little of the selfishness of old people's minds, who, having an instinctive dread of final results and of the real characters of their acquaintances, prefer not to be too inquisitive or to know too much. Who knows? Perhaps all this mystery was nothing but a paltry matter, unworthy to disturb or to interest her, some petty woman's quarrel. She went to sleep thereupon, reassured, and ceased to cudgel her brains.

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In truth, how could mademoiselle have guessed Germinie's degradation and the horror of her secret! In her most poignant suffering, in her wildest intoxication, the unhappy creature retained the incredible strength necessary to suppress and keep back everything. From her passionate, overcharged nature, which found relief so naturally in expansion, never a word escaped or a syllable that cast a ray of light upon her secret. Mortification, contempt, disappointment, self-sacrifice, the death of her child, the treachery of her lover, the dying agony of her love, all remained voiceless within her, as if she stifled their cries by pressing her hands upon her heart. Her rare attacks of weakness, when she seemed to be struggling with pains that strangled her, the fierce, feverish caresses lavished upon Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, the sudden paroxysms, as if she were trying to give birth to something, always ended without words and found relief in tears.

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Even illness, with its resulting weakness and enervation, forced nothing from her. It could make no impression on that heroic resolution to keep silent to the end. Hysterical attacks extorted shrieks from her and nothing but shrieks. When she was a girl she dreamed aloud; she forced her dreams to cease speaking, she closed the lips of her sleep. As mademoiselle might have discovered from her breath that she had been drinking, she ate shallots and garlic, and concealed the fumes of liquor with their offensive odors. She even trained her intoxication, her drunken torpor to awake at her mistress's footstep, and remain awake in her presence.

Thus she led, as it were, two lives. She was like two women, and by dint of energy, adroitness and feminine diplomacy, with a self-assurance that never failed her even in the mental confusion caused by drink, she succeeded in separating those two existences, in living them both without mingling them, in never allowing the two women that lived in her to be confounded with each other, in continuing to be, with Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, the virtuous, respectable girl she had been, in emerging from her orgies without carrying away the taste of them, in displaying, when she left her lover, a sort of old-maidish modesty, shocked by the scandalous courses of other maids. She never uttered a word or bore herself in a way to arouse a suspicion of her clandestine life; nothing about her conveyed a hint as to the way her nights were passed. When she placed her foot upon the door-mat outside Mademoiselle de Varandeuil's apartments, when she approached her, when she stood before her, she adopted the tone and the attitude, even to a certain way of holding the dress, which relieve a woman from so much as a suspicion of having aught to do with men. She talked freely upon all subjects, as if she had nothing to blush for. She spoke with bitterness of the misdoings and shame of others, as if she were herself beyond reproach. She joked with her mistress about love, in a jovial, unembarrassed, indifferent tone; to hear her you would have thought she was talking of an old acquaintance of whom she had lost sight. And in the eyes of all those who saw her only as Mademoiselle de Varandeuil did and at her home, there was a certain atmosphere of chastity about her thirty-five years, the odor of stern, unimpeachable virtue, peculiar to middle-aged maid-servants and plain women.

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And yet all this falsehood in the matter of appearances was not hypocrisy in Germinie. It did not arise from downright duplicity, from corrupt striving for effect: it was her affection for mademoiselle that made her what she was with her. She was determined at any price to save her the grief of seeing her as she was, of going to the bottom of her character. She deceived her solely in order to retain her affection,—with a sort of respect; and a feeling of veneration, almost of piety, stole into the ghastly comedy she was playing, like the feeling a girl has who lies to her mother in order not to rend her heart.

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## XXXVII

To lie! nothing was left for her but that. She felt that it was an impossibility to draw back from her present position. She did not even entertain the idea of an attempt to escape from it, it seemed such a hopeless task, she was so cowardly, so crushed and degraded, and she felt that she was still so firmly bound to that man by all sorts of vile, degrading chains, even by the contempt that he no longer tried to conceal from her!

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Sometimes, as she reflected upon her plight, she was dismayed. The simple ideas and terrors of the peasantry recurred to her mind. And the superstitions of her youth whispered to her that the man had cast a spell upon her, that he had perhaps given her enchanted bread to eat. Otherwise would she have been what she was? Would she have felt, at the mere sight of him, that thrill of emotion through her whole frame, that almost brute-like sensation of the approach of a master? Would she have felt her whole body, her mouth, her arms, her loving and caressing gestures involuntarily go out to him? Would she have belonged to him so absolutely? Long and bitterly she dwelt upon all that should have cured her, rescued her: the man's disdain, his insults, the degrading concessions he had forced from her; and she was compelled to admit that there had been nothing too precious for her to sacrifice to him, and that for him she had swallowed the things she loathed most bitterly. She tried to imagine the degree of degradation to which her love would refuse to descend, and she could conceive of none. He could do what he chose with her, insult her, beat her, and she would remain under his heel! She could not think of herself as not belonging to him. She could not think of herself without him. To have that man to love was necessary to her existence; she derived warmth from him, she lived by him, she breathed him. There seemed to be no parallel case to hers among the women of her condition whom she knew. No one of her comrades carried into a *liaison* the intensity, the bitterness, the torture, the enjoyment of suffering that she found in hers. No one of them carried into it that which was killing her and which she could not dispense with.

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To herself she appeared an extraordinary creature, of an exceptional nature, with the temperament of animals whom ill-treatment binds the closer to their masters. There were days when she did not know herself, and when she wondered if she were still the same woman. As she went over in her mind all the base deeds to which Jupillon had induced her to stoop, she could not believe that it was really she who had submitted to it. Had she, violent and impulsive as she knew herself to be, boiling over with fiery passions, rebellious and hotheaded, exhibited such docility and resignation? She had repressed her wrath, forced back the murderous thoughts that had crowded to her brain so many times! She had always obeyed, always possessed her soul in patience, always hung her head! She had forced her nature, her instincts, her pride, her vanity, and more than all else, her jealousy, the fierce passions of her heart, to crawl at that man's feet! For the sake of keeping him she had stooped to share him, to allow him to have mistresses, to receive him from the hands of others, to seek a part of his cheek on which his cousin had not kissed him! And now, after all these sacrifices, with which she had wearied him, she retained her hold upon him by a still more distasteful sacrifice: she drew him to her by gifts, she opened her purse to him to induce him to keep appointments with her, she purchased his good-humor by gratifying his whims and his caprices; she paid this brute, who haggled over the price of his kisses and demanded *pourboires* of love! And she lived from day to day in constant dread of what the miserable villain would demand of her on the morrow.

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## XXXVIII

"He must have twenty francs," Germinie mechanically repeated the sentence to herself several times, but her thoughts did not go beyond the words she uttered. The walk and the climb up five flights of stairs had made her dizzy. She fell in a sitting posture on the greasy couch in the kitchen, hung her head, and laid her arms on the table. Her ears were ringing. Her ideas went and came in a disorderly throng, stifling one another in her brain, and of them all but one remained, more and more distinct and persistent: "He must have twenty francs! twenty francs! twenty francs!" And she looked as if she expected to find them somewhere there, in the fireplace, in the waste-basket, under the stove. Then she thought of the people who owed her, of a German maid who had promised to repay her more than a year before. She rose and tied her capstrings. She no longer said: "He must have twenty francs;" she said: "I will get them."

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She went down to Adèle: "You haven't twenty francs for a note that just came, have you? Mademoiselle has gone out."

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"Nothing here," said Adèle; "I gave madame my last twenty francs last night to get her supper. The jade hasn't come back yet. Will you have thirty sous?"

She ran to the grocer's. It was Sunday, and three o'clock in the afternoon: the grocer had closed

his shop.

There were a number of people at the fruitwoman's; she asked for four sous' worth of herbs.

"I haven't any money," said she. She hoped that the woman would say: "Do you want some?" Instead of that, she said: "What an idea! as if I was afraid of you!" There were other maids there, so she went out without saying anything more.

"Is there anything for us?" she said to the concierge. "Ah! by the way, my Pipelet, you don't happen to have twenty francs about you, do you? it will save my going way up-stairs again."

"Forty, if you want——"

She breathed freely. The concierge went to a desk at the back of the lodge. "*Sapristi!* my wife has taken the key. Why! how pale you are!"

"It isn't anything." And she rushed out into the courtyard toward the door of the servant's staircase.

This is what she thought as she went up-stairs: "There are people who find twenty-franc pieces. He needed them to-day, he told me. Mademoiselle gave me my money not five days ago, and I can't ask her. After all, what are twenty francs more or less to her? The grocer would surely have lent them to me. I had another grocer on Rue Taitbout: he didn't close till evening Sundays." [235]

She was in front of her own door. She leaned over the rail of the other staircase, looked to see if anyone was coming up, entered her room, went straight to mademoiselle's bedchamber, opened the window and breathed long and hard with her elbows on the window-sill. Sparrows hastened to her from the neighboring chimneys, thinking that she was going to toss bread to them. She closed the window and glanced at the top of the commode—first at a vein of marble, then at a little sandal-wood box, then at the key—a small steel key left in the lock. Suddenly there was a ringing in her ears; she thought that the bell rang. She ran and opened the door: there was no one there. She returned with the certainty that she was alone, went to the kitchen for a cloth and began to rub a mahogany armchair, turning her back to the commode; but she could still see the box, she could see it lying open, she could see the coins at the right where mademoiselle kept her gold, the papers in which she wrapped it, a hundred francs in each;—her twenty francs were there! She closed her eyes as if the light dazzled them. She felt a dizziness in her conscience; but immediately her whole being rose in revolt against her, and it seemed to her as if her heart in its indignation rose to her throat. In an instant the honor of her whole life stood erect between her hand and that key. Her upright, unselfish, devoted past, twenty years of resistance to the evil counsels and the corruption of that foul quarter, twenty years of scorn for theft, twenty years in which her pocket had not held back a sou from her employers, twenty years of indifference to gain, twenty years in which temptation had never come near her, her long maintained and natural virtue, mademoiselle's confidence in her—all these things came to her mind in a single instant. Her youthful years clung to her and took possession of her. From her family, from the memory of her parents, from the unsullied reputation of her wretched name, from the dead from whom she was descended, there arose a murmur as of guardian angels hovering about her. For one second she was saved. [236]

And then, insensibly, evil thoughts glided one by one into her brain. She sought for subjects of bitterness, for excuses for ingratitude to her mistress. She compared with her own wages the wages of which the other maids in the house boasted vaingloriously. She concluded that mademoiselle was very fortunate to have her in her service, and that she should have increased her wages more since she had been with her.

"And then," she suddenly asked herself, "why does she leave the key in her box?" And she began to reflect thereupon that the money in the box was not used for living expenses, but had been laid aside by mademoiselle to buy a velvet dress for a goddaughter.—"Sleeping money," she said to herself. She marshaled her reasons with precipitation, as if to make it impossible to discuss them. "And then, it's only for once. She would lend them to me if I asked her. And I will return them." [237]

She put out her hand and turned the key. She stopped; it seemed to her that the intense silence round about was listening to her and looking at her. She raised her eyes: the mirror threw back her face at her. Before that face, her own, she was afraid; she recoiled in terror and shame as if before the face of her crime: it was a thief's head that she had upon her shoulders!

She fled into the corridor. Suddenly she turned upon her heel, went straight to the box, turned the key, put in her hand, fumbled under the hair trinkets and souvenirs, felt in a roll of five louis and took out one piece, closed the box and rushed into the kitchen. She had the little coin in her hand and dared not look at it. [238]

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## XXXIX

Then it was that Germinie's abasement and degradation began to be visible in her personal [239]

appearance, to make her stupid and slovenly. A sort of drowsiness came over her ideas. She was no longer keen and prompt of apprehension. What she had read and what she had learned seemed to escape her. Her memory, which formerly retained everything, became confused and unreliable. The sharp wit of the Parisian maid-servant gradually vanished from her conversation, her retorts, her laughter. Her face, once so animated, was no longer lighted up by gleams of intelligence. In her whole person you would have said that she had become once more the stupid peasant girl that she was when she came from her province, when she went to a stationer's for gingerbread. She seemed not to understand. As mademoiselle expressed it, she made faces like an idiot. She was obliged to explain to her, to repeat two or three times things that Germinie had always grasped on the merest hint. She asked herself, when she saw how slow and torpid she was, if somebody had not exchanged her maid for another.—"Why, you're getting to be a perfect imbecile!" she would sometimes say to her testily. She remembered the time when Germinie was so useful about finding dates, writing an address on a card, telling her what day they had put in the wood or broached the cask of wine,—all of which were things that her old brain could not remember. Now Germinie remembered nothing. In the evening, when she went over her accounts with mademoiselle, she could not think what she had bought in the morning; she would say: "Wait!" but she would simply pass her hand vaguely across her brow; nothing would come to her mind. Mademoiselle, to save her tired old eyes, had fallen into the habit of having Germinie read the newspaper to her; but she got to stumbling so and reading with so little intelligence, that mademoiselle was compelled to decline her services with thanks.

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As her faculties failed, she abandoned and neglected her body in a like degree. She gave no thought to her dress, nor to cleanliness even. In her indifference she retained nothing of a woman's natural solicitude touching her personal appearance; she did not dress decently. She wore dresses spotted with grease and torn under the arms, aprons in rags, worn stockings in shoes that were out at heel. She allowed the cooking, the smoke, the coal, the wax, to soil her hands and face and simply wiped them as she would after dusting. Formerly she had had the one coquettish and luxurious instinct of poor women, a love for clean linen. No one in the house had fresher caps than she. Her simple little collars were always of that snowy whiteness that lights up the skin so prettily and makes the whole person clean. Now she wore frayed, dirty caps which looked as if she had slept in them. She went without ruffles, her collar made a band of filth against the skin of her neck, and you felt that she was less clean beneath than above. An odor of poverty, rank and musty, arose from her. Sometimes it was so strong that Mademoiselle de Varandeuil could not refrain from saying to her: "Go and change your clothes, my girl—you smell of the poor!"

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In the street she no longer looked as if she belonged to any respectable person. She had not the appearance of a virtuous woman's maid. She lost the aspect of a servant who, by dint of displaying her self-esteem and self-respect even in her garb, reflects in her person the honor and the pride of her masters. From day to day she sank nearer to the level of that abject, shameless creature whose dress drags in the gutter—a dirty slattern.

As she neglected herself, so she neglected everything about her. She kept nothing in order, she did no cleaning or washing. She allowed dirt and disorder to make their way into the apartments, to invade mademoiselle's own sanctum, with whose neatness mademoiselle was formerly so well pleased and so proud. The dust collected there, the spiders spun their webs behind the frames, the mirrors were as if covered with a veil; the marble mantels, the mahogany furniture, lost their lustre; moths flew up from the carpets which were never shaken, worms ensconced themselves where the brush and broom no longer came to disturb them; neglect spread a film of dust over all the sleeping, neglected objects that were formerly awakened and enlivened every morning by the maid's active hand. A dozen times mademoiselle had tried to spur Germinie's self-esteem to action; but thereupon, for a whole day, there was such a frantic scrubbing, accompanied by such gusts of ill-humor, that mademoiselle would take an oath never to try again. One day, however, she made bold to write Germinie's name with her finger in the dust on her mirror; Germinie did not forgive her for a week. At last mademoiselle became resigned. She hardly ventured to remark mildly, when she saw that her maid was in good humor: "Confess, Germinie, that the dust is very well treated with us!"

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To the wondering observations of the friends who still came to see her and whom Germinie was forced to admit, mademoiselle would reply, in a compassionate, sympathetic tone: "Yes, it is filthy, I know! But what can you expect? Germinie's sick, and I prefer that she shouldn't kill herself." Sometimes, when Germinie had gone out, she would venture to rub a cloth over a commode or touch a frame with the duster, with her gouty hands. She would do it hurriedly, afraid of being scolded, of having a scene, if the maid should return and detect her.

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Germinie did almost no work; she barely served mademoiselle's meals. She had reduced her mistress's breakfast and dinner to the simplest dishes, those which she could cook most easily and quickly. She made her bed without raising the mattress, *à l'Anglaise*. The servant that she had been was not to be recognized in her, did not exist in her, except on the days when mademoiselle gave a small dinner party, the number of covers being always considerable on account of the party of children invited. On those days Germinie emerged, as if by enchantment, from her indolence and apathy, and, putting forth a sort of feverish strength, she recovered all her former energy in face of her ovens and the lengthened table. And mademoiselle was dumfounded to see her, all by herself, declining assistance and capable of anything, prepare in a few hours a dinner for half a score of persons, serve it and clear the table afterwards, with the nimble hands and all the quick dexterity of her youth.

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## XL

"No—not this time, no," said Germinie, rising from the foot of Jupillon's bed where she was sitting. "There's no way. Why, you know perfectly well that I haven't a sou—anything you can call a sou! You've seen the stockings I wear, haven't you?" [245]

She lifted her skirt and showed him her stockings, all full of holes and tied together with strings. "I haven't a change of anything. Money? Why, I didn't even have enough to give mademoiselle a few flowers on her birthday. I bought her a bunch of violets for a sou! Oh! yes, money, indeed! That last twenty francs—do you know where I got them? I took them out of mademoiselle's box! I've put them back. But that's done with. I don't want any more of that kind of thing. It will do for once. Where do you expect me to get money now, just tell me that, will you? You can't pawn your skin at the Mont-de-Piété—unless!—But as to doing anything of that sort again, never in my life! Whatever else you choose, but no stealing! I won't do it again. Oh! I know very well what you will do. So much the worse!" [246]

"Well! have you worked yourself up enough?" said Jupillon. "If you'd told me that about the twenty francs, do you suppose I'd have taken it? I didn't suppose you were as hard up as all that. I saw that you went on as usual. I fancied it wouldn't put you out to lend me a twenty-franc piece, and I'd have returned it in a week or two with the others. But you don't say anything? Oh! well, I'm done, I won't ask you for any more. But that's no reason we should quarrel, as I can see." And he added, with an indefinable glance at Germinie: "Till Thursday, eh?"

"Till Thursday!" said Germinie, desperately. She longed to throw herself into Jupillon's arms, to ask his pardon for her poverty, to say to him: "You see, I can't do it!"

She repeated: "Till Thursday!" and took her leave.

When, on Thursday, she knocked at the door of Jupillon's apartment on the ground floor, she thought she heard a man's hurried step at the other end of the room. The door opened; before her stood Jupillon's cousin with her hair in a net, wearing a red jacket and slippers, and with the costume and bearing of a woman who is at home in a man's house. Her belongings were tossed about here and there: Germinie saw them on the chairs she had paid for.

"Whom does madame wish to see?" demanded the cousin, impudently. [247]

"Monsieur Jupillon?"

"He has gone out."

"I'll wait for him," said Germinie, and she attempted to enter the other room.

"You'll wait at the porter's lodge then;" and the cousin barred the way.

"When will he return?"

"When the hens have teeth," said the girl, seriously, and shut the door in her face.

"Well! this is just what I expected of him," said Germinie to herself, as she walked along the street. The pavement seemed to give way beneath her trembling legs. [248]

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## XLI

When she returned that evening from a christening dinner, which she had been unable to avoid attending, mademoiselle heard talking in her room. She thought that there was someone with Germinie, and, marveling thereat, she opened the door. In the dim light shed by an untrimmed, smoking candle she saw nothing at first; but, upon looking more closely, she discovered her maid lying in a heap at the foot of the bed. [249]

Germinie was talking in her sleep. She was talking with a strange accent that caused emotion, almost fear. The vague solemnity of supernatural things, a breath from regions beyond this life, arose in the room, with those words of sleep, involuntary, fugitive words, palpitating, half-spoken, as if a soul without a body were wandering about a dead man's lips. The voice was slow and deep, and had a far-off sound, with long pauses of heavy breathing, and words breathed forth like sighs, with now and then a vibrating, painful note that went to the heart,—a voice laden with mystery and with the nervous tremor of the darkness, in which the sleeper seemed to be groping for souvenirs of the past and passing her hand over faces. "Oh! she loved me dearly," mademoiselle heard her say. "And if he had not died we should be very happy now, shouldn't we? No! no! But it's done, worse luck, and I don't want to tell of it." [250]

The words were followed by a nervous contraction of her features as if she sought to seize her secret on the edge of her lips and force it back.

Mademoiselle, with something very like terror, leaned over the poor, forlorn body, powerless to direct its own acts, to which the past returned as a ghost returns to a deserted house. She listened to the confessions that were all ready to rush forth but were instinctively checked, to the unconscious mind that spoke without restraint, to the voice that did not hear itself. A sensation of horror came over her: she felt as if she were beside a dead body haunted by a dream.

After a pause of some duration, and what seemed to be a sort of conflict between the things that were present in her mind, Germinie apparently turned her attention to the circumstances of her present life. The words that escaped her, disjointed, incoherent words, were, as far as mademoiselle could understand them, addressed to some person by way of reproach. And as she talked on, her language became as unrecognizable as her voice, which had taken on the tone and accent of the dreamer. It rose above the woman, above her ordinary style, above her daily expressions. It was the language of the people, purified and transfigured by passion. Germinie accentuated words according to their orthography; she uttered them with all their eloquence. The sentences came from her mouth with their proper rhythm, their heart-rending pathos and their tears, as from the mouth of an admirable actress. There were bursts of tenderness, interlarded with shrieks; then there were outbreaks of rebellion, fierce bursts of passion, and the most extraordinary, biting, implacable irony, always merging into a paroxysm of nervous laughter that repeated the same result and prolonged it from echo to echo. Mademoiselle was confounded, stupefied, and listened as at the theatre. Never had she heard disdain hurled down from so lofty a height, contempt so tear itself to tatters and gush forth in laughter, a woman's words express such a fierce thirst for vengeance against a man. She ransacked her memory: such play of feature, such intonations, such a dramatic and heart-rending voice as that voice of a consumptive coughing away her life, she could not remember since the days of Mademoiselle Rachel.

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At last Germinie awoke abruptly, her eyes filled with the tears of her dream, and jumped down from the bed, seeing that her mistress had returned. "Thanks," said mademoiselle, "don't disturb yourself! Wallow about on my bed all you please!"

"Oh! mademoiselle," said Germinie, "I wasn't lying where you put your head. I have made it nice and warm for your feet."

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"Indeed! Suppose you tell me what you've been dreaming? There was a man in it—you were having a dispute with him——"

"Dream?" said Germinie, "I don't remember."

She silently set about undressing her mistress, trying to recall her dream. When she had put her in bed, she said, drawing near to her: "Ah! mademoiselle, won't you give me a fortnight, for once, to go home? I remember now."

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## XLII

Soon after this, mademoiselle was amazed to notice an entire change in her maid's manner and habits. Germinie no longer had her sullen, savage moods, her outbreaks of rebellion, her fits of muttering words expressive of discontent. She suddenly threw off her indolence and became once more an energetic worker. She no longer passed hours in doing her marketing; she seemed to avoid the street. She ceased to go out in the evening; indeed, she hardly stirred from mademoiselle's side, hovering about her and watching her from the time she rose in the morning until she went to bed at night, lavishing continuous, incessant, almost irritating attentions upon her, never allowing her to rise or even to put out her hand for anything, waiting upon her and keeping watch of her as if she were a child. At times mademoiselle was so worn out with her, so weary of this constant fussing about her person, that she would open her mouth to say: "Come, come! aren't you almost ready to clear out!" But Germinie would look up at her with a smile, a smile so sad and sweet that it checked the impatient exclamation on the old maid's lips. And so she stayed on with her, going about with a sort of fascinated, divinely stolid air, in the impassibility of profound adoration, buried in almost idiotic contemplation.

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At that period all the poor girl's affection turned to mademoiselle. Her voice, her gestures, her eyes, her silence, her thoughts, went out to her mistress with the fervor of expiation, with the contrition of a prayer, the rapt intensity of a cult. She loved her with all the loving violence of her nature. She loved her with all the deceptive ardor of her passion. She strove to give her all that she had not given her, all that others had taken from her. Every day her love clung more closely, more devoutly, to the old maid, who was conscious of being enveloped, embraced, agreeably warmed by the heat from those two arms that were thrown about her old age.

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## XLIII

But the past and its debts were still there, and whispered to her every hour: "If mademoiselle knew!" [255]

She lived in the constant panic of a guilty woman, trembling with dread from morning till night. There was never a ring at the door that she did not say to herself: "It has come at last!" Letters in a strange handwriting filled her with anxiety. She would feel of the wax with her fingers, bury the letters in her pocket, hesitate about delivering them, and the moment when mademoiselle unfolded the terrible paper and scanned its contents with the inexpressive eye of elderly people was as full of suspense to her as if she were awaiting sentence of death. She felt that her secret and her falsehood were in everybody's hand. The house had seen her and might speak. The quarter knew her as she was. Of all about her, there was no one but her mistress whose esteem she could still steal.

As she went in and out, the concierge looked at her with a smile and a glance, that said: "I know." She no longer dared to call him: "My Pipelet." When she returned home he looked into her basket. "I am so fond of that!" his wife would say, when it contained some tempting morsel. At night she would take down what was left. She ate nothing herself. She ended by supplying them with food. [256]

The whole street frightened her no less than the hall and the porter's lodge. There was a face in every shop that reflected her shame and commented on her sins. At every step she had to purchase silence by groveling humility. The dealers she had not been able to repay had her in their clutches. If she said that anything was too dear, she was reminded in a bantering way that they were her masters, and that she must pay the price unless she chose to be denounced. A jest or an allusion drove the color from her cheeks. She was bound to them, compelled to trade with them and to allow them to empty her pockets as if they were accomplices. The successor of Madame Jupillon, who had gone into the grocery business at Bar-sur Aube,—the new *crémière*,—gave her bad milk, and when she suggested that mademoiselle complained about it, and that she was found fault with every morning, the woman replied: "Much you care for your mademoiselle!" And at the fish-stall, if she smelt of a fish, and said: "This has been frozen," the reply would be: "Bah! tell me next, will you, that I let the moon shine on their gills, so's to make 'em look fresh! So these are hard days for you, eh, my duck?" Mademoiselle wanted her to go to the *Halle Centrale* one day for her dinner, and she mentioned the fact in the fish-woman's presence. "Oho! yes, yes, to the *Halle*! I'd like to see you go to the *Halle*!" And she bestowed a glance upon her in which Germinie saw a threat to send her account to her mistress. The grocer sold her coffee that smelt of snuff, rotten prunes, dried rice and old biscuit. If she ventured to remonstrate, "Nonsense!" he would say; "an old customer like you wouldn't want to make trouble for me. Don't I tell you I give you good weight?" And he would coolly give her false weight of the goods that she ordered, and that he forced her to order. [257] [258]

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## XLIV

It was a very great trial to Germinie—a trial that she sought, however—to have to pass through a street where there was a school for young girls, when she went out before dinner to buy an evening paper for mademoiselle. She often happened to be at the door when the school was dismissed; she tried to run away—and stood still. [259]

At first there would be a sound like that made by a swarm of bees, a buzzing and humming, one of those great outbursts of childish joy that wake the echoes in the streets of Paris. From the dark and narrow passageway leading to the schoolroom the children would rush forth as if escaping from an open cage, and run about and frolic in the sunlight. They would push and jostle one another, and toss their empty baskets in the air. Then some would call to one another and form little groups; tiny hands would go forth to meet other tiny hands; friends would take one another by the arm or put their arms around one another's waists or necks, and walk along nibbling at the same tart. Soon the whole band would be in motion, walking slowly up the filthy street with loitering step. The larger ones, ten years old at most, would stop and talk, like little women, at the *portes cochères*. Others would stop to drink from their luncheon bottles. The smaller ones would amuse themselves by dipping the soles of their shoes in the gutter. And there were some who made a headdress of a cabbage leaf picked up from the ground,—a green cap sent by the good God, beneath which the fresh young face smiled brightly. [260]

Germinie would gaze at them all and walk along with them; she would go in among them in order to feel the rustling of their aprons. She could not take her eyes off the little arms under which the school satchels leaped about, the little pea-green dresses, the little black leggings, the little legs in the little woolen stockings. In her eyes there was a sort of divine light about all those little flaxen heads, with the soft hair of the child Jesus. A little stray lock upon a little neck, a bit of baby flesh above a chemise or at the end of a sleeve—at times she saw nothing but that; it was to

her all the sunshine of the street—and the sky!

Gradually the troop dwindled away. Each street took some children away to neighboring streets. The school dispersed along the road. The gaiety of all the tiny footsteps died away little by little. The little dresses disappeared one by one. Germinie followed the last, she attached herself to those who went the farthest.

On one occasion, as she was walking along thus, devouring with her eyes the memory of her daughter, she was suddenly seized with a frenzied longing to embrace something; she rushed at one of the little girls and grasped her arm just as a kidnapper of children would do. "Mamma! mamma!" the little one cried, and wept as she pulled her arm away. [261]

Germinie fled. [262]

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## XLV

To Germinie all days were alike, equally gloomy and desolate. She had reached a point at last where she expected nothing from chance and asked nothing from the unforeseen. Her life seemed to her to be forever encaged in her despair; it would always be the same implacable thing, the same straight, monotonous road to misfortune, the same dark path with death at the end. In all the time to come there was no future for her. [263]

And yet, in the depths of despair in which she was crouching, thoughts passed through her mind at times which made her raise her head and look before her to a point beyond the present. At times the illusion of a last hope smiled upon her. It seemed to her that she might even yet be happy, and that if certain things should come to pass, she would be. Thereupon she imagined that those things did happen. She arranged incidents and catastrophes. She linked the impossible to the impossible. She reconstructed the opportunities of her life. And her fevered hope, setting about the task of creating events according to her desire on the horizon of the future, soon became intoxicated with the insane vision of her suppositions. [264]

Then the delirious hope would gradually fade away. She would tell herself that it was impossible, that nothing of what she dreamed of could happen, and she would sink back in her chair and think. After a moment or two she would rise and walk, slowly and uncertainly, to the fireplace, toy with the coffee-pot on the mantelpiece, and at last decide to take it: she would learn what the rest of her life was to be. Her good fortune, her ill fortune, everything that was to happen to her was there, in that fortune-telling device of the woman of the people, on the plate on which she was about to pour the coffee-grounds. She drained the water from the grounds, waited a few minutes, breathed upon them with the religious breath with which her lips, as a child, touched the paten at the village church. Then she leaned over them, with her head thrust forward, terrifying in her immobility, with her eyes fixed intently upon the black dust scattered in patches over the plate. She sought what she had seen fortune-tellers find in the granulations and the almost imperceptible traces left by the coffee as it trickled away. She fatigued her eyes by gazing at the innumerable little spots, and deciphered shapes and letters and signs therein. She put aside some grains with her finger in order to see them more clearly and more sharply defined. She turned the plate slowly in her hands, this way and that, questioned its mystery on all sides, and hunted down, within its circular rim, apparitions, images, rudiments of names, shadowy initials, resemblances to different people, rough outlines of objects, omens in embryo, symbols of trifles, which told her that she would be *victorious*. She wanted to see these things and she compelled herself to discover them. Under her tense gaze the porcelain became alive with the visions of her insomnia; her disappointments, her hatreds, the faces she detested, arose gradually from the magic plate and the designs drawn thereon by chance. By her side the candle, which she forgot to snuff, gave forth an intermittent, dying light: it sank lower and lower in the silence, night came on apace, and Germinie, as if turned to stone in her agony, always remained rooted there, alone and face to face with her fear of the future, trying to decipher in the dregs of the coffee the confused features of her destiny, until she thought she could detect a cross, beside a woman who resembled Jupillon's cousin—a cross, that is to say, *a speedy death*. [265] [266]

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## XLVI

The love which she lacked, and which it was her determination to deny herself, became the torment of her life, incessant, abominable torture. She had to defend herself against the fevers of her body and the irritations from without, against the easily aroused emotions and the indolent cowardice of her flesh, against all the solicitations of nature by which she was assailed. She had to contend with the heat of the day, with the suggestions of the darkness, with the moist warmth [267]

of stormy weather, with the breath of her past and her memories, with the pictures suddenly thrown upon the background of her mind, with the voices that whispered caressingly in her ear, with the emotions that sent a thrill of tenderness into her every limb.

Weeks, months, years, the frightful temptation endured, and she did not yield or take another lover. Fearful of herself, she avoided man and fled from his sight. She continued her domestic, unsocial habits, always closeted with mademoiselle, or else above in her own room. On Sundays she did not leave the house. She had ceased to consort with the other maids in the house, and, in order to occupy her time and forget herself, she plunged into vast undertakings in the way of sewing, or buried herself in sleep. When musicians came into the courtyard she closed the windows in order not to hear them: the sensuousness of music moved her very soul.

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In spite of everything, she could not calm or cool her passions. Her evil thoughts rekindled themselves, lived and flourished upon themselves. At every moment the fixed idea of desire arose from her whole being, became throughout her body the fierce torment that knows no end, that delirium of the senses, obsession,—the obsession that nothing can dispel and that constantly returns, the shameless, implacable obsession, swarming with images, the obsession that brings love close to the woman's every sense, that touches with it her closed eyes, forces it smoking into her brain and pours it, hot as fire, into her arteries!

At length, the nervous exhaustion caused by these constant assaults, the irritation of this painful continence, began to disturb Germinie's faculties. She fancied that she could see her temptations: a ghastly hallucination brought the realization of her dreams near to her senses. It happened that at certain moments the things she saw in her room, the candlesticks, the legs of the chairs, everything about her assumed impure appearances and shapes. Obscenity arose from everything before her eyes and approached her. At such times she would look at her kitchen clock, and would say, like a condemned man whose body no longer belongs to himself: "In five minutes I am going down into the street." And when the five minutes had passed she would stay where she was.

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## XLVII

The time came at last in this life of torture when Germinie abandoned the conflict. Her conscience yielded, her will succumbed, she bowed her head beneath her destiny. All that remained to her of resolution, energy, courage, vanished before the feeling, the despairing conviction, of her powerlessness to save herself from herself. She felt that she was being borne along on a resistless current, that it was useless, almost impious, to try to stop. That great power of the world that causes suffering, the malevolent power that bears the name of a god on the marble of the antique tragedies, and is called *No Chance* on the tattooed brow of the galley-slave—Fatality—was trampling upon her, and Germinie lowered her head beneath its foot.

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When, in her hours of discouragement, the bitter experiences of her past recurred to her memory, when she followed, from her infancy, the links in the chain of her deplorable existence, that long line of afflictions that had followed her years and grown heavier with them; all the incidents that had succeeded one another in her life, as if by preconcerted arrangement on the part of misery, without her having ever caught a glimpse of the hand of the Providence of which she had heard so much—she said to herself that she was one of those miserable creatures who are destined from their birth to an eternity of misery, one of those for whom happiness was not made, and who know it only because they envy it in others. She fed and nourished herself on that thought, and by dint of yielding to the despair it tended to produce, by dint of brooding over the unbroken chain of her misfortunes and the endless succession of her disappointments, she reached the point where she looked upon the most trifling annoyances of her life and her service as a part of the persecution of her evil genius. A little money that she loaned and that was not repaid, a counterfeit coin that was put off upon her in a shop, an errand that she failed to perform satisfactorily, a purchase in which she was cheated—all these things were in her opinion due neither to her own fault nor to chance. It was the sequel of what had gone before. Life was in a conspiracy against her and persecuted her everywhere, in everything, great and small, from her daughter's death to bad groceries. There were days when she broke everything she touched; she thereupon imagined that she was accursed to her finger-tips. Accursed! almost damned; she persuaded herself that she was so in very truth, when she questioned her body, when she probed her feelings. Did she not feel, in the fire in her blood, in the appetite of her organs, in her passionate weakness, the spur of the Fatality of Love, the mystery and obsession of a disease, stronger than her modesty and her reason, having already delivered her over to the shameful excesses of passion, and destined—she had a presentiment that it was so—to deliver her again in the same way?

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And so she had one sentence always in her mouth, a sentence that was the refrain of her thought: "What can you expect? I am unlucky. I have had no chance. From the beginning nothing ever succeeded with me!" She said it in the tone of a woman who has abandoned hope. With the persuasion, every day more firm, that she was born under an unlucky star, that she was in the power of hatred and vengeance that were more powerful than she, Germinie had come to be

afraid of everything that happens in ordinary life. She lived in that state of cowardly unrest wherein the unexpected is dreaded as a possible calamity, wherein a ring at the bell causes alarm, wherein one turns a letter over and over, weighing the mystery it contains, not daring to open it, wherein the news you are about to hear, the mouth that opens to speak to you, cause the perspiration to start upon your temples. She was in that state of suspicion, of shuddering fear, of trembling awe in face of destiny, wherein misfortune sees naught but misfortune, and wherein one would like to check the current of his life so that it should not go forward whither all the endeavors and the attacks of others are forcing it.

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At last, by virtue of the tears she shed, she arrived at that supreme disdain, that climax of suffering, where the excess of pain seems a satire, where chagrin, exceeding the utmost limits of human strength, exceeds its sensibility as well, and the stricken heart, which no longer feels the blows, says to the Heaven it defies: "Go on!"

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## XLVIII

"Where are you going in that rig?" said Germinie one Sunday morning to Adèle, as she passed in grand array along the corridor on the sixth floor, in front of her open door.

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"Ah! there you are! I'm going to a swell wedding, my dear! There's a crowd of us—big Marie, the *great bully*, you know—Elisa, from 41, the two Badiniers, big and little—and men, too! In the first place, there's my *dealer in sudden death*. Yes, and—Oh! didn't you know—my new flame, the master-at-arms of the 24th—and a friend of his, a painter, a real Father Joy. We're going to Vincennes. Everyone carries something. We shall dine on the grass—the men will pay for the wine. And there'll be plenty of it, I promise you!"

"I'll go, too," said Germinie.

"You? nonsense! you don't go to parties any more."

"But I tell you I'll go," said Germinie, in a sharp, decided tone. "Just give me time to tell mademoiselle and put on a dress. If you'll wait I'll go and get half a lobster."

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Half an hour later the two women left the house; they skirted the city wall and found the rest of the party sitting outside a café on Boulevard de la Chopinette. After taking a glass of currant wine, they entered two large cabs and rode away. When they arrived at the fortress at Vincennes they alighted and the whole party walked along the bank of the moat. As they were passing under the wall of the fort, the master-at-arms' friend, the painter, shouted to an artilleryman, who was doing sentry duty beside a cannon: "Say! old fellow, you'd rather drink one than stand guard over it, eh?"<sup>[1]</sup>

"Isn't he funny?" said Adèle to Germinie, nudging her with her elbow.

Soon they were fairly in the forest of Vincennes.

Narrow paths crossed and recrossed in every direction on the hard, uneven, footprint-covered ground. In the spaces between all these little roads there was here and there a little grass, but down-trodden, withered, yellow, dead grass, strewn about like bedding for cattle, its straw-colored blades were everywhere mingled with briars, amid the dull green of nettles. It was easily recognizable as one of the rural spots to which the great faubourgs resort on Sundays to loll about in the grass, and which resemble a lawn trampled by a crowd after a display of fireworks. Gnarled, misshapen trees were scattered here and there; dwarf elms with gray trunks covered with yellow, leprous-like spots and stripped of branches to a point higher than a man's head; scraggy oaks, eaten by caterpillars so that their leaves were like lacework. The verdure was scant and sickly and entirely unshaded, the leaves above had a very unhealthy look; the stunted, ragged, parched foliage made only faint green lines against the sky. Clouds of dust from the high-roads covered the bushes with a gray pall. Everything had the wretched, impoverished aspect of trampled vegetation that has no chance to breathe, the melancholy effect of the grass at the barriers! Nature seemed to sprout from beneath the pavements. No birds sang in the trees, no insects hummed about the dusty ground; the noise of the spring-carts stunned the birds; the hand-organ put the rustling of the trees to silence; the denizens of the street strolled about through the paths, singing. Women's hats, fastened with four pins to a handkerchief, were hanging from the trees; the red plume of an artilleryman burst upon one at every moment through the scanty leaves; dealers in honey rose from the thickets; on the trampled greensward children in blouses were cutting twigs, workingmen's families idling their time away nibbling at *pleasure*, and little urchins catching butterflies in their caps. It was a forest after the pattern of the original Bois de Boulogne, hot and dusty, a much-frequented and sadly-abused promenade, one of those spots, avaricious of shade, to which the common people flock to disport themselves at the gates of great capitals—burlesque forests, filled with corks, where you find slices of melon and skeletons in the underbrush.

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The heat on this day was stifling; the sun was swimming in clouds, shedding a veiled diffuse light

that was almost blinding to the eyes and that seemed to portend a storm. The air was heavy and dead; nothing stirred; the leaves and their tiny, meagre shadows did not move; the forest seemed weary and crushed, as it were, beneath the heavy sky. At rare intervals a breath of air from the south passed lazily along, sweeping the ground, one of those enervating, lifeless winds that blow upon the senses and fan the breath of desire into a flame. With no knowledge whence it came, Germinie felt over her whole body a sensation like the tickling of the down on a ripe peach against the skin.

They went gayly along, with the somewhat excited activity that the country air imparts to the common people. The men ran, the women tripped after them and caught them. They played at rolling on the grass. There was a manifest longing to dance and climb trees; the painter amused himself by throwing stones at the loop-holes in the gateways of the fortress, and he never missed his aim.

At last they all sat down in a sort of clearing under a clump of oaks, whose shadows were lengthening in the setting sun. The men, lighting matches on the seats of their trousers, began to smoke. The women chattered and laughed and threw themselves backward in paroxysms of inane hilarity and noisy outbursts of delight. Germinie alone did not speak or laugh. She did not listen or look. Her eyes, beneath their lowered lids, were fixed upon the toes of her boots. So engrossed in thought was she that you would have said she was totally oblivious to time and place. Lying at full length on the grass, her head slightly raised by a hammock, she made no other movement than to lay her hands, palm downwards, on the grass beside her; in a short time she would turn them on their backs and let them lie in that position, seeking the coolness of the earth to allay the fever of her flesh.

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"There's a lazybones! going to sleep?" said Adèle.

Germinie opened wide her blazing eyes, without answering, and until dinner maintained the same position, the same silence, the same air of torpor, feeling about her for places where her burning hands had not rested.

"Come, old girl!" said a woman's voice, "sing us something."

"Oh! no," Adèle replied, "I haven't got wind enough before eating."

Suddenly a great stone came hurtling through the air and struck the ground near Germinie's head; at the same moment she heard the painter's voice shouting: "Don't be afraid! that's your chair."

One and all laid their handkerchiefs on the ground by way of tablecloth. Eatables were produced from greasy papers. Bottles were uncorked and the wine went round; the glasses were rested against tufts of grass, and they fell to upon bits of pork and sausages, with slices of bread for plates. The painter cut boats out of paper to hold the salt, and imitated the orders shouted out by waiters in a café. "*Boum! Pavillon! Servez!*" he cried. The company gradually became animated. The open air, the patches of blue sky, the food and drink started the gayety of the table in full blast. Hands approached one another, mouths met, coarse remarks were whispered from one to another, shirt sleeves crept around waists, and now and then energetic embraces were attended by greedy, resounding kisses.

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Germinie drank, and said nothing. The painter, who had taken his place by her side, felt decidedly chilly and embarrassed beside his extraordinary neighbor, who amused herself "so entirely inside." Suddenly he began to beat a tattoo with his knife against his glass, drowning the uproar of the party, and rose to his knees.

"Mesdames!" said he, with the voice of a paroquet that has sung too much, "here's the health of a man in hard luck: myself! Perhaps it will bring me good luck! Deserted, yes, mesdames; yes, I've been deserted! I'm a widower! you know the kind of widower, *razibus!* I was struck all of a heap. Not that I cared much for her, but habit, that old villain, habit! The fact is I'm as bored as a bed-bug in a watch spring. For two weeks my life has been like a restaurant without a *pousse-café!* And when I love love as if it had made me! No wife! That's what I call weaning a grown man! that is to say, since I've known what it is, I take off my hat to the curés: I feel very sorry for them, 'pon my word! No wife! and there are so many of 'em! But I can't walk about with a sign: *Vacant man to let. Inquire within.* In the first place it would have to be stamped by M'sieu le Préfet, and then, people are such fools, it would draw a crowd! All of which, mesdames, is intended to inform you, that if, among the people you have the honor of knowing, there should happen to be one who'd like to make an acquaintance—virtuous acquaintance—a pretty little left-handed marriage—why she needn't look any farther! I'm her man—Victor-Médéric Gautruche! a home body, a genuine house-ivy for sentiment! She has only to apply at my former hotel, *La Clef de Sûreté.* And gay as a hunchback who's just drowned his wife! Gautruche, called Gogo-la-Gaiété, egad! A pretty fellow who knows what's what, who doesn't beat about the bush, a good old body who takes things easy and who won't give himself the colic with that fishes' grog!" With that he took a bottle of water that stood beside him and hurled it twenty yards away. "Long live the walls! They're the same to papa that the sky is to the good God! Gogo-la-Gaiété paints them through the week and beats them on Monday!<sup>[2]</sup> And with all that not jealous, not ugly, not a wife-beater, but a real love of a man, who never harmed one of the fair sex in his life! If you want physique, *parbleu!* I'm your man!"

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He rose to his feet and, drawing up his wavering body, clad in an old blue coat with gilt buttons,

to its full height, removing his gray hat so as to show his perspiring, polished, bald skull, and tossing his old plucked *gamin's* head, he continued: "You see what it is! It isn't a very attractive piece of property; it doesn't help it to exhibit it. But it yields well, it's a little dilapidated, but well put together. Dame! Here I am with my little forty nine-years—no more hair than a billiard ball, a witchgrass beard that would make good herb-tea, foundations not too solid, feet as long as La Villette—and with all the rest thin enough to take a bath in a musket-barrel. There's the bill of lading! Pass the prospectus along! If any woman wants all that in a lump—any respectable person—not too young—who won't amuse herself by painting me too yellow—you understand, I don't ask for a Princess of Batignolles—why, sure as you're born, I'm her man!"

Germinie seized Gautruche's glass, half emptied it at a draught and held out the side from which she had drunk to him.

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At nightfall the party returned on foot. When they reached the fortifications, Gautruche drew a large heart with the point of his knife on the stone, and all the names with the date were carved inside.

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In the evening Gautruche and Germinie were upon the outer boulevards, near Barrière Rochechouart. Beside a low house with these words, in a plaster panel: *Madame Merlin. Dresses cut and tried on, two francs*, they stopped at a stone staircase of three steps leading into a dark passage, at the end of which shone the red light of an Argand lamp. At the entrance to the passage, these words were printed in black on a wooden sign:

*Hotel of the Little Blue Hand.*

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## XLIX

Médérie Gautruche was one of the wenching, idling, vagabond workmen who make their whole life a Monday. Filled with the love of wine, his lips forever wet with the last drop, his insides as thoroughly lined with tartar as an old wine cask, he was one of those whom the Burgundians graphically call *boyaux rouges*.<sup>[3]</sup> Always a little tipsy, tipsy from yesterday when he had drunk nothing to-day, he looked at life through the sunbeam in his head. He smiled at his fate, he yielded to it with the easy indifference of the drunkard, smiling vaguely from the steps of the wineshop at things in general, at life and the road that stretched away into the darkness. *Ennui*, care, want, had gained no hold upon him; and if by chance a grave or gloomy thought did come into his mind, he turned his head away, uttered an exclamation that sounded like *psitt!* which was his way of saying *pshaw!* and, raising his right arm, caricaturing the gesture of a Spanish dancer, he would toss his melancholy over his shoulder to the devil. He had the superb after-drinking philosophy, the jovial serenity, of the bottle. He knew neither envy nor longing. His dreams served him as a cashbox. For three sous he was sure of a small glass of happiness; for twelve, of a bottle of ideal bliss. Being content with everything, he liked everything, and found food for laughter and entertainment in everything. Nothing in the world seemed sad to him—except a glass of water.

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With this drunkard's expansiveness, with the gayety of his excellent health and his temperament, Gautruche combined the characteristic gayety of his profession, the good humor and the warm-heartedness of that free, unfatiguing life, in the open air, between heaven and earth, which seeks distraction in singing, and flings the workmen's *blague* at passers-by, from its lofty perch upon a ladder. He was a house-painter and did lettering. He was the one man in Paris who would attack a sign without a measure, with no other guide than a cord, without outlining the letters in white; he was the only one who could place each of the letters in position inside of the frame of a placard, and, without losing an instant in aligning them, dash off capitals off-hand. He was also renowned for fantastic letters, capricious letters, letters shaded in bronze or gold to imitate those cut in stone. Thus he made fifteen to twenty francs on some days. But as he drank it all up, he was not wealthy, and he always had unpaid scores on the slate at the wine-shops.

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He was a man brought up in the street. The street had been his mother, his nurse and his school. The street had given him his self-assurance, his ready tongue and his wit. All that the keen mind of a man of the people can pick up upon the pavements of Paris he had picked up. All that falls from the upper to the lower strata of a great city, the strainings and drippings, the crumbs of ideas and information, the things that float in the sensitive atmosphere and the brimming gutters, the contact with the covers of books, bits of *feuilletons* swallowed between two glasses, odds and ends of plays heard on the boulevard, had endowed him with that accidental intelligence which, though without education, learns everything. He possessed an inexhaustible, imperturbable store of talk. His words gushed forth abundantly in original remarks, laughable images, the metaphors that flow from the comic genius of crowds. He had the natural picturesqueness of the unadulterated farce. He was brimming over with amusing stories and buffoonery, rich in the

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possession of the richest of all repertoires of house-painter's nonsense. Being a member of divers of the low haunts called *lists*, he knew all the new tunes and ballads, and he was never tired of singing. He was amusing, in short, from head to foot. And if you merely looked at him you laughed at him, as at a comic actor.

A man of his cheerful, hearty temperament suited Germinie.

Germinie was not a mere beast of burden with nothing but her work in her head. She was not the servant, who stands like a post, with the frightened face and doltish air of utter stupidity, when masters and mistresses are talking in her presence. She, too, had cast off her shell, fashioned herself and opened her mind to the education of Paris. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, having no occupation, and being interested after the manner of old maids in what was going on in the quarter, had long been in the habit of making Germinie tell her what news she had gleaned, what she knew of the tenants, all the gossip of the house and the street; and this habit of narration, of talking with her mistress like a sort of companion, of describing people and drawing silhouettes of them, had eventually developed in her a facility of animated description, of happy, unconscious characterization, a piquancy and sometimes an acrimony in her remarks that were most remarkable in the mouth of a servant. She had progressed so far that she often surprised Mademoiselle de Varandeuil by her quickness of comprehension, her promptness at grasping things only half said, her good fortune and facility in selecting such words as good talkers use. She knew how to jest. She understood a play upon words. She expressed herself without *cuirs*,<sup>[4]</sup> and when there was a discussion concerning orthography at the creamery, her opinion was listened to with as much deference as that of the clerk in the registry of deaths at the mayoralty who came there to breakfast. She had also that background of indiscriminate reading which women of her class have when they read at all. With the two or three kept women in whose service she had been, she had passed her nights devouring novels; since then she had continued to read the *feuilletons* cut by her acquaintances from the bottom of newspapers, and she had gathered from them a vague idea of many things and of some of the kings of France. She had retained enough of such subjects to make her desire to talk of them with others. Through a woman in the house who worked for an author on the street, she often had tickets to the play; when she came away she could remember the whole play and the names of the actors she had seen on the programme. She loved to buy ballads and one sou novels, and read them.

The air, the keen breath of Quartier Bréda, full of the *verve* of the artist and the studio, of art and vice, had sharpened these tastes of Germinie's mind and had created in her new needs and demands. Long before her disorderly life began, she had cut loose from the virtuous companionship of decent women of her rank and station, from the worthy creatures who were so uninteresting and stupid. She had quitted the circle of orderly, dull uprightness, of sleep-inducing conversations around the tea-table under the auspices of the old servants of mademoiselle's elderly acquaintances. She had shunned the wearisome society of maids whom their absorption in their employment and the fascination of the savings bank rendered unendurably stupid. She had reached the point where, before accepting the companionship of people, she must satisfy herself that they possessed a degree of intelligence corresponding to her own and were capable of understanding her. And now, when she emerged from her fits of brutishness, when she found her old self and was born again, in diversion and pleasure, she must for her enjoyment have kindred spirits of her own. She wanted men about her who would make her laugh, noisy gayety, the spirituous wit that intoxicated her with the wine that was poured into her glass. And thus it was that she sank to the level of the rascally Bohemia of the common people, uproarious, maddening, intoxicating, like all Bohemias: thus it was that she fell to the lot of a Gautruche.

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## L

As Germinie was returning to the house one morning at daybreak, she heard, from the shadows of the *porte-cochère* as it closed behind her, a voice cry: "Who's that?" She ran to the servants' staircase, but found that she was pursued, and as she turned a corner on the landing the concierge seized her. As soon as he recognized her, he said: "Oh! is it you? excuse me; don't be frightened! What a giddy creature you are! It surprises you to see me up so early, eh? It's on account of the thieving that's going on these days in the cook's bedroom on the second. Good-night to you! it's lucky for you I don't tell all I know."

A few days later Germinie learned through Adèle that the husband of the cook who had been robbed said that there was no need to look very far; that the thief was in the house, and that he knew what he knew. Adèle added that it was making a good deal of talk in the street and that there were plenty of people who would believe it and repeat it. Germinie became very indignant and told her mistress all about it. Mademoiselle was even more indignant than she, and, feeling personally outraged by the insult, wrote instantly to the cook's mistress that she must put a stop at once to the slanderous statements concerning a girl who had been in her service twenty years, and for whom she would answer as for herself. The cook was reprimanded. Her husband in his wrath talked louder than ever. He made a great outcry and for several days filled the house with his project of going to the commissioner of police and calling upon him to question Germinie as to

where she procured the money to start the *crémière's* son in business, as to where she procured the money to purchase a substitute for him, and how she paid the expenses of the men she kept. For a whole week the terrible threat hung over Germinie's head. At last the thief was discovered and the threat fell to the ground. But it had had its effect on the poor girl. It had done all the injury it could do in that confused brain, where, under the sudden, overpowering rush of the blood, her reason was wavering and became overcast at the slightest shock. It had overturned that brain which was so prompt to go astray in fear or vexation, which lost so quickly the faculty of good judgment, of discernment, clear-sightedness and appreciation of its surroundings, which exaggerated its troubles, which plunged into foolish alarms, previsions of evil, despairing presentiments, which looked upon its terrors as realities, and was constantly lost in the pessimism of that species of delirium, at the end of which it could find nothing but this ejaculation and this phrase: "Bah! I will kill myself!"

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Throughout the week the fever in her brain caused her to experience all the effects of the things she thought might happen. By day and night she saw her shame laid bare and made public; she saw her secret, her cowardice, her wrong-doing, all that she carried about with her concealed and sewn in her heart—she saw it all uncovered, noised abroad, disclosed—disclosed to mademoiselle! Her debts on Jupillon's account, augmented by her debts for drink and for food for Gautruche, by all that she purchased now on credit, her debt to the concierge and the shopkeepers would soon become known and ruin her! A cold shiver ran down her back at the thought: she could feel mademoiselle turning her away! Throughout the week she constantly imagined herself standing before the commissioner of police. Seven long days she brooded over that word and that idea: the Law! the Law as it appears to the imagination of the lower classes; something terrible, indefinable, inevitable, which is everywhere, and lurks in everyone's shadow; an omnipotent source of calamity which appears vaguely in the judge's black gown, between the police sergeant and the executioner, with the hands of the gendarme and the arms of the guillotine! She, who was subject to all the instinctive terrors of the common people, and who often repeated that she would much rather die than appear before the court—she imagined herself seated in the dock, between two gendarmes, in a court-room, surrounded by all the unfamiliar paraphernalia of the Law, her ignorance of which made them objects of terror to her. Throughout the week her ears heard footsteps on the stairs coming to arrest her!

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The shock was too violent for nerves as weak as hers. The mental upheaval of that week of agony possessed her with an idea that hitherto had only hovered about her—the idea of suicide. She began to listen, with her head in her hands, to the voice that spoke to her of deliverance. She opened her ears to the sweet music of death that we hear in the background of life like the fall of mighty waters in the distance, dying away in space. The temptations that speak to the discouraged heart of the things that put an end to life so quickly and so easily, of the means of quelling suffering with the hand, pursued and solicited her. Her glance rested wistfully upon all the things about her that could cure the disease called life. She accustomed her fingers and her lips to them. She touched them, handled them, drew them near to her. She sought to test her courage upon them and to obtain a foretaste of death. She would remain for hours at her kitchen window with her eyes fixed on the pavements in the courtyard down at the foot of the five flights—pavements that she knew and could have distinguished from others! As the daylight faded she would lean farther out bending almost double over the ill-secured window-bar, hoping always that it would give way and drag her down with it—praying that she might die without having to make the desperate, voluntary leap into space to which she no longer felt equal.

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"Why, you'll fall out!" said mademoiselle one day, grasping her skirt impulsively in her alarm. "What are you looking at down there in the courtyard?"

"Oh! nothing—the pavements."

"In Heaven's name, are you crazy? How you frightened me!"

"Oh! people don't fall that way," said Germinie in a strange tone. "I tell you, mademoiselle, in order to fall one must have a mighty longing to do it!"

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## LI

Germinie had not been able to induce Gautruche, who was haunted by a former mistress, to give her the key to his room. When he had not returned she was obliged to await his coming outside, in the cold, dark street.

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At first she would walk back and forth in front of the house. She would take twenty steps in one direction and twenty in the other. Then, as if to prolong her period of waiting, she would take a longer turn, and, going farther and farther every time, would end by extending her walk to both ends of the boulevard. Frequently she walked thus for hours, shamefaced and mud-stained, in the fog and darkness, amid the iniquitous and horrible surroundings of an avenue near the barriers, where darkness reigned. She followed the line of red-wine shops, the naked arbors, the *cabaret* trellises supported by dead trees such as we see in bear-pits, low, flat hovels with curtainless windows cut at random in the walls, cap factories where shirts are sold, and wicked-looking



hotels where a night's lodging may be had. She passed by closed, hermetically-sealed shops, black with bankruptcy, by fragments of condemned walls, by dark passageways with iron gratings, by walled-up windows, by doors that seemed to give admission to those abodes of murder, the plan of which is handed to the jury at the assizes. As she went on, there were gloomy little gardens, crooked buildings, architecture in its most degraded form, tall, mouldy *portes-cochères*, hedge-rows, within which could be vaguely seen the uncanny whiteness of stones in the darkness, corners of unfinished buildings from which arose the stench of nitrification, walls disfigured by disgusting placards and fragments of torn advertisements by which they were spotted with loathsome publications as by leprosy. From time to time, at a sharp turn in the street, she would come upon lanes that seemed to plunge into dark holes a few steps from their beginning, and from which a blast of damp air came forth as from a cellar; dark no-thoroughfares stood out against the sky with the rigidity of a great wall; streets stretched vaguely away in the distance, with the feeble gleam of a lantern twinkling here and there at long intervals upon the ghostly plaster fronts of the houses.

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Germinie would walk on and on. She would cover all the territory where low debauchery fills its crop on Mondays and finds its loves, between a hospital, a slaughter-house, and a cemetery; Lariboisière, the Abattoir and Montmartre.

The people who passed that way—the workman returning from Paris whistling; the workingwoman, her day's work ended, hurrying on with her hands under her armpits to keep herself warm; the street-walker in her black cap—would stare at her as they passed. Strange men acted as if they recognized her; the light made her ashamed. She would turn and run toward the other end of the boulevard and follow the dark, deserted footway along the city wall; but she was soon driven away by horrible shadows of men and by brutally familiar hands.

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She tried to go away; she insulted herself inwardly; she called herself a cowardly wretch; she swore to herself that each turn should be the last, that she would go as far as a certain tree, and that was all; if he had not returned, she would go away and put an end to the whole thing. But she did not go; she walked on and on; she waited, more consumed than ever, the longer he delayed, with the mad desire to see him.

At last, as the hours flew by and the boulevard became empty, Germinie, exhausted, overdone with weariness, would approach the houses. She would loiter from shop to shop, she would go mechanically where gas was still burning, and stand stupidly in the bright glare from the shop windows. She welcomed the dazzling light in her eyes, she tried to allay her impatience by benumbing it. The objects to be seen through the perspiring windows of the wine-shops—the cooking utensils, the bowls of punch flanked by two empty bottles with sprigs of laurel protruding from their necks, the show-cases in which the liquors combined their varied colors in a single beam, a cup filled with plated spoons—these things would hold her attention for a long while. She would read the old announcements of lottery drawings placarded on the walls of a saloon, the advertisements of *gloria*—coffee with brandy—the inscriptions in yellow letters: *New wine, pure blood, 70 centimes*. For a whole quarter of an hour she would stand staring into a back room containing a man in a blouse sitting on a stool by a table, a stove-pipe, a slate, and two black tea-boards against the wall. Her fixed, vacant stare would rest, through the reddish mist, upon the dark forms of shoemakers leaning over their benches. It fell and lingered heedlessly upon a counter that was being washed, upon hands that were counting the receipts of the day, upon a tunnel or jug that was being scoured with sandstone. She had ceased to think. She would simply stand there, nailed to the spot and growing weaker and weaker, feeling her courage vanish from the mere weariness of standing on her feet, seeing things only through a sort of film as in a swoon, hearing the noise made by the muddy cabs rolling over the wet pavements only as a buzzing in her ears, ready to fall and compelled again and again to lean against the wall for support.

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In her then condition of prostration and illness, with that semi-hallucination of vertigo that made her so timid of crossing the Seine and impelled her to cling to the bridge railings, it happened that, on certain evenings, when it rained, these fits of weakness that she had upon the outer boulevard assumed the terrors of a nightmare. When the light from the lanterns, trembling in misty vapor, cast its varying, flickering reflection on the damp ground; when the pavements, the sidewalks, the earth, seemed to melt away and disappear under the rain, and there was no appearance of solidity anywhere in the aqueous darkness, the wretched creature, almost mad with fatigue, would fancy that she could see a flood rising in the gutter. A mirage of terror would show her suddenly the water all about her, and creeping constantly nearer to her. She would close her eyes, not daring to move, fearing to feel her feet slip from under her; she would begin to weep, and would weep on until someone passed by and offered to escort her to the *Hotel of the Little Blue Hand*.

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## LII

She would then ascend the stairs; that was her last place of refuge. She would fly from the rain and snow and cold, from fear, despair, and fatigue. She would go up and sit on the top step

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against Gautruche's closed doors; she would draw her shawl and skirts closely about her in order to leave room for those who went and came up that long steep ladder, and would draw back as far as possible into the corner in order that her shame might fill but little space on the narrow landing.

From the open doors the odor of unventilated closets, of families heaped together in a single room, the exhalations of unhealthy trades, the dense, greasy fumes of cooking done in chafing-dishes on the floor, the stench of rags and the faint damp smell of clothes drying in the house, came forth and filled the hall. The broken-paned window behind Germinie wafted to her nostrils the fetid stench of a leaden pipe in which the whole house emptied its refuse and its filth. Her stomach rose in revolt every moment at a puff of infection; she was obliged to take from her pocket a phial of melissa water that she always carried, and swallow a mouthful of it to avoid being ill. [304]

But the staircase had its passers, too: honest workmen's wives went up with a bushel of charcoal, or a pint of wine for supper. Their feet would rub against her as they passed, and as they went farther up, Germinie would feel their scornful glances resting upon her and falling upon her with more crushing force at every floor. The children—little girls in *fanchons* who flitted up the dark stairway and brightened it as if with flowers, little girls in whom she saw, as she so often saw in dreams, her own little one, living and grown to girlhood—she saw them stop and look at her with wide open eyes that seemed to recoil from her; then the little creatures would turn and run breathlessly up-stairs, and, when they were well out of reach, would lean over the rail until they almost fell, and hurl impure jests at her, the insults of the children of the common people. Insulting words, poured out upon her by those rosebud mouths, wounded Germinie more deeply than all else. She would half rise for an instant; then, overwhelmed by shame, resigning herself to her fate, she would fall back into her corner, and, pulling her shawl over her head in order to bury herself therein out of sight, she would sit like a dead woman, crushed, inert, insensible, cowering over her own shadow, like a bundle tossed on the floor which everyone might tread upon—having no control of her faculties, dead to everything except the footsteps that she was listening for—and that did not come. [305]

At last, after long hours, hours that she could not count, she would fancy that she heard a stumbling walk in the street; then a vinous voice would mount the stairs, stammering "*Canaille! canaille* of a saloon-keeper!—you sold me the kind of wine that goes to my head!"

It was he.

And almost every day the same scene was enacted.

"Ah! there y'are, my Germinie," he would say as his eyes fell upon her. "It's like this—I'll tell you all about it. I'm a little bit under water." And, as he put the key in the lock: "I'll tell you all about it. It isn't my fault."

He would enter the room, kick aside a turtle-dove with mangy wings that limped forward to greet him, and close the door. "It wasn't me, d'ye see. It was Paillon, you know Paillon? that little round fellow, fat as a mad dog. Well, it was him, 'pon my honor. He insisted on paying for a sixteen-sous bottle for me. He offered to treat me, and I *proffered* him thanks. Thereupon we naturally *consoled*<sup>[5]</sup> our coffee; when you're consoled, you console! and as one thing led to another, we fell upon each other! There was a very devil of a carnage! The proof of it is that that gallows-bird of a saloon-keeper threw us out-o'-doors like lobster shells!"

Germinie, during the explanation, would have lighted the candle, stuck in a yellow copper candlestick. By its flickering light the dirty paper on the walls could be seen, covered with caricatures from *Charivari*, torn from the paper and pasted on the wall. [306]

"Well, you're a love!" Gautruche would exclaim, as he saw her place a cold fowl and two bottles of wine on the table. "For I must tell you all I've had in my stomach to-day—a plate of wretched soup—that's all. Ah! it must have taken a stout master-at-arms to put that fellow's eyes out!"

And he would begin to eat. Germinie would sit with her elbows on the table, watching him and drinking, and her glance would grow dark.

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"Pshaw! all the *négresses* are dead,"<sup>[6]</sup> Gautruche would say at last, as he drained the bottles one by one. "Put the children to bed!"

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Thereupon terrible, fierce, abhorrent outbursts of passion would ensue between those two strange creatures, savage ardor followed by savage satiety, frantic storms of lust, caresses that were impregnated with the fierce brutality of wine, kisses that seemed to seek the blood beneath the skin, like the tongue of a wild beast, and at the end, utter exhaustion that swallowed them up and left their bodies like corpses.

Germinie plunged into these debauches with—what shall I say?—delirium, madness, desperation,

a sort of supreme frenzy. Her ungovernable passions turned against themselves, and, going beyond their natural appetites, forced themselves to suffer. Satiety exhausted them without extinguishing them; and, overpassing the widest limits of excess, they excited themselves to self-torture. In the poor creature's paroxysms of excitement, her brain, her nerves, the imagination of her maddened body, no longer sought pleasure in pleasure, but something sharper, keener, and more violent: pain in pleasure. And the words "to die" constantly escaped from her compressed lips, as if she were invoking death in an undertone and seeking to embrace it in the agonies of love.

Sometimes, in the night, she would suddenly sit up on the edge of the bed, rest her bare feet on the cold floor, and remain there, wild-eyed, listening to the things that breathe in a sleeping-chamber. And little by little the obscurity of the place and hour seemed to envelop her. She seemed to herself to fall and writhe helplessly in the blind unconsciousness of the night. Her will became as naught. All sorts of black things, that seemed to have wings and voices, beat against her temples. The ghastly temptations that afford madness a vague glimpse of crime caused a red light, the flash of murder, to pass before her eyes, close at hand; and hands placed against her back pushed her toward the table where the knives lay. She would close her eyes and move one foot; then fear would lay hold of her and she would cling to the bedclothes; and at last she would turn around, fall back upon the bed, and go to sleep beside the man she had been tempted to murder; why? she had no idea; for nothing—for the sake of killing!

And so, until daybreak, in that wretched furnished lodging, the fierce struggle of those fatal passions would continue, while the poor maimed, limping dove, the infirm bird of Venus, nesting in one of Gautruche's old shoes, would utter now and then, awakened by the noise, a frightened coo.

## Chapter III

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### LIII

In those days Gautruche became a little disgusted with drinking. He felt the first pangs of the disease of the liver that had long been lurking in his heated, alcoholized blood, under his brick-red cheek bones. The horrible pains that gnawed at his side, and twisted the cords of his stomach for a whole week, caused him to reflect. There came to his mind, together with divers resolutions inspired by prudence, certain almost sentimental ideas of the future. He said to himself that he must put a little more water into his life, if he wanted to live to old age. While he lay writhing in bed and tying himself into knots, with his knees up to his chin to lessen the pain, he looked about at his den, the four walls within which he passed his nights, to which he brought his drunken body home in the evening, and from which he fled into the daylight in the morning; and he thought about making a real home for himself. He dreamed of a room, where he could keep a wife, a wife who would make him a good stew, look after him if he were ill, straighten out his affairs, keep his linen in order, prevent him from beginning a new score at the wine-shop; a wife, in short, who would combine all the useful qualities of a housekeeper, and who, in addition, would not be a stupid fool, but would understand him and laugh with him. Such a wife was all found: Germinie was the very one. She probably had a little hoard, a few sous laid by during the time she had been in her old mistress's service; and with what he earned they could "grub along" in comfort. He had no doubt of her consent; he was sure beforehand that she would accept his proposition. More than that, her scruples, if she had any, would not hold out against the prospect of marriage which he proposed to exhibit to her at the end of their *liaison*.

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One Monday she had come to his room as usual.

"Say, Germinie," he began, "what would you say to this, eh? A good room—not like this box—a real room, with a closet—at Montmartre, and two windows, no less! Rue de l'Empereur—with a view an Englishman would give five thousand francs to carry away with him. Something first-class, bright, and cheerful, you know, a place where you could stay all day without hating yourself. Because, I tell you I'm beginning to have enough of moving about here and there just to change fleas. And that isn't all, either: I'm tired of being cooped up in furnished lodgings, I'm tired of being all alone. Friends don't make society. They fall on you like flies in your glass when you're to pay, and then, there you are! In the first place, I don't propose to drink any more, honor bright! no more for me, you'll see! You understand I don't intend to use myself up in this life, not if I know myself. Not by any means! Attention! We mustn't let drink get the better of us. It seemed to me those days as if I'd been swallowing corkscrews. And I've no desire to knock at the monument just yet. Well, to go from the thread to the needle, this is what I thought: I'll make the proposition to Germinie. I'll treat myself to a little furniture. You've got what you have in your

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room. You know I'm not much of a shirker, I haven't a lazy bone in my body where work's concerned. And then we might look to not always be working for others: we might take a lodging-house for country thieves. If you had a little something put aside, that would help. We would join forces in genteel fashion, and have ourselves straightened out some day before the mayor. That's not such a bad scheme, is it, old girl, eh? And you'll leave your old lady this time, won't you, for your dear old Gautruche?"

Germinie, who had listened to him with her head thrust forward and her chin resting on the palm of her hand, threw herself back with a burst of strident laughter.

"Ha! ha! ha! You thought—and you have the face to tell me so!—you thought I'd leave her! Mademoiselle? Did you really think so? You're a fool, you know! Why, you might have thousands and hundred thousands, you might be stuffed with gold, do you hear? all stuffed with it. You're joking, aren't you? Mademoiselle? Why, don't you know? haven't I ever told you? I would like to see her die and these hands not be there to close her eyes! I'd like to see it! Come now, really, did you think so?"

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"Damnation! I imagined, from the way you acted with me, I thought you cared more for me than that—that you loved me, in fact!" exclaimed the painter, disconcerted by the terrible, stinging irony of Germinie's words.

"Ah! you thought that, too—that I loved you!" And, as if she were suddenly uprooting from the depths of her heart the remorse and suffering of her passions, she continued: "Well, yes! I do love you—I love you as you love me! just as much! and that's all! I love you as one loves something that is close at hand—that one makes use of because it is there! I am used to you as one gets used to an old dress and wears it again and again. That's how I love you! How do you suppose I should care for you? I'd like you to tell me what difference it can make to me whether it's you or another? For, after all, what have you been to me more than any other man would be? In the first place, you took me. Well? Is that enough to make me love you? What have you done, then, to attach me to you, will you be kind enough to tell me? Have you ever sacrificed a glass of wine to me? Have you even so much as taken pity on me when I was tramping about in the mud and snow at the risk of my life? Oh! yes! And what did people say to me and spit out in my face so that my blood boiled from one end of my body to the other! You never troubled your head about all the insults I've swallowed waiting for you! Look you! I've been wanting to tell you all this for a long time—it's been choking me. Tell me," she continued, with a ghastly smile, "do you flatter yourself you've driven me wild with your physical beauty, with your hair, which you've lost, with that head of yours? Hardly! I took you—I'd have taken anyone, it didn't matter who! It was one of the times when I had to have someone! At those times I don't know anything or see anything. I'm not myself at all. I took you because it was a hot day!"

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She paused an instant.

"Go on," said Gautruche, "iron me on all the seams. Don't mind me as long as your hand's in."

"So?" continued Germinie, "how enchanted you imagined I was going to be to take up with you! You said to yourself: 'The good-natured fool! she'll be glad of the chance! And all I shall have to do will be to promise to marry her. She'll throw up her place. She'll leave her mistress in the lurch.' The idea! Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle, who has no one but me! Ah! you don't know anything about such things. You wouldn't understand if I should tell you. Mademoiselle, who is everything to me! Why, since my mother died, I've had nobody but her, never been treated kindly by anybody but her! Who beside her ever said to me when I was unhappy: 'Are you unhappy?' And, when I was sick: 'Don't you feel well?' No one! There's been no one but her to take care of me, to care what became of me. God! and you talk of loving on account of what there is between us! Ah! mademoiselle has loved me! Yes, loved me! And I'm dying of it, do you know? of having become such a miserable creature as I am, a——" She said the word. "And of deceiving her, of stealing her affection, of allowing her still to love me as her daughter! Ah! if she should ever learn anything—but, no fear of that, it won't be long. There's one woman who would make a pretty leap out of a fifth-story window, as true as God is my master! But fancy—you are not my heart, you are not my life, you are only my pleasure. But I did have a man. Ah! I don't know whether I loved him! but you could have torn me to pieces for him without a word from me. In short, he was the man that made me what I am. Well, d'ye see, when my passion for him was at its hottest, when I breathed only as he wished me to, when I was mad over him and would have let him walk on my stomach if he'd wanted to—even then, if mademoiselle had been sick, if she had motioned to me with her little finger, I'd have gone back to her. Yes, I would have left him for her! I tell you I would have left him!"

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"In that case—if that's the way things stand, my dear—if you're so fond of your old lady as that, I have only one piece of advice to give you: you'd better not leave your good lady, d'ye see!"

"That's my dismissal, is it?" said Germinie, rising.

"Faith! it's very like it."

"Well! adieu. That suits me!"

She went straight to the door, and left the room without a word.

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After this rupture Germinie fell where she was sure to fall, below shame, below nature itself. Lower and lower the unhappy, passionate creature fell, until she wallowed in the gutter. She took up the lovers whose passions are exhausted in one night, those whom she passed or met on the street, those whom chance throws in the way of a wandering woman. She had no need to give herself time for the growth of desire: her caprice was fierce and sudden, kindled instantly. Pouncing greedily upon the first comer, she hardly looked at him and could not have recognized him. Beauty, youth, the physical qualities of a lover, in which the passion of the most degraded woman seeks to realize a base ideal, as it were—none of those things tempted her now or touched her. In all men her eyes saw nothing but man: the individual mattered naught to her. The last indication of decency and of human feeling in debauchery,—preference, selection,—and even that which represents all that prostitutes retain of conscience and personality,—disgust, even disgust,—she had lost!

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And she wandered about the streets at night, with the furtive, stealthy gait of wild beasts prowling in the shadow in quest of food. As if unsexed, she made the advances, she solicited brutes, she took advantage of drunkenness, and men yielded to her. She walked along, peering on every side, approaching every shadowy corner where impurity might lurk under cover of the darkness and solitude, where hands were waiting to swoop down upon a shawl. Belated pedestrians saw her by the light of the street lanterns, an ill-omened, shuddering phantom, gliding along, almost crawling, bent double, slinking by in the shadow, with that appearance of illness and insanity and of utter aberration which sets the thoughtful man's heart and the physician's mind at work on the brink of deep abysses of melancholy.

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## LV

One evening when she was prowling about Rue du Rocher, as she passed a wine-shop at the corner of Rue de Labarde, she noticed the back of a man who was drinking at the bar: it was Jupillon.

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She stopped short, turned toward the street with her back against the door of the wine-shop, and waited. The light in the shop was behind her, her shoulders against the bars, and there she stood motionless, her skirt gathered up in one hand in front, and her other hand falling listlessly at her side. She resembled a statue of darkness seated on a milestone. In her attitude there was an air of stern determination and the necessary patience to wait there forever. The passers-by, the carriages, the street—she saw them all indistinctly and as if they were far away. The tow-horse, waiting to assist in drawing the omnibuses up the hill,—a white horse, he was,—stood in front of her, worn out and motionless, sleeping on his feet, with his head and forefeet in the bright light from the door: she did not see him. There was a dense fog. It was one of those vile, detestable Parisian nights when it seems as if the water that falls had become mud before falling. The gutter rose and flowed about her feet. She remained thus half an hour without moving, with her back to the light and her face in the shadow, a threatening, desperate, forbidding creature, like a statue of Fatality erected by Darkness at a wine-shop door!

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At last Jupillon came out. She stood before him with folded arms.

"My money?" she said. Her face was that of a woman who has ceased to possess a conscience, for whom there is no God, no police, no assizes, no scaffold—nothing!

Jupillon felt that his customary *blague* was arrested in his throat.

"Your money?" he repeated; "your money ain't lost. But I must have time. Just now, you see, work ain't very plenty. That shop business of mine came to grief a long while ago, you know. But in three months' time, I promise. Are you pretty well?"

"*Canaille!* Ah! I've got you now! Ah! you'd sneak away, would you? But it was you, my curse! it was you who made me what I am, brigand! robber! sneak! It was you."

Germinie hurled these words in his face, pushing against him, forcing him back, pressing her body against his. She seemed to be rubbing against the blows that she invited and provoked, and as she leaned toward him thus, she cried: "Come, strike me! What, then, must I say to you to make you strike me?"

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She had ceased to think. She did not know what she wanted; she simply felt that she needed to be struck. There had come upon her an instinctive, irrational desire to be maltreated, bruised, made to suffer in her flesh, to experience a violent shock, a sharp pain that would put a stop to what was going on in her brain. She could think of nothing but blows to bring matters to a crisis. After the blows, she saw, with the lucidity of an hallucination, all sorts of things come to pass,—the guard arriving, the gendarmes from the post, the commissioner! the commissioner to whom she could tell everything, her story, her misfortunes, how the man before her had abused her and

what he had cost her! Her heart collapsed in anticipation at the thought of emptying itself, with shrieks and tears, of everything with which it was bursting.

"Come, strike me!" she repeated, still advancing upon Jupillon, who tried to slink away, and, as he retreated, tossed caressing words to her as you do to a dog that does not recognize you and seems inclined to bite. A crowd was beginning to collect about them.

"Come, old harridan, don't bother monsieur!" exclaimed a police officer, grasping Germinie by the arm and swinging her around roughly. Under that brutal insult from the hand of the law, Germinie's knees wavered: she thought she should faint. Then she was afraid, and fled in the middle of the street.

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## LVI

Passion is subject to the most insensate reactions, the most inexplicable revivals. The accursed love that Germinie believed to have been killed by all the wounds and blows Jupillon had inflicted upon it came to life once more. She was dismayed to find it in her heart when she returned home. The mere sight of the man, his proximity for those few moments, the sound of his voice, the act of breathing the air that he breathed, were enough to turn her heart back to him and relegate her to the past.

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Notwithstanding all that had happened, she had never been able to tear Jupillon's image altogether from her heart: its roots were still imbedded there. He was her first love. She belonged to him against her own will by all the weaknesses of memory, by all the cowardice of habit. Between them there were all the bonds of torture that hold a woman fast forever,—sacrifice, suffering, degradation. He owned her, body and soul, because he had outraged her conscience, trampled upon her illusions, made her life a martyrdom. She belonged to him, belonged to him forever, as to the author of all her sorrows.

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And that shock, that scene which should have caused her to think with horror of ever meeting him again, rekindled in her the frenzied desire to meet him again. Her passion seized her again in its full force. The thought of Jupillon filled her mind so completely that it purified her. She abruptly called a halt in the vagabondage of her passions: she determined to belong thenceforth to no one, as that was the only method by which she could still belong to him.

She began to spy upon him, to make a study of his usual hours for going out, the streets he passed through, the places that he visited. She followed him to Batignolles, to his new quarters, walked behind him, content to put her foot where he had put his, to be guided by his steps, to see him now and then, to notice a gesture that he made, to snatch one of his glances. That was all: she dared not speak to him; she kept at some distance behind, like a lost dog, happy not to be driven away with kicks.

For weeks and weeks she made herself thus the man's shadow, a humble, timid shadow that shrank back and moved away a few steps when it thought it was in danger of being seen; then drew nearer again with faltering steps, and, at an impatient movement from the man, stopped once more, as if asking pardon.

Sometimes she waited at the door of a house which he entered, caught him up again when he came out and escorted him home, always at a distance, without speaking to him, with the air of a beggar begging for crumbs and thankful for what she was allowed to pick up. Then she would listen at the shutters of the ground-floor apartment in which he lived, to ascertain if he was alone, if there was anybody there.

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When he had a woman on his arm, although she suffered keenly, she was the more persistent in following him. She went where they went to the end. She entered the public gardens and ballrooms behind them. She walked within sound of their laughter and their words, tore her heart to tatters looking at them and listening to them, and stood at their backs with every jealous instinct of her nature bleeding.

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## LVII

It was November. For three or four days Germinie had not fallen in with Jupillon. She went to hover about his lodgings, watching for him. When she reached the street on which he lived, she saw a broad beam of light struggling out through the closed shutters. She approached and heard bursts of laughter, the clinking of glasses, women's voices, then a song and one voice, that of the woman whom she hated with all the hatred of her heart, whom she would have liked to see lying

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dead before her, and whose death she had so often sought to discover in the coffee-grounds,—the cousin!

She glued her ear to the shutter, breathing in what they said, absorbed in the torture of listening to them, pasturing her famished heart upon suffering. It was a cold, rainy winter's night. She did not feel the cold or rain. All her senses were engaged in listening. The voice she detested seemed at times to grow faint and die away beneath kisses, and the notes it sang died in her throat as if stifled by lips placed upon the song. The hours passed. Germinie was still at her post. She did not think of going away. She waited, with no knowledge of what she was waiting for. It seemed to her that she must remain there always, until the end. The rain fell faster. The water from a broken gutter overhead beat down upon her shoulders. Great drops glided down her neck. An icy shiver ran up and down her back. The water dripped from her dress to the ground. She did not notice it. She was conscious of no pain in any of her limbs except the pain that flowed from her heart.

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Well on toward morning there was a movement in the house, and footsteps approached the door. Germinie ran and hid in a recess in the wall some steps away, and from there saw a woman come out, escorted by a young man. As she watched them walk away, she felt something soft and warm on her hands that frightened her at first; it was a dog licking her, a great dog that she had held in her lap many an evening, when he was a puppy, in the *crémère's* back shop.

"Come here, Molosse!" Jupillon shouted impatiently twice or thrice in the darkness.

The dog barked, ran back, returned and gambled about her, and at last entered the house. The door closed. The voices and singing lured Germinie back to her former position against the shutter, and there she remained, drenched by the rain, allowing herself to be drenched, as she listened and listened, till morning, till daybreak, till the hour when the masons on their way to work, with their dinner loaf under their arms, began to laugh at her as they passed.

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## LVIII

Two or three days after that night in the rain, Germinie's features were distorted with pain, her skin was like marble and her eyes blazing. She said nothing, made no complaints, but went about her work as usual.

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"Here! girl, look at me a moment," said mademoiselle, and she led her abruptly to the window. "What does all this mean? this look of a dead woman risen from the grave? Come, tell me honestly, are you sick? My God! how hot your hands are!"

She grasped her wrist, and in a moment threw it down.

"What a silly slut! you're in a burning fever! And you keep it to yourself!"

"Why no, mademoiselle," Germinie stammered. "I think it's nothing but a bad cold. I went to sleep the other evening with my kitchen window open."

"Oh! you're a good one!" retorted mademoiselle; "you might be dying and you'd never as much as say: 'Ouf!' Wait."

She put on her spectacles, and hastily moving her arm-chair to a small table by the fireplace, she wrote a few lines in her bold hand.

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"Here," said she, folding the note, "you will do me the favor to give this to your friend Adèle and have her send the concierge with it. And now to bed you go!"

But Germinie refused to go to bed. It was not worth while. She would not tire herself. She would sit down all day. Besides, the worst of her sickness was over; she was getting better already. And then it always killed her to stay in bed.

The doctor, summoned by mademoiselle's note, came in the evening. He examined Germinie, and ordered the application of croton oil. The trouble in the chest was of such a nature that he could say nothing about it until he had observed the effect of his remedies.

He returned a few days later, sent Germinie to bed and sounded her chest for a long while.

"It's a most extraordinary thing," he said to mademoiselle, when he went downstairs; "she has had pleurisy upon her and hasn't kept her bed for a moment! Is she made of iron, in Heaven's name? Oh! the energy of some women! How old is she?"

"Forty-one."

"Forty-one! Oh! it's not possible. Are you sure? She looks fully fifty."

"Ah! as to that, she looks as old as you please. What can you expect? Never in good health,—always sick, disappointment, sorrow,—and a disposition that can't help tormenting itself."

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"Forty-one years old! it's amazing!" the physician repeated.



After a moment's reflection, he continued:

"So far as you know, is there any hereditary lung trouble in her family? Has she had any relatives who have died young?"

"She lost a sister by pleurisy; but she was older. She was forty-eight, I think."

The doctor had become very grave. "However, the lung is getting freer," he said, in an encouraging tone. "But it is absolutely necessary that she should have rest. And send her to me once a week. Let her come and see me. And let her take a pleasant day for it,—a bright, sunny day."

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## LIX

Mademoiselle talked and prayed and implored and scolded to no purpose: she could not induce Germinie to lay aside her work for a few days. Germinie would not even listen to the suggestion that she should have an assistant to do the heavier work. She declared that it was useless, impossible; that she could never endure the thought of another woman approaching her, waiting upon her, attending to her wants; that it would give her a fever simply to think of such a thing as she lay in bed; that she was not dead yet; and she begged that she might be allowed to go on as usual, so long as she could put one foot before the other. She said it in such an affectionate tone, her eyes were so beseeching, her feeble voice was so humble and so passionate in making the request, that mademoiselle had not the courage to force her to accept an assistant. She simply called her a "blockhead," who believed, like all country-people, that a few days in bed means death.

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Keeping on her feet, with an apparent improvement due to the physician's energetic treatment, Germinie continued to make mademoiselle's bed, accepting her assistance to turn the mattresses. She also continued to prepare her food, and that was an especially distasteful task to her.

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When she was preparing mademoiselle's breakfast and dinner, she felt as if she should die in her kitchen, one of the wretched little kitchens common in great cities, which are the cause of so much pulmonary trouble in women. The embers that she kindled, and from which a thread of suffocating smoke slowly arose, began to stir her stomach to revolt; soon the charcoal that she bought from the charcoal dealer next door, strong Paris charcoal, full of half-charred wood, enveloped her in its stifling odor. The dirty, smoking funnel, the low chimney-piece poured back into her lungs the corroding heat of the waist-high oven. She suffocated, she felt the fiery heat of all her blood surge upward to her face and cause red blotches to appear on her forehead. Her head whirled. In the half-asphyxiated condition of laundresses who pass back and forth through the vapor of their charcoal stoves, she would rush to the window and draw a few breaths of the icy outside air.

She had other motives for suffering on her feet, for keeping constantly about her work despite her increasing weakness, than the repugnance of country-people to take to their beds, or her fierce, jealous determination that no one but herself should attend to mademoiselle's needs: she had a constant terror of denunciation, which might accompany the installation of a new servant. It was absolutely necessary that she should be there, to keep watch on mademoiselle and prevent anyone from coming near her. It was necessary, too, that she should show herself, that the quarter should see her, and that she should not appear to her creditors with the aspect of a dead woman. She must make a pretence of being strong, she must assume a cheerful, lively demeanor, she must impart confidence to the whole street with the doctor's studied words, with a hopeful air, and with the promise not to die. She must appear at her best in order to reassure her debtors and to prevent apprehensions on the subject of money from ascending the stairs and applying to mademoiselle.

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She acted up to her part in this horrible, but necessary, comedy. She was absolutely heroic in the way she made her whole body lie,—in drawing up her enfeebled form to its full height as she passed the shops, whose proprietors' eyes were upon her; in quickening her trailing footsteps; in rubbing her cheeks with a rough towel before going out in order to bring back the color of blood to them; in covering the pallor of her disease and her death-mask with rouge.

Despite the terrible cough that racked her sleepless nights, despite her stomach's loathing for food, she passed the whole winter conquering and overcoming her own weakness and struggling with the ups and downs of her disease.

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At every visit that he made, the doctor told mademoiselle that he was unable to find that any of her maid's vital organs were seriously diseased. The lungs were a little ulcerated near the top; but people recovered from that. "But her body seems worn out, thoroughly worn out," he said again and again, in a sad tone, with an almost embarrassed manner that impressed mademoiselle. And he always had something to say, at the end of his visit, about a change of air—about the country.

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## LX

When August arrived, the doctor had nothing but that to advise or prescribe—the country. Notwithstanding the repugnance of elderly people to move, to change their abode and the habits and regular hours of their life; despite her domestic nature and the sort of pang that she felt at being torn from her hearthstone, mademoiselle decided to take Germinie into the country. She wrote to the *chick's* daughter, who lived, with a brood of children, on a small estate in a village of Brie, and who had been, for many years, begging her to pay her a long visit. She requested her hospitality for a month or six weeks for herself and her sick maid. [337]

They set out. Germinie was delighted. On their arrival she felt decidedly better. For some days her disease seemed to be diverted by the change. But the weather that summer was very uncertain, with much rain, sudden changes, and high winds. Germinie had a chill, and mademoiselle soon heard again, overhead, just above the room in which she slept, the frightful cough that had been so painful and hard to bear at Paris. There were hurried paroxysms of coughing that seemed almost to strangle her; spasms that would break off for a moment, then begin again; and the pauses caused the ear and the heart to experience a nervous, anxious anticipation of what was certain to come next, and always did come,—racking and tearing, dying away again, but still vibrating in the ear, even when it had ceased: never silent, never willing to have done. [338]

And yet Germinie rose from those horrible nights with an energy and activity that amazed mademoiselle and at times reassured her. She was out of bed as early as anybody in the house. One morning, at five o'clock, she went with the man-servant in a *char-à-banc* to a mill-pond three leagues away, for fish; at another time she dragged herself to the saint's day ball, with the maids from the house, and did not return until they did, at daybreak. She worked all the time; assisted the servants. She was always sitting on the edge of a chair, in a corner of the kitchen, doing something with her fingers. Mademoiselle was obliged to force her to go out, to drive her into the garden to sit. Then Germinie would sit on the green bench, with her umbrella over her head, and the sun in her skirts and on her feet. Hardly moving, she would forget herself utterly as she inhaled the light and air and warmth, passionately and with a sort of feverish joy. Her distended lips would part to admit the fresh, clear air. Her eyes burned, but did not move; and in the light shadow of the silk umbrella her gaunt, wasted, haggard face stared vacantly into space like an amorous death's head. [339]

Weary as she was at night, no persuasion could induce her to retire before her mistress. She insisted upon being at hand to undress her. Seated by her side, she would rise from time to time to wait upon her as best she could, assist her to take off a petticoat, then sit down again, collect her strength for a moment, rise again, and insist upon doing something for her. Mademoiselle had to force her to sit down and order her to keep quiet. And all the time that the evening toilet lasted she had always upon her lips the same tiresome chatter about the servants of the house.

"Why, mademoiselle, you haven't an idea of the eyes they make at each other when they think no one sees them—the cook and the man—I mean. They keep quiet when I am by; but the other day I surprised them in the bakery. They were kissing, fancy! Luckily madame here don't suspect it."

"Ah! there you are again with your tale-bearing! Why, good God!" mademoiselle would exclaim, "what difference does it make to you whether they *coo* or don't *coo*? They're kind to you, aren't they? That's all that's necessary."

"Oh! very kind, mademoiselle; as far as that's concerned I haven't a word to say. Marie got up in the night last night to give me some water—and as for him, when there's any dessert left, it's always for me. Oh! he's very polite to me—in fact, Marie don't like it very well that he thinks so much about me. You understand, mademoiselle—"

"Come, come! go to bed with all your nonsense!" said her mistress sharply, sad, and annoyed as well, to find such a keen interest in others' love-affairs in one so ill. [340]

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## LXI

When they returned from the country, the doctor, after examining Germinie, said to Mademoiselle: "It has been very rapid, very rapid. The left lung is entirely gone. The right has begun to be affected at the top, and I fear that there is more or less difficulty all through it. She's a dead woman. She may live six weeks, two months at most." [341]

"Great Heaven!" said Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, "everyone I have ever loved will go before me! Tell me, must I wait until everybody has gone?"

"Have you thought of placing her in some institution?" said the doctor, after a moment's silence. "You can't keep her here. It's too great a burden, too great a grief for you to have her with you," he added, at a gesture from mademoiselle.

"No, monsieur, no, I haven't thought of it. Oh! yes, I am likely to send her away. Why you must have seen, monsieur: that girl isn't a maid, she isn't a servant in my eyes; she's like the family I never had! What would you have me say to her: 'Be off with you now!' Ah! I never suffered so much before on account of not being rich and having a wretched four-sou apartment like this. I, mention such a thing to her! why, it's impossible! And where could she go? To the Maison Dubois? Oh! yes, to the Dubois! She went there once to see the maid I had before, who died there. You might as well kill her! The hospital, then? No, not there; I don't choose to have her die in that place!" [342]

"Good God, mademoiselle, she'll be a hundred times better off there than here. I would get her admitted at Lariboisière, during the term of service of a doctor who is a friend of mine. I would recommend her to an intern, who is under great obligations to me. She would have a very excellent Sister to nurse her in the hall to which I would have her sent. If necessary, she could have a private room. But I am sure she would prefer to be in a common room. It's the essential thing to do, you see, mademoiselle. She can't stay in that chamber up there. You know what these horrible servants' quarters are. Indeed, it's my opinion that the health authorities ought to compel the landlords to show common humanity in that direction; it's an outrage! The cold weather is coming; there's no fireplace; with the window and the roof it will be like an ice-house. You see she still keeps about. She has a marvelous stock of courage, prodigious nervous vitality. But, in spite of everything, the bed will claim her in a few days,—she won't get up again. Come, listen to reason, mademoiselle. Let me speak to her, will you?" [343]

"No, not yet. I must get used to the idea. And then, when I see her around me I imagine she isn't going to die so quickly as all that. There's time enough. Later, we'll see about it,—yes, later."

"Excuse me, mademoiselle, if I venture to say to you that you are quite capable of making yourself sick nursing her."

"I? Oh! as for me!" And Mademoiselle de Varandeuil made a gesture indicating that her life was of no consequence. [344]

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## LXII

Amid Mademoiselle de Varandeuil's desperate anxiety concerning her maid's health, she became conscious of a strange feeling, a sort of fear in the presence of the new, unfamiliar, mysterious creature that sickness had made of Germinie. Mademoiselle had a sense of discomfort beside that hollow, ghostly face, which was almost unrecognizable in its implacable rigidity, and which seemed to return to itself, to recover consciousness, only furtively, by fits and starts, in the effort to produce a pallid smile. The old woman had seen many people die; her memories of many painful years recalled the expressions of many dear, doomed faces, of many faces that were sad and desolate and grief-stricken in death; but no face of all those she remembered had ever assumed, as the end drew near, that distressing expression of a face retiring within itself and closing the doors. [345]

Enveloped in her suffering, Germinie maintained her savage, rigid, self-contained, impenetrable demeanor. She was as immovable as bronze. Mademoiselle, as she looked at her, asked herself what it could be that she brooded over thus without moving; whether it was her life rising in revolt, the dread of death, or a secret remorse for something in her past. Nothing external seemed to affect the sick woman. She was no longer conscious of things about her. Her body became indifferent to everything, did not ask to be relieved, seemed not to desire to be cured. She complained of nothing, found no pleasure or diversion in anything. Even her longing for affection had left her. She no longer made any motion to bestow or invite a caress, and every day something human left her body, which seemed to be turning to stone. Often she would bury herself in profound silence that made one expect a heart-rending shriek or word; but after glancing about the room, she would say nothing and begin again to stare fixedly, vacantly, at the same spot in space. [346]

When mademoiselle returned from the friend's house with whom she dined, she would find Germinie in the dark, sunk in an easy-chair with her legs stretched out upon a chair, her head hanging forward on her breast, and so profoundly absorbed that sometimes she did not hear the door open. As she walked forward into the room it seemed to Mademoiselle de Varandeuil as if she were breaking in upon a ghastly *tête-à-tête* between Disease and the Shadow of Death, wherein Germinie was already seeking, in the terror of the Invisible, the blindness of the grave and the darkness of death.

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## LXIII

Throughout the month of October, Germinie obstinately refused to take to her bed. Each day, however, she was weaker and more helpless than the day before. She was hardly able to ascend the flight of stairs that led to her sixth floor, dragging herself along by the railing. One day she fell on the stairs: the other servants picked her up and carried her to her chamber. But that did not stop her; the next day she went downstairs again, with the fitful gleam of strength that invalids commonly have in the morning. She prepared mademoiselle's breakfast, made a pretence of working, and kept moving about the apartment, clinging to the chairs and dragging herself along. Mademoiselle took pity on her; she forced her to lie down on her own bed. Germinie lay there half an hour, an hour, wide awake, not speaking, but with her eyes open, fixed, and staring into vacancy like the eyes of a person in severe pain. [347]

One morning she did not come down. Mademoiselle climbed to the sixth floor, turned into a narrow corridor in which the air was heavy with the odors from servants' water-closets and at last reached Germinie's door, No. 21. Germinie apologized for having compelled her to come up. It was impossible for her to put her feet out of the bed. She had terrible pains in her bowels and they were badly swollen. She begged mademoiselle to sit down a moment and, to make room for her, removed the candlestick that stood on the chair at the head of her bed. [348]

Mademoiselle sat down and remained a few moments, looking about the wretched room,—one of those where the doctor has to lay his hat on the bed, and where there is barely room to die! It was a small attic room, without a chimney, with a scuttle window in the sloping roof, which admitted the heat of summer and the cold of winter. Old trunks, clothes bags, a foot-bath, and the little iron bedstead on which Germinie's niece had slept, were heaped up in a corner under the sloping roof. The bed, one chair, a little disabled washstand with a broken pitcher, comprised the whole of the furniture. Above the bed, in an imitation violet-wood frame, hung a daguerreotype of a man.

The doctor came during the day. "Aha! peritonitis," he said, when mademoiselle described Germinie's condition.

He went up to see the sick woman. "I am afraid," he said, when he came down, "that there's an abscess in the intestine communicating with an abscess in the bladder. It's a serious case, very serious. You must tell her not to move about much in her bed, to turn over with great care. She might die suddenly in horrible agony. I suggested to her to go to Lariboisière,—she agreed at once. She seemed to have no repugnance at all. But I don't know how she will bear the journey. However, she has such an unlimited stock of energy; I have never seen anything like it. Tomorrow morning you shall have the order of admission." [349]

When mademoiselle went up to Germinie's room again, she found her smiling in her bed, gay as a lark at the idea of going away.

"It's a matter of six weeks at most, mademoiselle," said she. [350]

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## LXIV

At two o'clock the next day the doctor brought the order for her admission to Lariboisière. The invalid was ready to start. Mademoiselle suggested that they should send to the hospital for a litter. "Oh! no," said Germinie, hastily, "I should think I was dead." She was thinking of her debts; she must show herself to her creditors on the street, alive, and on her feet to the last! [351]

She got out of bed. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil assisted her to put on her petticoat and her dress. As soon as she left her bed, all signs of life disappeared from her face, the flush from her complexion: it seemed as if earth suddenly took the place of blood under her skin. She went down the steep servants' stairway, clinging to the baluster, and reached her mistress's apartments. She sat down in an arm-chair near the window in the dining-room. She insisted upon putting on her stockings without assistance, and as she pulled them on with her poor trembling hands, the fingers striking against one another, she afforded a glimpse of her legs, which were so thin as to make one shudder. The housekeeper, meanwhile, was putting together in a bundle a little linen, a glass, a cup, and a pewter plate, which she wished to carry with her. When that was done, Germinie looked about her for a moment; she cast one last glance around the room, a glance that seemed to long to take everything away with her. Then, as her eyes rested on the door through which the housekeeper had just gone out, she said to mademoiselle: "At all events I leave a good woman with you." [352]

She rose. The door closed noisily behind her, as if to say adieu, and, supported by Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, who almost carried her, she went down the five flights of the main stairway. At every landing she paused to take breath. In the vestibule she found the concierge, who had brought her a chair. She fell into it. The vulgar fellow laughingly promised her that she would be well in six weeks. She moved her head slightly as she said *yes*, a muffled *yes*.

She was in the cab, beside her mistress. It was an uncomfortable cab and jolted over the pavements. She sat forward on the seat to avoid the concussion of the jolting, and clung to the door with her hand. She watched the houses pass, but did not speak. When they reached the hospital gate, she refused to be carried. "Can you walk as far as that?" said the concierge, pointing to the reception-room some sixty feet distant. She made an affirmative sign and walked: it was a dead woman walking, because she was determined to walk!

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At last she reached the great hall, cold and stiff and clean and bare and horrible, with a circle of wooden benches around the waiting litter. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil led her to a straw chair near a glazed door. A clerk opened the door, asked Mademoiselle de Varandeuil Germinie's name and age, and wrote for a quarter of an hour, covering ten or more sheets of paper with a religious emblem at the top. That done, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil kissed her and turned to go; she saw an attendant take her under the arms, then she saw no more, but turned and fled, and, throwing herself upon the cushions of the cab, she burst into sobs and gave vent to all the tears with which her heart had been suffocated for an hour past. The driver on his box was amazed to hear such violent weeping.

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## LXV

On the visiting day, Thursday, mademoiselle started at half-past twelve to go and see Germinie. It was her purpose to be at her bedside at the moment the doors were thrown open, at one o'clock precisely. As she rode through the streets she had passed through four days before, she remembered the ghastly ride of Monday. It seemed to her as if she were incommoding a sick person in the cab, of which she was the only occupant, and she sat close in the corner in order to make room for the memory of Germinie. In what condition should she find her? Should she find her at all? Suppose her bed should be empty?

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The cab passed through a narrow street filled with orange carts, and with women sitting on the sidewalk offering biscuit for sale in baskets. There was something unspeakably wretched and dismal in this open-air display of fruit and cakes,—the delicacies of the dying, the *viaticum* of invalids, craved by feverish mouths, longed for by the death-agony,—which workingmen's hands, black with toil, purchase as they pass, to carry to the hospital and offer death a tempting morsel. Children carried them with sober faces, almost reverentially, and without touching them, as if they understood.

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The cab stopped before the gate of the courtyard. It was five minutes to one. There was a long line of women crowding about the gate, women with their working clothes on, sorrowful, depressed and silent. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil took her place in the line, went forward with the others and was admitted: they searched her. She inquired for Salle Sainte-Joséphine, and was directed to the second wing on the second floor. She found the hall and the bed, No. 14, which was, as she had been told, one of the last at the right. Indeed, she was guided thither, as it were, from the farther end of the hall, by Germinie's smile—the smile of a sick person in a hospital at an unexpected visit, which says, so gently, as soon as you enter the room: "Here I am."

She leaned over the bed. Germinie tried to push her away with a gesture of humility and the shamefacedness of a servant.

Mademoiselle de Varandeuil kissed her.

"Ah!" said Germinie, "the time dragged terribly yesterday. I imagined it was Thursday and I longed so for you."

"My poor girl! How are you?"

"Oh! I'm getting on finely now—the swelling in my bowels has all gone. I have only three weeks to stay here, mademoiselle, you'll see. They talk about a month or six weeks, but I know better. And I'm very comfortable here, I don't mind it at all. I sleep all night now. My! but I was thirsty, when you brought me here Monday! They wouldn't give me wine and water."

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## Chapter LXV

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*One and all, after a  
moment's  
conversation,  
leaned over  
Germinie to kiss  
her, and with  
every kiss  
Mademoiselle de*

*Varandeuil could  
hear an indistinct  
murmur as of  
words exchanged;  
a whispered  
question from  
those who kissed,  
a hasty reply from  
her who was  
kissed.*



"What have you there to drink?"

"Oh! what I had at home—lime-water. Would you mind pouring me out some, mademoiselle? their pewter things are so heavy!"

She raised herself with one arm by the aid of the little stick that hung over the middle of the bed, and putting out the other thin, trembling arm, left bare by the sleeve falling back from it, she took the glass mademoiselle held out to her, and drank.

"There," said she when she had done, and she placed both her arms outside the bed, on the coverlid.

"What a pity that I have to put you out in this way, my poor demoiselle!" she continued. "Things must be in a horribly dirty state at home!"

"Don't worry about that."

There was a moment's silence. A faint smile came to Germinie's lips. "I am sailing under false colors," she said, lowering her voice; "I have confessed so as to get well."

Then she moved her head on the pillow in order to bring her mouth nearer to Mademoiselle de Varandeuil's ear:

"There are tales to tell here. I have a funny neighbor yonder." She indicated with a glance and a movement of her shoulder the patient to whom her back was turned. "There's a man who comes here to see her. He talked to her an hour yesterday. I heard them say they'd had a child. She has left her husband. He was like a madman, the man was, when he was talking to her."

As she spoke, Germinie's face lighted up as if she were still full of the scene of the day before, still stirred up and feverish with jealousy, so near death as she was, because she had heard love spoken of beside her!

Suddenly her expression changed. A woman came toward her bed. She seemed embarrassed

when she saw Mademoiselle de Varandeuil. After a few moments, she kissed Germinie, and hurriedly withdrew as another woman came up. The new-comer did the same, kissed Germinie and at once took her leave. After the women a man came; then another woman. One and all, after a moment's conversation, leaned over Germinie to kiss her, and with every kiss Mademoiselle de Varandeuil could hear an indistinct murmur as of words exchanged; a whispered question from those who kissed, a hasty reply from her who was kissed.

"Well!" she said to Germinie, "I hope you are well taken care of!"

"Oh! yes," Germinie answered in a peculiar tone, "they take excellent care of me!"

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She had lost the animation that she displayed at the beginning of the visit. The little blood that had mounted to her cheeks remained there in one spot only. Her face seemed closed; it was cold and deaf, like a wall. Her drawn-in lips were sealed, as it were. Her features were concealed beneath the veil of infinite dumb agony. There was nothing caressing or eloquent in her staring eyes, absorbed as they were and filled with one fixed thought. You would have said that all exterior signs of her ideas were drawn within her by an irresistible power of concentration, by a last supreme effort of her will, and that her whole being was clinging in desperation to a sorrow that drew everything to itself.

The visitors she had just received were the grocer, the fish-woman, the butter woman and the laundress—all her debts, incarnate! The kisses were the kisses of her creditors, who came to keep on the scent of their claims and to extort money from her death-agony!

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## LXVI

Mademoiselle had just risen on Saturday morning. She was making a little package of four jars of Bar preserves, which she intended to carry to Germinie the next day, when she heard low voices, a colloquy between the housekeeper and the concierge in the reception room. Almost immediately the door opened and the concierge came in.

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"Sad news, mademoiselle," he said.

And he handed her a letter he had in his hand; it bore the stamp of the Lariboisière hospital: Germinie was dead; she died at seven o'clock that morning.

Mademoiselle took the letter; she saw only the letters that said: "Dead! dead!" And they repeated the word: "Dead! dead!" to no purpose, for she could not believe it. As is always the case with a person of whose death one learns abruptly, Germinie appeared to her instinct with life, and her body, which was no more, seemed to stand before her with the awe-inspiring presence of a ghost. Dead! She should never see her more! So there was no longer a Germinie on earth! Dead! She was dead! And the person she should hear henceforth moving about in the kitchen would not be she; somebody else would open the door for her, somebody else would potter about her room in the morning! "Germinie!" she cried at last, in the tone with which she was accustomed to call her; then, collecting her thoughts: "Machine! creature! What's your name?" she cried, savagely, to the bewildered housekeeper. "My dress—I must go there."

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She was so taken by surprise by this sudden fatal termination of the disease, that she could not accustom her mind to the thought. She could hardly realize that sudden, secret, vague death, of which her only knowledge was derived from a scrap of paper. Was Germinie really dead? Mademoiselle asked herself the question with the doubt of persons who have lost a dear one far away, and, not having seen her die, do not admit that she is dead. Was she not still alive the last time she saw her? How could it have happened? How could she so suddenly have become a thing good for nothing except to be put under ground? Mademoiselle dared not think about it, and yet she kept on thinking. The mystery of the death-agony, of which she knew nothing, attracted and terrified her. The anxious interest of her affection turned to her maid's last hours, and she tried gropingly to take away the veil and repel the feeling of horror. Then she was seized with an irresistible longing to know everything, to witness, with the help of what might be told her, what she had not seen. She felt that she must know if Germinie had spoken before she died,—if she had expressed any desire, spoken of any last wishes, uttered one of those sentences which are the final outcry of life.

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When she reached Lariboisière, she passed the concierge,—a stout man reeking with life as one reeks with wine,—passed through the corridors where pallid convalescents were gliding hither and thither, and rang at a door, veiled with white curtains, at the extreme end of the hospital. The door was opened: she found herself in a parlor, lighted by two windows, where a plaster cast of the Virgin stood upon an altar, between two views of Vesuvius, which seemed to shiver against the bare wall. Behind her, through an open door, came the voices of Sisters and little girls chattering together, a clamor of youthful voices and fresh laughter, the natural gayety of a cheery room where the sun frolics with children at play.

Mademoiselle asked to speak with the *mother* of Salle Sainte-Joséphine. A short, half-deformed Sister, with a kind, homely face, a face alight with the grace of God, came in answer to her

request. Germinie had died in her arms. "She hardly suffered at all," the Sister told mademoiselle; "she was sure that she was better; she felt relieved; she was full of hope. About seven this morning, just as her bed was being made, she suddenly began vomiting blood, and passed away without knowing that she was dying." The Sister added that she had said nothing, asked for nothing, expressed no wish.

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Mademoiselle rose, delivered from the horrible thoughts she had had. Germinie had been spared all the tortures of the death-agony that she had dreamed of. Mademoiselle was grateful for that death by the hand of God which gathers in the soul at a single stroke.

As she was going away an attendant came to her and said: "Will you be kind enough to identify the body?"

*The body!* The words gave mademoiselle a terrible shock. Without awaiting her reply, the attendant led the way to a high yellow door, over which was written: *Amphitheatre*. He knocked; a man in shirt sleeves, with a pipe in his mouth, opened the door and bade them wait a moment.

Mademoiselle waited. Her thoughts terrified her. Her imagination was on the other side of that awful door. She tried to anticipate what she was about to see. And her mind was so filled with confused images, with fanciful alarms, that she shuddered at the thought of entering the room, of recognizing that disfigured face among a number of others, if, indeed, she could recognize it! And yet she could not tear herself away; she said to herself that she should never see her again!

The man with the pipe opened the door: mademoiselle saw nothing but a coffin, the lid of which extended only to the neck, leaving Germinie's face uncovered, with the eyes open, and the hair erect upon her head.

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## LXVII

Prostrated by the excitement and by this last spectacle, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil took to her bed on returning home, after she had given the concierge the money for the purchase of a burial lot, and for the burial. And when she was in bed the things she had seen arose before her. The horrible dead body was still beside her, the ghastly face framed by the coffin. That never-to-be-forgotten face was engraved upon her mind; beneath her closed eyelids she saw it and was afraid of it. Germinie was there, with the distorted features of one who has been murdered, with sunken orbits and eyes that seemed to have withdrawn into their holes! She was there with her mouth still distorted by the vomiting that accompanied her last breath! She was there with her hair, her terrible hair, brushed back and standing erect upon her head!

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Her hair!—that haunted mademoiselle more persistently than all the rest. The old maid thought, involuntarily, of things that had come to her ears when she was a child, of superstitions of the common people stored away in the background of her memory; she asked herself if she had not been told that dead people whose hair is like that carry a crime with them to the grave. And at times it was such hair as that that she saw upon that head, the hair of crime, standing on end with terror and stiffened with horror before the justice of Heaven, like the hair of the condemned man before the scaffold in La Grève!

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On Sunday mademoiselle was too ill to leave her bed. On Monday she tried to rise and dress, in order to attend the funeral; but she was attacked with faintness, and was obliged to return to her bed.

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## LXVIII

"Well! is it all over?" said mademoiselle from her bed, as the concierge entered her room about eleven o'clock, on his return from the cemetery, with the black coat and the sanctimonious manner suited to the occasion.

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"*Mon Dieu*, yes, mademoiselle. Thank God! the poor girl is out of pain."

"Stay! I have no head to-day. Put the receipts and the rest of the money on my table. We will settle our accounts some other day."

The concierge stood before her without moving or evincing any purpose to go, shifting from one hand to the other a blue velvet cap made from the dress of one of his daughters. After a moment's reflection, he decided to speak.

"This burying is an expensive business, mademoiselle. In the first place, there's——"



"Who asked you to give the figures?" Mademoiselle de Varandeuil interrupted, with the haughty air of superb charity.

The concierge continued: "And as I was saying, a lot in the cemetery, which you told me to get, ain't given away. It's no use for you to have a kind heart, mademoiselle, you ain't any too rich,—everyone knows that,—and I says to myself: 'Mademoiselle's going to have no small amount to pay out, and I know mademoiselle, she'll pay.' So it'll do no harm to economize on that, eh? It'll be just so much saved. The other'll be just as safe under ground. And then, what will give her the most pleasure up yonder? Why, to know that she isn't making things hard for anybody, the excellent girl."

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"Pay? What?" said mademoiselle, out of patience with the concierge's circumlocution.

"Oh! that's of no account," he replied; "she was very fond of you, all the same. And then, when she was very sick, it wasn't the time. Oh! *Mon Dieu*, you needn't put yourself out—there's no hurry about it—it's money she owed a long while. See, this is it."

He took a stamped paper from the inside pocket of his coat.

"I didn't want her to make a note,—she insisted."

Mademoiselle de Varandeuil seized the stamped paper and saw at the foot:

*"I acknowledge the receipt of the above amount.*

GERMINIE LACERTEUX."

It was a promise to pay three hundred francs in monthly installments, which were to be endorsed on the back.

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"There's nothing there, you see," said the concierge, turning the paper over.

Mademoiselle de Varandeuil took off her spectacles. "I will pay," she said.

The concierge bowed. She glanced at him; he did not move.

"That is all, I hope?" she said, sharply.

The concierge had his eyes fixed on a leaf in the carpet. "That's all—unless——"

Mademoiselle de Varandeuil had the same feeling of terror as at the moment she passed through the door on whose other side she was to see her maid's dead body.

"But how does she owe all this?" she cried. "I paid her good wages, I almost clothed her. Where did her money go, eh?"

"Ah! there you are, mademoiselle. I should rather not have told you,—but as well to-day as to-morrow. And then, too, it's better that you should be warned; when you know beforehand you can arrange matters. There's an account with the poultry woman. The poor girl owed a little everywhere; she didn't keep things in very good shape these last few years. The laundress left her book the last time she came. It amounts to quite a little,—I don't know just how much. It seems there's a note at the grocer's—an old note—it goes back years. He'll bring you his book."

"How much at the grocer's?"

"Something like two hundred and fifty."

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All these disclosures, falling upon Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, one after another, extorted exclamations of stupefied surprise from her. Resting her elbow on her pillow, she said nothing as the veil was torn away, bit by bit, from this life, as its shameful features were brought to light one by one.

"Yes, about two hundred and fifty. There's a good deal of wine, he tells me."

"I have always had wine in the cellar."

"The *crémère*," continued the concierge, without heeding her remark, "that's no great matter,—some seventy-five francs. It's for absinthe and brandy."

"She drank!" cried Mademoiselle de Varandeuil, everything made clear to her by those words.

The concierge did not seem to hear.

"You see, mademoiselle, knowing the Jupillons was the death of her,—the young man especially. It wasn't for herself that she did what she did. And the disappointment, you see. She took to drink. She hoped to marry him, I ought to say. She fitted up a room for him. When they get to buying furniture the money goes fast. She ruined herself,—think of it! It was no use for me to tell her not to throw herself away by drinking as she did. You don't suppose I was going to tell you, when she came in at six o'clock in the morning! It was the same with her child. Oh!" the concierge added, in reply to mademoiselle's gesture, "it was a lucky thing the little one died. Never mind, you can say she led a gay life—and a hard one. That's why I say the common ditch. If I was you—she's cost you enough, mademoiselle, all the time she's been living on you. And you

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can leave her where she is—with everybody else."

"Ah! that's how it is! that's what she was! She stole for men! she ran in debt! Ah! she did well to die, the hussy! And I must pay! A child!—think of that: the slut! Yes, indeed, she can rot where she will! You have done well, Monsieur Henri. Steal! She stole from me! In the ditch, parbleu! that's quite good enough for her! To think that I let her keep all my keys—I never kept any account. My God! That's what comes of confidence. Well! here we are—I'll pay—not on her account, but on my own. And I gave her my best pair of sheets to be buried in! Ah! if I'd known I'd have given you the kitchen dish-clout, *mademoiselle how I am duped!*"

And mademoiselle continued in this strain for some moments until the words choked one another in her throat and strangled her.

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## LXIX

As a result of this scene, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil kept her bed a week, ill and raging, filled with indignation that shook her whole body, overflowed through her mouth, and tore from her now and again some coarse insult which she would hurl with a shriek of rage at her maid's vile memory. Night and day she was possessed by the same fever of malediction, and even in her dreams her attenuated limbs were convulsed with wrath.

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Was it possible! Germinie! her Germinie! She could think of nothing else. Debts!—a child!—all sorts of shame! The degraded creature! She abhorred her, she detested her. If she had lived she would have denounced her to the police. She would have liked to believe in hell so that she might be consigned to the torments that await the dead. Her maid was such a creature as that! A girl who had been in her service twenty years! whom she had loaded down with benefits! Drunkenness! she had sunk so low as that! The horror that succeeds a bad dream came to mademoiselle, and all the waves of loathing that flowed from her heart said: "Out upon the dead woman whose life the grave vomited forth and whose filth it cast out!"

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How she had deceived her! How the wretch had pretended to love her! And to make her appear more ungrateful and more despicable Mademoiselle de Varandeuil recalled her manifestations of affection, her attentions, her jealousies, which seemed a part of her adoration. She saw her bending over her when she was ill. She thought of her caresses. It was all a lie! Her devotion was a lie! The delight with which she kissed her, the love upon her lips, were lies! Mademoiselle told herself over and over again, she persuaded herself that it was so; and yet, little by little, from these reminiscences, from these evocations of the past whose bitterness she sought to make more bitter, from the far-off sweetness of days gone by, there arose within her a first sensation of pity.

She drove away the thoughts that tended to allay her wrath; but reflection brought them back. Thereupon there came to her mind some things to which she had paid no heed during Germinie's lifetime, trifles of which the grave makes us take thought and upon which death sheds light. She had a vague remembrance of certain strange performances on the part of her maid, of feverish effusions and frantic embraces, of her throwing herself on her knees as if she were about to make a confession, of movements of the lips as if a secret were trembling on their verge. She saw, with the eyes we have for those who are no more, Germinie's wistful glances, her gestures and attitudes, the despairing expression of her face. And now she realized that there were deep wounds beneath, heart-rending pain, the torment of her anguish and her repentance, the tears of blood of her remorse, all sorts of suffering forced out of sight throughout her life, and in her whole being a Passion of shame that dared not ask forgiveness except with silence!

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Then she would scold herself for the thought and call herself an old fool. Her instinct of rigid uprightness, the stern conscience and harsh judgment of a stainless life, the things which cause a virtuous woman to condemn a harlot and should have caused a saint like Mademoiselle de Varandeuil to be without pity for her servant—everything within her rebelled against a pardon. The voice of justice, stifling her kindness of heart, cried: "Never! never!" And she would expel Germinie's infamous phantom with a pitiless gesture.

There were times, indeed, when, in order to make her condemnation and execration of her memory more irrevocable, she would heap charges upon her and slander her. She would add to the dead woman's horrible list of sins. She would reproach Germinie for more than was justly chargeable to her. She would attribute crimes to her dark thoughts, murderous desires to her impatient dreams. She would strive to think, she would force herself to think, that she had desired her mistress's death and had been awaiting it.

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But at that very moment, amid the blackest of her thoughts and suppositions, a vision arose and stood in a bright light before her. A figure approached, that seemed to come to meet her glance, a figure against which she could not defend herself, and which passed through the hands with which she sought to force it back. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil saw her dead maid once more. She saw once more the face of which she had caught a glimpse in the amphitheatre, the crucified face, the tortured face to which the blood and agony of a heart had mounted together. She saw it

once more with the faculty which the second sight of memory separates from its surroundings. And that face, as it became clearer to her, caused her less terror. It appeared to her, divesting itself, as it were, of its fear-inspiring, horrifying qualities. Suffering alone remained, but it was the suffering of expiation, almost of prayer, the suffering of a dead face that would like to weep. And as its expression grew ever milder, mademoiselle came at last to see in it a glance of supplication, of supplication that, at last, compelled her pity. Insensibly there glided into her reflections indulgent thoughts, suggestions of apology that surprised herself. She asked herself if the poor girl was as guilty as others, if she had deliberately chosen the path of evil, if life, circumstances, the misfortune of her body and her destiny, had not made her the creature she had been, a creature of love and sorrow. Suddenly she stopped: she was on the point of forgiving her!

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One morning she leaped out of bed.

"Here! you—you other!" she cried to her housekeeper, "the devil take your name! I can't remember it. Give me my clothes, quick! I have to go out."

"The idea, mademoiselle—just look at the roofs, they're all white."

"Well, it snows, that's all."

Ten minutes later, Mademoiselle de Varandeuil said to the driver of the cab she had sent for:

"Montmartre Cemetery!"

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## LXX

In the distance an enclosure wall extended, perfectly straight, as far as the eye could see. The thread of snow that marked the outline of its coping gave it a dirty, rusty color. In a corner at the left three leafless trees reared their bare black branches against the sky. They rustled sadly, with the sound of pieces of dead wood stirred by the south wind. Above these trees, behind the wall and close against it, arose the two arms from which hung one of the last oil-lamps in Paris. A few snow-covered roofs were scattered here and there; beyond, the hill of Montmartre rose sharply, its white shroud broken by oases of brown earth and sandy patches. Low gray walls followed the slope, surmounted by gaunt, stunted trees whose branches had a bluish tint in the mist, as far as two black windmills. The sky was of a leaden hue, with occasional cold, bluish streaks as if ink had been applied with a brush! over Montmartre there was a light streak, of a yellow color, like the Seine water after heavy rains. Above that wintry beam the wings of an invisible windmill turned and turned,—slow-moving wings, unvarying in their movement, which seemed to be turning for eternity.

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In front of the wall, against which was planted a thicket of dead cypresses, turned red by the frost, was a vast tract of land upon which were two rows of crowded, jostling overturned crosses, like two great funeral processions. The crosses touched and pushed one another and trod on one another's heels. They bent and fell and collapsed in the ranks. In the middle there was a sort of congestion which had caused them to bulge out on both sides; you could see them lying—covered by the snow and raising it into mounds with the thick wood of which they were made—upon the paths, somewhat trampled in the centre, that skirted the two long files. The broken ranks undulated with the fluctuation of a multitude, the disorder and wavering course of a long march. The black crosses with their arms outstretched assumed the appearance of ghosts and persons in distress. The two disorderly columns made one think of a human panic, a desperate, frightened army. It was as if one were looking on at a terrible rout.

All the crosses were laden with wreaths, wreaths of immortelles, wreaths of white paper with silver thread, black wreaths with gold thread; but you could see them beneath the snow, worn out, withered, ghastly things, souvenirs, as it were, which the other dead would not accept and which had been picked up in order to make a little toilet for the crosses with gleanings from the graves.

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All the crosses had a name written in white; but there were other names that were not even written on a piece of wood,—a broken branch of a tree, stuck in the ground, with an envelope tied around it—such tombstones as that were to be seen there!

On the left, where they were digging a trench for a third row of crosses, the workman's shovel threw black dirt into the air, which fell upon the white earth around. Profound silence, the deaf silence of the snow, enveloped everything, and but two sounds could be heard; the dull sound made by the clods of earth and the heavy sound of regular footsteps; an old priest who was waiting there, his head enveloped in a black cowl, dressed in a black gown and stole, and with a dirty, yellow surplice, was trying to keep himself warm by stamping his great galoches on the pavement of the high road, in front of the crosses.

Such was the common ditch in those days. That tract of land, those crosses and that priest said this: "Here sleeps the Death of the common people; this is the poor man's end!"

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O Paris! thou art the heart of the world, thou art the great city of humanity, the great city of charity and brotherly love! Thou hast kindly intentions, old-fashioned habits of compassion, theatres that give alms. The poor man is thy citizen as well as the rich man. Thy churches speak of Jesus Christ; thy laws speak of equality; thy newspapers speak of progress; all thy governments speak of the common people; and this is where thou castest those who die in thy service, those who kill themselves ministering to thy luxury, those who perish in the noisome odors of thy factories, those who have sweated their lives away working for thee, giving thee thy prosperity, thy pleasures, thy splendors, those who have furnished thy animation and thy noise, those who have lengthened with the links of their lives the chain of thy duration as a capital, those who have been the crowd in thy streets and the common people of thy grandeur. Each of thy cemeteries has a like shameful corner, hidden in the angle of a wall, where thou makest haste to bury them, and where thou castest dirt upon them in such stingy clods, that one can see the ends of their coffins protruding! One would say that thy charity stops with their last breath, that thy only free gift is the bed whereon they suffer, and that, when the hospital can do no more for them, thou, who art so vast and so superb, hast no place for them! Thou dost heap them up, crowd them together and mingle them in death, as thou didst mingle them in the death-agony beneath the sheets of thy hospitals a hundred years since! As late as yesterday thou hadst only that priest on sentry duty, to throw a drop of paltry holy water on every comer: not the briefest prayer! Even that symbol of decency was lacking: God could not be disturbed for so small a matter! And what the priest blesses is always the same thing: a trench in which the pine boxes strike against one another, where the dead enjoy no privacy! Corruption there is common to all; no one has his own, but each one has that of all the rest: the worms are owned promiscuously! In the devouring soil a Montfaucon hastens to make way for the Catacombs. For the dead here have no more time than room to rot in: the earth is taken from them before it has finished with them! before their bones have assumed the color and the ancient appearance, so to speak, of stone, before the passing years have effaced the last trace of humanity and the memory of a body! The excavation is renewed when the earth is still themselves, when they are the damp soil in which the mattock is buried. The earth is loaned to them, you say? But it does not even confine the odor of death! In summer, the wind that passes over this scarcely-covered human charnel-house wafts the unholy miasma to the city of the living. In the scorching days of August the keepers deny admission to the place: there are flies that bear upon them the poison of the carrion, pestilential flies whose sting is deadly!

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Mademoiselle arrived at this spot after passing the wall that separates the lots sold in perpetuity from those sold temporarily only. Following the directions given her by a keeper, she walked along between the further line of crosses and the newly-opened trench. And there she made her way over buried wreaths, over the snowy pall, to a hole where the trench began. It was covered over with old rotten planks and a sheet of oxidized zinc on which a workman had thrown his blue blouse. The earth sloped away behind them to the bottom of the trench, where could be seen the sinister outlines of three wooden coffins: there were one large one and two smaller ones just behind. The crosses of the past week, of the day before, of two days before, extended in a line down the slope; they glided along, plunged suddenly downward, and seemed to be taking long strides as if they were in danger of being carried over a precipice.

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Mademoiselle began to ascend the path by these crosses, spelling out the dates and searching for the names with her wretched eyes. She reached the crosses of the 8th of November: that was the day before her maid's death, and Germinie should be close by. There were five crosses of the 9th of November, five crosses huddled close together: Germinie was not in the crush. Mademoiselle de Varandeuil went a little farther on, to the crosses of the 10th, then to those of the 11th, then to those of the 12th. She returned to the 8th, and looked carefully around in all directions: there was nothing, absolutely nothing,—Germinie had been buried without a cross! Not even a bit of wood had been placed in the ground by which to identify her grave!

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At last the old lady dropped on her knees in the snow, between two crosses, one of which bore the date of the 9th and the other of the 10th of November. All that remained of Germinie should be almost in that spot. That ill-defined space was her ill-defined grave. To pray over her body it was necessary to pray at random between two dates,—as if the poor girl's destiny had decreed that there should be no more room on earth for her body than for her heart!

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## NOTES

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- [1] *Canon* is the French word for cannon; it is also used in vulgar parlance to mean a glass of wine drunk at the bar.
- [2] *Battre les murailles*—to beat the walls—has a slang meaning: to be so drunk that you can't see, or can't lie down without holding on.
- [3] Literally, *red bowels*—common slang for hard drinkers.
- [4] *Cuir* is an expression used to denote the error in speaking, which consists—in French—in pronouncing a *t* for an *s*, and vice versa at the end of words which are joined in pronunciation to the next word: *e.g.*, *il étai-z-à la campagne* for *il était à la campagne*.
- [5] In the slang vocabulary, to *console* one's coffee means to add brandy to it.
- [6] A *négresse* is a bottle of red wine, and, as applied to that article, *morte* (dead) means empty.

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