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L'ASSOMMOIR

by Émile Zola

CHAPTER I
GERVAISE

Gervaise had waited and watched for Lantier until two in the morning. Then chilled and shivering, she turned from the window and threw herself across the bed, where she fell into a feverish doze with her cheeks wet with tears. For the last week when they came out of the Veau à Deux Têtes, where they ate, he had sent her off to bed with the children and had not appeared until late into the night and always with a story that he had been looking for work.

This very night, while she was watching for his return, she fancied she saw him enter the ballroom of the Grand-Balcon, whose ten windows blazing with lights illuminated, as with a sheet of fire, the black lines of the outer boulevards. She caught a glimpse of Adèle, a pretty brunette who dined at their restaurant and who was walking a few steps behind him, with her hands swinging as if she had just dropped his arm, rather than pass before the bright light of the globes over the door in his company.

When Gervaise awoke about five o'clock, stiff and sore, she burst into wild sobs, for Lantier had not come in. For the first time he had slept out. She sat on the edge of the bed, half shrouded in the canopy of faded chintz that hung from the arrow fastened to the ceiling by a string. Slowly, with her eyes suffused with tears, she looked around this miserable *chambre garnie*, whose furniture consisted of a chestnut bureau of which one drawer was absent, three straw chairs and a greasy table on which was a broken-handled pitcher.

Another bedstead—an iron one—had been brought in for the children. This stood in front of the bureau and filled up two thirds of the room.

A trunk belonging to Gervaise and Lantier stood in the corner wide open, showing its empty sides, while at the bottom a man's old hat lay among soiled shirts and hose. Along the walls and on the backs of the chairs hung a ragged shawl, a pair of muddy pantaloons and a dress or two—all too bad for the old-clothes man to buy. In the middle of the mantel between two mismated tin candlesticks was a bundle of pawn tickets from the Mont-de-Piété. These tickets were of a delicate shade of rose.

The room was the best in the hotel—the first floor looking out on the boulevard.

Meanwhile side by side on the same pillow the two children lay calmly sleeping. Claude, who was eight years old, was breathing calmly and regularly with his little hands outside of the coverings, while Etienne, only four, smiled with one arm under his brother's neck.

When their mother's eyes fell on them she had a new paroxysm of sobs and pressed her handkerchief to her mouth to stifle them. Then with bare feet, not stopping to put on her slippers which had fallen off, she ran to the window out of which she leaned as she had done half the night and inspected the sidewalks as far as she could see.

The hotel was on the Boulevard de la Chapelle, at the left of the Barrière Poissonnièrs. It was a two-story building, painted a deep red up to the first floor, and had disjointed weather-stained blinds.

Above a lantern with glass sides was a sign between the two windows:

HÔTEL BONCŒUR
KEPT BY
MARSOULLIER

in large yellow letters, partially obliterated by the dampness. Gervaise, who was prevented by the lantern from seeing as she desired, leaned out still farther, with her handkerchief on her lips. She looked to the right toward the Boulevard de Rochechouart, where groups of butchers stood with their bloody frocks before their establishments, and the fresh breeze brought in whiffs, a strong animal smell—the smell of slaughtered cattle.

She looked to the left, following the ribbonlike avenue, past the Hospital de Lariboisière, then building. Slowly, from one end to the other of the horizon, did she follow the wall, from behind which in the nightime she had heard strange groans and cries, as if some fell murder were being perpetrated. She looked at it with horror, as if in some dark corner—dark with dampness and filth—she should distinguish Lantier—Lantier lying dead with his throat cut.

Suddenly Gervaise thought she distinguished Lantier amid this crowd,

and she leaned eagerly forward at the risk of falling from the window. With a fresh pang of disappointment she pressed her handkerchief to her lips to restrain her sobs.

A fresh, youthful voice caused her to turn around.

"Lantier has not come in then?"

"No, Monsieur Coupeau," she answered, trying to smile.

The speaker was a tinsmith who occupied a tiny room at the top of the house. His bag of tools was over his shoulder; he had seen the key in the door and entered with the familiarity of a friend.

"You know," he continued, "that I am working nowadays at the hospital. What a May this is! The air positively stings one this morning."

As he spoke he looked closely at Gervaise; he saw her eyes were red with tears and then, glancing at the bed, discovered that it had not been disturbed. He shook his head and, going toward the couch where the children lay with their rosy cherub faces, he said in a lower voice:

"You think your husband ought to have been with you, madame. But don't be troubled; he is busy with politics. He went on like a mad man the other day when they were voting for Eugène Sue. Perhaps he passed the night with his friends abusing that reprobate Bonaparte."

"No, no," she murmured with an effort. "You think nothing of that kind I know where Lantier is only too well. We have our sorrows like the rest of the world!"

Coupeau gave a knowing wink and departed, having offered to bring her some milk if she did not care to go out; she was a good woman, he told her and might count on him any time when she was in trouble.

As soon as Gervaise was alone she returned to the window.

From the Barrière the lowing of the cattle and the bleating of the sheep still came on the keen, fresh morning air. Among the crowd she recognized the locksmiths by their blue frocks, the masons by their white overalls, the painters by their coats, from under which hung their blouses. This crowd was cheerless. All of neutral tints—grays and blues predominating, with never a dash of color. Occasionally a workman stopped and lighted his pipe, while his companions passed on. There was no laughing, no talking, but they strode on steadily with cadaverous faces toward that Paris which quickly swallowed them up.

At the two corners of La Rue des Poissonnièrs were two wineshops, where the shutters had just been taken down. Here some of the workmen lingered, crowding into the shop, spitting, coughing and drinking glasses of brandy and water. Gervaise was watching the place on the left of the street, where she thought she had seen Lantier go in, when a stout woman, bareheaded and wearing a large apron, called to her from the pavement,

"You are up early, Madame Lantier!"

Gervaise leaned out.

"Ah, is it you, Madame Boche! Yes, I am up early, for I have much to do today."

"Is that so? Well, things don't get done by themselves, that's sure!"

And a conversation ensued between the window and the sidewalk. Mme Boche was the concierge of the house wherein the restaurant Veau à Deux Têtes occupied the *rez-de-chaussée*.

Many times Gervaise had waited for Lantier in the room of this woman rather than face the men who were eating. The concierge said she had just been round the corner to arouse a lazy fellow who had promised to do some work and then went on to speak of one of her lodgers who had come in the night before with some woman and had made such a noise that every one was disturbed until after three o'clock.

As she gabbled, however, she examined Gervaise with considerable curiosity and seemed, in fact, to have come out under the window for that express purpose.

"Is Monsieur Lantier still asleep?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes, he is asleep," answered Gervaise with flushing cheeks.

Madame saw the tears come to her eyes and, satisfied with her discovery, was turning away when she suddenly stopped and called out:

"You are going to the lavatory this morning, are you not? All right then, I have some things to wash, and I will keep a place for you next to me, and we can have a little talk!"

Then as if moved by sudden compassion, she added:

"Poor child, don't stay at that window any longer. You are purple with cold and will surely make yourself sick!"

But Gervaise did not move. She remained in the same spot for two mortal hours, until the clock struck eight. The shops were now all open. The procession in blouses had long ceased, and only an occasional one hurried along. At the wineshops, however, there was the same crowd of men drinking, spitting and coughing. The workmen in the street had given place to the workwomen. Milliners' apprentices, florists, burnishers, who with thin shawls drawn closely around them came in bands of three or four, talking eagerly, with gay laughs and quick glances. Occasionally one solitary figure was seen, a pale-faced, serious woman, who walked rapidly, neither looking to the right nor to the left.

Then came the clerks, blowing on their fingers to warm them, eating a roll as they walked; young men, lean and tall, with clothing they had outgrown and with eyes heavy with sleep; old men, who moved along with measured steps, occasionally pulling out their watches, but able, from many years' practice, to time their movements almost to a second.

The boulevards at last were comparatively quiet. The inhabitants were sunning themselves. Women with untidy hair and soiled petticoats were nursing their babies in the open air, and an occasional dirty-faced brat fell into the gutter or rolled over with shrieks of pain or joy.

Gervaise felt faint and ill; all hope was gone. It seemed to her that all was over and that Lantier would come no more. She looked from the dingy slaughterhouses, black with their dirt and loathsome odor, on to the new and staring hospital and into the rooms consecrated to disease and death. As yet the windows were not in, and there was nothing to impede her view of the large, empty wards. The sun shone directly in her face and blinded her.

She was sitting on a chair with her arms dropping drearily at her side but not weeping, when Lantier quietly opened the door and walked in.

"You have come!" she cried, ready to throw herself on his neck.

"Yes, I have come," he answered, "and what of it? Don't begin any of your nonsense now!" And he pushed her aside. Then with an angry gesture he tossed his felt hat on the bureau.

He was a small, dark fellow, handsome and well made, with a delicate mustache which he twisted in his fingers mechanically as he spoke. He wore an old coat, buttoned tightly at the waist, and spoke with a strongly marked Provencal accent.

Gervaise had dropped upon her chair again and uttered disjointed phrases of lamentation.

"I have not closed my eyes—I thought you were killed! Where have you been all night? I feel as if I were going mad! Tell me, Auguste, where have you been?"

"Oh, I had business," he answered with an indifferent shrug of his shoulders. "At eight o'clock I had an engagement with that friend, you know, who is thinking of starting a manufactory of hats. I was detained, and I preferred stopping there. But you know I don't like to be watched and catechized. Just let me alone, will you?"

His wife began to sob. Their voices and Lantier's noisy movements as he pushed the chairs about woke the children. They started up, half naked with tumbled hair, and hearing their mother cry, they followed her example, rending the air with their shrieks.

"Well, this is lovely music!" cried Lantier furiously. "I warn you, if you don't all stop, that out of this door I go, and you won't see me again in a hurry! Will you hold your tongue? Good-by then; I'll go back where I came from."

He snatched up his hat, but Gervaise rushed toward him, crying:

"No! No!"

And she soothed the children and stifled their cries with kisses and laid them tenderly back in their bed, and they were soon happy and merrily playing together. Meanwhile the father, not even taking off his boots, threw himself on the bed with a weary air. His face was white from exhaustion and a sleepless night; he did not close his eyes but looked around the room.

"A nice-looking place, this!" he muttered.

Then examining Gervaise, he said half aloud and half to himself:

"So! You have given up washing yourself, it seems!"

Gervaise was only twenty-two. She was tall and slender with delicate features, already worn by hardships and anxieties. With her hair uncombed and shoes down at the heel, shivering in her white sack, on which was much dust and many stains from the furniture and wall where it had hung, she looked at least ten years older from the hours of suspense and tears she had passed.

Lantier's word startled her from her resignation and timidity.

"Are you not ashamed?" she said with considerable animation. "You know very well that I do all I can. It is not my fault that we came here. I should like to see you with two children in a place where you can't get a drop of hot water. We ought as soon as we reached Paris to have settled ourselves at once in a home; that was what you promised."

"Pshaw," he muttered; "You had as much good as I had out of our savings. You ate the fatted calf with me—and it is not worth while to make a row about it now!"

She did not heed his word but continued:

"There is no need of giving up either. I saw Madame Fauconnier, the laundress in La Rue Neuve. She will take me Monday. If you go in with your friend we shall be afloat again in six months. We must find some kind of a hole where we can live cheaply while we work. That is the thing to do now. Work! Work!"

Lantier turned his face to the wall with a shrug of disgust which enraged his wife, who resumed:

"Yes, I know very well that you don't like to work. You would like to wear fine clothes and walk about the streets all day. You don't like my looks since you took all my dresses to the pawnbrokers. No, no, Auguste, I did not intend to speak to you about it, but I know very well where you spent the night. I saw you go into the Grand-Balcon with that streetwalker Adèle. You have made a charming choice. She wears fine clothes and is clean. Yes, and she has reason to be, certainly; there is not a man in that restaurant who does not know her far better than an honest girl should be known!"

Lantier leaped from the bed. His eyes were as black as night and his face deadly pale.

"Yes," repeated his wife, "I mean what I say. Madame Boche will not keep her or her sister in the house any longer, because there are always a crowd of men hanging on the staircase."

Lantier lifted both fists, and then conquering a violent desire to beat her, he seized her in his arms, shook her violently and threw her on the bed where the children were. They at once began to cry again while he stood for a moment, and then, with the air of a man who finally takes a resolution in regard to which he has hesitated, he said:

"You do not know what you have done, Gervaise. You are wrong—as you will soon discover."

For a moment the voices of the children filled the room. Their mother, lying on their narrow couch, held them both in her arms and said over and over again in a monotonous voice:

"If you were not here, my poor darlings! If you were not here! If you were not here!"

Lantier was lying flat on his back with his eyes fixed on the ceiling. He was not listening; his attention was concentrated on some fixed idea. He remained in this way for an hour and more, not sleeping, in spite of his evident and intense fatigue. When he turned and, leaning on his elbow, looked about the room again, he found that Gervaise had arranged the chamber and made the children's bed. They were washed and dressed. He watched her as she swept the room and dusted the furniture.

The room was very dreary still, however, with its smoke-stained ceiling and paper discolored by dampness and three chairs and dilapidated bureau, whose greasy surface no dusting could clean. Then while she washed herself and arranged her hair before the small mirror, he seemed to examine her arms and shoulders, as if instituting a comparison between herself and someone else. And he smiled a disdainful little smile.

Gervaise was slightly, very slightly, lame, but her lameness was perceptible, only on such days as she was very tired. This morning, so weary was she from the watches of the night, that she could hardly walk without support.

A profound silence reigned in the room; they did not speak to each other. He seemed to be waiting for something. She, adopting an unconcerned air, seemed to be in haste.

She made up a bundle of soiled linen that had been thrown into a corner behind the trunk, and then he spoke:

"What are you doing? Are you going out?"

At first she did not reply. Then when he angrily repeated the question she answered:

"Certainly I am. I am going to wash all these things. The children

cannot live in dirt."

He threw two or three handkerchiefs toward her, and after another long silence he said:

"Have you any money?"

She quickly rose to her feet and turned toward him; in her hand she held some of the soiled clothes.

"Money! Where should I get money unless I had stolen it? You know very well that day before yesterday you got three francs on my black skirt. We have breakfasted twice on that, and money goes fast. No, I have no money. I have four sous for the lavatory. I cannot make money like other women we know."

He did not reply to this allusion but rose from the bed and passed in review the ragged garments hung around the room. He ended by taking down the pantaloons and the shawl and, opening the bureau, took out a sack and two chemises. All these he made into a bundle, which he threw at Gervaise.

"Take them," he said, "and make haste back from the pawnbroker's."

"Would you not like me to take the children?" she asked. "Heavens! If pawnbrokers would only make loans on children, what a good thing it would be!"

She went to the Mont-de-Piété, and when she returned a half-hour later she laid a silver five-franc piece on the mantelshelf and placed the ticket with the others between the two candlesticks.

"This is what they gave me," she said coldly. "I wanted six francs, but they would not give them. They always keep on the safe side there, and yet there is always a crowd."

Lantier did not at once take up the money. He had sent her to the Mont-de-Piété that he might not leave her without food or money, but when he caught sight of part of a ham wrapped in paper on the table with half a loaf of bread he slipped the silver piece into his vest pocket.

"I did not dare go to the milk woman," explained Gervaise, "because we owe her for eight days. But I shall be back early. You can get some bread and some chops and have them ready. Don't forget the wine too."

He made no reply. Peace seemed to be made, but when Gervaise went to the trunk to take out some of Lantier's clothing he called out:

"No—let that alone."

"What do you mean?" she said, turning round in surprise. "You can't wear these things again until they are washed! Why shall I not take them?"

And she looked at him with some anxiety. He angrily tore the things from her hands and threw them back into the trunk.

"Confound you!" he muttered. "Will you never learn to obey? When I say a thing I mean it—"

"But why?" she repeated, turning very pale and seized with a terrible suspicion. "You do not need these shirts; you are not going away. Why should I not take them?"

He hesitated a moment, uneasy under the earnest gaze she fixed upon him. "Why? Why? Because," he said, "I am sick of hearing you say that you wash and mend for me. Attend to your own affairs, and I will attend to mine."

She entreated him, defended herself from the charge of ever having complained, but he shut the trunk with a loud bang and then sat down upon it, repeating that he was master at least of his own clothing. Then to escape from her eyes, he threw himself again on the bed, saying he was sleepy and that she made his head ache, and finally slept or pretended to do so.

Gervaise hesitated; she was tempted to give up her plan of going to the lavatory and thought she would sit down to her sewing. But at last she was reassured by Lantier's regular breathing; she took her soap and her ball of bluing and, going to the children, who were playing on the floor with some old corks, she said in a low voice:

"Be very good and keep quiet. Papa is sleeping."

When she left the room there was not a sound except the stifled laughter of the little ones. It was then after ten, and the sun was shining brightly in at the window.

Gervaise, on reaching the boulevard, turned to the left and followed the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. As she passed Mme Fauconnier's shop she nodded to the woman. The lavatory, whither she went, was in the middle of this street, just where it begins to ascend. Over a large low building towered three enormous reservoirs for water, huge cylinders of zinc

strongly made, and in the rear was the drying room, an apartment with a very high ceiling and surrounded by blinds through which the air passed. On the right of the reservoirs a steam engine let off regular puffs of white smoke. Gervaise, habituated apparently to puddles, did not lift her skirts but threaded her way through the part of *eau de Javelle* which encumbered the doorway. She knew the mistress of the establishment, a delicate woman who sat in a cabinet with glass doors, surrounded by soap and bluing and packages of bicarbonate of soda.

As Gervaise passed the desk she asked for her brush and beater, which she had left to be taken care of after her last wash. Then having taken her number, she went in. It was an immense shed, as it were, with a low ceiling—the beams and rafters unconcealed—and lighted by large windows, through which the daylight streamed. A light gray mist or steam pervaded the room, which was filled with a smell of soapsuds and *eau de Javelle* combined. Along the central aisle were tubs on either side, and two rows of women with their arms bare to the shoulders and their skirts tucked up stood showing their colored stockings and stout laced shoes.

They rubbed and pounded furiously, straightening themselves occasionally to utter a sentence and then applying themselves again to their task, with the steam and perspiration pouring down their red faces. There was a constant rush of water from the faucets, a great splashing as the clothes were rinsed and pounding and banging of the beaters, while amid all this noise the steam engine in the corner kept up its regular puffing.

Gervaise went slowly up the aisle, looking to the right and the left. She carried her bundle under her arm and limped more than usual, as she was pushed and jarred by the energy of the women about her.

"Here! This way, my dear," cried Mme Boche, and when the young woman had joined her at the very end where she stood, the concierge, without stopping her furious rubbing, began to talk in a steady fashion.

"Yes, this is your place. I have kept it for you. I have not much to do. Boche is never hard on his linen, and you, too, do not seem to have much. Your package is quite small. We shall finish by noon, and then we can get something to eat. I used to give my clothes to a woman in La Rue Pelat, but bless my heart, she washed and pounded them all away, and I made up my mind to wash myself. It is clear gain, you see, and costs only the soap."

Gervaise opened her bundle and sorted the clothes, laying aside all the colored pieces, and when Mme Boche advised her to try a little soda she shook her head.

"No, no!" she said. "I know all about it!"

"You know?" answered Boche curiously. "You have washed then in your own place before you came here?"

Gervaise, with her sleeves rolled up, showing her pretty, fair arms, was soaping a child's shirt. She rubbed it and turned it, soaped and rubbed it again. Before she answered she took up her beater and began to use it, accenting each phrase or rather punctuating them with her regular blows.

"Yes, yes, washed—I should think I had! Ever since I was ten years old. We went to the riverside, where I came from. It was much nicer than here. I wish you could see it—a pretty corner under the trees by the running water. Do you know Plassans? Near Marseilles?"

"You are a strong one, anyhow!" cried Mme Boche, astonished at the rapidity and strength of the woman. "Your arms are slender, but they are like iron."

The conversation continued until all the linen was well beaten and yet whole! Gervaise then took each piece separately, rinsed it, then rubbed it with soap and brushed it. That is to say, she held the cloth firmly with one hand and with the other moved the short brush from her, pushing along a dirty foam which fell off into the water below.

As she brushed they talked.

"No, we are not married," said Gervaise. "I do not intend to lie about it. Lantier is not so nice that a woman need be very anxious to be his wife. If it were not for the children! I was fourteen and he was eighteen when the first one was born. The other child did not come for four years. I was not happy at home. Papa Macquart, for the merest trifle, would beat me. I might have married, I suppose."

She dried her hands, which were red under the white soapsuds.

"The water is very hard in Paris," she said.

Mme Boche had finished her work long before, but she continued to

dabble in the water merely as an excuse to hear this story, which for two weeks had excited her curiosity. Her mouth was open, and her eyes were shining with satisfaction at having guessed so well.

"Oh yes, just as I knew," she said to herself, "but the little woman talks too much! I was sure, though, there had been a quarrel."

Then aloud:

"He is not good to you then?"

"He was very good to me once," answered Gervaise, "but since we came to Paris he has changed. His mother died last year and left him about seventeen hundred francs. He wished to come to Paris, and as Father Macquart was in the habit of hitting me in the face without any warning, I said I would come, too, which we did, with the two children. I meant to be a fine laundress, and he was to continue with his trade as a hatter. We might have been very happy. But, you see, Lantier is extravagant; he likes expensive things and thinks of his amusement before anything else. He is not good for much, anyhow!

"We arrived at the Hôtel Montmartre. We had dinners and carriages, suppers and theaters, a watch for him, a silk dress for me—for he is not selfish when he has money. You can easily imagine, therefore, at the end of two months we were cleaned out. Then it was that we came to Hôtel Boncœur and that this life began." She checked herself with a strange choking in the throat. Tears gathered in her eyes. She finished brushing her linen.

"I must get my scalding water," she murmured.

But Mme Boche, much annoyed at this sudden interruption to the long-desired confidence, called the boy.

"Charles," she said, "it would be very good of you if you would bring a pail of hot water to Madame Lantier, as she is in a great hurry." The boy brought a bucketful, and Gervaise paid him a sou. It was a sou for each bucket. She turned the hot water into her tub and soaked her linen once more and rubbed it with her hands while the steam hovered round her blonde head like a cloud.

"Here, take some of this," said the concierge as she emptied into the water that Gervaise was using the remains of a package of bicarbonate of soda. She offered her also some *eau de Javelle*, but the young woman refused. It was only good, she said, for grease spots and wine stains.

"I thought him somewhat dissipated," said Mme Boche, referring to Lantier without naming him.

Gervaise, leaning over her tub and her arms up to the elbows in the soapsuds, nodded in acquiescence.

"Yes," continued the concierge, "I have seen many little things." But she started back as Gervaise turned round with a pale face and quivering lips.

"Oh, I know nothing," she continued. "He likes to laugh—that is all—and those two girls who are with us, you know, Adèle and Virginie, like to laugh too, so they have their little jokes together, but that is all there is of it, I am sure."

The young woman, with the perspiration standing on her brow and her arms still dripping, looked her full in the face with earnest, inquiring eyes.

Then the concierge became excited and struck her breast, exclaiming:

"I tell you I know nothing whatever, nothing more than I tell you!"

Then she added in a gentle voice, "But he has honest eyes, my dear. He will marry you, child; I promise that he will marry you!"

Gervaise dried her forehead with her damp hand and shook her head. The two women were silent for a moment; around them, too, it was very quiet. The clock struck eleven. Many of the women were seated swinging their feet, drinking their wine and eating their sausages, sandwiched between slices of bread. An occasional economical housewife hurried in with a small bundle under her arm, and a few sounds of the pounder were still heard at intervals; sentences were smothered in the full mouths, or a laugh was uttered, ending in a gurgling sound as the wine was swallowed, while the great machine puffed steadily on. Not one of the women, however, heard it; it was like the very respiration of the lavatory—the eager breath that drove up among the rafters the floating vapor that filled the room.

The heat gradually became intolerable. The sun shone in on the left through the high windows, imparting to the vapor opaline tints—the palest rose and tender blue, fading into soft grays. When the women began to grumble the boy Charles went from one window to the other, drawing down the heavy linen shades. Then he crossed to the other side,

the shady side, and opened the blinds. There was a general exclamation of joy—a formidable explosion of gaiety.

All this time Gervaise was going on with her task and had just completed the washing of her colored pieces, which she threw over a trestle to drip; soon small pools of blue water stood on the floor. Then she began to rinse the garments in cold water which ran from a spigot near by.

"You have nearly finished," said Mme Boche. "I am waiting to help you wring them."

"Oh, you are very good! It is not necessary though!" answered the young woman as she swashed the garments through the clear water. "If I had sheets I would not refuse your offer, however."

Nevertheless, she accepted the aid of the concierge. They took up a brown woolen skirt, badly faded, from which poured out a yellow stream as the two women wrung it together.

Suddenly Mme Boche cried out:

"Look! There comes big Virginie! She is actually coming here to wash her rags tied up in a handkerchief."

Gervaise looked up quickly. Virginie was a woman about her own age, larger and taller than herself, a brunette and pretty in spite of the elongated oval of her face. She wore an old black dress with flounces and a red ribbon at her throat. Her hair was carefully arranged and massed in a blue chenille net.

She hesitated a moment in the center aisle and half shut her eyes, as if looking for something or somebody, but when she distinguished Gervaise she went toward her with a haughty, insolent air and supercilious smile and finally established herself only a short distance from her.

"That is a new notion!" muttered Mme Boche in a low voice. "She was never known before to rub out even a pair of cuffs. She is a lazy creature, I do assure you. She never sews the buttons on her boots. She is just like her sister, that minx of an Adèle, who stays away from the shop two days out of three. What is she rubbing now? A skirt, is it? It is dirty enough, I am sure!"

It was clear that Mme Boche wished to please Gervaise. The truth was she often took coffee with Adèle and Virginie when the two sisters were in funds. Gervaise did not reply but worked faster than before. She was now preparing her bluing water in a small tub standing on three legs. She dipped in her pieces, shook them about in the colored water, which was almost a lake in hue, and then, wringing them, she shook them out and threw them lightly over the high wooden bars.

While she did this she kept her back well turned on big Virginie. But she felt that the girl was looking at her, and she heard an occasional derisive sniff. Virginie, in fact, seemed to have come there to provoke her, and when Gervaise turned around the two women fixed their eyes on each other.

"Let her be," murmured Mme Boche. "She is not the one, now I tell you!"

At this moment, as Gervaise was shaking her last piece of linen, she heard laughing and talking at the door of the lavatory.

"Two children are here asking for their mother!" cried Charles.

All the women looked around, and Gervaise recognized Claude and Etienne. As soon as they saw her they ran toward her, splashing through the puddle's, their untied shoes half off and Claude, the eldest, dragging his little brother by the hand.

The women as they passed uttered kindly exclamations of pity, for the children were evidently frightened. They clutched their mother's skirts and buried their pretty blond heads.

"Did Papa send you?" asked Gervaise.

But as she stooped to tie Etienne's shoes she saw on Claude's finger the key of her room with its copper tag and number.

"Did you bring the key?" she exclaimed in great surprise. "And why, pray?"

The child looked down on the key hanging on his finger, which he had apparently forgotten. This seemed to remind him of something, and he said in a clear, shrill voice:

"Papa is gone!"

"He went to buy your breakfast, did he not? And he told you to come and look for me here, I suppose?"

Claude looked at his brother and hesitated. Then he exclaimed:

"Papa has gone, I say. He jumped from the bed, put his things in his

trunk, and then he carried his trunk downstairs and put it on a carriage. We saw him—he has gone!"

Gervaise was kneeling, tying the boy's shoe. She rose slowly with a very white face and with her hands pressed to either temple, as if she were afraid of her head cracking open. She could say nothing but the same words over and over again:

"Great God! Great God! Great God!"

Mme Boche, in her turn, interrogated the child eagerly, for she was charmed at finding herself an actor, as it were, in this drama.

"Tell us all about it, my dear. He locked the door, did he? And then he told you to bring the key here?" And then, lowering her voice, she whispered in the child's ear:

"Was there a lady in the carriage?" she asked.

The child looked troubled for a moment but speedily began his story again with a triumphant air.

"He jumped off the bed, put his things in the trunk, and he went away."

Then as Mme Boche made no attempt to detain him, he drew his brother to the faucet, where the two amused themselves in making the water run.

Gervaise could not weep. She felt as if she were stifling. She covered her face with her hands and turned toward the wall. A sharp, nervous trembling shook her from head to foot. An occasional sobbing sigh or, rather, gasp escaped from her lips, while she pressed her clenched hands more tightly on her eyes, as if to increase the darkness of the abyss in which she felt herself to have fallen.

"Come! Come, my child!" muttered Mme Boche.

"If you knew! If you only knew all!" answered Gervaise. "Only this very morning he made me carry my shawl and my chemises to the Mont-de-Piété, and that was the money he had for the carriage."

And the tears rushed to her eyes. The recollection of her visit to the pawnbroker's, of her hasty return with the money in her hand, seemed to let loose the sobs that strangled her and was the one drop too much. Tears streamed from her eyes and poured down her face. She did not think of wiping them away.

"Be reasonable, child! Be quiet," whispered Mme Boche. "They are all looking at you. Is it possible you can care so much for any man? You love him still, although such a little while ago you pretended you did not care for him, and you cry as if your heart would break! Oh lord, what fools we women are!"

Then in a maternal tone she added:

"And such a pretty little woman as you are too. But now I may as well tell you the whole, I suppose? Well then, you remember when I was talking to you from the sidewalk and you were at your window? I knew then that it was Lantier who came in with Adèle. I did not see his face, but I knew his coat, and Boche watched and saw him come downstairs this morning. But he was with Adèle, you understand. There is another person who comes to see Virginie twice a week."

She stopped for a moment to take breath and then went on in a lower tone still.

"Take care! She is laughing at you—the heartless little cat! I bet all her washing is a sham. She has seen her sister and Lantier well off and then came here to find out how you would take it."

Gervaise took her hands down from her face and looked around. When she saw Virginie talking and laughing with two or three women a wild tempest of rage shook her from head to foot. She stooped with her arms extended, as if feeling for something, and moved along slowly for a step or two, then snatched up a bucket of soapsuds and threw it at Virginie.

"You devil! Be off with you!" cried Virginie, starting back. Only her feet were wet.

All the women in the lavatory hurried to the scene of action. They jumped up on the benches, some with a piece of bread in their hands, others with a bit of soap, and a circle of spectators was soon formed.

"Yes, she is a devil!" repeated Virginie. "What has got into the fool?" Gervaise stood motionless, her face convulsed and lips apart. The other continued:

"She got tired of the country, it seems, but she left one leg behind her, at all events."

The women laughed, and big Virginie, elated at her success, went on in a louder and more triumphant tone:

"Come a little nearer, and I will soon settle you. You had better have

remained in the country. It is lucky for you that your dirty soapsuds only went on my feet, for I would have taken you over my knees and given you a good spanking if one drop had gone in my face. What is the matter with her, anyway?" And big Virginie addressed her audience: "Make her tell what I have done to her! Say! Fool, what harm have I ever done to you?"

"You had best not talk so much," answered Gervaise almost inaudibly; "you know very well where my husband was seen yesterday. Now be quiet or harm will come to you. I will strangle you—quick as a wink."

"Her husband, she says! Her husband! The lady's husband! As if a looking thing like that had a husband! Is it my fault if he has deserted her? Does she think I have stolen him? Anyway, he was much too good for her. But tell me, some of you, was his name on his collar? Madame has lost her husband! She will pay a good reward, I am sure, to anyone who will carry him back!"

The women all laughed. Gervaise, in a low, concentrated voice, repeated:

"You know very well—you know very well! Your sister—yes, I will strangle your sister!"

"Oh yes, I understand," answered Virginie. "Strangle her if you choose. What do I care? And what are you staring at me for? Can't I wash my clothes in peace? Come, I am sick of this stuff. Let me alone!"

Big Virginie turned away, and after five or six angry blows with her beater she began again:

"Yes, it is my sister, and the two adore each other. You should see them bill and coo together. He has left you with these dirty-faced imps, and you left three others behind you with three fathers! It was your dear Lantier who told us all that. Ah, he had had quite enough of you—he said so!"

"Miserable fool!" cried Gervaise, white with anger.

She turned and mechanically looked around on the floor; seeing nothing, however, but the small tub of bluing water, she threw that in Virginie's face.

"She has spoiled my dress!" cried Virginie, whose shoulder and one hand were dyed a deep blue. "You just wait a moment!" she added as she, in her turn, snatched up a tub and dashed its contents at Gervaise. Then ensued a most formidable battle. The two women ran up and down the room in eager haste, looking for full tubs, which they quickly flung in the faces of each other, and each deluge was heralded and accompanied by a shout.

"Is that enough? Will that cool you off?" cried Gervaise.

And from Virginie:

"Take that! It is good to have a bath once in your life!"

Finally the tubs and pails were all empty, and the two women began to draw water from the faucets. They continued their mutual abuse while the water was running, and presently it was Virginie who received a bucketful in her face. The water ran down her back and over her skirts. She was stunned and bewildered, when suddenly there came another in her left ear, knocking her head nearly off her shoulders; her comb fell and with it her abundant hair.

Gervaise was attacked about her legs. Her shoes were filled with water, and she was drenched above her knees. Presently the two women were deluged from head to foot; their garments stuck to them, and they dripped like umbrellas which had been out in a heavy shower.

"What fun!" said one of the laundresses as she looked on at a safe distance.

The whole lavatory were immensely amused, and the women applauded as if at a theater. The floor was covered an inch deep with water, through which the termagants splashed. Suddenly Virginie discovered a bucket of scalding water standing a little apart; she caught it and threw it upon Gervaise. There was an exclamation of horror from the lookers-on. Gervaise escaped with only one foot slightly burned, but exasperated by the pain, she threw a tub with all her strength at the legs of her opponent. Virginie fell to the ground.

"She has broken her leg!" cried one of the spectators.

"She deserved it," answered another, "for the tall one tried to scald her!"

"She was right, after all, if the blonde had taken away her man!"

Mme Boche rent the air with her exclamations, waving her arms frantically high above her head. She had taken the precaution to place herself behind a rampart of tubs, with Claude and Etienne clinging to her

skirts, weeping and sobbing in a paroxysm of terror and keeping up a cry of "Mamma! Mamma!" When she saw Virginie prostrate on the ground she rushed to Gervaise and tried to pull her away.

"Come with me!" she urged. "Do be sensible. You are growing so angry that the Lord only knows what the end of all this will be!"

But Gervaise pushed her aside, and the old woman again took refuge behind the tubs with the children. Virginie made a spring at the throat of her adversary and actually tried to strangle her. Gervaise shook her off and snatched at the long braid hanging from the girl's head and pulled it as if she hoped to wrench it off, and the head with it.

The battle began again, this time silent and wordless and literally tooth and nail. Their extended hands with fingers stiffly crooked, caught wildly at all in their way, scratching and tearing. The red ribbon and the chenille net worn by the brunette were torn off; the waist of her dress was ripped from throat to belt and showed the white skin on the shoulder.

Gervaise had lost a sleeve, and her chemise was torn to her waist. Strips of clothing lay in every direction. It was Gervaise who was first wounded. Three long scratches from her mouth to her throat bled profusely, and she fought with her eyes shut lest she should be blinded. As yet Virginia showed no wound. Suddenly Gervaise seized one of her earrings—pear-shaped, of yellow glass—she tore it out and brought blood.

"They will kill each other! Separate them," cried several voices.

The women gathered around the combatants; the spectators were divided into two parties—some exciting and encouraging Gervaise and Virginie as if they had been dogs fighting, while others, more timid, trembled, turned away their heads and said they were faint and sick. A general battle threatened to take place, such was the excitement.

Mme Boche called to the boy in charge:

"Charles! Charles! Where on earth can he be?"

Finally she discovered him, calmly looking on with his arms folded. He was a tall youth with a big neck. He was laughing and hugely enjoying the scene. It would be a capital joke, he thought, if the women tore each other's clothes to rags and if they should be compelled to finish their fight in a state of nudity.

"Are you there then?" cried Mme Boche when she saw him. "Come and help us separate them, or you can do it yourself."

"No, thank you," he answered quietly. "I don't propose to have my own eyes scratched out! I am not here for that. Let them alone! It will do them no harm to let a little of their hot blood out!"

Mme Boche declared she would summon the police, but to this the mistress of the lavatory, the delicate-looking woman with weak eyes, strenuously objected.

"No, no, I will not. It would injure my house!" she said over and over again.

Both women lay on the ground. Suddenly Virginie struggled up to her knees. She had got possession of one of the beaters, which she brandished. Her voice was hoarse and low as she muttered:

"This will be as good for you as for your dirty linen!"

Gervaise, in her turn, snatched another beater, which she held like a club. Her voice also was hoarse and low.

"I will beat your skin," she muttered, "as I would my coarse towels."

They knelt in front of each other in utter silence for at least a minute, with hair streaming, eyes glaring and distended nostrils. They each drew a long breath.

Gervaise struck the first blow with her beater full on the shoulders of her adversary and then threw herself over on the side to escape Virginie's weapon, which touched her on the hip.

Thus started, they struck each other as laundresses strike their linen, in measured cadence.

The women about them ceased to laugh; many went away, saying they were faint. Those who remained watched the scene with a cruel light in their eyes. Mme Boche had taken Claude and Etienne to the other end of the room, whence came the dreary sound of their sobs which were heard through the dull blows of the beaters.

Suddenly Gervaise uttered a shriek. Virginie had struck her just above the elbow on her bare arm, and the flesh began to swell at once. She rushed at Virginie; her face was so terrible that the spectators thought she meant to kill her.

"Enough! Enough!" they cried.

With almost superhuman strength she seized Virginie by the waist, bent her forward with her face to the brick floor and, notwithstanding her struggles, lifted her skirts and showed the white and naked skin. Then she brought her beater down as she had formerly done at Plassans under the trees on the riverside, where her employer had washed the linen of the garrison.

Each blow of the beater fell on the soft flesh with a dull thud, leaving a scarlet mark.

"Oh! Oh!" murmured Charles with his eyes nearly starting from his head.

The women were laughing again by this time, but soon the cry began again of "Enough! Enough!"

Gervaise did not even hear. She seemed entirely absorbed, as if she were fulfilling an appointed task, and she talked with strange, wild gaiety, recalling one of the rhymes of her childhood:

> "Pan! Pan! Margot au lavoir,
> Pan! Pan! à coups de battoir;
> Pan! Pan! va laver son coeur,
> Pan! Pan! tout noir de douleur

"Take that for yourself and that for your sister and this for Lantier. And now I shall begin all over again. That is for Lantier—that for your sister—and this for yourself!

> "Pan! Pan! Margot au lavoir!
> Pan! Pan! à coups de battoir."

They tore Virginie from her hands. The tall brunette, weeping and sobbing, scarlet with shame, rushed out of the room, leaving Gervaise mistress of the field, who calmly arranged her dress somewhat and, as her arm was stiff, begged Mme Boche to lift her bundle of linen on her shoulder.

While the old woman obeyed she dilated on her emotions during the scene that had just taken place.

"You ought to go to a doctor and see if something is not broken. I heard a queer sound," she said.

But Gervaise did not seem to hear her and paid no attention either to the women who crowded around her with congratulations. She hastened to the door where her children awaited her.

"Two hours!" said the mistress of the establishment, already installed in her glass cabinet. "Two hours and two sous!"

Gervaise mechanically laid down the two sous, and then, limping painfully under the weight of the wet linen which was slung over her shoulder and dripped as she moved, with her injured arm and bleeding cheek, she went away, dragging after her with her naked arm the still-sobbing and tear-stained Etienne and Claude.

Behind her the lavatory resumed its wonted busy air, a little gayer than usual from the excitement of the morning. The women had eaten their bread and drunk their wine, and they splashed the water and used their beaters with more energy than usual as they recalled the blows dealt by Gervaise. They talked from alley to alley, leaning over their tubs. Words and laughs were lost in the sound of running water. The steam and mist were golden in the sun that came in through holes in the curtain. The odor of soapsuds grew stronger and stronger.

When Gervaise entered the alley which led to the Hôtel Boncœur her tears choked her. It was a long, dark, narrow alley, with a gutter on one side close to the wall, and the loathsome smell brought to her mind the recollection of having passed through there with Lantier a fortnight previous.

And what had that fortnight been? A succession of quarrels and dissensions, the remembrance of which would be forevermore a regret and bitterness.

Her room was empty, filled with the glowing sunlight from the open window. This golden light rendered more apparent the blackened ceiling and the walls with the shabby, dilapidated paper. There was not an article beyond the furniture left in the room, except a woman's fichu that seemed to have caught on a nail near the chimney. The children's bed was pulled out into the center of the room; the bureau drawers were wide open, displaying their emptiness. Lantier had washed and had used the last of the pomade—two cents' worth on the back of a playing card—the dirty water in which he had washed still stood in the basin. He had

forgotten nothing; the corner hitherto occupied by his trunk now seemed to Gervaise a vast desert. Even the small mirror was gone. With a presentiment of evil she turned hastily to the chimney. Yes, she was right, Lantier had carried away the tickets. The pink papers were no longer between the candlesticks!

She threw her bundle of linen into a chair and stood looking first at one thing and then at another in a dull agony that no tears came to relieve.

She had but one sou in the world. She heard a merry laugh from her boys who, already consoled, were at the window. She went toward them and, laying a hand on each of their heads, looked out on that scene on which her weary eyes had dwelt so long that same morning.

Yes, it was on that street that she and her children would soon be thrown, and she turned her hopeless, despairing eyes toward the outer boulevards—looking from right to left, lingering at the two extremities, seized by a feeling of terror, as if her life thenceforward was to be spent between a slaughterhouse and a hospital.

CHAPTER II
GERVAISE AND COUPEAU

Three weeks later, about half-past eleven one fine sunny morning, Gervaise and Coupeau, the tinworker, were eating some brandied fruit at the Assommoir.

Coupeau, who was smoking outside, had seen her as she crossed the street with her linen and compelled her to enter. Her huge basket was on the floor, back of the little table where they sat.

Father Colombe's Tavern, known as the Assommoir, was on the corners of the Rue des Poissonnièrs and of the Boulevard de Rochechouart. The sign bore the one single word in long, blue letters:

DISTILLATION

And this word stretched from one end to the other. On either side of the door stood tall oleanders in small casks, their leaves covered thick with dust. The enormous counter with its rows of glasses, its fountain and its pewter measures was on the left of the door, and the huge room was ornamented by gigantic casks painted bright yellow and highly varnished, hooped with shining copper. On high shelves were bottles of liquors and jars of fruits; all sorts of flasks standing in order concealed the wall and repeated their pale green or deep crimson tints in the great mirror behind the counter.

The great feature of the house, however, was the distilling apparatus which stood at the back of the room behind an oak railing on which the tipsy workmen leaned as they stupidly watched the still with its long neck and serpentine tubes descending to subterranean regions—a very devil's kitchen.

At this early hour the Assommoir was nearly empty. A stout man in his shirt sleeves—Father Colombe himself—was serving a little girl not more than twelve years old with four cents' worth of liquor in a cup.

The sun streamed in at the door and lay on the floor, which was black where the men had spat as they smoked. And from the counter, from the casks, from all the room, rose an alcoholic emanation which seemed to intoxicate the very particles of dust floating in the sunshine.

In the meantime Coupeau rolled a new cigarette. He was very neat and clean, wearing a blouse and a little blue cloth cap and showing his white teeth as he smiled.

The lower jaw was somewhat prominent and the nose slightly flat; he had fine brown eyes and the face of a happy child and good-natured animal. His hair was thick and curly. His complexion was delicate still, for he was only twenty-six. Opposite him sat Gervaise in a black gown, leaning slightly forward, finishing her fruit, which she held by the stem.

They were near the street, at the first of the four tables arranged in front of the counter. When Coupeau had lighted his cigar he placed both elbows on the table and looked at the woman without speaking. Her pretty face had that day something of the delicate transparency of fine porcelain.

Then continuing something which they apparently had been previously discussing, he said in a low voice:

"Then you say no, do you? Absolutely no?"

"Of course. No it must be, Monsieur Coupeau," answered Gervaise with a smile. "Surely you do not intend to begin that again here! You promised to be reasonable too. Had I known, I should certainly have refused your treat."

He did not speak but gazed at her more intently than before with tender boldness. He looked at her soft eyes and dewy lips, pale at the corners but half parted, allowing one to see the rich crimson within.

She returned his look with a kind and affectionate smile. Finally she said:

"You should not think of such a thing. It is folly! I am an old woman. I have a boy eight years old. What should we do together?"

"Much as other people do, I suppose!" answered Coupeau with a wink.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You know nothing about it, Monsieur Coupeau, but I have had some experience. I have two mouths in the house, and they have excellent appetites. How am I to bring up my children if I trifle away my time? Then, too, my misfortune has taught me one great lesson, which is that

the less I have to do with men, the better!"

She then proceeded to explain all her reasons, calmly and without anger. It was easy to see that her words were the result of grave consideration.

Coupeau listened quietly, saying only at intervals:

"You are hurting my feelings. Yes, hurting my feelings."

"Yes, I see that," she answered, "and I am really very sorry for you. If I had any idea of leading a different life from that which I follow today it might as well be with you as with another. You have the look of a good-natured man. But what is the use? I have now been with Madame Fauconnier for a fortnight. The children are going to school, and I am very happy, for I have plenty to do. Don't you see, therefore, that it is best for us to remain as we are?"

And she stooped to pick up her basket.

"You are keeping me here to talk," she said, "and they are waiting for me at my employer's. You will find some other woman, Monsieur Coupeau, far prettier than I, who will not have two children to bring up!"

He looked at the clock and made her sit down again.

"Wait!" he cried. "It is still thirty-five minutes of eleven. I have twenty-five minutes still, and don't be afraid of my familiarity, for the table is between us! Do you dislike me so very much that you can't stay and talk with me for five minutes?"

She put down her basket, unwilling to seem disobliging, and they talked for some time in a friendly sort of way. She had breakfasted before she left home, and he had swallowed his soup in the greatest haste and laid in wait for her as she came out. Gervaise, as she listened to him, watched from the windows—between the bottles of brandied fruit—the movement of the crowd in the street, which at this hour—that of the Parisian breakfast—was unusually lively. Workmen hurried into the baker's and, coming out with a loaf under their arms, they went into the Veau à Deux Têtes, three doors higher up, to breakfast at six sous. Next the baker's was a shop where fried potatoes and mussels with parsley were sold. A constant succession of shopgirls carried off paper parcels of fried potatoes and cups filled with mussels, and others bought bunches of radishes. When Gervaise leaned a little more toward the window she saw still another shop, also crowded, from which issued a steady stream of children holding in their hands, wrapped in paper, a breaded cutlet or a sausage, still warm.

A group formed around the door of the Assommoir.

"Say, Bibi-la-Grillade," asked a voice, "will you stand a drink all around?"

Five workmen went in, and the same voice said:

"Father Colombe, be honest now. Give us honest glasses, and no nutshells, if you please."

Presently three more workmen entered together, and finally a crowd of blouses passed in between the dusty oleanders.

"You have no business to ask such questions," said Gervaise to Coupeau; "of course I loved him. But after the manner in which he deserted me—"

They were speaking of Lantier. Gervaise had never seen him again; she supposed him to be living with Virginie's sister, with a friend who was about to start a manufactory for hats.

At first she thought of committing suicide, of drowning herself, but she had grown more reasonable and had really begun to trust that things were all for the best. With Lantier she felt sure she never could have done justice to the children, so extravagant were his habits.

He might come, of course, and see Claude and Etienne. She would not show him the door; only so far as she herself was concerned, he had best not lay his finger on her. And she uttered these words in a tone of determination, like a woman whose plan of life is clearly defined, while Coupeau, who was by no means inclined to give her up lightly, teased and questioned her in regard to Lantier with none too much delicacy, it is true, but his teeth were so white and his face so merry that the woman could not take offense. "Did you beat him?" he asked finally. "Oh, you are none too amiable. You beat people sometimes, I have heard."

She laughed gaily.

Yes, it was true she had whipped that great Virginie. That day she could have strangled someone with a glad heart. And she laughed again, because Coupeau told her that Virginie, in her humiliation, had left the *Quartier*.

Gervaise's face, as she laughed, however, had a certain childish sweetness. She extended her slender, dimpled hands, declaring she would not hurt a fly. All she knew of blows was that she had received a good many in her life. Then she began to talk of Plassans and of her youth. She had never been indiscreet, nor was she fond of men. When she had fallen in with Lantier she was only fourteen, and she regarded him as her husband. Her only fault, she declared, was that she was too amiable and allowed people to impose on her and that she got fond of people too easily; were she to love another man, she should wish and expect to live quietly and comfortably with him always, without any nonsense.

And when Coupeau slyly asked her if she called her dear children nonsense she gave him a little slap and said that she, of course, was much like other women. But women were not like men, after all; they had their homes to take care of and keep clean; she was like her mother, who had been a slave to her brutal father for more than twenty years!

"My very lameness—" she continued.

"Your lameness?" interrupted Coupeau gallantly. "Why, it is almost nothing. No one would ever notice it!"

She shook her head. She knew very well that it was very evident, and at forty it would be far worse, but she said softly, with a faint smile, "You have a strange taste, to fall in love with a lame woman!"

He, with his elbows on the table, still coaxed and entreated, but she continued to shake her head in the negative. She listened with her eyes fixed on the street, seemingly fascinated by the surging crowd.

The shops were being swept; the last frying pan of potatoes was taken from the stove; the pork merchant washed the plates his customers had used and put his place in order. Groups of mechanics were hurrying out from all the workshops, laughing and pushing each other like so many schoolboys, making a great scuffling on the sidewalk with their hobnailed shoes; while some, with their hands in their pockets, smoked in a meditative fashion, looking up at the sun and winking prodigiously. The sidewalks were crowded and the crowd constantly added to by men who poured from the open door—men in blouses and frocks, old jackets and coats, which showed all their defects in the clear morning light.

The bells of the various manufactories were ringing loudly, but the workmen did not hurry. They deliberately lighted their pipes and then with rounded shoulders slouched along, dragging their feet after them.

Gervaise mechanically watched a group of three, one man much taller than the other two, who seemed to be hesitating as to what they should do next. Finally they came directly to the Assommoir.

"I know them," said Coupeau, "or rather I know the tall one. It is Mes-Bottes, a comrade of mine."

The Assommoir was now crowded with boisterous men. Two glasses rang with the energy with which they brought down their fists on the counter. They stood in rows, with their hands crossed over their stomachs or folded behind their backs, waiting their turn to be served by Father Colombe.

"Hallo!" cried Mes-Bottes, giving Coupeau a rough slap on the shoulders. "How fine you have got to be with your cigarettes and your linen shirt bosom! Who is your friend that pays for all this? I should like to make her acquaintance."

"Don't be so silly!" returned Coupeau angrily.

But the other gave a knowing wink.

"Ah, I understand. 'A word to the wise—'" And he turned round with a fearful lurch to look at Gervaise, who shuddered and recoiled. The tobacco smoke, the odor of humanity added to this air heavy with alcohol, was oppressive, and she choked a little and coughed.

"Ah, what an awful thing it is to drink!" she said in a whisper to her friend, to whom she then went on to say how years before she had drunk anisette with her mother at Plassans and how it had made her so very sick that ever since that day she had never been able to endure even the smell of liquors.

"You see," she added as she held up her glass, "I have eaten, the fruit, but I left the brandy, for it would make me ill."

Coupeau also failed to understand how a man could swallow glasses of brandy and water, one after the other. Brandied fruit, now and again, was not bad. As to absinthe and similar abominations, he never touched them—not he, indeed. His comrades might laugh at him as much as they pleased; he always remained on the other side of the door when they came in to swallow perdition like that.

His father, who was a tinworker like himself, had fallen one day from the roof of No. 25, in La Rue Coquenaud, and this recollection had made him very prudent ever since. As for himself, when he passed through that street and saw the place he would sooner drink the water in the gutter than swallow a drop at the wineshop. He concluded with the sentence:

"You see, in my trade a man needs a clear head and steady legs."

Gervaise had taken up her basket; she had not risen from her chair, however, but held it on her knees with a dreary look in her eyes, as if the words of the young mechanic had awakened in her mind strange thoughts of a possible future.

She answered in a low, hesitating tone, without any apparent connection:

"Heaven knows I am not ambitious. I do not ask for much in this world. My idea would be to live a quiet life and always have enough to eat—a clean place to live in—with a comfortable bed, a table and a chair or two. Yes, I would like to bring my children up in that way and see them good and industrious. I should not like to run the risk of being beaten—no, that would not please me at all!"

She hesitated, as if to find something else to say, and then resumed:

"Yes, and at the end I should wish to die in my bed in my own home!"

She pushed back her chair and rose. Coupeau argued with her vehemently and then gave an uneasy glance at the clock. They did not, however, depart at once. She wished to look at the still and stood for some minutes gazing with curiosity at the great copper machine. The tinworker, who had followed her, explained to her how the thing worked, pointing out with his finger the various parts of the machine, and showed the enormous retort whence fell the clear stream of alcohol. The still, with its intricate and endless coils of wire and pipes, had a dreary aspect. Not a breath escaped from it, and hardly a sound was heard. It was like some night task performed in daylight by a melancholy, silent workman.

In the meantime Mes-Bottes, accompanied by his two comrades, had lounged to the oak railing and leaned there until there was a corner of the counter free. He laughed a tipsy laugh as he stood with his eyes fixed on the machine.

"By thunder!" he muttered. "That is a jolly little thing!"

He went on to say that it held enough to keep their throats fresh for a week. As for himself, he would like to hold the end of that pipe between his teeth, and he would like to feel that liquor run down his throat in a steady stream until it reached his heels.

The still did its work slowly but surely. There was not a glimmer on its surface—no firelight reflected in its clean-colored sides. The liquor dropped steadily and suggested a persevering stream which would gradually invade the room, spread over the streets and boulevard and finally deluge and inundate Paris itself.

Gervaise shuddered and drew back. She tried to smile, but her lips quivered as she murmured:

"It frightens me—that machine! It makes me feel cold to see that constant drip."

Then returning to the idea which had struck her as the acme of human happiness, she said:

"Say, do you not think that would be very nice? To work and have plenty to eat, to have a little home all to oneself, to bring up children and then die in one's bed?"

"And not be beaten," added Coupeau gaily. "But I will promise never to beat you, Madame Gervaise, if you will agree to what I ask. I will promise also never to drink, because I love you too much! Come now, say yes."

He lowered his voice and spoke with his lips close to her throat, while she, holding her basket in front of her, was making a path through the crowd of men.

But she did not say no or shake her head as she had done. She glanced up at him with a half-tender smile and seemed to rejoice in the assurance he gave that he did not drink.

It was clear that she would have said yes if she had not sworn never to have anything more to do with men.

Finally they reached the door and went out of the place, leaving it crowded to overflowing. The fumes of alcohol and the tipsy voices of the men carousing went out into the street with them.

Mes-Bottes was heard accusing Father Colombe of cheating by not

filling his glasses more than half full, and he proposed to his comrades to go in future to another place, where they could do much better and get more for their money.

"Ah," said Gervaise, drawing a long breath when they stood on the sidewalk, "here one can breathe again. Good-by, Monsieur Coupeau, and many thanks for your politeness. I must hasten now!"

She moved on, but he took her hand and held it fast.

"Go a little way with me. It will not be much farther for you. I must stop at my sister's before I go back to the shop."

She yielded to his entreaties, and they walked slowly on together. He told her about his family. His mother, a tailoress, was the housekeeper. Twice she had been obliged to give up her work on account of trouble with her eyes. She was sixty-two on the third of the last month. He was the youngest child. One of his sisters, Mme Lerat, a widow, thirty-six years old, was a flower maker and lived at Batignolles, in La Rue Des Moines. The other, who was thirty, had married a chainmaker—a man by the name of Lorilleux. It was to their rooms that he was now going. They lived in that great house on the left. He ate his dinner every night with them; it was an economy for them all. But he wanted to tell them now not to expect him that night, as he was invited to dine with a friend.

Gervaise interrupted him suddenly:

"Did I hear your friend call you Cadet-Cassis?"

"Yes. That is a name they have given me, because when they drag me into a wineshop it is cassis I always take. I had as lief be called Cadet-Cassis as Mes-Bottes, any time."

"I do not think Cadet-Cassis so very bad," answered Gervaise, and she asked him about his work. How long should he be employed on the new hospital?

"Oh," he answered, "there was never any lack of work." He had always more than he could do. He should remain in that shop at least a year, for he had yards and yards of gutters to make.

"Do you know," he said, "when I am up there I can see the Hôtel Boncœur. Yesterday you were at the window, and I waved my hand, but you did not see me."

They by this time had turned into La Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. He stopped and looked up.

"There is the house," he said, "and I was born only a few doors farther off. It is an enormous place."

Gervaise looked up and down the façade. It was indeed enormous. The house was of five stories, with fifteen windows on each floor. The blinds were black and with many of the slats broken, which gave an indescribable air of ruin and desolation to the place. Four shops occupied the *rez-de-chaussée*. On the right of the door was a large room, occupied as a cookshop. On the left was a charcoal vender, a thread-and-needle shop and an establishment for the manufacture of umbrellas.

The house appeared all the higher for the reason that on either side were two low buildings, squeezed close to it, and stood square, like a block of granite roughly hewn, against the blue sky. Totally without ornament, the house grimly suggested a prison.

Gervaise looked at the entrance, an immense doorway which rose to the height of the second story and made a deep passage, at the end of which was a large courtyard. In the center of this doorway, which was paved like the street, ran a gutter full of pale rose-colored water.

"Come up," said Coupeau; "they won't eat you."

Gervaise preferred to wait for him in the street, but she consented to go as far as the room of the concierge, which was within the porch, on the left.

When she had reached this place she again looked up.

Within there were six floors, instead of five, and four regular façades surrounded the vast square of the courtyard. The walls were gray, covered with patches of leprous yellow, stained by the dripping from the slate-covered roof. The wall had not even a molding to break its dull uniformity—only the gutters ran across it. The windows had neither shutters nor blinds but showed the panes of glass which were greenish and full of bubbles. Some were open, and from them hung checked mattresses and sheets to air. Lines were stretched in front of others, on which the family wash was hung to dry—men's shirts, women's chemises and children's breeches! There was a look as if the dwellers under that roof found their quarters too small and were oozing out at every crack and aperture.

For the convenience of each façade there was a narrow, high doorway, from which a damp passage led to the rear, where were four staircases with iron railings. These each had one of the first four letters of the alphabet painted at the side.

The *Rez de Chaussée* was divided into enormous workshops and lit by windows black with dust. The forge of a locksmith blazed in one; from another came the sound of a carpenter's plane, while near the doorway a pink stream from a dyeing establishment poured into the gutter. Pools of stagnant water stood in the courtyard, all littered with shavings and fragments of charcoal. A few pale tufts of grass struggled up between the flat stones, and the whole courtyard was lit but dimly.

In the shade near the water faucet three small hens were pecking with the vain hope of finding a worm, and Gervaise looked about her, amazed at the enormous place which seemed like a little world and as interested in the house as if it were a living creature.

"Are you looking for anyone?" asked the concierge, coming to her door considerably puzzled.

But the young woman explained that she was waiting for a friend and then turned back toward the street. As Coupeau still delayed, she returned to the courtyard, finding in it a strange fascination.

The house did not strike her as especially ugly. At some of the windows were plants—a wallflower blooming in a pot—a caged canary, who uttered an occasional warble, and several shaving mirrors caught the light and shone like stars.

A cabinetmaker sang, accompanied by the regular whistling sounds of his plane, while from the locksmith's quarters came a clatter of hammers struck in cadence.

At almost all the open windows the laughing, dirty faces of merry children were seen, and women sat with their calm faces in profile, bending over their work. It was the quiet time—after the morning labors were over and the men were gone to their work and the house was comparatively quiet, disturbed only by the sounds of the various trades. The same refrain repeated hour after hour has a soothing effect, Gervaise thought.

To be sure, the courtyard was a little damp. Were she to live there, she should certainly prefer a room on the sunny side.

She went in several steps and breathed that heavy odor of the homes of the poor—an odor of old dust, of rancid dirt and grease—but as the acridity of the smells from the dyehouse predominated, she decided it to be far better than the Hôtel Boncœur.

She selected a window—a window in the corner on the left, where there was a small box planted with scarlet beans, whose slender tendrils were beginning to wind round a little arbor of strings.

"I have made you wait too long, I am afraid," said Coupeau, whom she suddenly heard at her side. "They make a great fuss when I do not dine there, and she did not like it today, especially as my sister had bought veal. You are looking at this house," he continued. "Think of it—it is always lit from top to bottom. There are a hundred lodgers in it. If I had any furniture I would have had a room in it long ago. It would be very nice here, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," murmured Gervaise, "very nice indeed. At Plassans there were not so many people in one whole street. Look up at that window on the fifth floor—the window, I mean, where those beans are growing. See how pretty that is!"

He, with his usual recklessness, declared he would hire that room for her, and they would live there together.

She turned away with a laugh and begged him not to talk any more nonsense. The house might stand or fall—they would never have a room in it together.

But Coupeau, all the same, was not reproved when he held her hand longer than was necessary in bidding her farewell when they reached Mme Fauconnier's laundry.

For another month the kindly intercourse between Gervaise and Coupeau continued on much the same footing. He thought her wonderfully courageous, declared she was killing herself with hard work all day and sitting up half the night to sew for the children. She was not like the women he had known; she took life too seriously, by far!

She laughed and defended herself modestly. Unfortunately, she said, she had not always been discreet. She alluded to her first confinement when she was not more than fourteen and to the bottles of anisette she had emptied with her mother, but she had learned much from

experience, she said. He was mistaken, however, in thinking she was persevering and strong. She was, on the contrary, very weak and too easily influenced, as she had discovered to her cost. Her dream had always been to live in a respectable way among respectable people, because bad company knocks the life out of a woman. She trembled when she thought of the future and said she was like a sou thrown up in the air, falling, heads up or down, according to chance, on the muddy pavement. All she had seen, the bad example spread before her childish eyes, had given her valuable lessons. But Coupeau laughed at these gloomy notions and brought back her courage by attempting to put his arm around her waist. She slapped his hands, and he cried out that "for a weak woman, she managed to hurt a fellow considerably!"

As for himself, he was always as merry as a grig, and no fool, either. He parted his hair carefully on one side, wore pretty cravats and patent-leather shoes on Sunday and was as saucy as only a fine Parisian workman can be.

They were of mutual use to each other at the Hôtel Boncœur. Coupeau went for her milk, did many little errands for her and carried home her linen to her customers and often took the children out to walk. Gervaise, to return these courtesies, went up to the tiny room where he slept and in his absence looked over his clothes, sewed on buttons and mended his garments. They grew to be very good and cordial friends. He was to her a constant source of amusement. She listened to the songs he sang and to their slang and nonsense, which as yet had for her much of the charm of novelty. But he began to grow uneasy, and his smiles were less frequent. He asked her whenever they met the same question, "When shall it be?"

She answered invariably with a jest but passed her days in a fire of indelicate allusions, however, which did not bring a flush to her cheek. So long as he was not rough and brutal, she objected to nothing, but one day she was very angry when he, in trying to steal a kiss, tore out a lock of her hair.

About, the last of June Coupeau became absolutely morose, and Gervaise was so much disturbed by certain glances he gave her that she fairly barricaded her door at night. Finally one Tuesday evening, when he had sulked from the previous Sunday, he came to her door at eleven in the evening. At first she refused to open it, but his voice was so gentle, so sad even, that she pulled away the barrier she had pushed against the door for her better protection. When he came in she was startled and thought him ill; he was so deadly pale and his eyes were so bright. No, he was not ill, he said, but things could not go on like this; he could not sleep.

"Listen, Madame Gervaise," he exclaimed with tears in his eyes and a strange choking sensation in his throat. "We must be married at once. That is all there is to be said about it."

Gervaise was astonished and very grave.

"Oh, Monsieur Coupeau, I never dreamed of this, as you know very well, and you must not take such a step lightly."

But he continued to insist; he was certainly fully determined. He had come down to her then, without waiting until morning, merely because he needed a good sleep. As soon as she said yes he would leave her. But he would not go until he heard that word.

"I cannot say yes in such a hurry," remonstrated Gervaise. "I do not choose to run the risk of your telling me at some future day that I led you into this. You are making a great mistake, I assure you. Suppose you should not see me for a week—you would forget me entirely. Men sometimes marry for a fancy and in twenty-four hours would gladly take it all back. Sit down here and let us talk a little."

They sat in that dingy room lit only by one candle, which they forgot to snuff, and discussed the expediency of their marriage until after midnight, speaking very low, lest they should disturb the children, who were asleep with weir heads on the same pillow.

And Gervaise pointed them out to Coupeau. That was an odd sort of dowry to carry a man, surely! How could she venture to go to him with such encumbrances? Then, too, she was troubled about another thing. People would laugh at him. Her story was known; her lover had been seen, and there would be no end of talk if she should marry now.

To all these good and excellent reasons Coupeau answered with a shrug of his shoulders. What did he care for talk and gossip? He never meddled with the affairs of others; why should they meddle with his?

Yes, she had children, to be sure, and he would look out for them with her. He had never seen a woman in his life who was so good and so

courageous and patient. Besides, that had nothing to do with it! Had she been ugly and lazy, with a dozen dirty children, he would have wanted her and only her.

"Yes," he continued, tapping her on the knee, "you are the woman I want, and none other. You have nothing to say against that, I suppose?"

Gervaise melted by degrees. Her resolution forsook her, and a weakness of her heart and her senses overwhelmed her in the face of this brutal passion. She ventured only a timid objection or two. Her hands lay loosely folded on her knees, while her face was very gentle and sweet.

Through the open window came the soft air of a fair June night; the candle flickered in the wind; from the street came the sobs of a child, the child of a drunken man who was lying just in front of the door in the street. From a long distance the breeze brought the notes of a violin playing at a restaurant for some late marriage festival—a delicate strain it was, too, clear and sweet as musical glasses.

Coupeau, seeing that the young woman had exhausted all her arguments, snatched her hands and drew her toward him. She was in one of those moods which she so much distrusted, when she could refuse no one anything. But the young man did not understand this, and he contented himself with simply holding her hands closely in his.

"You say yes, do you not?" he asked.

"How you tease," she replied. "You wish it—well then, yes. Heaven grant that the day will not come when you will be sorry for it."

He started up, lifting her from her feet, and kissed her loudly. He glanced at the children.

"Hush!" he said. "We must not wake the boys. Good night."

And he went out of the room. Gervaise, trembling from head to foot, sat for a full hour on the side of her bed without undressing. She was profoundly touched and thought Coupeau very honest and very kind. The tipsy man in the street uttered a groan like that of a wild beast, and the notes of the violin had ceased.

The next evening Coupeau urged Gervaise to go with him to call on his sister. But the young woman shrank with ardent fear from this visit to the Lorilleuxs'. She saw perfectly well that her lover stood in dread of these people.

He was in no way dependent on this sister, who was not the eldest either. Mother Coupeau would gladly give her consent, for she had never been known to contradict her son. In the family, however, the Lorilleuxs were supposed to earn ten francs per day, and this gave them great weight. Coupeau would never venture to marry unless they agreed to accept his wife.

"I have told them about you," he said. "Gervaise—good heavens, what a baby you are! Come there tonight with me; you will find my sister a little stiff, and Lorilleux is none too amiable. The truth is they are much vexed, because, you see, if I marry I shall no longer dine with them—and that is their great economy. But that makes no odds; they won't put you out of doors. Do what I ask, for it is absolutely necessary."

These words frightened Gervaise nearly out of her wits. One Saturday evening, however, she consented. Coupeau came for her at half-past eight. She was all ready, wearing a black dress, a shawl with printed palm leaves in yellow and a white cap with fluted ruffles. She had saved seven francs for the shawl and two francs fifty centimes for the cap; the dress was an old one, cleaned and made over.

"They expect you," said Coupeau as they walked along the street, "and they have become accustomed to the idea of seeing me married. They are really quite amiable tonight. Then, too, if you have never seen a gold chain made you will be much amused in watching it. They have an order for Monday."

"And have they gold in these rooms?" asked Gervaise.

"I should say so! It is on the walls, on the floors—everywhere!"

By this time they had reached the door and had entered the courtyard. The Lorilleuxs lived on the sixth floor—staircase B. Coupeau told her with a laugh to keep tight hold of the iron railing and not let it go.

She looked up, half shutting her eyes, and gasped as she saw the height to which the staircase wound. The last gas burner, higher up, looked like a star trembling in a black sky, while two others on alternate floors cast long, slanting rays down the interminable stairs.

"Aha!" cried the young man as they stopped a moment on the second landing. "I smell onion soup; somebody has evidently been eating onion soup about here, and it smells good too."

It is true. Staircase B, dirty and greasy, both steps and railing with plastering knocked off and showing the laths beneath, was permeated with the smell of cooking. From each landing ran narrow corridors, and on either side were half-open doors painted yellow and black, with finger marks about the lock and handles, and through the open window came the damp, disgusting smell of sinks and sewers mingling with the odor of onions.

Up to the sixth floor came the noises from the rez-de-chaussée—the rattling of dishes being washed, the scraping of saucepans, and all that sort of thing. On one floor Gervaise saw through an open door on which were the words DESIGNER AND DRAUGHTSMAN in large letters two men seated at a table covered with a varnished cloth; they were disputing violently amid thick clouds of smoke from their pipes. The second and third floors were the quietest. Here through the open doors came the sound of a cradle rocking, the wail of a baby, a woman's voice, the rattle of a spoon against a cup. On one door she read a placard, MME GAUDRON, CARDER; on the next, M. MADINIER, MANUFACTURER OF BOXES.

On the fourth there was a great quarrel going on—blows and oaths—which did not prevent the neighbors opposite from playing cards with their door wide open for the benefit of the air. When Gervaise reached the fifth floor she was out of breath. Such innumerable stairs were a novelty to her. These winding railings made her dizzy. One family had taken possession of the landing; the father was washing plates in a small earthen pan near the sink, while the mother was scrubbing the baby before putting it to sleep. Coupeau laughingly bade Gervaise keep up her courage, and at last they reached the top, and she looked around to see whence came the clear, shrill voice which she had heard above all other sounds ever since her foot touched the first stair. It was a little old woman who sang as she worked, and her work was dressing dolls at three cents apiece. Gervaise clung to the railing, all out of breath, and looked down into the depths below—the gas burner now looked like a star at the bottom of a deep well. The smells, the turbulent life of this great house, seemed to rush over her in one tremendous gust. She gasped and turned pale.

"We have not got there yet," said Coupeau; "we have much farther to go." And he turned to the left and then to the right again. The corridor stretched out before them, faintly lit by an occasional gas burner; a succession of doors, like those of a prison or a convent, continued to appear, nearly all wide open, showing the sordid interiors. Finally they reached a corridor that was entirely dark.

"Here we are," said the tinworker. "Isn't it a journey? Look out for three steps. Hold onto the wall."

And Gervaise moved cautiously for ten paces or more. She counted the three steps, and then Coupeau pushed open a door without knocking. A bright light streamed forth. They went in.

It was a long, narrow apartment, almost like a prolongation of the corridor; a woolen curtain, faded and spotted, drawn on one side, divided the room in two.

One compartment, the first, contained a bed pushed under the corner of the mansard roof; a stove, still warm from the cooking of the dinner; two chairs, a table and a wardrobe. To place this last piece of furniture where it stood, between the bed and the door, had necessitated sawing away a portion of the ceiling.

The second compartment was the workshop. At the back, a tiny forge with bellows; on the right, a vice screwed against the wall under an étagère, where were iron tools piled up; on the left, in front of the window, was a small table covered with pincers, magnifying glasses, tiny scales and shears—all dirty and greasy.

"We have come!" cried Coupeau, going as far as the woolen curtain.

But he was not answered immediately.

Gervaise, much agitated by the idea that she was entering a place filled with gold, stood behind her friend and did not know whether to speak or retreat.

The bright light which came from a lamp and also from a brazier of charcoal in the forge added to her trouble. She saw Mme Lorilleux, a small, dark woman, agile and strong, drawing with all the vigor of her arms—assisted by a pair of pincers—a thread of black metal, which she passed through the holes of a drawplate held by the vice. Before the desk or table in front of the window sat Lorilleux, as short as his wife, but with broader shoulders. He was managing a tiny pair of pincers and doing some work so delicate that it was almost imperceptible. It was he

who first looked up and lifted his head with its scanty yellow hair. His face was the color of old wax, was long and had an expression of physical suffering.

"Ah, it is you, is it? Well! Well! But we are in a hurry, you understand. We have an order to fill. Don't come into the workroom. Remain in the chamber." And he returned to his work; his face was reflected in a ball filled with water, through which the lamp sent on his work a circle of the brightest possible light.

"Find chairs for yourselves," cried Mme Lorilleux. "This is the lady, I suppose. Very well! Very well!"

She rolled up her wire and carried it to the forge, and then she fanned the coals a little to quicken the heat.

Coupeau found two chairs and made Gervaise seat herself near the curtain. The room was so narrow that he could not sit beside her, so he placed his chair a little behind and leaned over her to give her the information he deemed desirable.

Gervaise, astonished by the strange reception given her by these people and uncomfortable under their sidelong glances, had a buzzing in her ears which prevented her from hearing what was said.

She thought the woman very old looking for her thirty years and also extremely untidy, with her hair tumbling over her shoulders and her dirty camisole.

The husband, not more than a year older, seemed to Gervaise really an old man with thin, compressed lips and bowed figure. He was in his shirt sleeves, and his naked feet were thrust into slippers down at the heel.

She was infinitely astonished at the smallness of the atelier, at the blackened walls and at the terrible heat.

Tiny drops bedewed the waxed forehead of Lorilleux himself, while Mme Lorilleux threw off her sack and stood in bare arms and chemise half slipped off.

"And the gold?" asked Gervaise softly.

Her eager eyes searched the corners, hoping to discover amid all the dirt something of the splendor of which she had dreamed.

But Coupeau laughed.

"Gold?" he said. "Look! Here it is—and here—and here again, at your feet."

He pointed in succession to the fine thread with which his sister was busy and at another package of wire hung against the wall near the vice; then falling down on his hands and knees, he gathered up from the floor, on the tip of his moistened finger, several tiny specks which looked like needle points.

Gervaise cried out, "That surely is not gold! That black metal which looks precisely like iron!"

Her lover laughed and explained to her the details of the manufacture in which his brother-in-law was engaged. The wire was furnished them in coils, just as it hung against the wall, and then they were obliged to heat and reheat it half a dozen times during their manipulations, lest it should break. Considerable strength and a vast deal of skill were needed, and his sister had both. He had seen her draw out the gold until it was like a hair. She would never let her husband do it because he always had a cough.

All this time Lorilleux was watching Gervaise stealthily, and after a violent fit of coughing he said with an air as if he were speaking to himself:

"I make columns."

"Yes," said Coupeau in an explanatory voice, "there are four different kinds of chains, and his style is called a column."

Lorilleux uttered a little grunt of satisfaction, all the time at work, with the tiny pincers held between very dirty nails.

"Look here, Cadet-Cassis," he said. "This very morning I made a little calculation. I began my work when I was only twelve years old. How many yards do you think I have made up to this day?"

He lifted his pale face.

"Eight thousand! Do you understand? Eight thousand! Enough to twist around the necks of all the women in this *Quartier*."

Gervaise returned to her chair, entirely disenchanted. She thought it was all very ugly and uninteresting. She smiled in order to gratify the Lorilleuxs, but she was annoyed and troubled at the profound silence they preserved in regard to her marriage, on account of which she had called there that evening. These people treated her as if she were simply

a spectator whose curiosity had induced Coupeau to bring her to see their work.

They began to talk; it was about the lodgers in the house. Mme Lorilleux asked her brother if he had not heard those Benard people quarreling as he came upstairs. She said the husband always came home tipsy. Then she spoke of the designer, who was overwhelmed with debts, always smoking and always quarreling. The landlord was going to turn out the Coquets, who owed three quarters now and who would put their furnace out on the landing, which was very dangerous. Mlle Remanjon, as she was going downstairs with a bundle of dolls, was just in time to rescue one of the children from being burned alive.

Gervaise was beginning to find the place unendurable. The heat was suffocating; the door could not be opened, because the slightest draft gave Lorilleux a cold. As they ignored the marriage question utterly, she pulled her lover's sleeve to signify her wish to depart. He understood and was himself annoyed at this affectation of silence.

"We are going," he said coldly, "We do not care to interrupt your work any longer."

He lingered a moment, hoping for a word or an allusion. Suddenly he decided to begin the subject himself.

"We rely on you, Lorilleux. You will be my wife's witness," he said.

The man lifted his head in affected surprise, while his wife stood still in the center of the workshop.

"Are you in earnest?" he murmured, and then continued as if soliloquizing, "It is hard to know when this confounded Cadet-Cassis is in earnest."

"We have no advice to give," interrupted his wife. "It is a foolish notion, this marrying, and it never succeeds. Never—no—never."

She drawled out these last words, examining Gervaise from head to foot as she spoke.

"My brother is free to do as he pleases, of course," she continued. "Of course his family would have liked—But then people always plan, and things turn out so different. Of course it is none of my business. Had he brought me the lowest of the low, I should have said, 'Marry her and let us live in peace!' He was very comfortable with us, nevertheless. He has considerable flesh on his bones and does not look as if he had been starved. His soup was always ready to the minute. Tell me, Lorilleux, don't you think that my brother's friend looks like Thérèse—you know whom I mean—that woman opposite, who died of consumption?"

"She certainly does," answered the chainmaker contemplatively.

"And you have two children, madame? I said to my brother I could not understand how he could marry a woman with two children. You must not be angry if I think of his interests; it is only natural. You do not look very strong. Say, Lorilleux, don't you think that Madame looks delicate?"

This courteous pair made no allusion to her lameness, but Gervaise felt it to be in their minds. She sat stiff and still before them, her thin shawl with its yellow palm leaves wrapped closely about her, and answered in monosyllables, as if before her judges. Coupeau, realizing her sufferings, cried out:

"This is all nonsense you are talking! What I want to know is if the day will suit you, July twenty-ninth."

"One day is the same as another to us," answered his sister severely. "Lorilleux can do as he pleases in regard to being your witness. I only ask for peace."

Gervaise, in her embarrassment, had been pushing about with her feet some of the rubbish on the floor; then fearing she had done some harm, she stooped to ascertain. Lorilleux hastily approached her with a lamp and looked at her fingers with evident suspicion.

"Take care," he said. "Those small bits of gold stick to the shoes sometimes and are carried off without your knowing it."

This was a matter of some importance, of course, for his employers weighed what they entrusted to him. He showed the hare's-foot with which he brushed the particles of gold from the table and the skin spread on his knees to receive them. Twice each week the shop was carefully brushed; all the rubbish was kept and burned, and the ashes were examined, where were found each month twenty-five or thirty francs of gold.

Mme Lorilleux did not take her eyes from the shoes of her guest.

"If Mademoiselle would be so kind," she murmured with an amiable smile, "and would just look at her soles herself. There is no cause for

offense, I am sure!"

Gervaise, indignant and scarlet, reseated herself and held up her shoes for examination. Coupeau opened the door with a gay good night, and she followed him into the corridor after a word or two of polite farewell.

The Lorilleuxs turned to their work at the end of their room where the tiny forge still glittered. The woman with her chemise slipped off her shoulder which was red with the reflection from the brazier, was drawing out another wire, the muscles in her throat swelling with her exertions.

The husband, stooping under the green light of the ball of water, was again busy with his pincers, not stopping even to wipe the sweat from his brow.

When Gervaise emerged from the narrow corridors on the sixth landing she said with tears in her eyes:

"This certainly does not promise very well!"

Coupeau shook his head angrily. Lorilleux should pay for this evening! Was there ever such a miser? To care if one carried off three grains of gold in the dust on one's shoes. All the stories his sister told were pure fictions and malice. His sister never meant him to marry; his eating with them saved her at least four sous daily. But he did not care whether they appeared on the twenty-ninth of July or not; he could get along without them perfectly well.

But Gervaise, as she descended the staircase, felt her heart swell with pain and fear. She did not like the strange shadows on the dimly lit stairs. From behind the doors, now closed, came the heavy breathing of sleepers who had gone to their beds on rising from the table. A faint laugh was heard from one room, while a slender thread of light filtered through the keyhole of the old lady who was still busy with her dolls, cutting out the gauze dresses with squeaking scissors. A child was crying on the next floor, and the smell from the sinks was worse than ever and seemed something tangible amid this silent darkness. Then in the courtyard, while Coupeau pulled the cord, Gervaise turned and examined the house once more. It seemed enormous as it stood black against the moonless sky. The gray facades rose tall and spectral; the windows were all shut. No clothes fluttered in the breeze; there was literally not the smallest look of life, except in the few windows that were still lighted. From the damp corner of the courtyard came the drip-drip of the fountain. Suddenly it seemed to Gervaise as if the house were striding toward her and would crush her to the earth. A moment later she smiled at her foolish fancy.

"Take care!" cried Coupeau.

And as she passed out of the courtyard she was compelled to jump over a little sea which had run from the dyer's. This time the water was blue, as blue as the summer sky, and the reflection of the lamps carried by the concierge was like the stars themselves.

CHAPTER III
A MARRIAGE OF THE PEOPLE

Gervaise did not care for any great wedding. Why should they spend their money so foolishly? Then, too, she felt a little ashamed and did not care to parade their marriage before the whole *Quartier*. But Coupeau objected. It would never do not to have some festivities—a little drive and a supper, perhaps, at a restaurant; he would ask for nothing more. He vowed that no one should drink too much and finally obtained the young woman's consent and organized a picnic at five francs per head at the Moulin d'Argent, Boulevard de la Chapelle. He was a small wine merchant who had a garden back of his restaurant. He made out a list. Among others appeared the names of two of his comrades, Bibi-la-Grillade and Mes-Bottes. It was true that Mes-Bottes crooked his elbow, but he was so deliciously funny that he was always invited to picnics. Gervaise said she, in her turn, would bring her employer, Mme Fauconnier—all told, there would be fifteen at the table. That was quite enough.

Now as Coupeau was literally penniless, he borrowed fifty francs from his employer. He first bought his wedding ring; it cost twelve francs out of the shop, but his brother-in-law purchased it for him for nine at the factory. He then ordered an overcoat, pantaloons and vest from a tailor to whom he paid twenty-five francs on account. His patent-leather shoes and his bolivar could last awhile longer. Then he put aside his ten francs for the picnic, which was what he and Gervaise must pay, and they had precisely six francs remaining, the price of a Mass at the altar of the poor. He had no liking for those black frocks, and it broke his heart to give these beloved francs to them. But a marriage without a Mass, he had heard, was really no marriage at all.

He went to the church to see if he could not drive a better bargain, and for an hour he fought with a stout little priest in a dirty soutane who, finally declaring that God could never bless such a union, agreed that the Mass should cost only five francs. Thus Coupeau had twenty sous in hand with which to begin the world!

Gervaise, in her turn, had made her preparations, had worked late into the night and laid aside thirty francs. She had set her heart on a silk mantelet marked thirteen francs, which she had seen in a shopwindow. She paid for it and bought for ten francs from the husband of a laundress who had died in Mme Fauconnier's house a delaine dress of a deep blue, which she made over entirely. With the seven francs that remained she bought a rose for her cap, a pair of white cotton gloves and shoes for Claude. Fortunately both the boys had nice blouses. She worked for four days mending and making; there was not a hole or a rip in anything. At last the evening before the important day arrived; Gervaise and Coupeau sat together and talked, happy that matters were so nearly concluded. Their arrangements were all made. They were to go to the mayor's office—the two sisters of Coupeau declared they would remain at home, their presence not being necessary there. Then Mother Coupeau began to weep, saying she wished to go early and hide in a corner, and they promised to take her.

The hour fixed for the party to assemble at the Moulin d'Argent was one o'clock sharp. From then they were to seek an appetite on the Plaine-St-Denis and return by rail. Saturday morning, as he dressed, Coupeau thought with some anxiety of his scanty funds; he supposed he ought to offer a glass of wine and a slice of ham to his witnesses while waiting for dinner; unexpected expenses might arise; no, it was clear that twenty sous was not enough. He consequently, after taking Claude and Etienne to Mlle Boche, who promised to appear with them at dinner, ran to his brother-in-law and borrowed ten francs; he did it with reluctance, and the words stuck in his throat, for he half expected a refusal. Lorilleux grumbled and growled but finally lent the money. But Coupeau heard his sister mutter under her breath, "That is a good beginning."

The civil marriage was fixed for half-past ten. The day was clear and the sun intensely hot. In order not to excite observation the bridal pair, the mother and the four witnesses, separated—Gervaise walked in front, having the arm of Lorilleux, while M. Madinier gave his to Mamma Coupeau; on the opposite sidewalk were Coupeau, Boche and Bibi-la-Grillade. These three wore black frock coats and walked with their arms dangling from their rounded shoulders. Boche wore yellow pantaloons. Bibi-la-Grillade's coat was buttoned to the chin, as he had no vest, and a

wisp of a cravat was tied around his neck.

M. Madinier was the only one who wore a dress coat, a superb coat with square tails, and people stared as he passed with the stout Mamma Coupeau in a green shawl and black bonnet with black ribbons. Gervaise was very sweet and gentle, wearing her blue dress and her trim little silk mantle. She listened graciously to Lorilleux, who, in spite of the warmth of the day, was nearly lost in the ample folds of a loose overcoat. Occasionally she would turn her head and glance across the street with a little smile at Coupeau, who was none too comfortable in his new clothes. They reached the mayor's office a half-hour too early, and their turn was not reached until nearly eleven. They sat in the corner of the office, stiff and uneasy, pushing back their chairs a little out of politeness each time one of the clerks passed them, and when the magistrate appeared they all rose respectfully. They were bidden to sit down again, which they did, and were the spectators of three marriages—the brides in white and the bridesmaids in pink and blue, quite fine and stylish.

When their own turn came Bibi-la-Grillade had disappeared, and Boche hunted him up in the square, where he had gone to smoke a pipe. All the forms were so quickly completed that the party looked at each other in dismay, feeling as if they had been defrauded of half the ceremony. Gervaise listened with tears in her eyes, and the old lady wept audibly.

Then they turned to the register and wrote their names in big, crooked letters—all but the newly made husband, who, not being able to write, contented himself with making a cross.

Then the clerk handed the certificate to Coupeau. He, admonished by a touch of his wife's elbow, presented him with five sous.

It was quite a long walk from the mayor's office to the church. The men stopped midway to take a glass of beer, and Gervaise and Mamma Coupeau drank some cassis with water. There was not a particle of shade, for the sun was directly above their heads. The beadle awaited them in the empty church; he hurried them toward a small chapel, asking them indignantly if they were not ashamed to mock at religion by coming so late. A priest came toward them with an ashen face, faint with hunger, preceded by a boy in a dirty surplice. He hurried through the service, gabbling the Latin phrases with sidelong glances at the bridal party. The bride and bridegroom knelt before the altar in considerable embarrassment, not knowing when it was necessary to kneel and when to stand and not always understanding the gestures made by the clerk.

The witnesses thought it more convenient to stand all the time, while Mamma Coupeau, overcome by her tears again, shed them on a prayer book which she had borrowed from a neighbor.

It was high noon. The last Mass was said, and the church was noisy with the movements of the sacristans, who were putting the chairs in their places. The center altar was being prepared for some fete, for the hammers were heard as the decorations were being nailed up. And in the choking dust raised by the broom of the man who was sweeping the corner of the small altar the priest laid his cold and withered hand on the heads of Gervaise and Coupeau with a sulky air, as if he were uniting them as a mere matter of business or to occupy the time between the two Masses.

When the signatures were again affixed to the register in the vestry and the party stood outside in the sunshine, they had a sensation as if they had been driven at full speed and were glad to rest.

"I feel as if I had been at the dentist's. We had no time to cry out before it was all over!"

"Yes," muttered Lorilleux, "they take less than five minutes to do what can't be undone in all one's life! Poor Cadet-Cassis!"

Gervaise kissed her new mother with tears in her eyes but with smiling lips. She answered the old woman gently:

"Do not be afraid. I will do my best to make him happy. If things turn out ill it shall not be my fault."

The party went at once to the Moulin d'Argent. Coupeau now walked with his wife some little distance in advance of the others. They whispered and laughed together and seemed to see neither the people nor the houses nor anything that was going on about them.

At the restaurant Coupeau ordered at once some bread and ham; then seeing that Boche and Bibi-la-Grillade were really hungry, he ordered more wine and more meat. His mother could eat nothing, and Gervaise, who was dying of thirst, drank glass after glass of water barely reddened with wine.

"This is my affair," said Coupeau, going to the counter where he paid

four francs, five sous.

The guests began to arrive. Mme Fauconnier, stout and handsome, was the first. She wore a percale gown, ecru ground with bright figures, a rose-colored cravat and a bonnet laden with flowers. Then came Mlle Remanjon in her scanty black dress, which seemed so entirely a part of herself that it was doubtful if she laid it aside at night. The Gaudron household followed. The husband, enormously stout, looked as if his vest would burst at the least movement, and his wife, who was nearly as huge as himself, was dressed in a delicate shade of violet which added to her apparent size.

"Ah," cried Mme Lerat as she entered, "we are going to have a tremendous shower!" And she bade them all look out the window to see how black the clouds were.

Mme Lerat, Coupeau's eldest sister, was a tall, thin woman, very masculine in appearance and talking through her nose, wearing a puce-colored dress that was much too loose for her. It was profusely trimmed with fringe, which made her look like a lean dog just coming out of the water. She brandished an umbrella as she talked, as if it had been a walking stick. As she kissed Gervaise she said:

"You have no idea how the wind blows, and it is as hot as a blast from a furnace!"

Everybody at once declared they had felt the storm coming all the morning. Three days of extreme heat, someone said, always ended in a gust.

"It will blow over," said Coupeau with an air of confidence, "but I wish my sister would come, all the same."

Mme Lorilleux, in fact, was very late. Mme Lerat had called for her, but she had not then begun to dress. "And," said the widow in her brother's ear, "you never saw anything like the temper she was in!"

They waited another half-hour. The sky was growing blacker and blacker. Clouds of dust were rising along the street, and down came the rain. And it was in the first shower that Mme Lorilleux arrived, out of temper and out of breath, struggling with her umbrella, which she could not close.

"I had ten minds," she exclaimed, "to turn back. I wanted you to wait until next Saturday. I knew it would rain today—I was certain of it!"

Coupeau tried to calm her, but she quickly snubbed him. Was it he, she would like to know, who was to pay for her dress if it were spoiled?

She wore black silk, so tight that the buttonholes were burst out, and it showed white on the shoulders,—while the skirt was so scant that she could not take a long step.

The other women, however, looked at her silk with envy.

She took no notice of Gervaise, who sat by the side of her mother-in-law. She called to Lorilleux and with his aid carefully wiped every drop of rain from her dress with her handkerchief.

Meanwhile the shower ceased abruptly, but the storm was evidently not over, for sharp flashes of lightning darted through the black clouds.

Suddenly the rain poured down again. The men stood in front of the door with their hands in their pockets, dismally contemplating the scene. The women crouched together with their hands over their eyes. They were in such terror they could not talk; when the thunder was heard farther off they all plucked up their spirits and became impatient, but a fine rain was falling that looked interminable.

"What are we to do?" cried Mme Lorilleux crossly.

Then Mile Remanjon timidly observed that the sun perhaps would soon be out, and they might yet go into the country; upon this there was one general shout of derision.

"Nice walking it would be! And how pleasant the grass would be to sit upon!"

Something must be done, however, to get rid of the time until dinner. Bibi-la-Grillade proposed cards; Mme Lerat suggested storytelling. To each proposition a thousand objections were offered. Finally when Lorilleux proposed that the party should visit the tomb of Abelard and Heloise his wife's indignation burst forth.

She had dressed in her best only to be drenched in the rain and to spend the day in a wineshop, it seemed! She had had enough of the whole thing and she would go home. Coupeau and Lorilleux held the door, she exclaiming violently:

"Let me go; I tell you I will go!"

Her husband having induced her to listen to reason, Coupeau went to

Gervaise, who was calmly conversing with her mother-in-law and Mme Fauconnier.

"Have you nothing to propose?" he asked, not venturing to add any term of endearment.

"No," she said with a smile, "but I am ready to do anything you wish. I am very well suited as I am."

Her face was indeed as sunny as a morning in May. She spoke to everyone kindly and sympathetically. During the storm she had sat with her eyes riveted on the clouds, as if by the light of those lurid flashes she was reading the solemn book of the future.

M. Madinier had proposed nothing; he stood leaning against the counter with a pompous air; he spat upon the ground, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and rolled his eyes about.

"We could go to the Musée du Louvre, I suppose," and he smoothed his chin while awaiting the effect of this proposition.

"There are antiquities there—statues, pictures, lots of things. It is very instructive. Have any of you been there?" he asked.

They all looked at each other. Gervaise had never even heard of the place, nor had Mme Fauconnier nor Boche. Coupeau thought he had been there one Sunday, but he was not sure, but Mme Lorilleux, on whom Madinier's air of importance had produced a profound impression, approved of the idea. The day was wasted anyway; therefore, if a little instruction could be got it would be well to try it. As the rain was still falling, they borrowed old umbrellas of every imaginable hue from the establishment and started forth for the Musée du Louvre.

There were twelve of them, and they walked in couples, Mme Lorilleux with Madinier, to whom she grumbled all the way.

"We know nothing about her," she said, "not even where he picked her up. My husband has already lent them ten francs, and whoever heard of a bride without a single relation? She said she had a sister in Paris. Where is she today, I should like to know!"

She checked herself and pointed to Gervaise, whose lameness was very perceptible as she descended the hill.

"Just look at her!" she muttered. "Wooden legs!"

This epithet was heard by Mme Fauconnier, who took up the cudgels for Gervaise who, she said, was as neat as a pin and worked like a tiger.

The wedding party, coming out of La Rue St-Denis, crossed the boulevard under their umbrellas amid the pouring rain, driving here and there among the carriages. The drivers, as they pulled up their horses, shouted to them to look out, with an oath. On the gray and muddy sidewalk the procession was very conspicuous—the blue dress of the bride, the canary-colored breeches of one of the men, Madinier's square-tailed coat—all gave a carnivallike air to the group. But it was the hats of the party that were the most amusing, for they were of all heights, sizes and styles. The shopkeepers on the boulevard crowded to their windows to enjoy the drollery of the sight. The wedding procession, quite undisturbed by the observation it excited, went gaily on. They stopped for a moment on the Place des Victoires—the bride's shoestring was untied—she fastened it at the foot of the statue of Louis XIV, her friends waiting as she did so.

Finally they reached the Louvre. Here Madinier politely asked permission to take the head of the party; the place was so large, he said, that it was a very easy thing to lose oneself; he knew the prettiest rooms and the things best worth seeing, because he had often been there with an artist, a very intelligent fellow, from whom a great manufacturer of pasteboard boxes bought pictures.

The party entered the museum of Assyrian antiquities. They shivered and walked about, examining the colossal statues, the gods in black marble, strange beasts and monstrosities, half cats and half women. This was not amusing, and an inscription in Phoenician characters appalled them. Who on earth had ever read such stuff as that? It was meaningless nonsense!

But Madinier shouted to them from the stairs, "Come on! That is nothing! Much more interesting things up here, I assure you!"

The severe nudity of the great staircase cast a gloom over their spirits; an usher in livery added to their awe, and it was with great respect and on the tips of their toes they entered the French gallery.

How many statues! How many pictures! They wished they had all the money they had cost.

In the Gallerie d'Apollon the floor excited their admiration; it was smooth as glass; even the feet of the sofas were reflected in it. Madinier

bade them look at the ceiling and at its many beauties of decoration, but they said they dared not look up. Then before entering the Salon Carré he pointed to the window and said:

"That is the balcony where Charles IX fired on the people!"

With a magnificent gesture he ordered his party to stand still in the center of the Salon Carré.

"There are only chefs-d'oeuvres here," he whispered as solemnly as if he had been in a church.

They walked around the salon. Gervaise asked the meaning of one of the pictures, the *Noces de Cana*; Coupeau stopped before *La Joconde*, declaring that it was like one of his aunts.

Boche and Bibi-la-Grillade snickered and pushed each other at the sight of the nude female figures, and the Gaudrons, husband and wife, stood open-mouthed and deeply touched before Murillo's Virgin.

When they had been once around the room Madinier, who was quite attentive to Mme Lorilleux on account of her silk gown, proposed they should do it over again; it was well worth it, he said.

He never hesitated in replying to any question which she addressed to him in her thirst for information, and when she stopped before Titian's Mistress, whose yellow hair struck her as like her own, he told her it was a mistress of Henri IV, who was the heroine of a play then running at the Ambigu.

The wedding party finally entered the long gallery devoted to the Italian and Flemish schools of art. The pictures were all meaningless to them, and their heads were beginning to ache. They felt a thrill of interest, however, in the copyists with their easels, who painted without being disturbed by spectators. The artists scattered through the rooms had heard that a primitive wedding party was making a tour of the Louvre and hurried with laughing faces to enjoy the scene, while the weary bride and bridegroom, accompanied by their friends, clumsily moved about over the shining, resounding floors much like cattle let loose and with quite as keen an appreciation of the marvelous beauties about them.

The women vowed their backs were broken standing so long, and Madinier, declaring he knew the way, said they would leave after he had shown them a certain room to which he could go with his eyes shut. But he was very much mistaken. Salon succeeded to salon, and finally the party went up a flight of stairs and found themselves among cannons and other instruments of war. Madinier, unwilling to confess that he had lost himself, wandered distractedly about, declaring that the doors had been changed. The party began to feel that they were there for life, when suddenly to their great joy they heard the cry of the janitors resounding from room to room.

"Time to close the doors!"

They meekly followed one of them, and when they were outside they uttered a sigh of relief as they put up their umbrellas once more, but one and all affected great pleasure at having been to the Louvre.

The clock struck four. There were two hours to dispose of before dinner. The women would have liked to rest, but the men were more energetic and proposed another walk, during which so tremendous a shower fell that umbrellas were useless and dresses were irretrievably ruined. Then M. Madinier suggested that they should ascend the column on the Place Vendôme.

"It is not a bad idea," cried the men. And the procession began the ascent of the spiral staircase, which Boche said was so old that he could feel it shake. This terrified the ladies, who uttered little shrieks, but Coupeau said nothing; his arm was around his wife's waist, and just as they emerged upon the platform he kissed her.

"Upon my word!" cried Mme Lorilleux, much scandalized.

Madinier again constituted himself master of ceremonies and pointed out all the monuments, but Mme Fauconnier would not put her foot outside the little door; she would not look down on that pavement for all the world, she said, and the party soon tired of this amusement and descended the stairs. At the foot Madinier wished to pay, but Coupeau interfered and put into the hand of the guard twenty-four sous-two for each person. It was now half-past five; they had just time to get to the restaurant, but Coupeau proposed a glass of vermouth first, and they entered a cabaret for that purpose.

When they returned to the Moulin d'Argent they found Mme Boche with the two children, talking to Mamma Coupeau near the table, already spread and waiting. When Gervaise saw Claude and Etienne she

took them both on her knees and kissed them lovingly.

"Have they been good?" she asked.

"I should think Coupeau would feel rather queer!" said Mme Lorilleux as she looked on grimly.

Gervaise had been calm and smiling all day, but she had quietly watched her husband with the Lorilleuxs. She thought Coupeau was afraid of his sister—cowardly, in fact. The evening previous he had said he did not care a sou for their opinion on any subject and that they had the tongues of vipers, but now he was with them, he was like a whipped hound, hung on their words and anticipated their wishes. This troubled his wife, for it augured ill, she thought, for their future happiness.

"We won't wait any longer for Mes-Bottes," cried Coupeau. "We are all here but him, and his scent is good! Surely he can't be waiting for us still at St-Denis!"

The guests, in good spirits once more, took their seats with a great clatter of chairs.

Gervaise was between Lorilleux and Madinier, and Coupeau between Mme Fauconnier and his sister Mme Lorilleux. The others seated themselves.

"No one has asked a blessing," said Boche as the ladies pulled the tablecloth well over their skirts to protect them from spots.

But Mme Lorilleux frowned at this poor jest. The vermicelli soup, which was cold and greasy, was eaten with noisy haste. Two garçons served them, wearing aprons of a very doubtful white and greasy vests.

Through the four windows, open on the courtyard and its acacias, streamed the light, soft and warm, after the storm. The trees, bathed in the setting sun, imparted a cool, green tinge to the dingy room, and the shadows of the waving branches and quivering leaves danced over the cloth.

There were two fly-specked mirrors at either end of the room, which indefinitely lengthened the table spread with thick china. Every time the *garçons* opened the door into the kitchen there came a strong smell of burning fat.

"Don't let us all talk at once!" said Boche as a dead silence fell on the room, broken by the abrupt entrance of Mes-Bottes.

"You are nice people!" he exclaimed. "I have been waiting for you until I am wet through and have a fishpond in each pocket."

This struck the circle as the height of wit, and they all laughed while he ordered the *garçon* to and fro. He devoured three plates of soup and enormous slices of bread. The head of the establishment came and looked in in considerable anxiety; a laugh ran around the room. Mes-Bottes recalled to their memories a day when he had eaten twelve hard-boiled eggs and drunk twelve glasses of wine while the clock was striking twelve.

There was a brief silence. A waiter placed on the table a rabbit stew in a deep dish. Coupeau turned round.

"Say, boy, is that a gutter rabbit? It mews still."

And the low mewing of a cat seemed, indeed, to come from the dish. This delicate joke was perpetrated by Coupeau in the throat, without the smallest movement of his lips. This feat always met with such success that he never ordered a meal anywhere without a rabbit stew. The ladies wiped their eyes with their napkins because they laughed so much.

Mme Fauconnier begged for the head—she adored the head—and Boche asked especially for onions.

Mme Lerat compressed her lips and said morosely:

"Of course. I might have known that!"

Mme Lerat was a hard-working woman. No man had ever put his nose within her door since her widowhood, and yet her instincts were thoroughly bad; every word uttered by others bore to her ears a double meaning, a coarse allusion sometimes so deeply veiled that no one but herself could grasp its meaning.

Boche leaned over her with a sensual smile and entreated an explanation. She shook her head.

"Of course," she repeated. "Onions! I knew it!"

Everybody was talking now, each of his own trade. Madinier declared that boxmaking was an art, and he cited the New Year bonbon boxes as wonders of luxury. Lorilleux talked of his chains, of their delicacy and beauty. He said that in former times jewelers wore swords at their sides. Coupeau described a weathercock made by one of his comrades out of tin. Mme Lerat showed Bibi-la-Grillade how a rose stem was made by

rolling the handle of her knife between her bony fingers, and Mme Fauconnier complained loudly of one of her apprentices who the night before had badly scorched a pair of linen sheets.

"It is no use to talk!" cried Lorilleux, striking his fist on the table. "Gold is gold!"

A profound silence followed the utterance of this truism, amid which arose from the other end of the table the piping tones of Mlle Remanjon's voice as she said:

"And then I sew on the skirt. I stick a pin in the head to hold on the cap, and it is done. They sell for three cents."

She was describing her dolls to Mes-Bottes, whose jaws worked steadily, like machinery.

He did not listen, but he nodded at intervals, with his eyes fixed on the *garçons* to see that they carried away no dishes that were not emptied.

There had been veal cutlets and string beans served. As a *roti,* two lean chickens on a bed of water cresses were brought in. The room was growing very warm; the sun was lingering on the tops of the acacias, but the room was growing dark. The men threw off their coats and ate in their shirt sleeves.

"Mme Boche," cried Gervaise, "please don't let those children eat so much."

But Mme Coupeau interposed and declared that for once in a while a little fit of indigestion would do them no harm.

Mme Boche accused her husband of holding Mme Lerat's hand under the table.

Madinier talked politics. He was a Republican, and Bibi-la-Grillade and himself were soon in a hot discussion.

"Who cares," cried Coupeau, "whether we have a king, an emperor or a president, so long as we earn our five francs per day!"

Lorilleux shook his head. He was born on the same day as the Comte de Chambord, September 29, 1820, and this coincidence dwelt in his mind. He seemed to feel that there was a certain connection between the return of the king to France and his own personal fortunes. He did not say distinctly what he expected, but it was clear that it was something very agreeable.

The dessert was now on the table—a floating island flanked by two plates of cheese and two of fruit. The floating island was a great success. Mes-Bottes ate all the cheese and called for more bread. And then as some of the custard was left in the dish, he pulled it toward him and ate it as if it had been soup.

"How extraordinary!" said Madinier, filled with admiration.

The men rose to light their pipes and, as they passed Mes-Bottes, asked him how he felt.

Bibi-la-Grillade lifted him from the floor, chair and all.

"Zounds!" he cried. "The fellow's weight has doubled!"

Coupeau declared his friend had only just begun his night's work, that he would eat bread until dawn. The waiters, pale with fright, disappeared. Boche went downstairs on a tour of inspection and stated that the establishment was in a state of confusion, that the proprietor, in consternation, had sent out to all the bakers in the neighborhood, that the house, in fact, had an utterly ruined aspect.

"I should not like to take you to board," said Mme Gaudron.

"Let us have a punch," cried Mes-Bottes.

But Coupeau, seeing his wife's troubled face, interfered and said no one should drink anything more. They had all had enough.

This declaration met with the approval of some of the party, but the others sided with Mes-Bottes.

"Those who are thirsty are thirsty," he said. "No one need drink that does not wish to do so, I am sure." And he added with a wink, "There will be all the more for those who do!"

Then Coupeau said they would settle the account, and his friend could do as he pleased afterward.

Alas! Mes-Bottes could produce only three francs; he had changed his five-franc piece, and the remainder had melted away somehow on the road from St-Denis. He handed over the three francs, and Coupeau, greatly indignant, borrowed the other two from his brother-in-law, who gave the money secretly, being afraid of his wife.

M. Madinier had taken a plate. The ladies each laid down their five francs quietly and timidly, and then the men retreated to the other end

of the room and counted up the amount, and each man added to his subscription five sous for the *garçon*.

But when M. Madinier sent for the proprietor the little assembly were shocked at hearing him say that this was not all; there were "extras."

As this was received with exclamations of rage, he went into explanations. He had furnished twenty-five liters of wine instead of twenty, as he agreed. The floating island was an addition, on seeing that the dessert was somewhat scanty, whereupon ensued a formidable quarrel. Coupeau declared he would not pay a sou of the extras.

"There is your money," he said; "take it, and never again will one of us step a foot under your roof!"

"I want six francs more," muttered the man.

The women gathered about in great indignation; not a centime would they give, they declared.

Mme Fauconnier had had a wretched dinner; she said she could have had a better one at home for forty sous. Such arrangements always turned out badly, and Mme Gaudron declared aloud that if people wanted their friends at their weddings they usually invited them out and out.

Gervaise took refuge with her mother-in-law in a distant window, feeling heartily ashamed of the whole scene.

M. Madinier went downstairs with the man, and low mutterings of the storm reached the party. At the end of a half-hour he reappeared, having yielded to the extent of paying three francs, but no one was satisfied, and they all began a discussion in regard to the extras.

The evening was spoiled, as was Mme Lerat's dress; there was no end to the chapter of accidents.

"I know," cried Mme Lorilleux, "that the *garçon* spilled gravy from the chickens down my back." She twisted and turned herself before the mirror until she succeeded in finding the spot.

"Yes, I knew it," she cried, "and he shall pay for it, as true as I live. I wish I had remained at home!"

She left in a rage, and Lorilleux at her heels.

When Coupeau saw her go he was in actual consternation, and Gervaise saw that it was best to make a move at once. Mme Boche had agreed to keep the children with her for a day or two.

Coupeau and his wife hurried out in the hope of overtaking Mme Lorilleux which they soon did. Lorilleux, with the kindly desire of making all smooth said:

"We will go to your door with you."

"Your door, indeed!" cried his wife, and then pleasantly went on to express her surprise that they did not postpone their marriage until they had saved enough to buy a little furniture and move away from that hole up under the roof.

"But I have given up that room," said her brother. "We shall have the one Gervaise occupies; it is larger."

Mme Lorilleux forgot herself; she wheeled around suddenly.

"What!" she exclaimed. "You are going to live in Wooden Legs' room?"

Gervaise turned pale. This name she now heard for the first time, and it was like a slap in the face. She heard much more in her sister-in-law's exclamation than met the ear. That room to which allusion was made was the one where she had lived with Lantier for a whole month, where she had wept such bitter tears, but Coupeau did not understand that; he was only wounded by the name applied to his wife.

"It is hardly wise of you," he said sullenly, "to nickname people after that fashion, as perhaps you are not aware of what you are called in your *Quartier*. Cow's-Tail is not a very nice name, but they have given it to you on account of your hair. Why should we not keep that room? It is a very good one."

Mme Lorilleux would not answer. Her dignity was sadly disturbed at being called Cow's-Tail.

They walked on in silence until they reached the Hôtel Boncœur, and just as Coupeau gave the two women a push toward each other and bade them kiss and be friends, a man who wished to pass them on the right gave a violent lurch to the left and came between them.

"Look out!" cried Lorilleux. "It is Father Bazonge. He is pretty full tonight."

Gervaise, in great terror, flew toward the door. Father Bazonge was a man of fifty; his clothes were covered with mud where he had fallen in

the street.

"You need not be afraid," continued Lorilleux; "he will do you no harm. He is a neighbor of ours—the third room on the left in our corridor."

But Father Bazonge was talking to Gervaise. "I am not going to eat you, little one," he said. "I have drunk too much, I know very well, but when the work is done the machinery should be greased a little now and then."

Gervaise retreated farther into the doorway and with difficulty kept back a sob. She nervously entreated Coupeau to take the man away.

Bazonge staggered off, muttering as he did so:

"You won't mind it so much one of these days, my dear. I know something about women. They make a great fuss, but they get used to it all the same."

CHAPTER IV
A HAPPY HOME

Four years of hard and incessant toil followed this day. Gervaise and Coupeau were wise and prudent. They worked hard and took a little relaxation on Sundays. The wife worked twelve hours of the twenty-four with Mme Fauconnier and yet found time to keep her own home like waxwork. The husband was never known to be tipsy but brought home his wages and smoked his pipe at his own window at night before going to bed. They were the bright and shining lights, the good example of the whole *Quartier*, and as they made jointly about nine francs per day, it was easy to see they were putting by money.

But in the first few months of their married life they were obliged to trim their sails closely and had some trouble to make both ends meet. They took a great dislike to the Hôtel Boncœur. They longed for a home of their own with their own furniture. They estimated the cost over and over again and decided that for three hundred and fifty francs they could venture, but they had little hope of saving such a sum in less than two years, when a stroke of good luck befell them.

An old gentleman in Plassans sent for Claude to place him at school. He was a very eccentric old gentleman, fond of pictures and art. Claude was a great expense to his mother, and when Etienne alone was at home they saved the three hundred and fifty francs in seven months. The day they purchased their furniture they took a long and happy walk together, for it was an important step they had taken—important not only in their own eyes but in those of the people around them.

For two months they had been looking for an apartment. They wished, of all things, to take one in the old house where Mme Lorilleux lived, but there was not one single room to be rented, and they were compelled to relinquish the idea. Gervaise was reconciled to this more easily, since she did not care to be thrown in any closer contact with the Lorilleuxs. They looked further. It was essential that Gervaise should be near her friend and employer Mme Fauconnier, and they finally succeeded in their search and were indeed in wonderful luck, for they obtained a large room with a kitchen and tiny bedroom just opposite the establishment of the laundress. It was a small house, two stories, with one steep staircase, and was divided into two lodgings—the one on the right, the other on the left, while the lower floor was occupied by a carriage maker.

Gervaise was delighted. It seemed to her that she was once more in the country—no neighbors, no gossip, no interference—and from the place where she stood and ironed all day at Mme Fauconnier's she could see the windows of her own room.

They moved in the month of April. Gervaise was then near her confinement, but it was she who cleaned and put in order her new home. Every penny as of consequence, she said with pride, now that they would soon have another other mouth to feed. She rubbed her furniture, which was of old mahogany, good, but secondhand, until it shone like glass and was quite brokenhearted when she discovered a scratch. She held her breath if she knocked it when sweeping. The commode was her especial pride; it was so dignified and stately. Her pet dream, which, however, she kept to herself, was someday to have a clock to put in the center of the marble slab. If there had not been a baby in prospect she would have purchased this much-coveted article at once, but she sighed and dismissed the thought.

Etienne's bed was placed in the tiny room, almost a closet, and there was room for the cradle by its side. The kitchen was about as big as one's hand and very dark, but by leaving the door open one could see pretty well, and as Gervaise had no big dinners to get she managed comfortably. The large room was her pride. In the morning the white curtains of the alcove were drawn, and the bedroom was transformed into a lovely dining room, with its table in the middle, the commode and a wardrobe opposite each other. A tiny stove kept them warm in cold weather for seven sous per day.

Coupeau ornamented the walls with several engravings—one of a marshal of France on a spirited steed, with his baton in his hand. Above the commode were the photographs of the family, arranged in two lines, with an antique china *bénitier* between. On the corners of the commode a bust of Pascal faced another of Béranger—one grave, the other smiling. It was, indeed, a fair and pleasant home.

"How much do you think we pay here?" Gervaise would ask of each new visitor.

And when too high an estimate was given she was charmed.

"One hundred and fifty francs—not a penny more," she would exclaim. "Is it not wonderful?"

No small portion of the woman's satisfaction arose from an acacia which grew in her courtyard, one of whose branches crossed her window, and the scanty foliage was a whole wilderness to her.

Her baby was born one afternoon. She would not allow her husband to be sent for, and when he came gaily into the room he was welcomed by his pale wife, who whispered to him as he stooped over her:

"My dear, it is a girl."

"All right!" said the tinworker, jesting to hide his real emotion. "I ordered a girl. You always do just what I want!"

He took up the child.

"Let us have a good look at you, young lady! The down on the top of your head is pretty black, I think. Now you must never squall but be as good and reasonable always as your papa and mamma."

Gervaise, with a faint smile and sad eyes, looked at her daughter. She shook her head. She would have preferred a boy, because boys run less risks in a place like Paris. The nurse took the baby from the father's hands and told Gervaise she must not talk. Coupeau said he must go and tell his mother and sister the news, but he was famished and must eat something first. His wife was greatly disturbed at seeing him wait upon himself, and she tossed about a little and complained that she could not make him comfortable.

"You must be quiet," said the nurse again.

"It is lucky you are here, or she would be up and cutting my bread for me," said Coupeau.

He finally set forth to announce the news to his family and returned in an hour with them all.

The Lorilleuxs, under the influence of the prosperity of their brother and his wife, had become extremely amiable toward them and only lifted their eyebrows in a significant sort of way, as much as to say that they could tell something if they pleased.

"You must not talk, you understand," said Coupeau, "but they would come and take a peep at you, and I am going to make them some coffee."

He disappeared into the kitchen, and the women discussed the size of the baby and whom it resembled. Meanwhile Coupeau was heard banging round in the kitchen, and his wife nervously called out to him and told him where the things were that he wanted, but her husband rose superior to all difficulties and soon appeared with the smoking coffeepot, and they all seated themselves around the table, except the nurse, who drank a cup standing and then departed; all was going well, and she was not needed. If she was wanted in the morning they could send for her.

Gervaise lay with a faint smile on her lips. She only half heard what was said by those about her. She had no strength to speak; it seemed to her that she was dead. She heard the word baptism. Coupeau saw no necessity for the ceremony and was quite sure, too, that the child would take cold. In his opinion, the less one had to do with priests, the better. His mother was horrified and called him a heathen, while the Lorilleuxs claimed to be religious people also.

"It had better be on Sunday," said his sister in a decided tone, and Gervaise consented with a little nod. Everybody kissed her and then the baby, addressing it with tender epithets, as if it could understand, and departed.

When Coupeau was alone with his wife he took her hand and held it while he finished his pipe.

"I could not help their coming," he said, "but I am sure they have given you the headache." And the rough, clumsy man kissed his wife tenderly, moved by a great pity for all she had borne for his sake.

And Gervaise was very happy. She told him so and said her only anxiety now was to be on her feet again as soon as possible, for they had another mouth to feed. He soothed her and asked if she could not trust him to look out for their little one.

In the morning when he went to his work he sent Mme Boche to spend the day with his wife, who at night told him she never could consent to lie still any longer and see a stranger going about her room, and the next day she was up and would not be taken care of again. She had no time for such nonsense! She said it would do for rich women but not for her, and in another week she was at Mme Fauconnier's again at work.

Mme Lorilleux, who was the baby's godmother, appeared on Saturday evening with a cap and baptismal robe, which she had bought cheap because they had lost their first freshness. The next day Lorilleux, as godfather, gave Gervaise six pounds of sugar. They flattered themselves they knew how to do things properly and that evening, at the supper given by Coupeau, did not appear empty-handed. Lorilleux came with a couple of bottles of wine under each arm, and his wife brought a large custard which was a specialty of a certain restaurant.

Yes, they knew how to do things, these people, but they also liked to tell of what they did, and they told everyone they saw in the next month that they had spent twenty francs, which came to the ears of Gervaise, who was none too well pleased.

It was at this supper that Gervaise became acquainted with her neighbors on the other side of the house. These were Mme Goujet, a widow, and her son. Up to this time they had exchanged a good morning when they met on the stairs or in the street, but as Mme Goujet had rendered some small services on the first day of her illness, Gervaise invited them on the occasion of the baptism.

These people were from the *Department du Nond*. The mother repaired laces, while the son, a blacksmith by trade, worked in a factory.

They had lived in their present apartment for five years. Beneath the peaceful calm of their lives lay a great sorrow. Goujet, the husband and father, had killed a man in a fit of furious intoxication and then, while in prison, had choked himself with his pocket handkerchief. His widow and child left Lille after this and came to Paris, with the weight of this tragedy on their hearts and heads, and faced the future with indomitable courage and sweet patience. Perhaps they were overproud and reserved, for they held themselves aloof from those about them. Mme Goujet always wore mourning, and her pale, serene face was encircled with nunlike bands of white. Goujet was a colossus of twenty-three with a clear, fresh complexion and honest eyes. At the manufactory he went by the name of the Gueule-d'Or on account of his beautiful blond beard.

Gervaise took a great fancy to these people and when she first entered their apartment and was charmed with the exquisite cleanliness of all she saw. Mme Goujet opened the door into her son's room to show it to her. It was as pretty and white as the chamber of a young girl. A narrow iron bed, white curtains and quilt, a dressing table and bookshelves made up the furniture. A few colored engravings were pinned against the wall, and Mme Goujet said that her son was a good deal of a boy still—he liked to look at pictures rather than read. Gervaise sat for an hour with her neighbor, watching her at work with her cushion, its numberless pins and the pretty lace.

The more she saw of her new friends the better Gervaise liked them. They were frugal but not parsimonious. They were the admiration of the neighborhood. Goujet was never seen with a hole or a spot on his garments. He was very polite to all but a little diffident, in spite of his height and broad shoulders. The girls in the street were much amused to see him look away when they met him; he did not fancy their ways—their forward boldness and loud laughs. One day he came home tipsy. His mother uttered no word of reproach but brought out a picture of his father which was piously preserved in her wardrobe. And after that lesson Goujet drank no more liquor, though he conceived no hatred for wine.

On Sunday he went out with his mother, who was his idol. He went to her with all his troubles and with all his joys, as he had done when little.

At first he took no interest in Gervaise, but after a while he began to like her and treated her like a sister, with abrupt familiarity.

Cadet-Cassis, who was a thorough Parisian, thought Gueule-d'Or very stupid. What was the sense of turning away from all the pretty girls he met in the street? But this did not prevent the two young fellows from liking each other very heartily.

For three years the lives of these people flowed tranquilly on without an event. Gervaise had been elevated in the laundry where she worked, had higher wages and decided to place Etienne at school. Notwithstanding all her expenses of the household, they were able to save twenty and thirty francs each month. When these savings amounted to six hundred francs Gervaise could not rest, so tormented was she by ambitious dreams. She wished to open a small establishment herself and hire apprentices in her turn. She hesitated, naturally, to take the definite steps and said they would look around for a shop that would answer their purpose; their money in the savings bank was quietly rolling up. She had bought her clock, the object of her ambition; it was to be paid for in a

year—so much each month. It was a wonderful clock, rosewood with fluted columns and gilt moldings and pendulum. She kept her bankbook under the glass shade, and often when she was thinking of her shop she stood with her eyes fixed on the clock, as if she were waiting for some especial and solemn moment.

The Coupeaus and the Goujets now went out on Sundays together. It was an orderly party with a dinner at some quiet restaurant. The men drank a glass or two of wine and came home with the ladies and counted up and settled the expenditures of the day before they separated. The Lorilleuxs were bitterly jealous of these new friends of their brother's. They declared it had a very queer look to see him and his wife always with strangers rather than with his own family, and Mme Lorilleux began to say hateful things again of Gervaise. Mme Lerat, on the contrary, took her part, while Mamma Coupeau tried to please everyone.

The day that Nana—which was the pet name given to the little girl—was three years old Coupeau, on coming in, found his wife in a state of great excitement. She refused to give any explanation, saying, in fact, there really was nothing the matter, but she finally became so abstracted that she stood still with the plates in her hand as she laid the table for dinner, and her husband insisted on an explanation.

"If you must know," she said, "that little shop in La Rue de la Goutte-d'Or is vacant. I heard so only an hour ago, and it struck me all of a heap!"

It was a very nice shop in the very house of which they had so often thought. There was the shop itself—a back room—and two others. They were small, to be sure, but convenient and well arranged; only she thought it dear—five hundred francs.

"You asked the price then?"

"Yes, I asked it just out of curiosity," she answered with an air of indifference, "but it is too dear, decidedly too dear. It would be unwise, I think, to take it."

But she could talk of nothing else the whole evening. She drew the plan of the rooms on the margin of a newspaper, and as she talked she measured the furniture, as if they were to move the next day. Then Coupeau, seeing her great desire to have the place, declared he would see the owner the next morning, for it was possible he would take less than five hundred francs, but how would she like to live so near his sister, whom she detested?

Gervaise was displeased at this and said she detested no one and even defended the Lorilleuxs, declaring they were not so bad, after all. And when Coupeau was asleep her busy brain was at work arranging the rooms which as yet they had not decided to hire.

The next day when she was alone she lifted the shade from the clock and opened her bankbook. Just to think that her shop and future prosperity lay between those dirty leaves!

Before going to her work she consulted Mme Goujet, who approved of the plan. With a husband like hers, who never drank, she could not fail of success. At noon she called on her sister-in-law to ask her advice, for she did not wish to have the air of concealing anything from the family.

Mme Lorilleux was confounded. What, did Wooden Legs think of having an establishment of her own? And with an envious heart she stammered out that it would be very well, certainly, but when she had recovered herself a little she began to talk of the dampness of the courtyard and of the darkness of the *rez-de-chaussée*. Oh yes, it was a capital place for rheumatism, but of course if her mind was made up anything she could say would make no difference.

That night Gervaise told her husband that if he had thrown any obstacles in the way of her taking the shop she believed she should have fallen sick and died, so great was her longing. But before they came to any decision they must see if a diminution of the rent could be obtained.

"We can go tomorrow if you say so," was her husband's reply; "you can call for me at six o'clock."

Coupeau was then completing the roof of a three-storied house and was laying the very last sheets of zinc. It was May and a cloudless evening. The sun was low in the horizon, and against the blue sky the figure of Coupeau was clearly defined as he cut his zinc as quietly as a tailor might have cut out a pair of breeches in his workshop. His assistant, a lad of seventeen, was blowing up the furnace with a pair of bellows, and at each puff a great cloud of sparks arose.

"Put in the irons, Zidore!" shouted Coupeau.

The boy thrust the irons among the coals which showed only a dull

pink in the sunlight and then went to work again with his bellows. Coupeau took up his last sheet of zinc. It was to be placed on the edge of the roof, near the gutter. Just at that spot the roof was very steep. The man walked along in his list slippers much as if he had been at home, whistling a popular melody. He allowed himself to slip a little and caught at the chimney, calling to Zidore as he did so:

"Why in thunder don't you bring the irons? What are you staring at?"

But Zidore, quite undisturbed, continued to stare at a cloud of heavy black smoke that was rising in the direction of Grenelle. He wondered if it were a fire, but he crawled with the irons toward Coupeau, who began to solder the zinc, supporting himself on the point of one foot or by one finger, not rashly, but with calm deliberation and perfect coolness. He knew what he could do and never lost his head. His pipe was in his mouth, and he would occasionally turn to spit down into the street below.

"Hallo, Madame Boche!" he cried as he suddenly caught sight of his old friend crossing the street. "How are you today?"

She looked up, laughed, and a brisk conversation ensued between the roof and the street. She stood with her hands under her apron and her face turned up, while he, with one arm round a flue, leaned over the side of the house.

"Have you seen my wife?" he asked.

"No indeed; is she anywhere round?"

"She is coming for me. Is everyone well with you?"

"Yes, all well, thanks. I am going to a butcher near here who sells cheaper than up our way."

They raised their voices because a carriage was passing, and this brought to a neighboring window a little old woman, who stood in breathless horror, expecting to see the man fall from the roof in another minute.

"Well, good night," cried Mme Boche. "I must not detain you from your work."

Coupeau turned and took the iron Zidore held out to him. At the same moment Mme Boche saw Gervaise coming toward her with little Nana trotting at her side. She looked up to the roof to tell Coupeau, but Gervaise closed her lips with an energetic signal, and then as she reached the old concierge she said in a low voice that she was always in deadly terror that her husband would fall. She never dared look at him when he was in such places.

"It is not very agreeable, I admit," answered Mme Boche. "My man is a tailor, and I am spared all this."

"At first," continued Gervaise, "I had not a moment's peace. I saw him in my dreams on a litter, but now I have got accustomed to it somewhat."

She looked up, keeping Nana behind her skirts, lest the child should call out and startle her father, who was at that moment on the extreme edge. She saw the soldering iron and the tiny flame that rose as he carefully passed it along the edges of the zinc. Gervaise, pale with suspense and fear, raised her hands mechanically with a gesture of supplication. Coupeau ascended the steep roof with a slow step, then glancing down, he beheld his wife.

"You are watching me, are you?" he cried gaily. "Ah, Madame Boche, is she not a silly one? She was afraid to speak to me. Wait ten minutes, will you?"

The two women stood on the sidewalk, having as much as they could do to restrain Nana, who insisted on fishing in the gutter.

The old woman still stood at the window, looking up at the roof and waiting.

"Just see her," said Mme Boche. "What is she looking at?"

Coupeau was heard lustily singing; with the aid of a pair of compasses he had drawn some lines and now proceeded to cut a large fan; this he adroitly, with his tools, folded into the shape of a pointed mushroom. Zidore was again heating the irons. The sun was setting just behind the house, and the whole western sky was flushed with rose, fading to a soft violet, and against this sky the figures of the two men, immeasurably exaggerated, stood clearly out, as well as the strange form of the zinc which Coupeau was then manipulating.

"Zidore! The irons!"

But Zidore was not to be seen. His master, with an oath, shouted down the scuttle window which was open near by and finally discovered him two houses off. The boy was taking a walk, apparently, with his scanty

blond hair blowing all about his head.

"Do you think you are in the country?" cried Coupeau in a fury. "You are another Béranger, perhaps—composing verses! Will you have the kindness to give me my irons? Whoever heard the like? Give me my irons, I say!"

The irons hissed as he applied them, and he called to Gervaise:

"I am coming!"

The chimney to which he had fitted this cap was in the center of the roof. Gervaise stood watching him, soothed by his calm self-possession. Nana clapped her little hands.

"Papa! Papa!" she cried. "Look!"

The father turned; his foot slipped; he rolled down the roof slowly, unable to catch at anything.

"Good God!" he said in a choked voice, and he fell; his body turned over twice and crashed into the middle of the street with the dull thud of a bundle of wet linen.

Gervaise stood still. A shriek was frozen on her lips. Mme Boche snatched Nana in her arms and hid her head that she might not see, and the little old woman opposite, who seemed to have waited for this scene in the drama, quietly closed her windows.

Four men bore Coupeau to a druggist's at the corner, where he lay for an hour while a litter was sent for from the Hospital Lariboisière. He was breathing still, but that was all. Gervaise knelt at his side, hysterically sobbing. Every minute or two, in spite of the prohibition of the druggist, she touched him to see if he were still warm. When the litter arrived and they spoke of the hospital, she started up, saying violently:

"No—no! Not to the hospital—to our own home."

In vain did they tell her that the expenses would be very great if she nursed him at home.

"No—no!" she said. "I will show them the way. He is my husband, is he not? And I will take care of him myself."

And Coupeau was carried home, and as the litter was borne through the Quartier the women crowded together and extolled Gervaise. She was a little lame, to be sure, but she was very energetic, and she would save her man.

Mme Boche took Nana home and then went about among her friends to tell the story with interminable details.

"I saw him fall," she said. "It was all because of the child; he was going to speak to her, when down he went. Good lord! I trust I may never see such another sight."

For a week Coupeau's life hung on a thread. His family and his friends expected to see him die from one hour to another. The physician, an experienced physician whose every visit cost five francs, talked of a lesion, and that word was in itself very terrifying to all but Gervaise, who, pale from her vigils but calm and resolute, shrugged her shoulders and would not allow herself to be discouraged. Her man's leg was broken; that she knew very well, "but he need not die for that!" And she watched at his side night and day, forgetting her children and her home and everything but him.

On the ninth day, when the physician told her he would recover, she dropped, half fainting, on a chair, and at night she slept for a couple of hours with her head on the foot of his bed.

This accident to Coupeau brought all his family about him. His mother spent the nights there, but she slept in her chair quite comfortably. Mme Lerat came in every evening after work was over to make inquiries.

The Lorilleuxs at first came three or four times each day and brought an armchair for Gervaise, but soon quarrels and discussions arose as to the proper way of nursing the invalid, and Mme Lorilleux lost her temper and declared that had Gervaise stayed at home and not gone to pester her husband when he was at work the accident would not have happened.

When she saw Coupeau out of danger Gervaise allowed his family to approach him as they saw fit. His convalescence would be a matter of months. This again was a ground of indignation for Mme Lorilleux.

"What nonsense it was," she said, "for Gervaise to take him home! Had he gone to the hospital he would have recovered as quickly again."

And then she made a calculation of what these four months would cost: First, there was the time lost, then the physician, the medicines, the wines and finally the meat for beef tea. Yes, it would be a pretty sum, to be sure! If they got through it on their savings they would do well, but

she believed that the end would be that they would find themselves head over heels in debt, and they need expect no assistance from his family, for none of them was rich enough to pay for sickness at home!

One evening Mme Lorilleux was malicious enough to say:

"And your shop, when do you take it? The concierge is waiting to know what you mean to do."

Gervaise gasped. She had utterly forgotten the shop. She saw the delight of these people when they believed that this plan was given up, and from that day they never lost an occasion of twitting her on her dream that had toppled over like a house of cards, and she grew morbid and fancied they were pleased at the accident to their brother which had prevented the realization of their plans.

She tried to laugh and to show them she did not grudge the money that had been expended in the restoration of her husband's health. She did not withdraw all her savings from the bank at once, for she had a vague hope that some miracle would intervene which would render the sacrifice unnecessary.

Was it not a great comfort, she said to herself and to her enemies, for as such she had begun to regard the Lorilleuxs, that she had this money now to turn to in this emergency?

Her neighbors next door had been very kind and thoughtful to Gervaise all through her trouble and the illness of her husband.

Mme Goujet never went out without coming to inquire if there was anything she could do, any commission she could execute. She brought innumerable bowls of soup and, even when Gervaise was particularly busy, washed her dishes for her. Goujet filled her buckets every morning with fresh water, and this was an economy of at least two sous, and in the evening came to sit with Coupeau. He did not say much, but his companionship cheered and comforted the invalid. He was tender and compassionate and was thrilled by the sweetness of Gervaise's voice when she spoke to her husband. Never had he seen such a brave, good woman; he did not believe she sat in her chair fifteen minutes in the whole day. She was never tired, never out of temper, and the young man grew very fond of the poor woman as he watched her.

His mother had found a wife for him. A girl whose trade was the same as her own, a lace mender, and as he did not wish to go contrary to her desires he consented that the marriage should take place in September.

But when Gervaise spoke of his future he shook his head.

"All women are not like you, Madame Coupeau," he said. "If they were I should like ten wives."

At the end of two months Coupeau was on his feet again and could move—with difficulty, of course—as far as the window, where he sat with his leg on a chair. The poor fellow was sadly shaken by his accident. He was no philosopher, and he swore from morning until night. He said he knew every crack in the ceiling. When he was installed in his armchair it was little better. How long, he asked impatiently, was he expected to sit there swathed like a mummy? And he cursed his ill luck. His accident was a cursed shame. If his head had been disturbed by drink it would have been different, but he was always sober, and this was the result. He saw no sense in the whole thing!

"My father," he said, "broke his neck. I don't say he deserved it, but I do say there was a reason for it. But I had not drunk a drop, and yet over I went, just because I spoke to my child! If there be a Father in heaven, as they say, who watches over us all, I must say He manages things strangely enough sometimes!"

And as his strength returned his trade grew strangely distasteful to him. It was a miserable business, he said, roaming along gutters like a cat. In his opinion there should be a law which should compel every houseowner to tin his own roof. He wished he knew some other trade he could follow, something that was less dangerous.

For two months more Coupeau walked with a crutch and after a while was able to get into the street and then to the outer boulevard, where he sat on a bench in the sun. His gaiety returned; he laughed again and enjoyed doing nothing. For the first time in his life he felt thoroughly lazy, and indolence seemed to have taken possession of his whole being. When he got rid of his crutches he sauntered about and watched the buildings which were in the process of construction in the vicinity, and he jested with the men and indulged himself in a general abuse of work. Of course he intended to begin again as soon as he was quite well, but at present the mere thought made him feel ill, he said.

In the afternoons Coupeau often went to his sister's apartment; she

expressed a great deal of compassion for him and showed every attention. When he was first married he had escaped from her influence, thanks to his affection for his wife and hers for him. Now he fell under her thumb again; they brought him back by declaring that he lived in mortal terror of his wife. But the Lorilleuxs were too wise to disparage her openly; on the contrary, they praised her extravagantly, and he told his wife that they adored her and begged her, in her turn, to be just to them.

The first quarrel in their home arose on the subject of Etienne. Coupeau had been with his sister. He came in late and found the children fretting for their dinner. He cuffed Etienne's ears, bade him hold his tongue and scolded for an hour. He was sure he did not know why he let that boy stay in the house; he was none of his; until that day he had accepted the child as a matter of course.

Three days after this he gave the boy a kick, and it was not long before the child, when he heard him coming, ran into the Goujets', where there was always a corner at the table for him.

Gervaise had long since resumed her work. She no longer lifted the globe of her clock to take out her bankbook; her savings were all gone, and it was necessary to count the sous pretty closely, for there were four mouths to feed, and they were all dependent on the work of her two hands. When anyone found fault with Coupeau and blamed him she always took his part.

"Think how much he has suffered," she said with tears in her eyes. "Think of the shock to his nerves! Who can wonder that he is a little sour? Wait awhile, though, until he is perfectly well, and you will see that his temper will be as sweet as it ever was."

And if anyone ventured to observe that he seemed quite well and that he ought to go to work she would exclaim:

"No indeed, not yet. It would never do." She did not want him down in his bed again. She knew what the doctor had said, and she every day begged him to take his own time. She even slipped a little silver, into his vest pocket. All this Coupeau accepted as a matter of course. He complained of all sorts of pains and aches to gain a little longer period of indolence and at the end of six months had begun to look upon himself as a confirmed invalid.

He almost daily dropped into a wineshop with a friend; it was a place where he could chat a little, and where was the harm? Besides, whoever heard of a glass of wine killing a man? But he swore to himself that he would never touch anything but wine—not a drop of brandy should pass his lips. Wine was good for one—prolonged one's life, aided digestion—but brandy was a very different matter. Notwithstanding all these wise resolutions, it came to pass more than once that he came in, after visiting a dozen different cabarets, decidedly tipsy. On these occasions Gervaise locked her doors and declared she was ill, to prevent the Goujets from seeing her husband.

The poor woman was growing very sad. Every night and morning she passed the shop for which she had so ardently longed. She made her calculations over and over again until her brain was dizzy. Two hundred and fifty francs for rent, one hundred and fifty for moving and the apparatus she needed, one hundred francs to keep things going until business began to come in. No, it could not be done under five hundred francs.

She said nothing of this to anyone, deterred only by the fear of seeming to regret the money she had spent for her husband during his illness. She was pale and dispirited at the thought that she must work five years at least before she could save that much money.

One evening Gervaise was alone. Goujet entered, took a chair in silence and looked at her as he smoked his pipe. He seemed to be revolving something in his mind. Suddenly he took his pipe from his mouth.

"Madame Gervaise," he said, "will you allow me to lend you the money you require?"

She was kneeling at a drawer, laying some towels in a neat pile. She started up, red with surprise. He had seen her standing that very morning for a good ten minutes, looking at the shop, so absorbed that she had not seen him pass.

She refused his offer, however. No, she could never borrow money when she did not know how she could return it, and when he insisted she replied:

"But your marriage? This is the money you have saved for that."

"Don't worry on that account," he said with a heightened color. "I shall not marry. It was an idea of my mother's, and I prefer to lend you the money."

They looked away from each other. Their friendship had a certain element of tenderness which each silently recognized.

Gervaise accepted finally and went with Goujet to see his mother, whom he had informed of his intentions. They found her somewhat sad, with her serene, pale face bent over her work. She did not wish to thwart her son, but she no longer approved of the plan, and she told Gervaise why. With kind frankness she pointed out to her that Coupeau had fallen into evil habits and was living on her labors and would in all probability continue to do so. The truth was that Mme Goujet had not forgiven Coupeau for refusing to read during all his long convalescence; this and many other things had alienated her and her son from him, but they had in no degree lost their interest in Gervaise.

Finally it was agreed she should have five hundred francs and should return the money by paying each month twenty francs on account.

"Well, well!" cried Coupeau as he heard of this financial transaction. "We are in luck. There is no danger with us, to be sure, but if he were dealing with knaves he might never see hide or hair of his cash again!"

The next day the shop was taken, and Gervaise ran about with such a light heart that there was a rumor that she had been cured of her lameness by an operation.

CHAPTER V
AMBITIOUS DREAMS

The Boche couple, on the first of April, moved also and took the loge of the great house in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. Things had turned out very nicely for Gervaise who, having always got on very comfortably with the concierge in the house in Rue Neuve, dreaded lest she should fall into the power of some tyrant who would quarrel over every drop of water that was spilled and a thousand other trifles like that. But with Mme Boche all would go smoothly.

The day the lease was to be signed and Gervaise stood in her new home her heart swelled with joy. She was finally to live in that house like a small town, with its intersecting corridors instead of streets.

She felt a strange timidity—a dread of failure—when she found herself face to face with her enterprise. The struggle for bread was a terrible and an increasing one, and it seemed to her for a moment that she had been guilty of a wild, foolhardy act, like throwing herself into the jaws of a machine, for the planes in the cabinetmaker's shop and the hammers in the locksmith's were dimly grasped by her as a part of a great whole.

The water that ran past the door that day from the dyer's was pale green. She smiled as she stepped over it, accepting this color as a happy augury. She, with her husband, entered the loge, where Mme Boche and the owner of the building, M. Marescot, were talking on business.

Gervaise, with a thrill of pain, heard Boche advise the landlord to turn out the dressmaker on the third floor who was behindhand with her rent. She wondered if she would ever be turned out and then wondered again at the attitude assumed by these Boche people, who did not seem to have ever seen her before. They had eyes and ears only for the landlord, who shook hands with his new tenants but, when they spoke of repairs, professed to be in such haste that morning that it would be necessary to postpone the discussion. They reminded him of certain verbal promises he had made, and finally he consented to examine the premises.

The shop stood with its four bare walls and blackened ceiling. The tenant who had been there had taken away his own counters and cases. A furious discussion took place. M. Marescot said it was for them to embellish the shop.

"That may be," said Gervaise gently, "but surely you cannot call putting on a fresh paper, instead of this that hangs in strips, an embellishment. Whitening the curbing, too, comes under, the head of necessary repairs." She only required these two things.

Finally Marescot, with a desperate air, plunged his hands deep in his pockets, shrugged his shoulders and gave his consent to the repairs on the ceiling and to the paper, on condition that she would pay for half the paper, and then he hurried away.

When he had departed Boche clapped Coupeau on the shoulder. "You may thank me for that!" he cried and then went on to say that he was the real master of the house, that he settled the whole business of the establishment, and it was a nod and look from him that had influenced M. Marescot. That evening Gervaise, considering themselves in debt to Boche, sent him some wine.

In four days the shop should have been ready for them, but the repairs hung on for three weeks. At first they intended simply to have the paint scrubbed, but it was so shabby and worn that Gervaise repainted at her own expense. Coupeau went every morning, not to work, but to inspect operations, and Boche dropped the vest or pantaloons on which he was working and gave the benefit of his advice, and the two men spent the whole day smoking and spitting and arguing over each stroke of the brush. Some days the painters did not appear at all; on others they came and walked off in an hour's time, not to return again.

Poor Gervaise wrung her hands in despair. But finally, after two days of energetic labor, the whole thing was done, and the men walked off with their ladders, singing lustily.

Then came the moving, and finally Gervaise called herself settled in her new home and was pleased as a child. As she came up the street she could see her sign afar off:

CLEAR STARCHER
LACES AND EMBROIDERIES
DONE UP WITH ESPECIAL CARE

The twofirst words were painted in large yellow letters on a pale blue

ground.

In the recessed window shut in at the back by muslin curtains lay men's shirts, delicate handkerchiefs and cuffs; all these were on blue paper, and Gervaise was charmed. When she entered the door all was blue there; the paper represented a golden trellis and blue morning-glories. In the center was a huge table draped with blue-bordered cretonne to hide the trestles.

Gervaise seated herself and looked round, happy in the cleanliness of all about her. Her first glance, however, was directed to her stove, a sort of furnace whereon ten irons could be heated at once. It was a source of constant anxiety lest her little apprentice should fill it too full of coal and so injure it.

Behind the shop was her bedroom and her kitchen, from which a door opened into the court. Nana's bed stood in a little room at the right, and Etienne was compelled to share his with the baskets of soiled clothes. It was all very well, except that the place was very damp and that it was dark by three o'clock in the afternoon in winter.

The new shop created a great excitement in the neighborhood. Some people declared that the Coupeaus were on the road to ruin; they had, in fact, spent the whole five hundred francs and were penniless, contrary to their intentions. The morning that Gervaise first took down her shutters she had only six francs in the world, but she was not troubled, and at the end of a week she told her husband after two hours of abstruse calculations that they had taken in enough to cover their expenses.

The Lorilleuxs were in a state of rage, and one morning when the apprentice was emptying, on the sly, a bowl of starch which she had burned in making, just as Mme Lorilleux was passing, she rushed in and accused her sister-in-law of insulting her. After this all friendly relations were at an end.

"It all looks very strange to me," sniffed Mme Lorilleux. "I can't tell where the money comes from, but I have my suspicions." And she went on to intimate that Gervaise and Goujet were altogether too intimate. This was the groundwork of many fables; she said Wooden Legs was so mild and sweet that she had deceived her to the extent that she had consented to become Nana's godmother, which had been no small expense, but now things were very different. If Gervaise were dying and asked her for a glass of water she would not give it. She could not stand such people. As to Nana, it was different; they would always receive her. The child, of course, was not responsible for her mother's crimes. Coupeau should take a more decided stand and not put up with his wife's vile conduct.

Boche and his wife sat in judgment on the quarrel and gave as their opinion that the Lorilleuxs were much to blame. They were good tenants, of course. They paid regularly. "But," added Mme Boche, "I never could abide jealousy. They are mean people and were never known to offer a glass of wine to a friend."

Mother Coupeau visited her son and daughter successive days, listened to the tales of each and said never a word in reply.

Gervaise lived a busy life and took no notice of all this foolish gossip and strife. She greeted her friends with a smile from the door of her shop, where she went for a breath of fresh air. All the people in the neighborhood liked her and would have called her a great beauty but for her lameness. She was twenty-eight and had grown plump. She moved more slowly, and when she took a chair to wait for her irons to heat she rose with reluctance. She was growing fond of good living—that she herself admitted—but she did not regard it as a fault. She worked hard and had a right to good food. Why should she live on potato parings? Sometimes she worked all night when she had a great deal of work on hand.

She did the washing for the whole house and for some Parisian ladies and had several apprentices, besides two laundresses. She was making money hand over fist, and her good luck would have turned a wiser head than her own. But hers was not turned; she was gentle and sweet and hated no one except her sister-in-law. She judged everybody kindly, particularly after she had eaten a good breakfast. When people called her good she laughed. Why should she not be good? She had seen all her dreams realized. She remembered what she once said—that she wanted to work hard, have plenty to eat, a home to herself, where she could bring up her children, not be beaten and die in her bed! As to dying in her bed, she added she wanted that still, but she would put it off as long as possible, "if you please!" It was to Coupeau himself that Gervaise was especially sweet. Never a cross or an impatient word had he heard from

her lips, and no one had ever known her complain of him behind his back. He had finally resumed his trade, and as the shop where he worked was at the other end of Paris, she gave him every morning forty sous for his breakfast, his wine and tobacco. Two days out of six, however, Coupeau would meet a friend, drink up his forty sous and return to breakfast. Once, indeed, he sent a note, saying that his account at the cabaret exceeded his forty sous. He was in pledge, as it were; would his wife send the money? She laughed and shrugged her shoulders. Where was the harm in her husband's amusing himself a little? A woman must give a man a long rope if she wished to live in peace and comfort. It was not far from words to blows—she knew that very well.

The hot weather had come. One afternoon in June the ten irons were heating on the stove; the door was open into the street, but not a breath of air came in.

"What a melting day!" said Gervaise, who was stooping over a great bowl of starch. She had rolled up her sleeves and taken off her sack and stood in her chemise and white skirt; the soft hair in her neck was curling on her white throat. She dipped each cuff in the starch, the fronts of the shirts and the whole of the skirts. Then she rolled up the pieces tightly and placed them neatly in a square basket after having sprinkled with clear water all those portions which were not starched.

"This basket is for you, Madame Putois," she said, "and you will have to hurry, for they dry so fast in this weather."

Mine Putois was a thin little woman who looked cool and comfortable in her tightly buttoned dress. She had not taken her cap off but stood at the table, moving her irons to and fro with the regularity of an automaton. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"Put on your sack, Clémence; there are three men looking in, and I don't like such things."

Clémence grumbled and growled. What did she care what she liked? She could not and would not roast to suit anybody.

"Clémence, put on your sack," said Gervaise. "Madame Putois is right—it is not proper."

Clémence muttered but obeyed and consoled herself by giving the apprentice, who was ironing hose and towels by her side, a little push. Gervaise had a cap belonging to Mme Boche in her hand and was ironing the crown with a round ball, when a tall, bony woman came in. She was a laundress.

"You have come too soon, Madame Bijard!" cried Gervaise. "I said tonight. It is very inconvenient for me to attend to you at this hour." At the same time, however, Gervaise amiably laid down her work and went for the dirty clothes, which she piled up in the back shop. It took the two women nearly an hour to sort them and mark them with a stitch of colored cotton.

At this moment Coupeau entered.

"By Jove!" he said. "The sun beats down on one's head like a hammer." He caught at the table to sustain himself; he had been drinking; a spider web had caught in his dark hair, where many a white thread was apparent. His under jaw dropped a little, and his smile was good natured but silly.

Gervaise asked her husband if he had seen the Lorilleuxs in rather a severe tone; when he said no she smiled at him without a word of reproach.

"You had best go and lie down," she said pleasantly. "We are very busy, and you are in our way. Did I say thirty-two handkerchiefs, Madame Bijard? Here are two more; that makes thirty-four."

But Coupeau was not sleepy, and he preferred to remain where he was. Gervaise called Clémence and bade her to count the linen while she made out the list. She glanced at each piece as she wrote. She knew many of them by the color. That pillow slip belonged to Mme Boche because it was stained with the pomade she always used, and so on through the whole. Gervaise was seated with these piles of soiled linen about her. Augustine, whose great delight was to fill up the stove, had done so now, and it was red hot. Coupeau leaned toward Gervaise.

"Kiss me," he said. "You are a good woman."

As he spoke he gave a sudden lurch and fell among the skirts.

"Do take care," said Gervaise impatiently. "You will get them all mixed again." And she gave him a little push with her foot, whereat all the other women cried out.

"He is not like most men," said Mme Putois; "they generally wish to

beat you when they come in like this."

Gervaise already regretted her momentary vexation and assisted her husband to his feet and then turned her cheek to him with a smile, but he put his arm round her and kissed her neck. She pushed him aside with a laugh.

"You ought to be ashamed!" she said but yielded to his embrace, and the long kiss they exchanged before these people, amid the sickening odor of the soiled linen and the alcoholic fumes of his breath, was the first downward step in the slow descent of their degradation.

Mme Bijard tied up the linen and staggered off under their weight while Gervaise turned back to finish her cap. Alas! The stove and the irons were alike red hot; she must wait a quarter of an hour before she could touch the irons, and Gervaise covered the fire with a couple of shovelfuls of cinders. She then hung a sheet before the window to keep out the sun. Coupeau took a place in the corner, refusing to budge an inch, and his wife and all her assistants went to work on each side of the square table. Each woman had at her right a flat brick on which to set her iron. In the center of the table a dish of water with a rag and a brush in it and also a bunch of tall lilies in a broken jar.

Mme Putois had attacked the basket of linen prepared by Gervaise, and Augustine was ironing her towels, with her nose in the air, deeply interested in a fly that was buzzing about. As to Clémence, she was polishing off her thirty-fifth shirt; as she boasted of this great feat Coupeau staggered toward her.

"Madame," she called, "please keep him away; he will bother me, and I shall scorch my shirt."

"Let her be," said Gervaise without any especial energy. "We are in a great hurry today!"

Well, that was not his fault; he did not mean to touch the girl; he only wanted to see what she was about.

"Really," said his wife, looking up from her fluting iron, "I think you had best go to bed."

He began to talk again.

"You need not make such a fuss, Clémence; it is only because these women are here, and—"

But he could say no more; Gervaise quietly laid one hand on his mouth and the other on his shoulder and pushed him toward his room. He struggled a little and with a silly laugh asked if Clémence was not coming too.

Gervaise undressed her husband and tucked him up in bed as if he had been a child and then returned to her fluting irons in time to still a grand dispute that was going on about an iron that had not been properly cleaned.

In the profound silence that followed her appearance she could hear her husband's thick voice:

"What a silly wife I've got! The idea of putting me to bed in broad daylight!"

Suddenly he began to snore, and Gervaise uttered a sigh of relief. She used her fluting iron for a minute and then said quietly:

"There is no need of being offended by anything a man does when he is in this state. He is not an accountable being. He did not intend to insult you. Clémence, you know what a tipsy man is—he respects neither father nor mother."

She uttered these words in an indifferent, matter-of-fact way, not in the least disturbed that he had forgotten the respect due to her and to her roof and really seeing no harm in his conduct.

The work now went steadily on, and Gervaise calculated they would be finished by eleven o'clock. The heat was intense; the smell of charcoal deadened the air, while the branch of white lilies slowly faded and filled the room with their sweetness.

The day after all this Coupeau had a frightful headache and did not rise until late, too late to go to his work. About noon he began to feel better, and toward evening was quite himself. His wife gave him some silver and told him to go out and take the air, which meant with him taking some wine.

One glass washed down another, but he came home as gay as a lark and quite disgusted with the men he had seen who were drinking themselves to death.

"Where is your lover?" he said to his wife as he entered the shop. This was his favorite joke. "I never see him nowadays and must hunt him up."

He meant Goujet, who came but rarely, lest the gossips in the neighborhood should take it upon themselves to gabble. Once in about ten days he made his appearance in the evening and installed himself in a corner in the back shop with his pipe. He rarely spoke but laughed at all Gervaise said.

On Saturday evenings the establishment was kept open half the night. A lamp hung from the ceiling with the light thrown down by a shade. The shutters were put up at the usual time, but as the nights were very warm the door was left open, and as the hours wore on the women pulled their jackets open a little more at the throat, and he sat in his corner and looked on as if he were at a theater.

The silence of the street was broken by a passing carriage. Two o'clock struck—no longer a sound from outside. At half-past two a man hurried past the door, carrying with him a vision of flying arms, piles of white linen and a glow of yellow light.

Goujet, wishing to save Etienne from Coupeau's rough treatment, had taken him to the place where he was employed to blow the bellows, with the prospect of becoming an apprentice as soon as he was old enough, and Etienne thus became another tie between the clearstarcher and the blacksmith.

All their little world laughed and told Gervaise that her friend worshiped the very ground she trod upon. She colored and looked like a girl of sixteen.

"Dear boy," she said to herself, "I know he loves me, but never has he said or will he say a word of the kind to me!" And she was proud of being loved in this way. When she was disturbed about anything her first thought was to go to him. When by chance they were left alone together they were never disturbed by wondering if their friendship verged on love. There was no harm in such affection.

Nana was now six years old and a most troublesome little sprite. Her mother took her every morning to a school in the Rue Polonçeau, to a certain Mlle Josse. Here she did all manner of mischief. She put ashes into the teacher's snuffbox, pinned the skirts of her companions together. Twice the young lady was sent home in disgrace and then taken back again for the sake of the six francs each month. As soon as school hours were over Nana revenged herself for the hours of enforced quiet she had passed by making the most frightful din in the courtyard and the shop.

She found able allies in Pauline and Victor Boche. The whole great house resounded with the most extraordinary noises—the thumps of children falling downstairs, little feet tearing up one staircase and down another and bursting out on the sidewalk like a band of pilfering, impudent sparrows.

Mme Gaudron alone had nine—dirty, unwashed and unkempt, their stockings hanging over their shoes and the slits in their garments showing the white skin beneath. Another woman on the fifth floor had seven, and they came out in twos and threes from all the rooms. Nana reigned over this band, among which there were some half grown and others mere infants. Her prime ministers were Pauline and Victor; to them she delegated a little of her authority while she played mamma, undressed the youngest only to dress them again, cuffed them and punished them at her own sweet will and with the most fantastic disposition. The band pranced and waded through the gutter that ran from the dyehouse and emerged with blue or green legs. Nana decorated herself and the others with shavings from the cabinetmaker's, which they stole from under the very noses of the workmen.

The courtyard belonged to all of these children, apparently, and resounded with the clatter of their heels. Sometimes this courtyard, however, was not enough for them, and they spread in every direction to the infinite disgust of Mme Boche, who grumbled all in vain. Boche declared that the children of the poor were as plentiful as mushrooms on a dung heap, and his wife threatened them with her broom.

One day there was a terrible scene. Nana had invented a beautiful game. She had stolen a wooden shoe belonging to Mme Boche; she bored a hole in it and put in a string, by which she could draw it like a cart. Victor filled it with apple parings, and they started forth in a procession, Nana drawing the shoe in front, followed by the whole flock, little and big, an imp about the height of a cigar box at the end. They all sang a melancholy ditty full of "ahs" and "ohs." Nana declared this to be always the custom at funerals.

"What on earth are they doing now?" murmured Mme Boche suspiciously, and then she came to the door and peered out.

"Good heavens!" she cried. "It is my shoe they have got."

She slapped Nana, cuffed Pauline and shook Victor. Gervaise was filling a bucket at the fountain, and when she saw Nana with her nose bleeding she rushed toward the concierge and asked how she dared strike her child.

The concierge replied that anyone who had a child like that had best keep her under lock and key. The end of this was, of course, a complete break between the old friends.

But, in fact, the quarrel had been growing for a month. Gervaise, generous by nature and knowing the tastes of the Boche people, was in the habit of making them constant presents—oranges, a little hot soup, a cake or something of the kind. One evening, knowing that the concierge would sell her soul for a good salad, she took her the remains of a dish of beets and chicory. The next day she was dumfounded at hearing from Mlle Remanjon how Mme Boche had thrown the salad away, saying that she was not yet reduced to eating the leavings of other people! From that day forth Gervaise sent her nothing more. The Boches had learned to look on her little offerings as their right, and they now felt themselves to be robbed by the Coupeaus.

It was not long before Gervaise realized she had made a mistake, for when she was one day late with her October rent Mme Boche complained to the proprietor, who came blustering to her shop with his hat on. Of course, too, the Lorilleuxs extended the right hand of fellowship at once to the Boche people.

There came a day, however, when Gervaise found it necessary to call on the Lorilleuxs. It was on Mamma Coupeau's account, who was sixty-seven years old, nearly blind and helpless. They must all unite in doing something for her now. Gervaise thought it a burning shame that a woman of her age, with three well-to-do children, should be allowed for a moment to regard herself as friendless and forsaken. And as her husband refused to speak to his sister, Gervaise said she would.

She entered the room like a whirlwind, without knocking. Everything was just as it was on that night when she had been received by them in a fashion which she had never forgotten or forgiven. "I have come," cried Gervaise, "and I dare say you wish to know why, particularly as we are at daggers drawn. Well then, I have come on Mamma Coupeau's account. I have come to ask if we are to allow her to beg her bread from door to door—"

"Indeed!" said Mme Lorilleux with a sneer, and she turned away.

But Lorilleux lifted his pale face.

"What do you mean?" he asked, and as he had understood perfectly, he went on:

"What is this cry of poverty about? The old lady ate her dinner with us yesterday. We do all we can for her, I am sure. We have not the mines of Peru within our reach, but if she thinks she is to run to and fro between our houses she is much mistaken. I, for one, have no liking for spies." He then added as he took up his microscope, "When the rest of you agree to give five francs per month toward her support we will do the same." Gervaise was calmer now; these people always chilled the very marrow in her bones, and she went on to explain her views. Five francs were not enough for each of the old lady's children to pay. She could not live on fifteen francs per month.

"And why not?" cried Lorilleux. "She ought to do so. She can see well enough to find the best bits in a dish before her, and she can do something toward her own maintenance." If he had the means to indulge such laziness he should not consider it his duty to do so, he added.

Then Gervaise grew angry again. She looked at her sister-in-law and saw her face set in vindictive firmness.

"Keep your money," she cried. "I will take care of your mother. I found a starving cat in the street the other night and took it in. I can take in your mother too. She shall want for nothing. Good heavens, what people!"

Mme Lorilleux snatched up a saucepan.

"Clear out," she said hoarsely. "I will never give one sou—no, not one sou—toward her keep. I understand you! You will make my mother work for you like a slave and put my five francs in your pocket! Not if I know it, madame! And if she goes to live under your roof I will never see her again. Be off with you, I say!"

"What a monster!" cried Gervaise as she shut the door with a bang. On the very next day Mme Coupeau came to her. A large bed was put in the room where Nana slept. The moving did not take long, for the old lady

had only this bed, a wardrobe, table and two chairs. The table was sold and the chairs new-seated, and the old lady the evening of her arrival washed the dishes and swept up the room, glad to make herself useful. Mme Lerat had amused herself by quarreling with her sister, to whom she had expressed her admiration of the generosity evinced by Gervaise, and when she saw that Mme Lorilleux was intensely exasperated she declared she had never seen such eyes in anybody's head as those of the clearstarcher. She really believed one might light paper at them. This declaration naturally led to bitter words, and the sisters parted, swearing they would never see each other again, and since then Mme Lerat had spent most of her evenings at her brother's.

Three years passed away. There were reconciliations and new quarrels. Gervaise continued to be liked by her neighbors; she paid her bills regularly and was a good customer. When she went out she received cordial greetings on all sides, and she was more fond of going out in these days than of yore. She liked to stand at the corners and chat. She liked to loiter with her arms full of bundles at a neighbor's window and hear a little gossip.

CHAPTER VI
GOUJET AT HIS FORGE

One autumnal afternoon Gervaise, who had been to carry a basket of clothes home to a customer who lived a good way off, found herself in La Rue des Poissonnièrs just as it was growing dark. It had rained in the morning, and the air was close and warm. She was tired with her walk and felt a great desire for something good to eat. Just then she lifted her eyes and, seeing the name of the street, she took it into her head that she would call on Goujet at his forge. But she would ask for Etienne, she said to herself. She did not know the number, but she could find it, she thought. She wandered along and stood bewildered, looking toward Montmartre; all at once she heard the measured click of hammers and concluded that she had stumbled on the place at last. She did not know where the entrance to the building was, but she caught a gleam of a red light in the distance; she walked toward it and was met by a workman.

"Is it here, sir," she said timidly, "that my child—a little boy, that is to say—works? A little boy by the name of Etienne?"

"Etienne! Etienne!" repeated the man, swaying from side to side. The wind brought from him to her an intolerable smell of brandy, which caused Gervaise to draw back and say timidly:

"Is it here that Monsieur Goujet works?"

"Ah, Goujet, yes. If it is Goujet you wish to see go to the left."

Gervaise obeyed his instructions and found herself in a large room with the forge at the farther end. She spoke to the first man she saw, when suddenly the whole room was one blaze of light. The bellows had sent up leaping flames which lit every crevice and corner of the dusty old building, and Gervaise recognized Goujet before the forge with two other men. She went toward him.

"Madame Gervaise!" he exclaimed in surprise, his face radiant with joy, and then seeing his companions laugh and wink, he pushed Etienne toward his mother. "You came to see your boy," he said; "he does his duty like a hero.

"I am glad of it," she answered, "but what an awful place this is to get at!"

And she described her journey, as she called it, and then asked why no one seemed to know Etienne there.

"Because," said the blacksmith, "he is called Zou Zou here, as his hair is cut short as a Zouave's."

This visit paid by Gervaise to the forge was only the first of many others. She often went on Saturdays when she carried the clean linen to Mme Goujet, who still resided in the same house as before. The first year Gervaise had paid them twenty francs each month, or rather the difference between the amount of their washing, seven or eight francs, and the twenty which she agreed upon. In this way she had paid half the money she had borrowed, when one quarter day, not knowing to whom to turn, as she had not been able to collect her bills punctually, she ran to the Goujets' and borrowed the amount of her rent from them. Twice since she had asked a similar favor, so that the amount of her indebtedness now stood at four hundred and twenty-five francs.

Now she no longer paid any cash but did their washing. It was not that she worked less hard or that her business was falling off. Quite the contrary; but money had a way of melting away in her hands, and she was content nowadays if she could only make both ends meet. What was the use of fussing, she thought? If she could manage to live that was all that was necessary. She was growing quite stout withal.

Mme Goujet was always kind to Gervaise, not because of any fear of losing her money, but because she really loved her and was afraid of her going wrong in some way.

The Saturday after the first visit paid by Gervaise to the forge was also the first of the month. When she reached Mme Goujet's her basket was so heavy that she panted for two good minutes before she could speak. Every one knows how heavy shirts and such things are.

"Have you brought everything?" asked Mme Goujet, who was very exacting on this point. She insisted on every piece being returned each week. Another thing she exacted was that the clothes should be brought back always on the same day and hour.

"Everything is here," answered Gervaise with a smile. "You know I never leave anything behind."

"That is true," replied the elder woman. "You have many faults, my dear, but not that one yet."

And while the laundress emptied her basket, laying the linen on the bed, Mme Goujet paid her many compliments. She never burned her clothes or ironed off the buttons or tore them, but she did use a trifle too much bluing and made her shirts too stiff.

"Feel," she said; "it is like pasteboard. My son never complains, but I know he does not like them so."

"And they shall not be so again," said Gervaise. "No one ever touches any of your things but myself, and I would do them over ten times rather than see you dissatisfied."

She colored as she spoke.

"I have no intention of disparaging your work," answered Mme Goujet. "I never saw anyone who did up laces and embroideries as you do, and the fluting is simply perfect; the only trouble is a little too much starch, my dear. Goujet does not care to look like a fine gentleman."

She took up her book and drew a pen through the pieces as she spoke. Everything was there. She brought out the bundle of soiled clothes. Gervaise put them in her basket and hesitated.

"Madame Goujet," she said at last, "if you do not mind I should like to have the money for this week's wash."

The account this month was larger than usual, ten francs and over. Mme Goujet looked at her gravely.

"My child," she said slowly, "it shall be as you wish. I do not refuse to give you the money if you desire it; only this is not the way to get out of debt. I say this with no unkindness, you understand. Only you must take care."

Gervaise, with downcast eyes, received the lesson meekly. She needed the ten francs to complete the amount due the coal merchant, she said.

But her friend heard this with a stern countenance and told her she should reduce her expenses, but she did not add that she, too, intended to do the same and that in future she should do her washing herself, as she had formerly done, if she were to be out of pocket thus.

When Gervaise was on the staircase her heart was light, for she cared little for the reproof now that she had the ten francs in her hand; she was becoming accustomed to paying one debt by contracting another.

Midway on the stairs she met a tall woman coming up with a fresh mackerel in her hand, and behold! it was Virginie, the girl whom she had whipped in the lavatory. The two looked each other full in the face. Gervaise instinctively closed her eyes, for she thought the girl would slap her in the face with the mackerel. But, no; Virginie gave a constrained smile. Then the laundress, whose huge basket filled up the stairway and who did not choose to be outdone in politeness, said:

"I beg your pardon—"

"Pray don't apologize," answered Virginie in a stately fashion.

And they stood and talked for a few minutes with not the smallest allusion, however, to the past.

Virginie, then about twenty-nine, was really a magnificent-looking woman, head well set on her shoulders and a long, oval face crowned by bands of glossy black hair. She told her history in a few brief words. She was married. Had married the previous spring a cabinetmaker who had given up his trade and was hoping to obtain a position on the police force. She had just been out to buy this mackerel for him.

"He adores them," she said, "and we women spoil our husbands, I think. But come up. We are standing in a draft here."

When Gervaise had, in her turn, told her story and added that Virginie was living in the very rooms where she had lived and where her child was born, Virginie became still more urgent that she should go up. "It is always pleasant to see a place where one has been happy," she said. She herself had been living on the other side of the water but had got tired of it and had moved into these rooms only two weeks ago. She was not settled yet. Her name was Mme Poisson.

"And mine," said Gervaise, "is Coupeau."

Gervaise was a little suspicious of all this courtesy. Might not some terrible revenge be hidden under it all? And she determined to be well on her guard. But as Virginie was so polite just now she must be polite in her turn.

Poisson, the husband, was a man of thirty-five with a mustache and imperial; he was seated at a table near the window, making little boxes. His only tools were a penknife, a tiny saw and a gluepot; he was

executing the most wonderful and delicate carving, however. He never sold his work but made presents of it to his friends. It amused him while he was awaiting his appointment.

Poisson rose and bowed politely to Gervaise, whom his wife called an old friend. But he did not speak, his conversational powers not being his strong point. He cast a plaintive glance at the mackerel, however, from time to time. Gervaise looked around the room and described her furniture and where it had stood. How strange it was, after losing sight of each other so long, that they should occupy the same apartment! Virginie entered into new details. He had a small inheritance from his aunt, and she herself sewed a little, made a dress now and then. At the end of a half-hour Gervaise rose to depart; Virginie went to the head of the stairs with her, and there both hesitated. Gervaise fancied that Virginie wished to say something about Lantier and Adèle, but they separated without touching on these disagreeable topics.

This was the beginning of a great friendship. In another week Virginie could not pass the shop without going in, and sometimes she remained for two or three hours. At first Gervaise was very uncomfortable; she thought every time Virginie opened her lips that she would hear Lantier's name. Lantier was in her mind all the time she was with Mme Poisson. It was a stupid thing to do, after all, for what on earth did she care what had become of Lantier or of Adèle? But she was, nonetheless, curious to know something about them.

Winter had come, the fourth winter that the Coupeaus had spent in La Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. This year December and January were especially severe, and after New Year's the snow lay three weeks in the street without melting. There was plenty of work for Gervaise, and her shop was delightfully warm and singularly quiet, for the carriages made no noise in the snow-covered streets. The laughs and shouts of the children were almost the only sounds; they had made a long slide and enjoyed themselves hugely.

Gervaise took especial pleasure in her coffee at noon. Her apprentices had no reason to complain, for it was hot and strong and unadulterated by chicory. On the morning of Twelfth-day the clock had struck twelve and then half past, and the coffee was not ready. Gervaise was ironing some muslin curtains. Clémence, with a frightful cold, was, as usual, at work on a man's shirt. Mme Putois was ironing a skirt on a board, with a cloth laid on the floor to prevent the skirt from being soiled. Mamma Coupeau brought in the coffee, and as each one of the women took a cup with a sigh of enjoyment the street door opened and Virginie came in with a rush of cold air.

"Heavens!" she cried. "It is awful! My ears are cut off!"

"You have come just in time for a cup of hot coffee," said Gervaise cordially.

"And I shall be only too glad to have it!" answered Virginie with a shiver. She had been waiting at the grocer's, she said, until she was chilled through and through. The heat of that room was delicious, and then she stirred her coffee and said she liked the damp, sweet smell of the freshly ironed linen. She and Mamma Coupeau were the only ones who had chairs; the others sat on wooden footstools, so low that they seemed to be on the floor. Virginie suddenly stooped down to her hostess and said with a smile:

"Do you remember that day at the lavatory?"

Gervaise colored; she could not answer. This was just what she had been dreading. In a moment she felt sure she would hear Lantier's name. She knew it was coming. Virginie drew nearer to her. The apprentices lingered over their coffee and told each other as they looked stupidly into the street what they would do if they had an income of ten thousand francs. Virginie changed her seat and took a footstool by the side of Gervaise, who felt weak and cowardly and helpless to change the conversation or to stave off what was coming. She breathlessly awaited the next words, her heart big with an emotion which she would not acknowledge to herself.

"I do not wish to give you any pain," said Virginie blandly. "Twenty times the words have been on my lips, but I hesitated. Pray don't think I bear you any malice."

She tipped up her cup and drank the last drop of her coffee. Gervaise, with her heart in her mouth, waited in a dull agony of suspense, asking herself if Virginie could have forgiven the insult in the lavatory. There was a glitter in the woman's eyes she did not like.

"You had an excuse," Virginie added as she placed her cup on the table. "You had been abominably treated. I should have killed someone."

And then, dropping her little-affected tone, she continued more rapidly:

"They were not happy, I assure you, not at all happy. They lived in a dirty street, where the mud was up to their knees. I went to breakfast with them two days after he left you and found them in the height of a quarrel. You know that Adèle is a wretch. She is my sister, to be sure, but she is a wretch all the same. As to Lantier—well, you know him, so I need not describe him. But for a yes or a no he would not hesitate to thresh any woman that lives. Oh, they had a beautiful time! Their quarrels were heard all over the neighborhood. One day the police were sent for, they made such a hubbub."

She talked on and on, telling things that were enough to make the hair stand up on one's head. Gervaise listened, as pale as death, with a nervous trembling of her lips which might have been taken for a smile. For seven years she had never heard Lantier's name, and she would not have believed that she could have felt any such overwhelming agitation. She could no longer be jealous of Adèle, but she smiled grimly as she thought of the blows she had received in her turn from Lantier, and she would have listened for hours to all that Virginia had to tell, but she did not ask a question for some time. Finally she said:

"And do they still live in that same place?"

"No indeed! But I have not told you all yet. They separated a week ago."

"Separated!" exclaimed the clearstarcher.

"Who is separated?" asked Clémence, interrupting her conversation with Mamma Coupeau.

"No one," said Virginie, "or at least no one whom you know."

As she spoke she looked at Gervaise and seemed to take a positive delight in disturbing her still more. She suddenly asked her what she would do or say if Lantier should suddenly make his appearance, for men were so strange; no one could ever tell what they would do. Lantier was quite capable of returning to his old love. Then Gervaise interrupted her and rose to the occasion. She answered with grave dignity that she was married now and that if Lantier should appear she would ask him to leave. There could never be anything more between them, not even the most distant acquaintance.

"I know very well," she said, "that Etienne belongs to him, and if Lantier desires to see his son I shall place no obstacle in his way. But as to myself, Madame Poisson, he shall never touch my little finger again! It is finished."

As she uttered these last words she traced a cross in the air to seal her oath, and as if desirous to put an end to the conversation, she called out to her women:

"Do you think the ironing will be done today if you sit still? To work! To work!"

The women did not move; they were lulled to apathy by the heat, and Gervaise herself found it very difficult to resume her labors. Her curtains had dried in all this time, and some coffee had been spilled on them, and she must wash out the spots.

"Au revoir!" said Virginie. "I came out to buy a half pound of cheese. Poisson will think I am frozen to death!"

The better part of the day was now gone, and it was this way every day, for the shop was the refuge and haunt of all the chilly people in the neighborhood. Gervaise liked the reputation of having the most comfortable room in the *Quartier*, and she held her receptions, as the Lorilleux and Boche clique said, with a sniff of disdain. She would, in fact, have liked to bring in the very poor whom she saw shivering outside. She became very friendly toward a journeyman painter, an old man of seventy, who lived in a loft of the house, where he shivered with cold and hunger. He had lost his three sons in the Crimea, and for two years his hand had been so cramped by rheumatism that he could not hold a brush.

Whenever Gervaise saw Father Bru she called him in, made a place for him near the stove and gave him some bread and cheese. Father Bru, with his white beard and his face wrinkled like an old apple, sat in silent content for hours at a time, enjoying the warmth and the crackling of the coke.

"What are you thinking about?" Gervaise would say gaily.

"Of nothing—of all sorts of things," he would reply with a dazed air.

The workwomen laughed and thought it a good joke to ask if he were in love. He paid little heed to them but relapsed into silent thought.

From this time Virginie often spoke to Gervaise of Lantier, and one day

she said she had just met him. But as the clearstarcher made no reply Virginie then said no more. But on the next day she returned to the subject and told her that he had talked long and tenderly of her. Gervaise was much troubled by these whispered conversations in the corner of her shop. The name of Lantier made her faint and sick at heart. She believed herself to be an honest woman. She meant, in every way, to do right and to shun the wrong, because she felt that only in doing so could she be happy. She did not think much of Coupeau because she was conscious of no shortcomings toward him. But she thought of her friend at the forge, and it seemed to her that this return of her interest in Lantier, faint and undecided as it was, was an infidelity to Goujet and to that tender friendship which had become so very precious to her. Her heart was much troubled in these days. She dwelt on that time when her first lover left her. She imagined another day when, quitting Adèle, he might return to her—with that old familiar trunk.

When she went into the street it was with a spasm of terror. She fancied that every step behind her was Lantier's. She dared not look around lest his hand should glide about her waist. He might be watching for her at any time. He might come to her door in the afternoon, and this idea brought a cold sweat to her forehead, because he would certainly kiss her on her ear as he had often teased her by doing in the years gone by. It was this kiss she dreaded. Its dull reverberation deafened her to all outside sounds, and she could hear only the beatings of her own heart. When these terrors assailed her the forge was her only asylum, from whence she returned smiling and serene, feeling that Goujet, whose sonorous hammer had put all her bad dreams to flight, would protect her always.

What a happy season this was after all! The clearstarcher always carried a certain basket of clothes to her customer each week, because it gave her a pretext for going into the forge, as it was on her way. As soon as she turned the corner of the street in which it was situated she felt as lighthearted as if she were going to the country. The black charcoal dust in the road, the black smoke rising slowly from the chimneys, interested and pleased her as much as a mossy path through the woods. Afar off the forge was red even at midday, and her heart danced in time with the hammers. Goujet was expecting her and making more noise than usual, that she might hear him at a great distance. She gave Etienne a light tap on his cheek and sat quietly watching these two—this man and boy, who were so dear to her—for an hour without speaking. When the sparks touched her tender skin she rather enjoyed the sensation. He, in his turn, was fully aware of the happiness she felt in being there, and he reserved the work which required skill for the time when she could look on in wonder and admiration. It was an idyl that they were unconsciously enacting all that spring, and when Gervaise returned to her home it was in a spirit of sweet content.

By degrees her unreasonable fears of Lantier were conquered. Coupeau was behaving very badly at this time, and one evening as she passed the Assommoir she was certain she saw him drinking with Mes-Bottes. She hurried on lest she should seem to be watching him. But as she hastened she looked over her shoulder. Yes, it was Coupeau who was tossing down a glass of liquor with an air as if it were no new thing. He had lied to her then; he did drink brandy. She was in utter despair, and all her old horror of brandy returned. Wine she could have forgiven—wine was good for a working man—liquor, on the contrary, was his ruin and took from him all desire for the food that nourished and gave him strength for his daily toil. Why did not the government interfere and prevent the manufacture of such pernicious things?

When she reached her home she found the whole house in confusion. Her employees had left their work and were in the courtyard. She asked what the matter was.

"It is Father Bijard beating his wife; he is as drunk as a fool, and he drove her up the stairs to her room, where he is murdering her. Just listen!"

Gervaise flew up the stairs. She was very fond of Mme Bijard, who was her laundress and whose courage and industry she greatly admired. On the sixth floor a little crowd was assembled. Mme Boche stood at an open door.

"Have done!" she cried. "Have done, or the police will be summoned."

No one dared enter the room, because Bijard was well known to be like a madman when he was tipsy. He was rarely thoroughly sober, and on the occasional days when he condescended to work he always had a bottle of brandy at his side. He rarely ate anything, and if a match had been touched to his mouth he would have taken fire like a torch.

"Would you let her be killed?" exclaimed Gervaise, trembling from head to foot, and she entered the attic room, which was very clean and very bare, for the man had sold the very sheets off the bed to satisfy his mad passion for drink. In this terrible struggle for life the table had been thrown over, and the two chairs also. On the floor lay the poor woman with her skirts drenched as she had come from the washtub, her hair streaming over her bloody face, uttering low groans at each kick the brute gave her.

The neighbors whispered to each other that she had refused to give him the money she had earned that day. Boche called up the staircase to his wife:

"Come down, I say; let him kill her if he will. It will only make one fool the less in the world!"

Father Bru followed Gervaise into the room, and the two expostulated with the madman. But he turned toward them, pale and threatening; a white foam glistened on his lips, and in his faded eyes there was a murderous expression. He grasped Father Bru by the shoulder and threw him over the table and shook Gervaise until her teeth chattered and then returned to his wife, who lay motionless, with her mouth wide open and her eyes closed; and during this frightful scene little Lalie, four years old, was in the corner, looking on at the murder of her mother. The child's arms were round her sister Henriette, a baby who had just been weaned. She stood with a sad, solemn face and serious, melancholy eyes but shed no tears.

When Bijard slipped and fell Gervaise and Father Bru helped the poor creature to her feet, who then burst into sobs. Lalie went to her side, but she did not cry, for the child was already habituated to such scenes. And as Gervaise went down the stairs she was haunted by the strange look of resignation and courage in Lalie's eyes; it was an expression belonging to maturity and experience rather than to childhood.

"Your husband is on the other side of the street," said Clémence as soon as she saw Gervaise; "he is as tipsy as possible!"

Coupeau reeled in, breaking a square of glass with his shoulder as he missed the doorway. He was not tipsy but drunk, with his teeth set firmly together and a pinched expression about the nose. And Gervaise instantly knew that it was the liquor of the Assommoir which had vitiated his blood. She tried to smile and coaxed him to go to bed. But he shook her off and as he passed her gave her a blow.

He was just like the other—the beast upstairs who was now snoring, tired out by beating his wife. She was chilled to the heart and desperate. Were all men alike? She thought of Lantier and of her husband and wondered if there was no happiness in the world.

CHAPTER VII
A BIRTHDAY FÊTE

The nineteenth of June was the clearstarcher's birthday. There was always an excuse for a fete in the Coupeau mansion; saints were invented to serve as a pretext for idleness and festivities. Virginie highly commended Gervaise for living luxuriously. What was the use of her husband drinking up everything? Why should she save for her husband to spend at all the wineshops in the neighborhood? And Gervaise accepted this excuse. She was growing very indolent and much stouter, while her lameness had perceptibly increased.

For a whole month they discussed the preparation for this fete; they talked over dishes and licked their lips. They must have something out of the common way. Gervaise was much troubled as to whom she should invite. She wanted exactly twelve at table, not one more or one less. She, her husband, her mother-in-law and Mme Lerat were four. The Goujets and Poissons were four more. At first she thought she would not ask her two women, Mme Putois and Clémence, lest it should make them too familiar, but as the entertainment was constantly under discussion before them she ended by inviting them too. Thus there were ten; she must have two more. She decided on a reconciliation with the Lorilleuxs, who had extended the olive branch several times lately. Family quarrels were bad things, she said. When the Boche people heard of this they showed several little courtesies to Gervaise, who felt obliged to urge them to come also. This made fourteen without counting the children. She had never had a dinner like this, and she was both triumphant and terrified.

The nineteenth fell on a Monday, and Gervaise thought it very fortunate, as she could begin her cooking on Sunday afternoon. On Saturday, while the women hurried through their work, there was an endless discussion as to what the dishes should be. In the last three weeks only one thing had been definitely decided upon—a roast goose stuffed with onions. The goose had been purchased, and Mme Coupeau brought it in that Mme Putois might guess its weight. The thing looked enormous, and the fat seemed to burst from its yellow skin.

"Soup before that, of course," said Gervaise, "and we must have another dish."

Clémence proposed rabbits, but Gervaise wanted something more distinguished. Mme Putois suggested a *blanquette du veau*.

That was a new idea. Veal was always good too. Then Mme Coupeau made an allusion to fish, which no one seconded. Evidently fish was not in favor. Gervaise proposed a sparerib of pork and potatoes, which brightened all their faces, just as Virginie came in like a whirlwind.

"You are just in season. Mamma Coupeau, show her the goose," cried Gervaise.

Virginie admired it, guessed the weight and laid it down on the ironing table between an embroidered skirt and a pile of shirts. She was evidently thinking of something else. She soon led Gervaise into the back shop.

"I have come to warn you," she said quickly. "I just met Lantier at the very end of this street, and I am sure he followed me, and I naturally felt alarmed on your account, my dear."

Gervaise turned very pale. What did he want of her? And why on earth should he worry her now amid all the busy preparations for the fete? It seemed as if she never in her life had set her heart on anything that she was not disappointed. Why was it that she could never have a minute's peace?

But Virginie declared that she would look out for her. If Lantier followed her she would certainly give him over to the police. Her husband had been in office now for a month, and Virginie was very dictatorial and aggressive and talked of arresting everyone who displeased her. She raised her voice as she spoke, but Gervaise implored her to be cautious, because her women could hear every word. They went back to the front shop, and she was the first to speak.

"We have said nothing of vegetables," she said quietly.

"Peas, with a bit of pork," said Virginie authoritatively.

This was agreed upon with enthusiasm.

The next day at three Mamma Coupeau lighted the two furnaces belonging to the house and a third one borrowed from Mme Boche, and at half-past three the soup was gently simmering in a large pot lent by

the restaurant at the corner. They had decided to cook the veal and the pork the day previous, as those two dishes could be warmed up so well, and would leave for Monday only the goose to roast and the vegetables. The back shop was ruddy with the glow from the three furnaces—sauces were bubbling with a strong smell of browned flour. Mamma Coupeau and Gervaise, each with large white aprons, were washing celery and running hither and thither with pepper and salt or hurriedly turning the veal with flat wooden sticks made for the purpose. They had told Coupeau pleasantly that his room was better than his company, but they had plenty of people there that afternoon. The smell of the cooking found its way out into the street and up through the house, and the neighbors, impelled by curiosity, came down on all sorts of pretexts, merely to discover what was going on.

About five Virginie made her appearance. She had seen Lantier twice. Indeed, it was impossible nowadays to enter the street and not see him. Mme Boche, too, had spoken to him on the corner below. Then Gervaise, who was on the point of going for a sou's worth of fried onions to season her soup, shuddered from head to foot and said she would not go out ever again. The concierge and Virginie added to her terror by a succession of stories of men who lay in wait for women, with knives and pistols hidden in their coats.

Such things were read every day in the papers! When such a scamp as Lantier found a woman happy and comfortable, he was always wretched until he had made her so too. Virginie said she would go for the onions. "Women," she observed sententiously, "should protect each other, as well as serve each other, in such matters." When she returned she reported that Lantier was no longer there. The conversation around the stove that evening never once drifted from that subject. Mme Boche said that she, under similar circumstances, should tell her husband, but Gervaise was horror-struck at this and begged her never to breathe one single word about it. Besides, she fancied her husband had caught a glimpse of Lantier from something he had muttered amid a volley of oaths two or three nights before. She was filled with dread lest these two men should meet. She knew Coupeau so well that she had long since discovered that he was still jealous of Lantier, and while the four women discussed the imminent danger of a terrible tragedy the sauces and the meats hissed and simmered on the furnaces, and they ended by each taking a cup of soup to discover what improvement was desirable.

Monday arrived. Now that Gervaise had invited fourteen to dine, she began to be afraid there would not be room and finally decided to lay the table in the shop. She was uncertain how to place the table, which was the ironing table on trestles. In the midst of the hubbub and confusion a customer arrived and made a scene because her linen had not come home on the Friday previous. She insisted on having every piece that moment—clean or dirty, ironed or rough-dry.

Then Gervaise, to excuse herself, told a lie with wonderful sang-froid. It was not her fault. She was cleaning her rooms. Her women would be at work again the next day, and she got rid of her customer, who went away soothed by the promise that her wash would be sent to her early the following morning.

But Gervaise lost her temper, which was not a common thing with her, and as soon as the woman's back was turned called her by an opprobrious name and declared that if she did as people wished she could not take time to eat and vowed she would not have an iron heated that day or the next in her establishment. No! Not if the Grand Turk himself should come and entreat her on his knees to do up a collar for him. She meant to enjoy herself a little occasionally!

The entire morning was consumed in making purchases. Three times did Gervaise go out and come in, laden with bundles. But when she went the fourth time for the wine she discovered that she had not money enough. She could have got the wine on credit, but she could not be without money in the house, for a thousand little unexpected expenses arise at such times, and she and her mother-in-law racked their brains to know what they should do to get the twenty francs they considered necessary. Mme Coupeau, who had once been housekeeper for an actress, was the first to speak of the Mont-de-Piété. Gervaise laughed gaily.

"To be sure! Why had she not thought of it before?"

She folded her black silk dress and pinned it in a napkin; then she hid the bundle under her mother-in-law's apron and bade her keep it very flat, lest the neighbors, who were so terribly inquisitive, should find it out, and then she watched the old woman from the door to see that no one followed her.

But when Mamma Coupeau had gone a few steps Gervaise called her back into the shop and, taking her wedding ring from her finger, said:

"Take this, too, for we shall need all the money we can get today."

And when the old woman came back with twenty-five francs she clapped her hands with joy. She ordered six bottles of wine with seals to drink with the roast. The Lorilleuxs would be green with envy. For a fortnight this had been her idea, to crush the Lorilleuxs, who were never known to ask a friend to their table; who, on the contrary, locked their doors when they had anything special to eat. Gervaise wanted to give her a lesson and would have liked to offer the strangers who passed her door a seat at her table. Money was a very good thing and mighty pretty to look at, but it was good for nothing but to spend.

Mamma Coupeau and Gervaise began to lay their table at three o'clock. They had hung curtains before the windows, but as the day was warm the door into the street was open. The two women did not put on a plate or salt spoon without the avowed intention of worrying the Lorilleuxs. They had given them seats where the table could be seen to the best advantage, and they placed before them the real china plates.

"No, no, Mamma," cried Gervaise, "not those napkins. I have two which are real damask."

"Well! Well! I declare!" murmured the old woman. "What will they say to all this?"

And they smiled as they stood at opposite sides of this long table with its glossy white cloth and its places for fourteen carefully laid. They worshiped there as if it had been a chapel erected in the middle of the shop.

"How false they are!" said Gervaise. "Do you remember how she declared she had lost a piece of one of the chains when she was carrying them home? That was only to get out of giving you your five francs."

"Which I have never had from them but just twice," muttered the old woman.

"I will wager that next month they will invent another tale. That is one reason why they lock their doors when they have a rabbit. They think people might say, 'If you can eat rabbits you can give five francs to your mother!' How mean they are! What do they think would have become of you if I had not asked you to come and live here?"

Her mother-in-law shook her head. She was rather severe in her judgment of the Lorilleuxs that day, inasmuch as she was influenced by the gorgeous entertainment given by the Coupeaus. She liked the excitement; she liked to cook. She generally lived pretty well with Gervaise, but on those days which occur in all households, when the dinner was scanty and unsatisfactory, she called herself a most unhappy woman, left to the mercy of a daughter-in-law. In the depths of her heart she still loved Mme Lorilleux; she was her eldest child.

"You certainly would have weighed some pounds less with her," continued Gervaise. "No coffee, no tobacco, no sweets. And do you imagine that they would have put two mattresses on your bed?"

"No indeed," answered the old woman, "but I wish to see them when they first come in—just to see how they look!"

At four o'clock the goose was roasted, and Augustine, seated on a little footstool, was given a long-handled spoon and bidden to watch and baste it every few minutes. Gervaise was busy with the peas, and Mamma Coupeau, with her head a little confused, was waiting until it was time to heat the veal and the pork. At five the guests began to arrive. Clémence and Mme Putois, gorgeous to behold in their Sunday rig, were the first.

Clémence wore a blue dress and had some geraniums in her hand; Madame was in black, with a bunch of heliotrope. Gervaise, whose hands were covered with flour, put them behind her back, came forward and kissed them cordially.

After them came Virginie in scarf and hat, though she had only to cross the street; she wore a printed muslin and was as imposing as any lady in the land. She brought a pot of red carnations and put both her arms around her friend and kissed her.

The offering brought by Boche was a pot of pansies, and his wife's was mignonette; Mme Lerat's, a lemon verbena. The three furnaces filled the room with an overpowering heat, and the frying potatoes drowned their voices. Gervaise was very sweet and smiling, thanking everyone for the flowers, at the same time making the dressing for the salad. The perfume of the flowers was perceived above all the smell of cooking.

"Can't I help you?" said Virginie. "It is a shame to have you work so hard for three days on all these things that we shall gobble up in no

time."

"No indeed," answered Gervaise; "I am nearly through."

The ladies covered the bed with their shawls and bonnets and then went into the shop that they might be out of the way and talked through the open door with much noise and loud laughing.

At this moment Goujet appeared and stood timidly on the threshold with a tall white rosebush in his arms whose flowers brushed against his yellow beard. Gervaise ran toward him with her cheeks reddened by her furnaces. She took the plant, crying:

"How beautiful!"

He dared not kiss her, and she was compelled to offer her cheek to him, and both were embarrassed. He told her in a confused way that his mother was ill with sciatica and could not come. Gervaise was greatly disappointed, but she had no time to say much just then: she was beginning to be anxious about Coupeau—he ought to be in—then, too, where were the Lorilleuxs? She called Mme Lerat, who had arranged the reconciliation, and bade her go and see.

Mme Lerat put on her hat and shawl with excessive care and departed. A solemn hush of expectation pervaded the room.

Mme Lerat presently reappeared. She had come round by the street to give a more ceremonious aspect to the affair. She held the door open while Mme Lorilleux, in a silk dress, stood on the threshold. All the guests rose, and Gervaise went forward to meet her sister and kissed her, as had been agreed upon.

"Come in! Come in!" she said. "We are friends again."

"And I hope for always," answered her sister-in-law severely.

After she was ushered in the same program had to be followed out with her husband. Neither of the two brought any flowers. They had refused to do so, saying that it would look as if they were bowing down to Wooden Legs. Gervaise summoned Augustine and bade her bring some wine and then filled glasses for all the party, and each drank the health of the family.

"It is a good thing before soup," muttered Boche.

Mamma Coupeau drew Gervaise into the next room.

"Did you see her?" she said eagerly. "I was watching her, and when she saw the table her face was as long as my arm, and now she is gnawing her lips; she is so mad!"

It was true the Lorilleuxs could not stand that table with its white linen, its shining glass and square piece of bread at each place. It was like a restaurant on the boulevard, and Mme Lorilleux felt of the cloth stealthily to ascertain if it were new.

"We are all ready," cried Gervaise, reappearing and pulling down her sleeves over her white arms.

"Where can Coupeau be?" she continued.

"He is always late! He always forgets!" muttered his sister. Gervaise was in despair. Everything would be spoiled. She proposed that someone should go out and look for him. Goujet offered to go, and she said she would accompany him. Virginie followed, all three bareheaded. Everyone looked at them, so gay and fresh on a week-day. Virginie in her pink muslin and Gervaise in a white cambric with blue spots and a gray silk handkerchief knotted round her throat. They went to one wineshop after another, but no Coupeau. Suddenly, as they went toward the boulevard, his wife uttered an exclamation.

"What is the matter?" asked Goujet.

The clearstarcher was very pale and so much agitated that she could hardly stand. Virginie knew at once and, leaning over her, looked in at the restaurant and saw Lantier quietly dining.

"I turned my foot," said Gervaise when she could speak. Finally at the Assommoir they found Coupeau and Poisson. They were standing in the center of an excited crowd. Coupeau, in a gray blouse, was quarreling with someone, and Poisson, who was not on duty that day, was listening quietly, his red mustache and imperial giving him, however, quite a formidable aspect.

Goujet left the women outside and, going in, placed his hand on Coupeau's shoulder, who, when he saw his wife and Virginie, fell into a great rage.

No, he would not move! He would not stand being followed about by women in this way! They might go home and eat their rubbishy dinner themselves! He did not want any of it!

To appease him Goujet was compelled to drink with him, and finally he

persuaded him to go with him. But when he was outside he said to Gervaise:

"I am not going home; you need not think it!"

She did not reply. She was trembling from head to foot. She had been speaking of Lantier to Virginie and begged the other to go on in front, while the two women walked on either side of Coupeau to prevent him from seeing Lantier as they passed the open window where he sat eating his dinner.

But Coupeau knew that Lantier was there, for he said:

"There's a fellow I know, and you know him too!"

He then went on to accuse her, with many a coarse word, of coming out to look, not for him, but for her old lover, and then all at once he poured out a torrent of abuse upon Lantier, who, however, never looked up or appeared to hear it.

Virginie at last coaxed Coupeau on, whose rage disappeared when they turned the corner of the street. They returned to the shop, however, in a very different mood from the one in which they had left it and found the guests, with very long faces, awaiting them.

Coupeau shook hands with the ladies in succession, with difficulty keeping his feet as he did so, and Gervaise, in a choked voice, begged them to take their seats. But suddenly she perceived that Mme Goujet not having come, there was an empty seat next to Mme Lorilleux.

"We are thirteen," she said, much disturbed, as she fancied this to be an additional proof of the misfortune which for some time she had felt to be hanging over them.

The ladies, who were seated, started up. Mme Putois offered to leave because, she said, no one should fly in the face of Destiny; besides, she was not hungry. As to Boche, he laughed, and said it was all nonsense.

"Wait!" cried Gervaise. "I will arrange it."

And rushing out on the sidewalk, she called to Father Bru, who was crossing the street, and the old man followed her into the room.

"Sit there," said the clearstarcher. "You are willing to dine with us, are you not?"

He nodded acquiescence.

"He will do as well as another," she continued in a low voice. "He rarely, if ever, had as much as he wanted to eat, and it will be a pleasure to us to see him enjoy his dinner."

Goujet's eyes were damp, so much was he touched by the kind way in which Gervaise spoke, and the others felt that it would bring them good luck. Mme Lorilleux was the only one who seemed displeased. She drew her skirts away and looked down with disgusted mien upon the patched blouse at her side.

Gervaise served the soup, and the guests were just lifting their spoons to their mouths when Virginie noticed that Coupeau had disappeared. He had probably returned to the more congenial society at the Assommoir, and someone said he might stay in the street; certainly no one would go after him, but just as they had swallowed the soup Coupeau appeared bearing two pots, one under each arm—a balsam and a wallflower. All the guests clapped their hands. He placed them on either side of Gervaise and, kissing her, he said:

"I forgot you, my dear, but all the same I loved you very much."

"Monsieur Coupeau is very amiable tonight; he has taken just enough to make him good natured," whispered one of the guests.

This little act on the part of the host brought back the smiles to the faces around the table. The wine began to circulate, and the voices of the children were heard in the next room. Etienne, Nana, Pauline and little Victor Fauconnier were installed at a small table and were told to be very good.

When the *blanquette du veau* was served the guests were moved to enthusiasm. It was now half-past seven. The door of the shop was shut to keep out inquisitive eyes, and curtains hung before the windows. The veal was a great success; the sauce was delicious and the mushrooms extraordinarily good. Then came the sparerib of pork. Of course all these good things demanded a large amount of wine.

In the next room at the children's table Nana was playing the mistress of the household. She was seated at the head of the table and for a while was quite dignified, but her natural gluttony made her forget her good manners when she saw Augustine stealing the peas from the plate, and she slapped the girl vehemently.

"Take care, mademoiselle," said Augustine sulkily, "or I will tell your

mother that I heard you ask Victor to kiss you."

Now was the time for the goose. Two lamps were placed on the table, one at each end, and the disorder was very apparent: the cloth was stained and spotted. Gervaise left the table to reappear presently, bearing the goose in triumph. Lorilleux and his wife exchanged a look of dismay.

"Who will cut it?" said the clearstarcher. "No, not I. It is too big for me to manage!"

Coupeau said he could do it. After all, it was a simple thing enough—he should just tear it to pieces.

There was a cry of dismay.

Mme Lerat had an inspiration.

"Monsieur Poisson is the man," she said; "of course he understands the use of arms." And she handed the sergeant the carving knife. Poisson made a stiff inclination of his whole body and drew the dish toward him and went to work in a slow, methodical fashion. As he thrust his knife into the breast Lorilleux was seized with momentary patriotism, and he exclaimed:

"If it were only a Cossack!"

At last the goose was carved and distributed, and the whole party ate as if they were just beginning their dinner. Presently there was a grand outcry about the heat, and Coupeau opened the door into the street. Gervaise devoured large slices of the breast, hardly speaking, but a little ashamed of her own gluttony in the presence of Goujet. She never forgot old Bru, however, and gave him the choicest morsels, which he swallowed unconsciously, his palate having long since lost the power of distinguishing flavors. Mamma Coupeau picked a bone with her two remaining teeth.

And the wine! Good heavens, how much they drank! A pile of empty bottles stood in the corner. When Mme Putois asked for water Coupeau himself removed the carafes from the table. No one should drink water, he declared, in his house—did she want to swallow frogs and live things? —and he filled up all the glasses. Hypocrites might talk as much as they pleased; the juice of the grape was a mighty good thing and a famous invention!

The guests all laughed and approved; working people must have their wine, they said, and Father Noah had planted the vine for them especially. Wine gave courage and strength for work; and if it chanced that a man sometimes took a drop too much, in the end it did him no harm, and life looked brighter to him for a time. Goujet himself, who was usually so prudent and abstemious, was becoming a little excited. Boche was growing red, and the Lorilleux pair very pale, while Poisson assumed a solemn and severe aspect. The men were all more or less tipsy, and the ladies—well, the less we say of the ladies, the better.

Suddenly Gervaise remembered the six bottles of sealed wine she had omitted to serve with the goose as she had intended. She produced them amid much applause. The glasses were filled anew, and Poisson rose and proposed the health of their hostess.

"And fifty more birthdays!" cried Virginie.

"No, no," answered Gervaise with a smile that had a touch of sadness in it. "I do not care to live to be very old. There comes a time when one is glad to go!"

A little crowd had collected outside and smiled at the scene, and the smell of the goose pervaded the whole street. The clerks in the grocery opposite licked their lips and said it was good and curiously estimated the amount of wine that had been consumed.

None of the guests were annoyed by being the subjects of observation, although they were fully aware of it and, in fact, rather enjoyed it. Coupeau, catching sight of a familiar face, held up a bottle, which, being accepted with a nod, he sent it out with a glass. This established a sort of fraternity with the street.

In the next room the children were unmanageable. They had taken possession of a saucepan and were drumming on it with spoons. Mamma Coupeau and Father Bru were talking earnestly. The old man was speaking of his two sons who had died in the Crimea. Ah, had they but lived, he would have had bread to eat in his old age!

Mme Coupeau, whose tongue was a little thick, said:

"Yes, but one has a good deal of unhappiness with children. Many an hour have I wept on account of mine."

Father Bru hardly heard what she said but talked on, half to himself.

"I can't get any work to do. I am too old. When I ask for any people laugh and ask if it was I who blacked Henri Quatre's boots. Last year I earned thirty sous by painting a bridge. I had to lie on my back all the time, close to the water, and since then I have coughed incessantly." He looked down at his poor stiff hands and added, "I know I am good for nothing. I wish I was by the side of my boys. It is a great pity that one can't kill one's self when one begins to grow old."

"Really," said Lorilleux, "I cannot see why the government does not do something for people in your condition. Men who are disabled—"

"But workmen are not soldiers," interrupted Poisson, who considered it his duty to espouse the cause of the government. "It is foolish to expect them to do impossibilities."

The dessert was served. In the center was a pyramid of spongecake in the form of a temple with melonlike sides, and on the top was an artificial rose with a butterfly of silver paper hovering over it, held by a gilt wire. Two drops of gum in the heart of the rose stood for dew. On the left was a deep plate with a bit of cheese, and on the other side of the pyramid was a dish of strawberries, which had been sugared and carefully crushed.

In the salad dish there were a few leaves of lettuce left.

"Madame Boche," said Gervaise courteously, "pray eat these. I know how fond you are of salad."

The concierge shook her head. There were limits even to her capacities, and she looked at the lettuce with regret. Clémence told how she had once eaten three quarts of water cresses at her breakfast. Mme Putois declared that she enjoyed lettuce with a pinch of salt and no dressing, and as they talked the ladies emptied the salad bowl.

None of the guests were dismayed at the dessert, although they had eaten so enormously. They had the night before them too; there was no need of haste. The men lit their pipes and drank more wine while they watched Gervaise cut the cake. Poisson, who prided himself on his knowledge of the habits of good society, rose and took the rose from the top and presented it to the hostess amid the loud applause of the whole party. She fastened it just over her heart, and the butterfly fluttered at every movement. A song was proposed—comic songs were a specialty with Boche—and the whole party joined in the chorus. The men kept time with their heels and the women with their knives on their glasses. The windows of the shop jarred with the noise. Virginie had disappeared twice, and the third time, when she came back, she said to Gervaise:

"My dear, he is still at the restaurant and pretends to be reading his paper. I fear he is meditating some mischief."

She spoke of Lantier. She had been out to see if he were anywhere in the vicinity. Gervaise became very grave.

"Is he tipsy?" she asked.

"No indeed, and that is what troubled me. Why on earth should he stay there so long if he is not drinking? My heart is in my mouth; I am so afraid something will happen."

The clearstarcher begged her to say no more. Mme Putois started up and began a fierce piratical song, standing stiff and erect in her black dress, her pale face surrounded by her black lace cap, and gesticulating violently. Poisson nodded approval. He had been to sea, and he knew all about it.

Gervaise, assisted by her mother-in-law, now poured out the coffee. Her guests insisted on a song from her, declaring that it was her turn. She refused. Her face was disturbed and pale, so much so that she was asked if the goose disagreed with her.

Finally she began to sing a plaintive melody all about dreams and rest. Her eyelids half closed as she ended, and she peered out into the darkness. Then followed a barcarole from Mme Boche and a romance from Lorilleux, in which figured perfumes of Araby, ivory throats, ebony hair, kisses, moonlight and guitars! Clémence followed with a song which recalled the country with its descriptions of birds and flowers. Virginie brought down the house with her imitation of a vivandière, standing with her hand on her hip and a wineglass in her hand, which she emptied down her throat as she finished.

But the grand success of the evening was Goujet, who sang in his rich bass the *"Adieux d'Abd-et-Kader."* The words issued from his yellow beard like the call of a trumpet and thrilled everyone around the table.

Virginie whispered to Gervaise:

"I have just seen Lantier pass the door. Good heavens! There he is again, standing still and looking in."

Gervaise caught her breath and timidly turned around. The crowd had increased, attracted by the songs. There were soldiers and shopkeepers and three little girls, five or six years old, holding each other by the hand, grave and silent, struck with wonder and admiration.

Lantier was directly in front of the door. Gervaise met his eyes and felt the very marrow of her bones chilled; she could not move hand or foot.

Coupeau called for more wine, and Clémence helped herself to more strawberries. The singing ceased, and the conversation turned upon a woman who had hanged herself the day before in the next street.

It was now Mme Lerat's turn to amuse the company, but she needed to make certain preparations.

She dipped the corner of her napkin into a glass of water and applied it to her temples because she was too warm. Then she asked for a teaspoonful of brandy and wiped her lips.

"I will sing *'L'Enfant du Bon Dieu,'*" she said pompously.

She stood up, with her square shoulders like those of a man, and began:

> "L'Enfant perdu que sa mère abandonne,
> Troue toujours un asile au Saint lieu,
> Dieu qui le voit, le defend de son trone,
> L'Enfant perdu, c'est L'Enfant du bon Dieu."

She raised her eyes to heaven and placed one hand on her heart; her voice was not without a certain sympathetic quality, and Gervaise, already quivering with emotion caused by the knowledge of Lantier's presence, could no longer restrain her tears. It seemed to her that she was the deserted child whom *le bon Dieu* had taken under His care. Clémence, who was quite tipsy, burst into loud sobs. The ladies took out their handkerchiefs and pressed them to their eyes, rather proud of their tenderness of heart.

The men felt it their duty to respect the feeling shown by the women and were, in fact, somewhat touched themselves. The wine had softened their hearts apparently.

Gervaise and Virginie watched the shadows outside. Mme Boche, in her turn, now caught a glimpse of Lantier and uttered an exclamation as she wiped away her fast-falling tears. The three women exchanged terrified, anxious glances.

"Good heavens!" muttered Virginie. "Suppose Coupeau should turn around. There would be a murder, I am convinced." And the earnestness of their fixed eyes became so apparent that finally he said:

"What are you staring at?"

And leaning forward, he, too, saw Lantier.

"This is too much," he muttered, "the dirty ruffian! It is too much, and I won't have it!"

As he started to his feet with an oath, Gervaise put her hand on his arm imploringly.

"Put down that knife," she said, "and do not go out, I entreat of you."

Virginie took away the knife that Coupeau had snatched from the table, but she could not prevent him from going into the street. The other guests saw nothing, so entirely absorbed were they in the touching words which Mme Lerat was still singing.

Gervaise sat with her hands clasped convulsively, breathless with fear, expecting to hear a cry of rage from the street and see one of the two men fall to the ground. Virginie and Mme Boche had something of the same feeling. Coupeau had been so overcome by the fresh air that when he rushed forward to take Lantier by the collar he missed his footing and found himself seated quietly in the gutter.

Lantier moved aside a little without taking his hands from his pockets.

Coupeau staggered to his feet again, and a violent quarrel commenced. Gervaise pressed her hands over her eyes; suddenly all was quiet, and she opened her eyes again and looked out.

To her intense astonishment she saw Lantier and her husband talking in a quiet, friendly manner.

Gervaise exchanged a look with Mme Boche and Virginie. What did this mean?

As the women watched them the two men began to walk up and down in front of the shop. They were talking earnestly. Coupeau seemed to be urging something, and Lantier refusing. Finally Coupeau took Lantier's arm and almost dragged him toward the shop.

"I tell you, you must!" he cried. "You shall drink a glass of wine with us.

Men will be men all the world over. My wife and I know that perfectly well."

Mme Lerat had finished her song and seated herself with the air of being utterly exhausted. She asked for a glass of wine. When she sang that song, she said, she was always torn to pieces, and it left her nerves in a terrible state.

Lantier had been placed at the table by Coupeau and was eating a piece of cake, leisurely dipping it into his glass of wine. With the exception of Mme Boche and Virginie, no one knew him.

The Lorilleuxs looked at him with some suspicion, which, however, was very far from the mark. An awkward silence followed, broken by Coupeau, who said simply:

"He is a friend of ours!"

And turning to his wife, he added:

"Can't you move round a little? Perhaps there is a cup of hot coffee!"

Gervaise looked from one to the other. She was literally dazed. When her husband first appeared with her former lover she had clasped her hands over her forehead with that instinctive gesture with which in a great storm one waits for the approach of the thunderclap.

It did not seem possible that the walls would not fall and crush them all. Then seeing the two men calmly seated together, it all at once seemed perfectly natural to her. She was tired of thinking about it and preferred to accept it. Why, after all, should she worry? No one else did. Everyone seemed to be satisfied; why should not she be also?

The children had fallen asleep in the back room, Pauline with her head on Etienne's shoulder. Gervaise started as her eyes fell on her boy. She was shocked at the thought of his father sitting there eating cake without showing the least desire to see his child. She longed to awaken him and show him to Lantier. And then again she had a feeling of passing wonder at the manner in which things settled themselves in this world.

She would not disturb the serenity of matters now, so she brought in the coffeepot and poured out a cup for Lantier, who received it without even looking up at her as he murmured his thanks.

"Now it is my turn to sing!" shouted Coupeau.

His song was one familiar to them all and even to the street, for the little crowd at the door joined in the chorus. The guests within were all more or less tipsy, and there was so much noise that the policemen ran to quell a riot, but when they saw Poisson they bowed respectfully and passed on.

No one of the party ever knew how or at what hour the festivities terminated. It must have been very late, for there was not a human being in the street when they departed. They vaguely remembered having joined hands and danced around the table. Gervaise remembered that Lantier was the last to leave, that he passed her as she stood in the doorway. She felt a breath on her cheek, but whether it was his or the night air she could not tell.

Mme Lerat had refused to return to Batignolles so late, and a mattress was laid on the floor in the shop near the table. She slept there amid the debris of the feast, and a neighbor's cat profited by an open window to establish herself by her side, where she crunched the bones of the goose all night between her fine, sharp teeth.

CHAPTER VIII
AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

The following Saturday Coupeau, who had not been home to dinner, came in with Lantier about ten o'clock. They had been eating pigs' feet at a restaurant at Montmarte.

"Don't scold, wife," said Coupeau; "we have not been drinking, you see; we can walk perfectly straight." And he went on to say how they had met each other quite by accident in the street and how Lantier had refused to drink with him, saying that when a man had married a nice little woman he had no business to throw away his money in that way. Gervaise listened with a faint smile; she had no idea of scolding. Oh no, it was not worth the trouble, but she was much agitated at seeing the two men together so soon again, and with trembling hands she knotted up her loosened hair.

Her workwomen had been gone some time. Nana and Mamma Coupeau were in bed, and Gervaise, who was just closing her shutters when her husband appeared, brought out some glasses and the remains of a bottle of brandy. Lantier did not sit down and avoided addressing her directly.

When she served him, however, he exclaimed:

"A drop, madame; a mere drop!"

Coupeau looked at them for a moment and then expressed his mind fully. They were no fools, he said, nor were they children. The past was the past. If people kept up their enmities for nine or ten years no one would have a soul to speak to soon. As for himself, he was made differently. He knew they were honest people, and he was sure he could trust them.

"Of course," murmured Gervaise, hardly knowing what she said, "of course."

"I regard her as a sister," said Lantier, "only as a sister."

"Give us your hand on that," cried Coupeau, "and let us be good friends in the future. After all, a good heart is better than gold, and I estimate friendship as above all price."

And he gave himself a little tap on his breast and looked about for applause, as if he had uttered rather a noble sentiment.

Then the three silently drank their brandy. Gervaise looked at Lantier and saw him for the first time, for on the night of the fete she had seen him, as it were, through a glass, darkly.

He had grown very stout, and his arms and legs very heavy. But his face was still handsome, although somewhat bloated by liquor and good living. He was dressed with care and did not look any older than his years. He was thirty-five. He wore gray pantaloons and a dark blue frock coat, like any gentleman, and had a watch and a chain on which hung a ring—a souvenir, apparently.

"I must go," he said presently.

He was at the door when Coupeau recalled him to say that he must never pass without coming in to say, "How do you do?"

Meanwhile Gervaise, who had disappeared, returned, pushing Etienne before her. The boy was half asleep but smiled as he rubbed his eyes. When he saw Lantier he stared and looked uneasily from him to Coupeau.

"Do you know this gentleman?" said his mother.

The child looked away and did not answer, but when his mother repeated the question he made a little sign that he remembered him. Lantier, grave and silent, stood still. When Etienne went toward him he stooped and kissed the child, who did not look at him but burst into tears, and when he was violently reproached by Coupeau he rushed away.

"It is excitement," said his mother, who was herself very pale.

"He is usually very good and very obedient," said Coupeau. "I have brought him up well, as you will find out. He will soon get used to you. He must learn something of life, you see, and will understand one of these days that people must forget and forgive, and I would cut off my head sooner than prevent a father from seeing his child!"

He then proposed to finish the bottle of brandy. They all three drank together again. Lantier was quite undisturbed, and before he left he insisted on aiding Coupeau to shut up the shop. Then as he dusted his hands with his handkerchief he wished them a careless good night.

"Sleep well. I am going to try and catch the omnibus. I will see you soon again."

Lantier kept his word and was seen from that time very often in the shop. He came only when Coupeau was home and asked for him before he crossed the threshold. Then seated near the window, always wearing a frock coat, fresh linen and carefully shaved, he kept up a conversation like a man who had seen something of the world. By degrees Coupeau learned something of his life. For the last eight years he had been at the head of a hat manufactory, and when he was asked why he had given it up he said vaguely that he was not satisfied with his partner; he was a rascal, and so on.

But his former position still imparted to him a certain air of importance. He said, also, that he was on the point of concluding an important matter—that certain business houses were in process of establishing themselves, the management of which would be virtually in his hands. In the meantime he had absolutely not one thing to do but to walk about with his hands in his pockets.

Any day he pleased, however, he could start again. He had only to decide on some house. Coupeau did not altogether believe this tale and insisted that he must be doing something which he did not choose to tell; otherwise how did he live?

The truth was that Lantier, excessively talkative in regard to other people's affairs, was very reticent about his own. He lied quite as often as he spoke the truth and would never tell where he resided. He said he was never at home, so it was of no use for anyone to come and see him.

"I am very careful," he said, "in making an engagement. I do not choose to bind myself to a man and find, when it is too late, that he intends to make a slave of me. I went one Monday to Champion at Monrouge. That evening Champion began a political discussion. He and I differed entirely, and on Tuesday I threw up the situation. You can't blame me, I am sure, for not being willing to sell my soul and my convictions for seven francs per day!"

It was now November. Lantier occasionally brought a bunch of violets to Gervaise. By degrees his visits became more frequent. He seemed determined to fascinate the whole house, even the *Quartier*, and he began by ingratiating himself with Clémence and Mme Putois, showing them both the greatest possible attention.

These two women adored him at the end of a month. Mme Boche, whom he flattered by calling on her in her loge, had all sorts of pleasant things to say about him.

As to the Lorilleuxs, they were furious when they found out who he was and declared that it was a sin and a disgrace for Gervaise to bring him into her house. But one fine day Lantier bearded them in their den and ordered a chain made for a lady of his acquaintance and made himself so agreeable that they begged him to sit down and kept him an hour. After this visit they expressed their astonishment that a man so distinguished could ever have seen anything in Wooden Legs to admire. By degrees, therefore, people had become accustomed to seeing him and no longer expressed their horror or amazement. Goujet was the only one who was disturbed. If Lantier came in while he was there he at once departed and avoided all intercourse with him.

Gervaise was very unhappy. She was conscious of a returning inclination for Lantier, and she was afraid of herself and of him. She thought of him constantly; he had taken entire possession of her imagination. But she grew calmer as days passed on, finding that he never tried to see her alone and that he rarely looked at her and never laid the tip of his finger on her.

Virginie, who seemed to read her through and through, asked her what she feared. Was there ever a man more respectful?

But out of mischief or worse, the woman contrived to get the two into a corner one day and then led the conversation into a most dangerous direction. Lantier, in reply to some question, said in measured tones that his heart was dead, that he lived now only for his son. He never thought of Claude, who was away. He embraced Etienne every night but soon forgot he was in the room and amused himself with Clémence.

Then Gervaise began to realize that the past was dead. Lantier had brought back to her the memory of Plassans and the Hôtel Boncœur. But this faded away again, and, seeing him constantly, the past was absorbed in the present. She shook off these memories almost with disgust. Yes, it was all over, and should he ever dare to allude to former years she would complain to her husband.

She began again to think of Goujet almost unconsciously.

One morning Clémence said that the night before she had seen Lantier walking with a woman who had his arm. Yes, he was coming up La Rue Notre-Dame de Lorette; the woman was a blonde and no better than she should be. Clémence added that she had followed them until the woman reached a house where she went in. Lantier waited in the street until there was a window opened, which was evidently a signal, for he went into the house at once.

Gervaise was ironing a white dress; she smiled slightly and said that she believed a Provencal was always crazy after women, and at night when Lantier appeared she was quite amused at Clémence, who at once attacked him. He seemed to be, on the whole, rather pleased that he had been seen. The person was an old friend, he said, one whom he had not seen for some time—a very stylish woman, in fact—and he told Clémence to smell of his handkerchief on which his friend had put some of the perfume she used. Just then Etienne came in, and his father became very grave and said that he was in jest—that his heart was dead.

Gervaise nodded approval of this sentiment, but she did not speak.

When spring came Lantier began to talk of moving into that neighborhood. He wanted a furnished, clean room. Mme Boche and Gervaise tried to find one for him. But they did not meet with any success. He was altogether too fastidious in his requirements. Every evening at the Coupeaus' he wished he could find people like themselves who would take a lodger.

"You are very comfortable here, I am sure," he would say regularly.

Finally one night when he had uttered this phrase, as usual, Coupeau cried out:

"If you like this place so much why don't you stay here? We can make room for you."

And he explained that the linen room could be so arranged that it would be very comfortable, and Etienne could sleep on a mattress in the corner.

"No, no," said Lantier; "it would trouble you too much. I know that you have the most generous heart in the world, but I cannot impose upon you. Your room would be a passageway to mine, and that would not be agreeable to any of us."

"Nonsense," said Coupeau. "Have we no invention? There are two windows; can't one be cut down to the floor and used as a door? In that case you would enter from the court and not through the shop. You would be by yourself, and we by ourselves."

There was a long silence, broken finally by Lantier.

"If this could be done," he said, "I should like it, but I am afraid you would find yourselves too crowded."

He did not look at Gervaise as he spoke, but it was clear that he was only waiting for a word from her. She did not like the plan at all; not that the thought of Lantier living under their roof disturbed her, but she had no idea where she could put the linen as it came in to be washed and again when it was rough-dry.

But Coupeau was enchanted with the plan. The rent, he said, had always been heavy to carry, and now they would gain twenty francs per month. It was not dear for him, and it would help them decidedly. He told his wife that she could have two great boxes made in which all the linen of the *Quartier* could be piled.

Gervaise still hesitated, questioning Mamma Coupeau with her eyes. Lantier had long since propitiated the old lady by bringing her gumdrops for her cough.

"If we could arrange it I am sure—" said Gervaise hesitatingly.

"You are too kind," remonstrated Lantier. "I really feel that it would be an intrusion."

Coupeau flamed out. Why did she not speak up, he should like to know? Instead of stammering and behaving like a fool?

"Etienne! Etienne!" he shouted.

The boy was asleep with his head on the table. He started up.

"Listen to me. Say to this gentleman, 'I wish it.' Say just those words and nothing more."

"I wish it!" stammered Etienne, half asleep.

Everybody laughed. But Lantier almost instantly resumed his solemn air. He pressed Coupeau's hand cordially.

"I accept your proposition," he said. "It is a most friendly one, and I thank you in my name and in that of my child."

The next morning Marescot, the owner of the house, happening to call,

Gervaise spoke to him of the matter. At first he absolutely refused and was as disturbed and angry as if she had asked him to build on a wing for her especial accommodation. Then after a minute examination of the premises he ended by giving his consent, only on condition, however, that he should not be required to pay any portion of the expense, and the Coupeaus signed a paper, agreeing to put everything into its original condition at the expiration of their lease.

That same evening Coupeau brought in a mason, a painter and a carpenter, all friends and boon companions of his, who would do this little job at night, after their day's work was over.

The cutting of the door, the painting and the cleaning would come to about one hundred francs, and Coupeau agreed to pay them as fast as his tenant paid him.

The next question was how to furnish the room? Gervaise left Mamma Coupeau's wardrobe in it. She added a table and two chairs from her own room. She was compelled to buy a bed and dressing table and divers other things, which amounted to one hundred and thirty francs. This she must pay for ten francs each month. So that for nearly a year they could derive no benefit from their new lodger.

It was early in June that Lantier took possession of his new quarters. Coupeau had offered the night before to help him with his trunk in order to avoid the thirty sous for a fiacre. But the other seemed embarrassed and said his trunk was heavy, and it seemed as if he preferred to keep it a secret even now where he resided.

He came about three o'clock. Coupeau was not there, and Gervaise, standing at her shop door, turned white as she recognized the trunk on the fiacre. It was their old one with which they had traveled from Plassans. Now it was banged and battered and strapped with cords.

She saw it brought in as she had often seen it in her dreams, and she vaguely wondered if it were the same fiacre which had taken him and Adèle away. Boche welcomed Lantier cordially. Gervaise stood by in silent bewilderment, watching them place the trunk in her lodger's room. Then hardly knowing what she said, she murmured:

"We must take a glass of wine together—"

Lantier, who was busy untying the cords on his trunk, did not look up, and she added:

"You will join us, Monsieur Boche!"

And she went for some wine and glasses. At that moment she caught sight of Poisson passing the door. She gave him a nod and a wink which he perfectly understood: it meant, when he was on duty, that he was offered a glass of wine. He went round by the courtyard in order not to be seen. Lantier never saw him without some joke in regard to his political convictions, which, however, had not prevented the men from becoming excellent friends.

To one of these jests Boche now replied:

"Did you know," he said, "that when the emperor was in London he was a policeman, and his special duty was to carry all the intoxicated women to the station house?"

Gervaise had filled three glasses on the table. She did not care for any wine; she was sick at heart as she stood looking at Lantier kneeling on the floor by the side of the trunk. She was wild to know what it contained. She remembered that in one corner was a pile of stockings, a shirt or two and an old hat. Were those things still there? Was she to be confronted with those tattered relics of the past?

Lantier did not lift the lid, however; he rose and, going to the table, held his glass high in his hands.

"To your health, madame!" he said.

And Poisson and Boche drank with him.

Gervaise filled their glasses again. The three men wiped their lips with the backs of their hands.

Then Lantier opened his trunk. It was filled with a hodgepodge of papers, books, old clothes and bundles of linen. He pulled out a saucepan, then a pair of boots, followed by a bust of Ledru Rollin with a broken nose, then an embroidered shirt and a pair of ragged pantaloons, and Gervaise perceived a mingled and odious smell of tobacco, leather and dust.

No, the old hat was not in the left corner; in its place was a pin cushion, the gift of some woman. All at once the strange anxiety with which she had watched the opening of this trunk disappeared, and in its place came an intense sadness as she followed each article with her eyes as Lantier took them out and wondered which belonged to her time and

which to the days when another woman filled his life.

"Look here, Poisson," cried Lantier, pulling out a small book. It was a scurrilous attack on the emperor, printed at Brussels, entitled The Amours of Napoleon III.

Poisson was aghast. He found no words with which to defend the emperor. It was in a book—of course, therefore, it was true. Lantier, with a laugh of triumph, turned away and began to pile up his books and papers, grumbling a little that there were no shelves on which to put them. Gervaise promised to buy some for him. He owned Louis Blanc's *Histoire de Dix Ans*, all but the first volume, which he had never had, Lamartine's *Les Girondins, The Mysteries of Paris* and *The Wandering Jew*, by Eugène Sue, without counting a pile of incendiary volumes which he had picked up at bookstalls. His old newspapers he regarded with especial respect. He had collected them with care for years: whenever he had read an article at a cafe of which he approved, he bought the journal and preserved it. He consequently had an enormous quantity, of all dates and names, tied together without order or sequence.

He laid them all in a corner of the room, saying as he did so:

"If people would study those sheets and adopt the ideas therein, society would be far better organized than it now is. Your emperor and all his minions would come down a bit on the ladder—"

Here he was interrupted by Poisson, whose red imperial and mustache irradiated his pale face.

"And the army," he said, "what would you do with that?"

Lantier became very much excited.

"The army!" he cried. "I would scatter it to the four winds of heaven! I want the military system of the country abolished! I want the abolition of titles and monopolies! I want salaries equalized! I want liberty for everyone. Divorces, too—"

"Yes; divorces, of course," interposed Boche. "That is needed in the cause of morality."

Poisson threw back his head, ready for an argument, but Gervaise, who did not like discussions, interfered. She had recovered from the torpor into which she had been plunged by the sight of this trunk, and she asked the men to take another glass. Lantier was suddenly subdued and drank his wine, but Boche looked at Poisson uneasily.

"All this talk is between ourselves, is it not?" he said to the policeman.

Poisson did not allow him to finish: he laid his hand on his heart and declared that he was no spy. Their words went in at one ear and out at another. He had forgotten them already.

Coupeau by this time appeared, and more wine was sent for. But Poisson dared linger no longer, and, stiff and haughty, he departed through the courtyard.

From the very first Lantier was made thoroughly at home. Lantier had his separate room, private entrance and key. But he went through the shop almost always. The accumulation of linen disturbed Gervaise, for her husband never arranged the boxes he had promised, and she was obliged to stow it away in all sorts of places, under the bed and in the corner. She did not like making up Etienne's mattress late at night either.

Goujet had spoken of sending the child to Lille to his own old master, who wanted apprentices. The plan pleased her, particularly as the boy, who was not very happy at home, was impatient to become his own master. But she dared not ask Lantier, who had come there to live ostensibly to be near his son. She felt, therefore, that it was hardly a good plan to send the boy away within a couple of weeks after his father's arrival.

When, however, she did make up her mind to approach the subject he expressed warm approval of the idea, saying that youths were far better in the country than in Paris.

Finally it was decided that Etienne should go, and when the morning of his departure arrived Lantier read his son a long lecture and then sent him off, and the house settled down into new habits.

Gervaise became accustomed to seeing the dirty linen lying about and to seeing Lantier coming in and going out. He still talked with an important air of his business operations. He went out daily, dressed with the utmost care and came home, declaring that he was worn out with the discussions in which he had been engaged and which involved the gravest and most important interests.

He rose about ten o'clock, took a walk if the day pleased him, and if it rained he sat in the shop and read his paper. He liked to be there. It was

his delight to live surrounded by a circle of worshiping women, and he basked indolently in the warmth and atmosphere of ease and comfort, which characterized the place.

At first Lantier took his meals at the restaurant at the corner, but after a while he dined three or four times a week with the Coupeaus and finally requested permission to board with them and agreed to pay them fifteen francs each Saturday. Thus he was regularly installed and was one of the family. He was seen in his shirt sleeves in the shop every morning, attending to any little matters or receiving orders from the customers. He induced Gervaise to leave her own wine merchant and go to a friend of his own. Then he found fault with the bread and sent Augustine to the Vienna bakery in a distant *faubourg*. He changed the grocer but kept the butcher on account of his political opinions.

At the end of a month he had instituted a change in the cuisine. Everything was cooked in oil: being a Provencal, that was what he adored. He made the omelets himself, which were as tough as leather. He superintended Mamma Coupeau and insisted that the beefsteaks should be thoroughly cooked, until they were like the soles of an old shoe. He watched the salad to see that nothing went in which he did not like. His favorite dish was vermicelli, into which he poured half a bottle of oil. This he and Gervaise ate together, for the others, being Parisians, could not be induced to taste it.

By degrees Lantier attended to all those affairs which fall to the share of the master of the house and to various details of their business, in addition. He insisted that if the five francs which the Lorilleux people had agreed to pay toward the support of Mamma Coupeau was not forthcoming they should go to law about it. In fact, ten francs was what they ought to pay. He himself would go and see if he could not make them agree to that. He went up at once and asked them in such a way that he returned in triumph with the ten francs. And Mme Lerat, too, did the same at his representation. Mamma Coupeau could have kissed Lantier's hands, who played the part, besides, of an arbiter in the quarrels between the old woman and Gervaise.

The latter, as was natural, sometimes lost patience with the old woman, who retreated to her bed to weep. He would bluster about and ask if they were simpletons, to amuse people with their disagreements, and finally induced them to kiss and be friends once more.

He expressed his mind freely in regard to Nana also. In his opinion she was brought up very badly, and here he was quite right, for when her father cuffed her her mother upheld her, and when, in her turn, the mother reproved, the father made a scene.

Nana was delighted at this and felt herself free to do much as she pleased.

She had started a new game at the farriery opposite. She spent entire days swinging on the shafts of the wagons. She concealed herself, with her troop of followers, at the back of the dark court, redly lit by the forge, and then would make sudden rushes with screams and whoops, followed by every child in the neighborhood, reminding one of a flock of martins or sparrows.

Lantier was the only one whose scoldings had any effect. She listened to him graciously. This child of ten years of age, precocious and vicious, coquetted with him as if she had been a grown woman. He finally assumed the care of her education. He taught her to dance and to talk slang!

Thus a year passed away. The whole neighborhood supposed Lantier to be a man of means—otherwise how did the Coupeaus live as they did? Gervaise, to be sure, still made money, but she supported two men who did nothing, and the shop, of course, did not make enough for that. The truth was that Lantier had never paid one sou, either for board or lodging. He said he would let it run on, and when it amounted to a good sum he would pay it all at once.

After that Gervaise never dared to ask him for a centime. She got bread, wine and meat on credit; bills were running up everywhere, for their expenditures amounted to three and four francs every day. She had never paid anything, even a trifle on account, to the man from whom she had bought her furniture or to Coupeau's three friends who had done the work in Lantier's room. The tradespeople were beginning to grumble and treated her with less politeness.

But she seemed to be insensible to this; she chose the most expensive things, having thrown economy to the winds, since she had given up paying for things at once. She always intended, however, to pay eventually and had a vague notion of earning hundreds of francs daily in

some extraordinary way by which she could pay all these people.

About the middle of summer Clémence departed, for there was not enough work for two women; she had waited for her money for some weeks. Lantier and Coupeau were quite undisturbed, however. They were in the best of spirits and seemed to be growing fat over the ruined business.

In the *Quartier* there was a vast deal of gossip. Everybody wondered as to the terms on which Lantier and Gervaise now stood. The Lorilleuxs viciously declared that Gervaise would be glad enough to resume her old relations with Lantier but that he would have nothing to do with her, for she had grown old and ugly. The Boche people took a different view, but while everyone declared that the whole arrangement was a most improper one, they finally accepted it as quite a matter of course and altogether natural.

It is quite possible there were other homes which were quite as open to invidious remarks within a stone's throw, but these Coupeaus, as their neighbors said, were good, kind people. Lantier was especially ingratiating. It was decided, therefore, to let things go their own way undisturbed.

Gervaise lived quietly indifferent to, and possibly entirely unsuspicious of, all these scandals. By and by it came to pass that her husband's own people looked on her as utterly heartless. Mme Lerat made her appearance every evening, and she treated Lantier as if he were utterly irresistible, into whose arms any and every woman would be only too glad to fall. An actual league seemed to be forming against Gervaise: all the women insisted on giving her a lover.

But she saw none of these fascinations in him. He had changed, unquestionably, and the external changes were all in his favor. He wore a frock coat and had acquired a certain polish. But she who knew him so well looked down into his soul through his eyes and shuddered at much she saw there. She could not understand what others saw in him to admire. And she said so one day to Virginie. Then Mme Lerat and Virginie vied with each other in the stories they told of Clémence and himself—what they did and said whenever her back was turned—and now they were sure, since she had left the establishment, that he went regularly to see her.

"Well, what of it?" asked Gervaise, her voice trembling. "What have I to do with that?"

But she looked into Virginie's dark brown eyes, which were specked with gold and emitted sparks as do those of cats. But the woman put on a stupid look as she answered:

"Why, nothing, of course; only I should think you would advise him not to have anything to do with such a person."

Lantier was gradually changing his manner to Gervaise. Now when he shook hands with her he held her fingers longer than was necessary. He watched her incessantly and fixed his bold eyes upon her. He leaned over her so closely that she felt his breath on her cheek. But one evening, being alone with her, he caught her in both arms. At that moment Goujet entered. Gervaise wrenched herself free, and the three exchanged a few words as if nothing had happened. Goujet was very pale and seemed embarrassed, supposing that he had intruded upon them and that she had pushed Lantier aside only because she did not choose to be embraced in public.

The next day Gervaise was miserable, unhappy and restless. She could not iron a handkerchief. She wanted to see Goujet and tell him just what had happened, but ever since Etienne had gone to Lille she had given up going to the forge, as she was quite unable to face the knowing winks with which his comrades received her. But this day she determined to go, and, taking an empty basket on her arms, she started off, pretending that she was going with skirts to some customers in La Rue des Portes-Blanches.

Goujet seemed to be expecting her, for she met him loitering on the corner.

"Ah," he said with a wan smile, "you are going home, I presume?"

He hardly knew what he was saying, and they both turned toward Montmartre without another word. They merely wished to go away from the forge. They passed several manufactories and soon found themselves with an open field before them. A goat was tethered near by and bleating as it browsed, and a dead tree was crumbling away in the hot sun.

"One might almost think oneself in the country," murmured Gervaise.

They took a seat under the dead tree. The clearstarcher set the basket

down at her feet. Before them stretched the heights of Montmartre, with its rows of yellow and gray houses amid clumps of trees, and when they threw back their heads a little they saw the whole sky above, clear and cloudless, but the sunlight dazzled them, and they looked over to the misty outlines of the *faubourg* and watched the smoke rising from tall chimneys in regular puffs, indicating the machinery which impelled it. These great sighs seemed to relieve their own oppressed breasts.

"Yes," said Gervaise after a long silence. "I have been on a long walk, and I came out—"

She stopped. After having been so eager for an explanation she found herself unable to speak and overwhelmed with shame. She knew that he as well as herself had come to that place with the wish and intention of speaking on one especial subject, and yet neither of them dared to allude to it. The occurrence of the previous evening weighed on both their souls.

Then with a heart torn with anguish and with tears in her eyes, she told him of the death of Mme Bijard, who had breathed her last that morning after suffering unheard-of agonies.

"It was caused by a kick of Bijard's," she said in her low, soft voice; "some internal injury. For three days she has suffered frightfully. Why are not such men punished? I suppose, though, if the law undertook to punish all the wretches who kill their wives that it would have too much to do. After all, one kick more or less: what does it matter in the end? And this poor creature, in her desire to save her husband from the scaffold, declared she had fallen over a tub."

Goujet did not speak. He sat pulling up the tufts of grass.

"It is not a fortnight," continued Gervaise, "since she weaned her last baby, and here is that child Lalie left to take care of two mites. She is not eight years old but as quiet and sensible as if she were a grown woman, and her father kicks and strikes her too. Poor little soul! There are some persons in this world who seem born to suffer."

Goujet looked at her and then said suddenly, with trembling lips:

"You made me suffer yesterday."

Gervaise clasped her hands imploringly, and he continued:

"I knew of course how it must end; only you should not have allowed me to think—"

He could not finish. She started up, seeing what his convictions were. She cried out:

"You are wrong! I swear to you that you are wrong! He was going to kiss me, but his lips did not touch me, and it is the very first time that he made the attempt. Believe me, for I swear—on all that I hold most sacred —that I am telling you the truth."

But the blacksmith shook his head. He knew that women did not always tell the truth on such points. Gervaise then became very grave.

"You know me well," she said; "you know that I am no liar. I again repeat that Lantier and I are friends. We shall never be anything more, for if that should ever come to pass I should regard myself as the vilest of the vile and should be unworthy of the friendship of a man like yourself." Her face was so honest, her eyes were so clear and frank, that he could do no less than believe her. Once more he breathed freely. He held her hand for the first time. Both were silent. White clouds sailed slowly above their heads with the majesty of swans. The goat looked at them and bleated piteously, eager to be released, and they stood hand in hand on that bleak slope with tears in their eyes.

"Your mother likes me no longer," said Gervaise in a low voice. "Do not say no; how can it be otherwise? We owe you so much money."

He roughly shook her arm in his eagerness to check the words on her lips; he would not hear her. He tried to speak, but his throat was too dry; he choked a little and then he burst out:

"Listen to me," he cried; "I have long wished to say something to you. You are not happy. My mother says things are all going wrong with you, and," he hesitated, "we must go away together and at once."

She looked at him, not understanding him but impressed by this abrupt declaration of a love from him, who had never before opened his lips in regard to it.

"What do you mean?" she said.

"I mean," he answered without looking in her face, "that we two can go away and live in Belgium. It is almost the same to me as home, and both of us could get work and live comfortably."

The color came to her face, which she would have hidden on his

shoulder to hide her shame and confusion. He was a strange fellow to propose an elopement. It was like a book and like the things she heard of in high society. She had often seen and known of the workmen about her making love to married women, but they did not think of running away with them.

"Ah, Monsieur Goujet!" she murmured, but she could say no more.

"Yes," he said, "we two would live all by ourselves."

But as her self-possession returned she refused with firmness.

"It is impossible," she said, "and it would be very wrong. I am married and I have children. I know that you are fond of me, and I love you too much to allow you to commit any such folly as you are talking of, and this would be an enormous folly. No; we must live on as we are. We respect each other now. Let us continue to do so. That is a great deal and will help us over many a roughness in our paths. And when we try to do right we are sure of a reward."

He shook his head as he listened to her, but he felt she was right. Suddenly he snatched her in his arms and kissed her furiously once and then dropped her and turned abruptly away. She was not angry, but the locksmith trembled from head to foot. He began to gather some of the wild daisies, not knowing what to do with his hands, and tossed them into her empty basket. This occupation amused him and tranquillized him. He broke off the head of the flowers and, when he missed his mark and they fell short of the basket, laughed aloud.

Gervaise sat with her back against the tree, happy and calm. And when she set forth on her walk home her basket was full of daisies, and she was talking of Etienne.

In reality Gervaise was more afraid of Lantier than she was willing to admit even to herself. She was fully determined never to allow the smallest familiarity, but she was afraid that she might yield to his persuasions, for she well knew the weakness and amiability of her nature and how hard it was for her to persist in any opposition to anyone.

Lantier, however, did not put this determination on her part to the test. He was often alone with her now and was always quiet and respectful. Coupeau declared to everyone that Lantier was a true friend. There was no nonsense about him; he could be relied upon always and in all emergencies. And he trusted him thoroughly, he declared. When they went out together—the three—on Sundays he bade his wife and Lantier walk arm in arm, while he mounted guard behind, ready to cuff the ears of anyone who ventured on a disrespectful glance, a sneer or a wink.

He laughed good-naturedly before Lantier's face, told him he put on a great many airs with his coats and his books, but he liked him in spite of them. They understood each other, he said, and a man's liking for another man is more solid and enduring than his love for a woman.

Coupeau and Lantier made the money fly. Lantier was continually borrowing money from Gervaise—ten francs, twenty francs—whenever he knew there was money in the house. It was always because he was in pressing need for some business matter. But still on those same days he took Coupeau off with him and at some distant restaurant ordered and devoured such dishes as they could not obtain at home, and these dishes were washed down by bottle after bottle of wine.

Coupeau would have preferred to get tipsy without the food, but he was impressed by the elegance and experience of his friend, who found on the carte so many extraordinary sauces. He had never seen a man like him, he declared, so dainty and so difficult. He wondered if all southerners were the same as he watched him discussing the dishes with the waiter and sending away a dish that was too salty or had too much pepper.

Neither could he endure a draft: his skin was all blue if a door was left open, and he made no end of a row until it was closed again.

Lantier was not wasteful in certain ways, for he never gave a garçon more than two sous after he had served a meal that cost some seven or eight francs.

They never alluded to these dinners the next morning at their simple breakfast with Gervaise. Naturally people cannot frolic and work, too, and since Lantier had become a member of his household Coupeau had never lifted a tool. He knew every drinking shop for miles around and would sit and guzzle deep into the night, not always pleased to find himself deserted by Lantier, who never was known to be overcome by liquor.

About the first of November Coupeau turned over a new leaf; he declared he was going to work the next day, and Lantier thereupon

preached a little sermon, declaring that labor ennobled man, and in the morning arose before it was light to accompany his friend to the shop, as a mark of the respect he felt. But when they reached a wineshop on the corner they entered to take a glass merely to cement good resolutions.

Near the counter they beheld Bibi-la-Grillade smoking his pipe with a sulky air.

"What is the matter, Bibi?" cried Coupeau.

"Nothing," answered his comrade, "except that I got my walking ticket yesterday. Perdition seize all masters!" he added fiercely.

And Bibi accepted a glass of liquor. Lantier defended the masters. They were not so bad after all; then, too, how were the men to get along without them? "To be sure," continued Lantier, "I manage pretty well, for I don't have much to do with them myself!"

"Come, my boy," he added, turning to Coupeau; "we shall be late if we don't look out."

Bibi went out with them. Day was just breaking, gray and cloudy. It had rained the night before and was damp and warm. The street lamps had just been extinguished. There was one continued tramp of men going to their work.

Coupeau, with his bag of tools on his shoulder, shuffled along; his footsteps had long since lost their ring.

"Bibi," he said, "come with me; the master told me to bring a comrade if I pleased."

"It won't be me then," answered Bibi. "I wash my hands of them all. No more masters for me, I tell you! But I dare say Mes-Bottes would be glad of the offer."

And as they reached the Assommoir they saw Mes-Bottes within. Notwithstanding the fact that it was daylight, the gas was blazing in the Assommoir. Lantier remained outside and told Coupeau to make haste, as they had only ten minutes.

"Do you think I will work for your master?" cried Mes-Bottes. "He is the greatest tyrant in the kingdom. No, I should rather suck my thumbs for a year. You won't stay there, old man! No, you won't stay there three days, now I tell you!"

"Are you in earnest?" asked Coupeau uneasily.

"Yes, I am in earnest. You can't speak—you can't move. Your nose is held close to the grindstone all the time. He watches you every moment. If you drink a drop he says you are tipsy and makes no end of a row!"

"Thanks for the warning. I will try this one day, and if the master bothers me I will just tell him what I think of him and turn on my heel and walk out."

Coupeau shook his comrade's hand and turned to depart, much to the disgust of Mes-Bottes, who angrily asked if the master could not wait five minutes. He could not go until he had taken a drink. Lantier entered to join in, and Mes-Bottes stood there with his hat on the back of his head, shabby, dirty and staggering, ordering Father Colombe to pour out the glasses and not to cheat.

At that moment Goujet and Lorilleux were seen going by. Mes-Bottes shouted to them to come in, but they both refused—Goujet saying he wanted nothing, and the other, as he hugged a little box of gold chains close to his heart, that he was in a hurry.

"Milksops!" muttered Mes-Bottes. "They had best pass their lives in the corner by the fire!"

Returning to the counter, he renewed his attack on Father Colombe, whom he accused of adulterating his liquors.

It was now bright daylight, and the proprietor of the Assommoir began to extinguish the lights. Coupeau made excuses for his brother-in-law, who, he said, could never drink; it was not his fault, poor fellow! He approved, too, of Goujet, declaring that it was a good thing never to be thirsty. Again he made a move to depart and go to his work when Lantier, with his dictatorial air, reminded him that he had not paid his score and that he could not go off in that way, even if it were to his duty.

"I am sick of the words 'work' and 'duty,'" muttered Mes-Bottes.

They all paid for their drinks with the exception of Bibi-la-Grillade, who stooped toward the ear of Father Colombe and whispered a few words. The latter shook his head, whereupon Mes-Bottes burst into a torrent of invectives, but Colombe stood in impassive silence, and when there was a lull in the storm he said:

"Let your friends pay for you then—that is a very simple thing to do."

By this time Mes-Bottes was what is properly called howling drunk,

and as he staggered away from the counter he struck the bag of tools which Coupeau had over his shoulder.

"You look like a peddler with his pack or a humpback. Put it down!"

Coupeau hesitated a moment, and then slowly and deliberately, as if he had arrived at a decision after mature deliberation, he laid his bag on the ground.

"It is too late to go this morning. I will wait until after breakfast now. I will tell him my wife was sick. Listen, Father Colombe, I will leave my bag of tools under this bench and come for them this afternoon."

Lantier assented to this arrangement. Of course work was a good thing, but friends and good company were better; and the four men stood, first on one foot and then on the other, for more than an hour, and then they had another drink all round. After that a game of billiards was proposed, and they went noisily down the street to the nearest billiard room, which did not happen to please the fastidious Lantier, who, however, soon recovered his good humor under the effect of the admiration excited in the minds of his friends by his play, which was really very extraordinary.

When the hour arrived for breakfast Coupeau had an idea.

"Let us go and find Bec Sali. I know where he works. We will make him breakfast with us."

The idea was received with applause. The party started forth. A fine drizzling rain was now falling, but they were too warm within to mind this light sprinkling on their shoulders.

Coupeau took them to a factory where his friend worked and at the door gave two sous to a small boy to go up and find Bec Sali and to tell him that his wife was very sick and had sent for him.

Bec Sali quickly appeared, not in the least disturbed, as he suspected a joke.

"Aha!" he said as he saw his friend. "I knew it!" They went to a restaurant and ordered a famous repast of pigs' feet, and they sat and sucked the bones and talked about their various employers.

"Will you believe," said Bec Sali, "that mine has had the brass to hang up a bell? Does he think we are slaves to run when he rings it? Never was he so mistaken—"

"I am obliged to leave you!" said Coupeau, rising at last with an important air. "I promised my wife to go to work today, and I leave you with the greatest reluctance."

The others protested and entreated, but he seemed so decided that they all accompanied him to the Assommoir to get his tools. He pulled out the bag from under the bench and laid it at his feet while they all took another drink. The clock struck one, and Coupeau kicked his bag under the bench again. He would go tomorrow to the factory; one day really did not make much difference.

The rain had ceased, and one of the men proposed a little walk on the boulevards to stretch their legs. The air seemed to stupefy them, and they loitered along with their arms swinging at their sides, without exchanging a word. When they reached the wineshop on the corner of La Rue des Poissonnièrs they turned in mechanically. Lantier led the way into a small room divided from the public one by windows only. This room was much affected by Lantier, who thought it more stylish by far than the public one. He called for a newspaper, spread it out and examined it with a heavy frown. Coupeau and Mes-Bottes played a game of cards, while wine and glasses occupied the center of the table.

"What is the news?" asked Bibi.

Lantier did not reply instantly, but presently, as the others emptied their glasses, he began to read aloud an account of a frightful murder, to which they listened with eager interest. Then ensued a hot discussion and argument as to the probable motives for the murder.

By this time the wine was exhausted, and they called for more. About five all except Lantier were in a state of beastly intoxication, and he found them so disgusting that, as usual, he made his escape without his comrades noticing his defection.

Lantier walked about a little and then, when he felt all right, went home and told Gervaise that her husband was with his friends. Coupeau did not make his appearance for two days. Rumors were brought in that he had been seen in one place and then in another, and always alone. His comrades had apparently deserted him. Gervaise shrugged her shoulders with a resigned air.

"Good heavens!" she said. "What a way to live!" She never thought of hunting him up. Indeed, on the afternoon of the third day, when she saw

him through the window of a wineshop, she turned back and would not pass the door. She sat up for him, however, and listened for his step or the sound of his hand fumbling at the lock.

The next morning he came in, only to begin the same thing at night again. This went on for a week, and at last Gervaise went to the Assommoir to make inquiries. Yes, he had been there a number of times, but no one knew where he was just then. Gervaise picked up the bag of tools and carried them home.

Lantier, seeing that Gervaise was out of spirits, proposed that she should go with him to a cafe concert. She refused at first, being in no mood for laughing; otherwise she would have consented, for Lantier's proposal seemed to be prompted by the purest friendliness. He seemed really sorry for her trouble and, indeed, assumed an absolutely paternal air.

Coupeau had never stayed away like this before, and she continually found herself going to the door and looking up and down the street. She could not keep to her work but wandered restlessly from place to place. Had Coupeau broken a limb? Had he fallen into the water? She did not think she could care so very much if he were killed, if this uncertainty were over, if she only knew what she had to expect. But it was very trying to live in this suspense.

Finally when the gas was lit and Lantier renewed his proposition of the cafe she consented. After all, why should she not go? Why should she refuse all pleasures because her husband chose to behave in this disgraceful way? If he would not come in she would go out.

They hurried through their dinner, and as she went out with Lantier at eight o'clock Gervaise begged Nana and Mamma Coupeau to go to bed early. The shop was closed, and she gave the key to Mme Boche, telling her that if Coupeau came in it would be as well to look out for the lights.

Lantier stood whistling while she gave these directions. Gervaise wore her silk dress, and she smiled as they walked down the street in alternate shadow and light from the shopwindows.

The cafe concert was on the Boulevard de Rochechouart. It had once been a cafe and had had a concert room built on of rough planks.

Over the door was a row of glass globes brilliantly illuminated. Long placards, nailed on wood, were standing quite out in the street by the side of the gutter.

"Here we are!" said Lantier. "Mademoiselle Amanda makes her debut tonight."

Bibi-la-Grillade was reading the placard. Bibi had a black eye, as if he had been fighting.

"Hallo!" cried Lantier. "How are you? Where is Coupeau? Have you lost him?"

"Yes, since yesterday. We had a little fight with a waiter at Baquets. He wanted us to pay twice for what we had, and somehow Coupeau and I got separated, and I have not seen him since."

And Bibi gave a great yawn. He was in a disgraceful state of intoxication. He looked as if he had been rolling in the gutter.

"And you know nothing of my husband?" asked Gervaise.

"No, nothing. I think, though, he went off with a coachman."

Lantier and Gervaise passed a very agreeable evening at the cafe concert, and when the doors were closed at eleven they went home in a sauntering sort of fashion. They were in no hurry, and the night was fair, though a little cool. Lantier hummed the air which Amanda had sung, and Gervaise added the chorus. The room had been excessively warm, and she had drunk several glasses of wine.

She expressed a great deal of indignation at Mlle Amanda's costume. How did she dare face all those men, dressed like that? But her skin was beautiful, certainly, and she listened with considerable curiosity to all that Lantier could tell her about the woman.

"Everybody is asleep," said Gervaise after she had rung the bell three times.

The door was finally opened, but there was no light. She knocked at the door of the Boche quarters and asked for her key.

The sleepy concierge muttered some unintelligible words, from which Gervaise finally gathered that Coupeau had been brought in by Poisson and that the key was in the door.

Gervaise stood aghast at the disgusting sight that met her eyes as she entered the room where Coupeau lay wallowing on the floor.

She shuddered and turned away. This sight annihilated every ray of

sentiment remaining in her heart.

"What am I to do?" she said piteously. "I can't stay here!"

Lantier snatched her hand.

"Gervaise," he said, "listen to me."

But she understood him and drew hastily back.

"No, no! Leave me, Auguste. I can manage."

But Lantier would not obey her. He put his arm around her waist and pointed to her husband as he lay snoring, with his mouth wide open.

"Leave me!" said Gervaise, imploringly, and she pointed to the room where her mother-in-law and Nana slept.

"You will wake them!" she said. "You would not shame me before my child? Pray go!"

He said no more but slowly and softly kissed her on her ear, as he had so often teased her by doing in those old days. Gervaise shivered, and her blood was stirred to madness in her veins.

"What does that beast care?" she thought. "It is his fault," she murmured; "all his fault. He sends me from his room!"

And as Lantier drew her toward his door Nana's face appeared for a moment at the window which lit her little cabinet.

The mother did not see the child, who stood in her nightdress, pale with sleep. She looked at her father as he lay and then watched her mother disappear in Lantier's room. She was perfectly grave, but in her eyes burned the sensual curiosity of premature vice.

CHAPTER IX
CLOUDS IN THE HORIZON

That winter Mamma Coupeau was very ill with an asthmatic attack, which she always expected in the month of December.

The poor woman suffered much, and the depression of her spirits was naturally very great. It must be confessed that there was nothing very gay in the aspect of the room where she slept. Between her bed and that of the little girl there was just room for a chair. The paper hung in strips from the wall. Through a round window near the ceiling came a dreary gray light. There was little ventilation in the room, which made it especially unfit for the old woman, who at night, when Nana was there and she could hear her breathe, did not complain, but when left alone during the day, moaned incessantly, rolling her head about on her pillow.

"Ah," she said, "how unhappy I am! It is the same as a prison. I wish I were dead!"

And as soon as a visitor came in—Virginie or Mme Boche—she poured out her grievances. "I should not suffer so much among strangers. I should like sometimes a cup of tisane, but I can't get it; and Nana—that child whom I have raised from the cradle—disappears in the morning and never shows her face until night, when she sleeps right through and never once asks me how I am or if she can do anything for me. It will soon be over, and I really believe this clearstarcher would smother me herself—if she were not afraid of the law!"

Gervaise, it is true, was not as gentle and sweet as she had been. Everything seemed to be going wrong with her, and she had lost heart and patience together. Mamma Coupeau had overheard her saying that she was really a great burden. This naturally cut her to the heart, and when she saw her eldest daughter, Mme Lerat, she wept piteously and declared that she was being starved to death, and when these complaints drew from her daughter's pocket a little silver, she expended it in dainties.

She told the most preposterous tales to Mme Lerat about Gervaise—of her new finery and of cakes and delicacies eaten in the corner and many other things of infinitely more consequence. Then in a little while she turned against the Lorilleuxs and talked of them in the most bitter manner. At the height of her illness it so happened that her two daughters met one afternoon at her bedside. Their mother made a motion to them to come closer. Then she went on to tell them, between paroxysms of coughing, that her son came home dead drunk the night before and that she was absolutely certain that Gervaise spent the night in Lantier's room. "It is all the more disgusting," she added, "because I am certain that Nana heard what was going on quite as well as I did."

The two women did not appear either shocked or surprised.

"It is none of our business," said Mme Lorilleux. "If Coupeau does not choose to take any notice of her conduct it is not for us to do so."

All the neighborhood were soon informed of the condition of things by her two sisters-in-law, who declared they entered her doors only on their mother's account, who, poor thing, was compelled to live amid these abominations.

Everyone accused Gervaise now of having perverted poor Lantier. "Men will be men," they said; "surely you can't expect them to turn a cold shoulder to women who throw themselves at their heads. She has no possible excuse; she is a disgrace to the whole street!"

The Lorilleuxs invited Nana to dinner that they might question her, but as soon as they began the child looked absolutely stupid, and they could extort nothing from her.

Amid this sudden and fierce indignation Gervaise lived—indifferent, dull and stupid. At first she loathed herself, and if Coupeau laid his hand on her she shivered and ran away from him. But by degrees she became accustomed to it. Her indolence had become excessive, and she only wished to be quiet and comfortable.

After all, she asked herself, why should she care? If her lover and her husband were satisfied, why should she not be too? So the household went on much as usual to all appearance. In reality, whenever Coupeau came in tipsy, she left and went to Lantier's room to sleep. She was not led there by passion or affection; it was simply that it was more comfortable. She was very like a cat in her choice of soft, clean places.

Mamma Coupeau never dared to speak out openly to the clearstarcher, but after a dispute she was unsparing in her hints and allusions. The first

time Gervaise fixed her eyes on her and heard all she had to say in profound silence. Then without seeming to speak of herself, she took occasion to say not long afterward that when a woman was married to a man who was drinking himself to death a woman was very much to be pitied and by no means to blame if she looked for consolation elsewhere.

Another time, when taunted by the old woman, she went still further and declared that Lantier was as much her husband as was Coupeau—that he was the father of two of her children. She talked a little twaddle about the laws of nature, and a shrewd observer would have seen that she—parrotlike—was repeating the words that some other person had put into her mouth. Besides, what were her neighbors doing all about her? They were not so extremely respectable that they had the right to attack her. And then she took house after house and showed her mother-in-law that while apparently so deaf to gossip she yet knew all that was going on about her. Yes, she knew—and now seemed to gloat over that which once had shocked and revolted her.

"It is none of my business, I admit," she cried; "let each person live as he pleases, according to his own light, and let everybody else alone."

One day when Mamma Coupeau spoke out more clearly she said with compressed lips:

"Now look here, you are flat on your back and you take advantage of that fact. I have never said a word to you about your own life, but I know it all the same—and it was atrocious! That is all! I am not going into particulars, but remember, you had best not sit in judgment on me!"

The old woman was nearly suffocated with rage and her cough.

The next day Goujet came for his mother's wash while Gervaise was out. Mamma Coupeau called him into her room and kept him for an hour. She read the young man's heart; she knew that his suspicions made him miserable. And in revenge for something that had displeased her she told him the truth with many sighs and tears, as if her daughter-in-law's infamous conduct was a bitter blow to her.

When Goujet left her room he was deadly pale and looked ten years older than when he went in. The old woman had, too, the additional pleasure of telling Gervaise on her return that Mme Goujet had sent word that her linen must be returned to her at once, ironed or unironed. And she was so animated and comparatively amiable that Gervaise scented the truth and knew instinctively what she had done and what she was to expect with Goujet. Pale and trembling, she piled the linen neatly in a basket and set forth to see Mme Goujet. Years had passed since she had paid her friends one penny. The debt still stood at four hundred and twenty-five francs. Each time she took the money for her washing she spoke of being pressed just at that time. It was a great mortification for her.

Coupeau was, however, less scrupulous and said with a laugh that if she kissed her friend occasionally in the corner it would keep things straight and pay him well. Then Gervaise, with eyes blazing with indignation, would ask if he really meant that. Had he fallen so low? Nor should he speak of Goujet in that way in her presence.

Every time she took home the linen of these former friends she ascended the stairs with a sick heart.

"Ah, it is you, is it?" said Mme Goujet coldly as she opened the door. Gervaise entered with some hesitation; she did not dare attempt to excuse herself. She was no longer punctual to the hour or the day—everything about her was becoming perfectly disorderly.

"For one whole week," resumed the lace mender, "you have kept me waiting. You have told me falsehood after falsehood. You have sent your apprentice to tell me that there was an accident—something had been spilled on the shirts, they would come the next day, and so on. I have been unnecessarily annoyed and worried, besides losing much time. There is no sense in it! Now what have you brought home? Are the shirts here which you have had for a month and the skirt which was missing last week?"

"Yes," said Gervaise, almost inaudibly; "yes, the skirt is here. Look at it!"

But Mme Goujet cried out in indignation.

That skirt did not belong to her, and she would not have it. This was the crowning touch, if her things were to be changed in this way. She did not like other people's things.

"And the shirts? Where are they? Lost, I suppose. Very well, settle it as you please, but these shirts I must have tomorrow morning!"

There was a long silence. Gervaise was much disturbed by seeing that

the door of Goujet's room was wide open. He was there, she was sure, and listening to all these reproaches which she knew to be deserved and to which she could not reply. She was very quiet and submissive and laid the linen on the bed as quickly as possible.

Mme Goujet began to examine the pieces.

"Well! Well!" she said. "No one can praise your washing nowadays. There is not a piece here that is not dirtied by the iron. Look at this shirt: it is scorched, and the buttons are fairly torn off by the root. Everything comes back—that comes at all, I should say—with the buttons off. Look at that sack: the dirt is all in it. No, no, I can't pay for such washing as this!"

She stopped talking—while she counted the pieces. Then she exclaimed:

"Two pairs of stockings, six towels and one napkin are missing from this week. You are laughing at me, it seems. Now, just understand, I tell you to bring back all you have, ironed or not ironed. If in an hour your woman is not here with the rest I have done with you, Madame Coupeau!"

At this moment Goujet coughed. Gervaise started. How could she bear being treated in this way before him? And she stood confused and silent, waiting for the soiled clothes.

Mme Goujet had taken her place and her work by the window.

"And the linen?" said Gervaise timidly.

"Many thanks," said the old woman. "There is nothing this week."

Gervaise turned pale; it was clear that Mme Goujet meant to take away her custom from her. She sank into a chair. She made no attempt at excuses; she only asked a question.

"Is Monsieur Goujet ill?"

"He is not well; at least he has just come in and is lying down to rest a little."

Mme Goujet spoke very slowly, almost solemnly, her pale face encircled by her white cap, and wearing, as usual, her plain black dress.

And she explained that they were obliged to economize very closely. In future she herself would do their washing. Of course Gervaise must know that this would not be necessary had she and her husband paid their debt to her son. But of course they would submit; they would never think of going to law about it. While she spoke of the debt her needle moved rapidly to and fro in the delicate meshes of her work.

"But," continued Mme Goujet, "if you were to deny yourself a little and be careful and prudent, you could soon discharge your debt to us; you live too well; you spend too freely. Were you to give us only ten francs each month—"

She was interrupted by her son, who called impatiently, "Mother! Come here, will you?"

When she returned she changed the conversation. Her son had undoubtedly begged her to say no more about this money to Gervaise. In spite of her evident determination to avoid this subject, she returned to it again in about ten minutes. She knew from the beginning just what would happen. She had said so at the time, and all had turned out precisely as she had prophesied. The tinworker had drunk up the shop and had left his wife to bear the load by herself. If her son had taken her advice he would never have lent the money. His marriage had fallen through, and he had lost his spirits. She grew very angry as she spoke and finally accused Gervaise openly of having, with her husband, deliberately conspired to cheat her simplehearted son.

"Many women," she exclaimed, "played the parts of hypocrites and prudes for years and were found out at the last!"

"Mother! Mother!" called Goujet peremptorily.

She rose and when she returned said:

"Go in; he wants to see you."

Gervaise obeyed, leaving the door open behind her. She found the room sweet and fresh looking, like that of a young girl, with its simple pictures and white curtains.

Goujet, crushed by what he had heard from Mamma Coupeau, lay at full length on the bed with pale face and haggard eyes.

"Listen!" he said. "You must not mind my mother's words; she does not understand. You do not owe me anything."

He staggered to his feet and stood leaning against the bed and looking at her.

"Are you ill?" she said nervously.

"No, not ill," he answered, "but sick at heart. Sick when I remember what you said and see the truth. Leave me. I cannot bear to look at you."

And he waved her away, not angrily, but with great decision. She went out without a word, for she had nothing to say. In the next room she took up her basket and stood still a moment; Mme Goujet did not look up, but she said:

"Remember, I want my linen at once, and when that is all sent back to me we will settle the account."

"Yes," answered Gervaise. And she closed the door, leaving behind her all that sweet odor and cleanliness on which she had once placed so high a value. She returned to the shop with her head bowed down and looking neither to the right nor the left.

Mother Coupeau was sitting by the fire, having left her bed for the first time. Gervaise said nothing to her—not a word of reproach or congratulation She felt deadly tired; all her bones ached, as if she had been beaten. She thought life very hard and wished that it were over for her.

Gervaise soon grew to care for nothing but her three meals per day. The shop ran itself; one by one her customers left her. Gervaise shrugged her shoulders half indifferently, half insolently; everybody could leave her, she said: she could always get work. But she was mistaken, and soon it became necessary for her to dismiss Mme Putois, keeping no assistant except Augustine, who seemed to grow more and more stupid as time went on. Ruin was fast approaching. Naturally, as indolence and poverty increased, so did lack of cleanliness. No one would ever have known that pretty blue shop in which Gervaise had formerly taken such pride. The windows were unwashed and covered with the mud scattered by the passing carriages. Within it was still more forlorn: the dampness of the steaming linen had ruined the paper; everything was covered with dust; the stove, which once had been kept so bright, was broken and battered. The long ironing table was covered with wine stains and grease, looking as if it had served a whole garrison. The atmosphere was loaded with a smell of cooking and of sour starch. But Gervaise was unconscious of it. She did not notice the torn and untidy paper and, having ceased to pay any attention to personal cleanliness, was hardly likely to spend her time in scrubbing the greasy floors. She allowed the dust to accumulate over everything and never lifted a finger to remove it. Her own comfort and tranquillity were now her first considerations.

Her debts were increasing, but they had ceased to give her any uneasiness. She was no longer honest or straightforward. She did not care whether she ever paid or not, so long as she got what she wanted. When one shop refused her more credit she opened an account next door. She owed something in every shop in the whole *Quartier*. She dared not pass the grocer or the baker in her own street and was compelled to make a lengthy circuit each time she went out. The tradespeople muttered and grumbled, and some went so far as to call her a thief and a swindler.

One evening the man who had sold her the furniture for Lantier's room came in with ugly threats.

Such scenes were unquestionably disagreeable. She trembled for an hour after them, but they never took away her appetite.

It was very stupid of these people, after all, she said to Lantier. How could she pay them if she had no money? And where could she get money? She closed her eyes to the inevitable and would not think of the future. Mamma Coupeau was well again, but the household had been disorganized for more than a year. In summer there was more work brought to the shop—white skirts and cambric dresses. There were ups and downs, therefore: days when there was nothing in the house for supper and others when the table was loaded.

Mamma Coupeau was seen almost daily, going out with a bundle under her apron and returning without it and with a radiant face, for the old woman liked the excitement of going to the Mont-de-Piété.

Gervaise was gradually emptying the house—linen and clothes, tools and furniture. In the beginning she took advantage of a good week to take out what she had pawned the week before, but after a while she ceased to do that and sold her tickets. There was only one thing which cost her a pang, and that was selling her clock. She had sworn she would not touch it, not unless she was dying of hunger, and when at last she saw her mother-in-law carry it away she dropped into a chair and wept like a baby. But when the old woman came back with twenty-five francs

and she found she had five francs more than was demanded by the pressing debt which had caused her to make the sacrifice, she was consoled and sent out at once for four sous' worth of brandy. When these two women were on good terms they often drank a glass together, sitting at the corner of the ironing table.

Mamma Coupeau had a wonderful talent for bringing a glass in the pocket of her apron without spilling a drop. She did not care to have the neighbors know, but, in good truth, the neighbors knew very well and laughed and sneered as the old woman went in and out.

This, as was natural and right, increased the prejudice against Gervaise. Everyone said that things could not go on much longer; the end was near.

Amid all this ruin Coupeau thrived surprisingly. Bad liquor seemed to affect him agreeably. His appetite was good in spite of the amount he drank, and he was growing stout. Lantier, however, shook his head, declaring that it was not honest flesh and that he was bloated. But Coupeau drank all the more after this statement and was rarely or ever sober. There began to be a strange bluish tone in his complexion. His spirits never flagged. He laughed at his wife when she told him of her embarrassments. What did he care, so long as she provided him with food to eat? And the longer he was idle, the more exacting he became in regard to this food.

He was ignorant of his wife's infidelity, at least, so all his friends declared. They believed, moreover, that were he to discover it there would be great trouble. But Mme Lerat, his own sister, shook her head doubtfully, averring that she was not so sure of his ignorance.

Lantier was also in good health and spirits, neither too stout nor too thin. He wished to remain just where he was, for he was thoroughly well satisfied with himself, and this made him critical in regard to his food, as he had made a study of the things he should eat and those he should avoid for the preservation of his figure. Even when there was not a cent he asked for eggs and cutlets: nourishing and light things were what he required, he said. He ruled Gervaise with a rod of iron, grumbled and found fault far more than Coupeau ever did. It was a house with two masters, one of whom, cleverer by far than the other, took the best of everything. He skimmed the Coupeaus, as it were, and kept all the cream for himself. He was fond of Nana because he liked girls better than boys. He troubled himself little about Etienne.

When people came and asked for Coupeau it was Lantier who appeared in his shirt sleeves with the air of the man of the house who is needlessly disturbed. He answered for Coupeau, said it was one and the same thing.

Gervaise did not find this life always smooth and agreeable. She had no reason to complain of her health. She had become very stout. But it was hard work to provide for and please these two men. When they came in, furious and out of temper, it was on her that they wreaked their rage. Coupeau abused her frightfully and called her by the coarsest epithets. Lantier, on the contrary, was more select in his phraseology, but his words cut her quite as deeply. Fortunately people become accustomed to almost everything in this world, and Gervaise soon ceased to care for the reproaches and injustice of these two men. She even preferred to have them out of temper with her, for then they let her alone in some degree; but when they were in a good humor they were all the time at her heels, and she could not find a leisure moment even to iron a cap, so constant were the demands they made upon her. They wanted her to do this and do that, to cook little dishes for them and wait upon them by inches.

One night she dreamed she was at the bottom of a well. Coupeau was pushing her down with his fists, and Lantier was tickling her to make her jump out quicker. And this, she thought, was a very fair picture of her life! She said that the people of the *Quartier* were very unjust, after all, when they reproached her for the way of life into which she had fallen. It was not her fault. It was not she who had done it, and a little shiver ran over her as she reflected that perhaps the worst was not yet.

The utter deterioration of her nature was shown by the fact that she detested neither her husband nor Lantier. In a play at the Gaite she had seen a woman hate her husband and poison him for the sake of her lover. This she thought very strange and unnatural. Why could the three not have lived together peaceably? It would have been much more reasonable!

In spite of her debts, in spite of the shifts to which her increasing poverty condemned her, Gervaise would have considered herself quite well off, but for the exacting selfishness of Lantier and Coupeau.

Toward autumn Lantier became more and more disgusted, declared he had nothing to live on but potato parings and that his health was suffering. He was enraged at seeing the house so thoroughly cleared out, and he felt that the day was not far off when he must take his hat and depart. He had become accustomed to his den, and he hated to leave it. He was thoroughly provoked that the extravagant habits of Gervaise necessitated this sacrifice on his part. Why could she not have shown more sense? He was sure he didn't know what would become of them. Could they have struggled on six months longer, he could have concluded an affair which would have enabled him to support the whole family in comfort.

One day it came to pass that there was not a mouthful in the house, not even a radish. Lantier sat by the stove in somber discontent. Finally he started up and went to call on the Poissons, to whom he suddenly became friendly to a degree. He no longer taunted the police officer but condescended to admit that the emperor was a good fellow after all. He showed himself especially civil to Virginie, whom he considered a clever woman and well able to steer her bark through stormy seas.

Virginie one day happened to say in his presence that she should like to establish herself in some business. He approved the plan and paid her a succession of adroit compliments on her capabilities and cited the example of several women he knew who had made or were making their fortunes in this way.

Virginie had the money, an inheritance from an aunt, but she hesitated, for she did not wish to leave the *Quartier* and she did not know of any shop she could have. Then Lantier led her into a corner and whispered to her for ten minutes; he seemed to be persuading her to something. They continued to talk together in this way at intervals for several days, seeming to have some secret understanding.

Lantier all this time was fretting and scolding at the Coupeaus, asking Gervaise what on earth she intended to do, begging her to look things fairly in the face. She owed five or six hundred francs to the tradespeople about her. She was behindhand with her rent, and Marescot, the landlord, threatened to turn her out if they did not pay before the first of January.

The Mont-de-Piété had taken everything; there was literally nothing but the nails in the walls left. What did she mean to do?

Gervaise listened to all this at first listlessly, but she grew angry at last and cried out:

"Look here! I will go away tomorrow and leave the key in the door. I had rather sleep in the gutter than live in this way!"

"And I can't say that it would not be a wise thing for you to do!" answered Lantier insidiously. "I might possibly assist you to find someone to take the lease off your hands whenever you really conclude to leave the shop."

"I am ready to leave it at once!" cried Gervaise violently. "I am sick and tired of it."

Then Lantier became serious and businesslike. He spoke openly of Virginie, who, he said, was looking for a shop; in fact, he now remembered having heard her say that she would like just such a one as this.

But Gervaise shrank back and grew strangely calm at this name of Virginie.

She would see, she said; on the whole, she must have time to think. People said a great many things when they were angry, which on reflection were found not to be advisable.

Lantier rang the changes on this subject for a week, but Gervaise said she had decided to employ some woman and go to work again, and if she were not able to get back her old customers she could try for new ones. She said this merely to show Lantier that she was not so utterly downcast and crushed as he had seemed to take for granted was the case.

He was reckless enough to drop the name of Virginie once more, and she turned upon him in a rage.

"No, no, never!" She had always distrusted Virginie, and if she wanted the shop it was only to humiliate her. Any other woman might have it, but not this hypocrite, who had been waiting for years to gloat over her downfall. No, she understood now only too well the meaning of the yellow sparks in her cat's eyes. It was clear to her that Virginie had never forgotten the scene in the lavatory, and if she did not look out there would be a repetition of it.

Lantier stood aghast at this anger and this torrent of words, but presently he plucked up courage and bade her hold her tongue and told her she should not talk of his friends in that way. As for himself, he was sick and tired of other people's affairs; in future he would let them all take care of themselves, without a word of counsel from him.

January arrived, cold and damp. Mamma Coupeau took to her bed with a violent cold which she expected each year at this time. But those about her said she would never leave the house again, except feet first.

Her children had learned to look forward to her death as a happy deliverance for all. The physician who came once was not sent for again. A little tisane was given her from time to time that she might not feel herself utterly neglected. She was just alive; that was all. It now became a mere question of time with her, but her brain was clear still, and in the expression of her eyes there were many things to be read—sorrow at seeing no sorrow in those she left behind her and anger against Nana, who was utterly indifferent to her.

One Monday evening Coupeau came in as tipsy as usual and threw himself on the bed, all dressed. Gervaise intended to remain with her mother-in-law part of the night, but Nana was very brave and said she would hear if her grandmother moved and wanted anything.

About half-past three Gervaise woke with a start; it seemed to her that a cold blast had swept through the room. Her candle had burned down, and she nastily wrapped a shawl around her with trembling hands and hurried into the next room. Nana was sleeping quietly, and her grandmother was dead in the bed at her side.

Gervaise went to Lantier and waked him.

"She is dead," she said.

"Well, what of it?" he muttered, half asleep. "Why don't you go to sleep?"

She turned away in silence while he grumbled at her coming to disturb him by the intelligence of a death in the house.

Gervaise dressed herself, not without tears, for she really loved the cross old woman whose son lay in the heavy slumbers of intoxication.

When she went back to the room she found Nana sitting up and rubbing her eyes. The child realized what had come to pass and trembled nervously in the face of this death of which she had thought much in the last two days, as of something which was hidden from children.

"Get up!" said her mother in a low voice. "I do not wish you to stay here."

The child slipped from her bed slowly and regretfully, with her eyes fixed on the dead body of her grandmother.

Gervaise did not know what to do with her or where to send her. At this moment Lantier appeared at the door. He had dressed himself, impelled by a little shame at his own conduct.

"Let the child go into my room," he said, "and I will help you."

Nana looked first at her mother and then at Lantier and then trotted with her little bare feet into the next room and slipped into the bed that was still warm.

She lay there wide awake with blazing cheeks and eyes and seemed to be absorbed in thought.

While Lantier and Gervaise were silently occupied with the dead Coupeau lay and snored.

Gervaise hunted in a bureau to find a little crucifix which she had brought from Plassans, when she suddenly remembered that Mamma Coupeau had sold it. They each took a glass of wine and sat by the stove until daybreak.

About seven o'clock Coupeau woke. When he heard what had happened he declared they were jesting. But when he saw the body he fell on his knees and wept like a baby. Gervaise was touched by these tears and found her heart softer toward her husband than it had been for many a long year.

"Courage, old friend!" said Lantier, pouring out a glass of wine as he spoke.

Coupeau took some wine, but he continued to weep, and Lantier went off under pretext of informing the family, but he did not hurry. He walked along slowly, smoking a cigar, and after he had been to Mme Lerat's he stopped in at a *crèmerie* to take a cup of coffee, and there he sat for an hour or more in deep thought.

By nine o'clock the family were assembled in the shop, whose shutters had not been taken down. Lorilleux only remained for a few moments

and then went back to his shop. Mme Lorilleux shed a few tears and then sent Nana to buy a pound of candles.

"How like Gervaise!" she murmured. "She can do nothing in a proper way!"

Mme Lerat went about among the neighbors to borrow a crucifix. She brought one so large that when it was laid on the breast of Mamma Coupeau the weight seemed to crush her.

Then someone said something about holy water, so Nana was sent to the church with a bottle. The room assumed a new aspect. On a small table burned a candle, near it a glass of holy water in which was a branch of box.

"Everything is in order," murmured the sisters; "people can come now as soon as they please."

Lantier made his appearance about eleven. He had been to make inquiries in regard to funeral expenses.

"The coffin," he said, "is twelve francs, and if you want a Mass, ten francs more. A hearse is paid for according to its ornaments."

"You must remember," said Mme Lorilleux with compressed lips, "that Mamma must be buried according to her purse."

"Precisely!" answered Lantier. "I only tell you this as your guide. Decide what you want, and after breakfast I will go and attend to it all."

He spoke in a low voice, oppressed by the presence of the dead. The children were laughing in the courtyard and Nana singing loudly.

Gervaise said gently:

"We are not rich, to be sure, but we wish to do what she would have liked. If Mamma Coupeau has left us nothing it was not her fault and no reason why we should bury her as if she were a dog. No, there must be a Mass and a hearse."

"And who will pay for it?" asked Mme Lorilleux. "We can't, for we lost much money last week, and I am quite sure you would find it hard work!"

Coupeau, when he was consulted, shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of profound indifference. Mme Lerat said she would pay her share.

"There are three of us," said Gervaise after a long calculation; "if we each pay thirty francs we can do it with decency."

But Mme Lorilleux burst out furiously:

"I will never consent to such folly. It is not that I care for the money, but I disapprove of the ostentation. You can do as you please."

"Very well," replied Gervaise, "I will. I have taken care of your mother while she was living; I can bury her now that she is dead."

Then Mme Lorilleux fell to crying, and Lantier had great trouble in preventing her from going away at once, and the quarrel grew so violent that Mme Lerat hastily closed the door of the room where the dead woman lay, as if she feared the noise would waken her. The children's voices rose shrill in the air with Nana's perpetual "Tra-la-la" above all the rest.

"Heavens, how wearisome those children are with their songs," said Lantier. "Tell them to be quiet, and make Nana come in and sit down."

Gervaise obeyed these dictatorial orders while her sisters-in-law went home to breakfast, while the Coupeaus tried to eat, but they were made uncomfortable by the presence of death in their crowded quarters. The details of their daily life were disarranged.

Gervaise went to Goujet and borrowed sixty francs, which, added to thirty from Mme Lerat, would pay the expenses of the funeral. In the afternoon several persons came in and looked at the dead woman, crossing themselves as they did so and shaking holy water over the body with the branch of box. They then took their seats in the shop and talked of the poor thing and of her many virtues. One said she had talked with her only three days before, and another asked if it were not possible it was a trance.

By evening the Coupeaus felt it was more than they could bear. It was a mistake to keep a body so long. One has, after all, only so many tears to shed, and that done, grief turns to worry. Mamma Coupeau—stiff and cold—was a terrible weight on them all. They gradually lost the sense of oppression, however, and spoke louder.

After a while M. Marescot appeared. He went to the inner room and knelt at the side of the corpse. He was very religious, they saw. He made a sign of the cross in the air and dipped the branch into the holy water and sprinkled the body. M. Marescot, having finished his devotions, passed out into the shop and said to Coupeau:

"I came for the two quarters that are due. Have you got the money for me?"

"No sir, not entirely," said Gervaise, coming forward, excessively annoyed at this scene taking place in the presence of her sisters-in-law. "You see, this trouble came upon us—"

"Undoubtedly," answered her landlord; "but we all of us have our troubles. I cannot wait any longer. I really must have the money. If I am not paid by tomorrow I shall most assuredly take immediate measures to turn you out."

Gervaise clasped her hands imploringly, but he shook his head, saying that discussion was useless; besides, just then it would be a disrespect to the dead.

"A thousand pardons!" he said as he went out. "But remember that I must have the money tomorrow."

And as he passed the open door of the lighted room he saluted the corpse with another genuflection.

After he had gone the ladies gathered around the stove, where a great pot of coffee stood, enough to keep them all awake for the whole night. The Poissons arrived about eight o'clock; then Lantier, carefully watching Gervaise, began to speak of the disgraceful act committed by the landlord in coming to a house to collect money at such a time.

"He is a thorough hypocrite," continued Lantier, "and were I in Madame Coupeau's place, I would walk off and leave his house on his hands."

Gervaise heard but did not seem to heed.

The Lorilleuxs, delighted at the idea that she would lose her shop, declared that Lantier's idea was an excellent one. They gave Coupeau a push and repeated it to him.

Gervaise seemed to be disposed to yield, and then Virginie spoke in the blandest of tones.

"I will take the lease off your hands," she said, "and will arrange the back rent with your landlord."

"No, no! Thank you," cried Gervaise, shaking off the lethargy in which she had been wrapped. "I can manage this matter and I can work. No, no, I say."

Lantier interposed and said soothingly:

"Never mind! We will talk of it another time—tomorrow, possibly."

The family were to sit up all night. Nana cried vociferously when she was sent into the Boche quarters to sleep; the Poissons remained until midnight. Virginia began to talk of the country: she would like to be buried under a tree with flowers and grass on her grave. Mme Lerat said that in her wardrobe—folded up in lavender—was the linen sheet in which her body was to be wrapped.

When the Poissons went away Lantier accompanied them in order, he said, to leave his bed for the ladies, who could take turns in sleeping there. But the ladies preferred to remain together about the stove.

Mme Lorilleux said she had no black dress, and it was too bad that she must buy one, for they were sadly pinched just at this time. And she asked Gervaise if she was sure that her mother had not a black skirt which would do, one that had been given her on her birthday. Gervaise went for the skirt. Yes, it would do if it were taken in at the waist.

Then Mme Lorilleux looked at the bed and the wardrobe and asked if there was nothing else belonging to her mother.

Here Mme Lerat interfered. The Coupeaus, she said, had taken care of her mother, and they were entitled to all the trifles she had left. The night seemed endless. They drank coffee and went by turns to look at the body, lying silent and calm under the flickering light of the candle.

The interment was to take place at half-past ten, but Gervaise would gladly have given a hundred francs, if she had had them, to anyone who would have taken Mamma Coupeau away three hours before the time fixed.

"Ah," she said to herself, "it is no use to disguise the fact: people are very much in the way after they are dead, no matter how much you have loved them!"

Father Bazonge, who was never known to be sober, appeared with the coffin and the pall. When he saw Gervaise he stood with his eyes starting from his head.

"I beg you pardon," he said, "but I thought it was for you," and he was turning to go away.

"Leave the coffin!" cried Gervaise, growing very pale. Bazonge began

to apologize:

"I heard them talking yesterday, but I did not pay much attention. I congratulate you that you are still alive. Though why I do, I do not know, for life is not such a very agreeable thing."

Gervaise listened with a shiver of horror and a morbid dread that he would take her away and shut her up in his box and bury her. She had once heard him say that he knew a woman who would be only too thankful if he would do exactly that.

"He is horribly drunk," she murmured in a tone of mingled disgust and terror.

"It will come for you another time," he said with a laugh; "you have only to make me a little sign. I am a great consolation to women sometimes, and you need not sneer at poor Father Bazonge, for he has held many a fine lady in his arms, and they made no complaint when he laid them down to sleep in the shade of the evergreens."

"Do hold your tongue," said Lorilleux; "this is no time for such talk. Be off with you!"

The clock struck ten. The friends and neighbors had assembled in the shop while the family were in the back room, nervous and feverish with suspense.

Four men appeared—the undertaker, Bazonge and his three assistants placed the body in the coffin. Bazonge held the screws in his mouth and waited for the family to take their last farewell.

Then Coupeau, his two sisters and Gervaise kissed their mother, and their tears fell fast on her cold face. The lid was put on and fastened down.

The hearse was at the door to the great edification of the tradespeople of the neighborhood, who said under their breath that the Coupeaus had best pay their debts.

"It is shameful," Gervaise was saying at the same moment, speaking of the Lorilleuxs. "These people have not even brought a bouquet of violets for their mother."

It was true they had come empty-handed, while Mme Lerat had brought a wreath of artificial flowers which was laid on the bier.

Coupeau and Lorilleux, with their hats in their hands, walked at the head of the procession of men. After them followed the ladies, headed by Mme Lorilleux in her black skirt, wrenched from the dead, her sister trying to cover a purple dress with a large black shawl.

Gervaise had lingered behind to close the shop and give Nana into the charge of Mme Boche and then ran to overtake the procession, while the little girl stood with the concierge, profoundly interested in seeing her grandmother carried in that beautiful carriage.

Just as Gervaise joined the procession Goujet came up a side street and saluted her with a slight bow and with a faint sweet smile. The tears rushed to her eyes. She did not weep for Mamma Coupeau but rather for herself, but her sisters-in-law looked at her as if she were the greatest hypocrite in the world.

At the church the ceremony was of short duration. The Mass dragged a little because the priest was very old.

The cemetery was not far off, and the cortege soon reached it. A priest came out of a house near by and shivered as he saw his breath rise with each *De Profundis* he uttered.

The coffin was lowered, and as the frozen earth fell upon it more tears were shed, accompanied, however, by sigh of relief.

The procession dispersed outside the gates of the cemetery, and at the very first cabaret Coupeau turned in, leaving Gervaise alone on the sidewalk. She beckoned to Goujet, who was turning the corner.

"I want to speak to you," she said timidly. "I want to tell you how ashamed I am for coming to you again to borrow money, but I was at my wit's end."

"I am always glad to be of use to you," answered the blacksmith. "But pray never allude to the matter before my mother, for I do not wish to trouble her. She and I think differently on many subjects."

She looked at him sadly and earnestly. Through her mind flitted a vague regret that she had not done as he desired, that she had not gone away with him somewhere. Then a vile temptation assailed her. She trembled.

"You are not angry now?" she said entreatingly.

"No, not angry, but still heartsick. All is over between us now and forever." And he walked off with long strides, leaving Gervaise stunned

by his words.

"All is over between us!" she kept saying to herself. "And what more is there for me then in life?"

She sat down in her empty, desolate room and drank a large tumbler of wine. When the others came in she looked up suddenly and said to Virginie gently:

"If you want the shop, take it!"

Virginie and her husband jumped at this and sent for the concierge, who consented to the arrangement on condition that the new tenants would become security for the two quarters then due.

This was agreed upon. The Coupeaus would take a room on the sixth floor near the Lorilleuxs. Lantier said politely that if it would not be disagreeable to the Poissons he should like much to retain his present quarters.

The policeman bowed stiffly but with every intention of being cordial and said he decidedly approved of the idea.

Then Lantier withdrew from the discussion entirely, watching Gervaise and Virginie out of the corners of his eyes.

That evening when Gervaise was alone again she felt utterly exhausted. The place looked twice its usual size. It seemed to her that in leaving Mamma Coupeau in the quiet cemetery she had also left much that was precious to her, a portion of her own life, her pride in her shop, her hopes and her energy. These were not all, either, that she had buried that day. Her heart was as bare and empty as her walls and her home. She was too weary to try and analyze her sensations but moved about as if in a dream.

At ten o'clock, when Nana was undressed, she wept, begging that she might be allowed to sleep in her grandmother's bed. Her mother vaguely wondered that the child was not afraid and allowed her to do as she pleased.

Nana was not timid by nature, and only her curiosity, not her fears, had been excited by the events of the last three days, and she curled herself up with delight in the soft, warm feather bed.

CHAPTER X
DISASTERS AND CHANGES

The new lodging of the Coupeaus was next that of the Bijards. Almost opposite their door was a closet under the stairs which went up to the roof—a mere hole without light or ventilation, where Father Bru slept.

A chamber and a small room, about as large as one's hand, were all the Coupeaus had now. Nana's little bed stood in the small room, the door of which had to be left open at night, lest the child should stifle.

When it came to the final move Gervaise felt that she could not separate from the commode which she had spent so much time in polishing when first married and insisted on its going to their new quarters, where it was much in the way and stopped up half the window, and when Gervaise wished to look out into the court she had not room for her elbows.

The first few days she spent in tears. She felt smothered and cramped; after having had so much room to move about in it seemed to her that she was smothering. It was only at the window she could breathe. The courtyard was not a place calculated to inspire cheerful thoughts. Opposite her was the window which years before had elicited her admiration, where every successive summer scarlet beans had grown to a fabulous height on slender strings. Her room was on the shady side, and a pot of mignonette would die in a week on her sill.

No, life had not been what she hoped, and it was all very hard to bear.

Instead of flowers to solace her declining years she would have but thorns. One day as she was looking down into the court she had the strangest feeling imaginable. She seemed to see herself standing just near the loge of the concierge, looking up at the house and examining it for the first time.

This glimpse of the past made her feel faint. It was at least thirteen years since she had first seen this huge building—this world within a world. The court had not changed. The facade was simply more dingy. The same clothes seemed to be hanging at the windows to dry. Below there were the shavings from the cabinetmaker's shop, and the gutter glittered with blue water, as blue and soft in tone as the water she remembered.

But she—alas, how changed was she! She no longer looked up to the sky. She was no longer hopeful, courageous and ambitious. She was living under the very roof in crowded discomfort, where never a ray of sunshine could reach her, and her tears fell fast in utter discouragement.

Nevertheless, when Gervaise became accustomed to her new surroundings she grew more content. The pieces of furniture she had sold to Virginie had facilitated her installation. When the fine weather came Coupeau had an opportunity of going into the country to work. He went and lived three months without drinking—cured for the time being by the fresh, pure air. It does a man sometimes an infinite deal of good to be taken away from all his old haunts and from Parisian streets, which always seem to exhale a smell of brandy and of wine.

He came back as fresh as a rose, and he brought four hundred francs with which he paid the Poissons the amount for which they had become security as well as several other small but pressing debts. Gervaise had now two or three streets open to her again, which for some time she had not dared to enter.

She now went out to iron by the day and had gone back to her old mistress, Mme Fauconnier, who was a kindhearted creature and ready to do anything for anyone who flattered her adroitly.

With diligence and economy Gervaise could have managed to live comfortably and pay all her debts, but this prospect did not charm her particularly. She suffered acutely in seeing the Poissons in her old shop. She was by no means of a jealous or envious disposition, but it was not agreeable to her to hear the admiration expressed for her successors by her husband's sisters. To hear them one would suppose that never had so beautiful a shop been seen before. They spoke of the filthy condition of the place when Virginie moved in—who had paid, they declared, thirty francs for cleaning it.

Virginie, after some hesitation, had decided on a small stock of groceries—sugar, tea and coffee, also bonbons and chocolate. Lantier had advised these because he said the profit on them was immense. The shop was repainted, and shelves and cases were put in, and a counter with scales such as are seen at confectioners'. The little inheritance that

Poisson held in reserve was seriously encroached upon. But Virginie was triumphant, for she had her way, and the Lorilleuxs did not spare Gervaise the description of a case or a jar.

It was said in the street that Lantier had deserted Gervaise, that she gave him no peace running after him, but this was not true, for he went and came to her apartment as he pleased. Scandal was connecting his name and Virginie's. They said Virginie had taken the clearstarcher's lover as well as her shop! The Lorilleuxs talked of nothing when Gervaise was present but Lantier, Virginie and the shop. Fortunately Gervaise was not inclined to jealousy, and Lantier's infidelities had hitherto left her undisturbed, but she did not accept this new affair with equal tranquillity. She colored or turned pale as she heard these allusions, but she would not allow a word to pass her lips, as she was fully determined never to gratify her enemies by allowing them to see her discomfiture; but a dispute was heard by the neighbors about this time between herself and Lantier, who went angrily away and was not seen by anyone in the Coupeau quarters for more than a fortnight.

Coupeau behaved very oddly. This blind and complacent husband, who had closed his eyes to all that was going on at home, was filled with virtuous indignation at Lantier's indifference. Then Coupeau went so far as to tease Gervaise in regard to this desertion of her lovers. She had had bad luck, he said, with hatters and blacksmiths—why did she not try a mason?

He said this as if it were a joke, but Gervaise had a firm conviction that he was in deadly earnest. A man who is tipsy from one year's end to the next is not apt to be fastidious, and there are husbands who at twenty are very jealous and at thirty have grown very complacent under the influence of constant tippling.

Lantier preserved an attitude of calm indifference. He kept the peace between the Poissons and the Coupeaus. Thanks to him, Virginie and Gervaise affected for each other the most tender regard. He ruled the brunette as he had ruled the blonde, and he would swallow her shop as he had that of Gervaise.

It was in June of this year that Nana partook of her first Communion. She was about thirteen, slender and tall as an asparagus plant, and her air and manner were the height of impertinence and audacity.

She had been sent away from the catechism class the year before on account of her bad conduct. And if the curé did not make a similar objection this year it was because he feared she would never come again and that his refusal would launch on the Parisian *pavé* another castaway.

Nana danced with joy at the mere thought of what the Lorilleuxs—as her godparents—had promised, while Mme Lerat gave the veil and cup, Virginie the purse and Lantier a prayer book, so that the Coupeaus looked forward to the day without anxiety.

The Poissons—probably through Lantier's advice—selected this occasion for their housewarming. They invited the Coupeaus and the Boche family, as Pauline made her first Communion on that day, as well as Nana.

The evening before, while Nana stood in an ecstasy of delight before her presents, her father came in in an abominable condition. His virtuous resolutions had yielded to the air of Paris; he had fallen into evil ways again, and he now assailed his wife and child with the vilest epithets, which did not seem to shock Nana, for they could fall from her tongue on occasion with facile glibness.

"I want my soup," cried Coupeau, "and you two fools are chattering over those fal-lals! I tell you, I will sit on them if I am not waited upon, and quickly too."

Gervaise answered impatiently, but Nana, who thought it better taste just then—all things considered—to receive with meekness all her father's abuse, dropped her eyes and did not reply.

"Take that rubbish away!" he cried with growing impatience. "Put it out of my sight or I will tear it to bits."

Nana did not seem to hear him. She took up the tulle cap and asked her mother what it cost, and when Coupeau tried to snatch the cap Gervaise pushed him away.

"Let the child alone!" she said. "She is doing no harm!"

Then her husband went into a perfect rage:

"Mother and daughter," he cried, "a nice pair they make. I understand very well what all this row is for: it is merely to show yourself in a new gown. I will put you in a bag and tie it close round your throat, and you will see if the curé likes that!"

Nana turned like lightning to protect her treasures. She looked her father full in the face, and, forgetting the lessons taught her by her priest, she said in a low, concentrated voice:

"Beast!" That was all.

After Coupeau had eaten his soup he fell asleep and in the morning woke quite amiable. He admired his daughter and said she looked quite like a young lady in her white robe. Then he added with a sentimental air that a father on such days was naturally proud of his child. When they were ready to go to the church and Nana met Pauline in the corridor, she examined the latter from head to foot and smiled condescendingly on seeing that Pauline had not a particle of chic.

The two families started off together, Nana and Pauline in front, each with her prayer book in one hand and with the other holding down her veil, which swelled in the wind like a sail. They did not speak to each other but keenly enjoyed seeing the shopkeepers run to their doors to see them, keeping their eyes cast down devoutly but their ears wide open to any compliment they might hear.

Nana's two aunts walked side by side, exchanging their opinions in regard to Gervaise, whom they stigmatized as an irreligious ne'er-do-well whose child would never have gone to the Holy Communion if it had depended on her.

At the church Coupeau wept all the time. It was very silly, he knew, but he could not help it. The voice of the curé was pathetic; the little girls looked like white-robed angels; the organ thrilled him, and the incense gratified his senses. There was one especial anthem which touched him deeply. He was not the only person who wept, he was glad to see, and when the ceremony was over he left the church feeling that it was the happiest day of his life. But an hour later he quarreled with Lorilleux in a wineshop because the latter was so hardhearted.

The housewarming at the Poissons' that night was very gay. Lantier sat between Gervaise and Virginie and was equally civil and attentive to both. Opposite was Poisson with his calm, impassive face, a look he had cultivated since he began his career as a police officer.

But the queens of the fete were the two little girls, Nana and Pauline, who sat very erect lest they should crush and deface their pretty white dresses. At dessert there was a serious discussion in regard to the future of the children. Mme Boche said that Pauline would at once enter a certain manufactory, where she would receive five or six francs per week. Gervaise had not decided yet, for Nana had shown no especial leaning in any direction. She had a good deal of taste, but she was butter-fingered and careless.

"I should make a florist of her," said Mme Lerat. "It is clean work and pretty work too."

Whereupon ensued a warm discussion. The men were especially careful of their language out of deference to the little girls, but Mme Lerat would not accept the lesson: she flattered herself she could say what she pleased in such a way that it could not offend the most fastidious ears.

Women, she declared, who followed her trade were more virtuous than others. They rarely made a slip.

"I have no objection to your trade," interrupted Gervaise. "If Nana likes to make flowers let her do so. Say, Nana, would you like it?"

The little girl did not look up from her plate, into which she was dipping a crust of bread. She smiled faintly as she replied:

"Yes, Mamma; if you desire it I have no objection."

The decision was instantly made, and Coupeau wished his sister to take her the very next day to the place where she herself worked, Rue du Caire, and the circle talked gravely of the duties of life. Boche said that Pauline and Nana were now women, since they had been to Communion, and they ought to be serious and learn to cook and to mend. They alluded to their future marriages, their homes and their children, and the girls touched each other under the table, giggled and grew very red. Lantier asked them if they did not have little husbands already, and Nana blushingly confessed that she loved Victor Fauconnier and never meant to marry anyone else.

Mme Lorilleux said to Mme Boche on their way home:

"Nana is our goddaughter now, but if she goes into that flower business, in six months she will be on the *pavé*, and we will have nothing to do with her."

Gervaise told Boche that she thought the shop admirably arranged. She had looked forward to an evening of torture and was surprised that

she had not experienced a pang.

Nana, as she undressed, asked her mother if the girl on the next floor, who had been married the week before, wore a dress of muslin like hers.

But this was the last bright day in that household. Two years passed away, and their prospects grew darker and their demoralization and degradation more evident. They went without food and without fire, but never without brandy.

They found it almost impossible to meet their rent, and a certain January came when they had not a penny, and Father Boche ordered them to leave.

It was frightfully cold, with a sharp wind blowing from the north.

M. Marescot appeared in a warm overcoat and his hands encased in warm woolen gloves and told them they must go, even if they slept in the gutter. The whole house was oppressed with woe, and a dreary sound of lamentation arose from most of the rooms, for half the tenants were behindhand. Gervaise sold her bed and paid the rent. Nana made nothing as yet, and Gervaise had so fallen off in her work that Mme Fauconnier had reduced her wages. She was irregular in her hours and often absented herself from the shop for several days together but was none the less vexed to discover that her old employee, Mme Putois, had been placed above her. Naturally at the end of the week Gervaise had little money coming to her.

As to Coupeau, if he worked he brought no money home, and his wife had ceased to count upon it. Sometimes he declared he had lost it through a hole in his pocket or it had been stolen, but after a while he ceased to make any excuses.

But if he had no cash in his pockets it was because he had spent it all in drink. Mme Boche advised Gervaise to watch for him at the door of the place where he was employed and get his wages from him before he had spent them all, but this did no good, as Coupeau was warned by his friends and escaped by a rear door.

The Coupeaus were entirely to blame for their misfortunes, but this is just what people will never admit. It is always ill luck or the cruelty of God or anything, in short, save the legitimate result of their own vices.

Gervaise now quarreled with her husband incessantly. The warmth of affection of husband and wife, of parents for their children and children for their parents had fled and left them all shivering, each apart from the other.

All three, Coupeau, Gervaise and Nana, watched each other with eyes of baleful hate. It seemed as if some spring had broken—the great mainspring that binds families together.

Gervaise did not shudder when she saw her husband lying drunk in the gutter. She would not have pushed him in, to be sure, but if he were out of the way it would be a good thing for everybody. She even went so far as to say one day in a fit of rage that she would be glad to see him brought home on a shutter. Of what good was he to any human being? He ate and he drank and he slept. His child learned to hate him, and she read the accidents in the papers with the feelings of an unnatural daughter. What a pity it was that her father had not been the man who was killed when that omnibus tipped over!

In addition to her own sorrows and privations, Gervaise, whose heart was not yet altogether hard, was condemned to hear now of the sufferings of others. The corner of the house in which she lived seemed to be consecrated to those who were as poor as herself. No smell of cooking filled the air, which, on the contrary, was laden with the shrill cries of hungry children, heavy with the sighs of weary, heartbroken mothers and with the oaths of drunken husbands and fathers.

Gervaise pitied Father Bru from the bottom of her heart; he lay the greater part of the time rolled up in the straw in his den under the staircase leading to the roof. When two or three days elapsed without his showing himself someone opened the door and looked in to see if he were still alive.

Yes, he was living; that is, he was not dead. When Gervaise had bread she always remembered him. If she had learned to hate men because of her husband her heart was still tender toward animals, and Father Bru seemed like one to her. She regarded him as a faithful old dog. Her heart was heavy within her whenever she thought of him, alone, abandoned by God and man, dying by inches or drying, rather, as an orange dries on the chimney piece.

Gervaise was also troubled by the vicinity of the undertaker Bazonge—a wooden partition alone separated their rooms. When he came in at

night she could hear him throw down his glazed hat, which fell with a dull thud, like a shovelful of clay, on the table. The black cloak hung against the wall rustled like the wings of some huge bird of prey. She could hear his every movement, and she spent most of her time listening to him with morbid horror, while he—all unconscious—hummed his vulgar songs and tipsily staggered to his bed, under which the poor woman's sick fancy pictured a dead body concealed.

She had read in some paper a dismal tale of some undertaker who took home with him coffin after coffin—children's coffins—in order to make one trip to the cemetery suffice. When she heard his step the whole corridor was pervaded to her senses with the odor of dead humanity.

She would as lief have resided at Père-Lachaise and watched the moles at their work. The man terrified her; his incessant laughter dismayed her. She talked of moving but at the same time was reluctant to do so, for there was a strange fascination about Bazonge after all. Had he not told her once that he would come for her and lay her down to sleep in the shadow of waving branches, where she would know neither hunger nor toil?

She wished she could try it for a month. And she thought how delicious it would be in midwinter, just at the time her quarter's rent was due. But, alas, this was not possible! The rest and the sleep must be eternal; this thought chilled her, and her longing for death faded away before the unrelenting severity of the bonds exacted by Mother Earth.

One night she was sick and feverish, and instead of throwing herself out of the window as she was tempted to do, she rapped on the partition and called loudly:

"Father Bazonge! Father Bazonge!"

The undertaker was kicking off his slippers, singing a vulgar song as he did so.

"What is the matter?" he answered.

But at his voice Gervaise awoke as from a nightmare. What had she done? Had she really tapped? she asked herself, and she recoiled from his side of the wall in chill horror. It seemed to her that she felt the undertaker's hands on her head. No! No! She was not ready. She told herself that she had not intended to call him. It was her elbow that had knocked the wall accidentally, and she shivered from head to foot at the idea of being carried away in this man's arms.

"What is the matter?" repeated Bazonge. "Can I serve you in any way, madame?"

"No! No! It is nothing!" answered the laundress in a choked voice. "I am very much obliged."

While the undertaker slept she lay wide awake, holding her breath and not daring to move, lest he should think she called him again.

She said to herself that under no circumstances would she ever appeal to him for assistance, and she said this over and over again with the vain hope of reassuring herself, for she was by no means at ease in her mind.

Gervaise had before her a noble example of courage and fortitude in the Bijard family. Little Lalie, that tiny child—about as big as a pinch of salt—swept and kept her room like wax; she watched over the two younger children with all the care and patience of a mother. This she had done since her father had kicked her mother to death. She had entirely assumed that mother's place, even to receiving the blows which had fallen formerly on that poor woman. It seemed to be a necessity of his nature that when he came home drunk he must have some woman to abuse. Lalie was too small, he grumbled; one blow of his fist covered her whole face, and her skin was so delicate that the marks of his five fingers would remain on her cheek for days!

He would fly at her like a wolf at a poor little kitten for the merest trifle. Lalie never answered, never rebelled and never complained. She merely tried to shield her face and suppressed all shrieks, lest the neighbors should come; her pride could not endure that. When her father was tired kicking her about the room she lay where he left her until she had strength to rise, and then she went steadily about her work, washing the children and making her soup, sweeping and dusting until everything was clean. It was a part of her plan of life to be beaten every day.

Gervaise had conceived a strong affection for this little neighbor. She treated her like a woman who knew something of life. It must be admitted that Lalie was large for her years. She was fair and pale, with solemn eyes for her years and had a delicate mouth. To have heard her talk one would have thought her thirty. She could make and mend, and

she talked of the children as if she had herself brought them into the world. She made people laugh sometimes when she talked, but more often she brought tears to their eyes.

Gervaise did everything she could for her, gave her what she could and helped the energetic little soul with her work. One day she was altering a dress of Nana's for her, and when the child tried it on Gervaise was chilled with horror at seeing her whole back purple and bruised, the tiny arm bleeding—all the innocent flesh of childhood martyrized by the brute—her father.

Bazonge might get the coffin ready, she thought, for the little girl could not bear this long. But Lalie entreated her friend to say nothing, telling her that her father did not know what he was doing, that he had been drinking. She forgave him with her whole heart, for madmen must not be held accountable for their deeds. After that Gervaise was on the watch whenever she heard Bijard coming up the stairs. But she never caught him in any act of absolute brutality. Several times she had found Lalie tied to the foot of the bedstead—an idea that had entered her father's brain, no one knew why, a whim of his disordered brain, disordered by liquor, which probably arose from his wish to tyrannize over the child, even when he was no longer there.

Lalie sometimes was left there all day and once all night. When Gervaise insisted on untying her the child entreated her not to touch the knots, saying that her father would be furious if he found the knots had been tampered with.

And really, she said with an angelic smile, she needed rest, and the only thing that troubled her was not to be able to put the room in order. She could watch the children just as well, and she could think, so that her time was not entirely lost. When her father let her free, her sufferings were not over, for it was sometimes more than an hour before she could stand—before the blood circulated freely in her stiffened limbs.

Her father had invented another cheerful game. He heated some sous red hot on the stove and laid them on the chimney piece. He then summoned Lalie and bade her go buy some bread. The child unsuspiciously took up the sous, uttered a little shriek and dropped them, shaking her poor burned fingers.

Then he would go off in a rage. What did she mean by such nonsense? She had thrown away the money and lost it, and he threatened her with a hiding if she did not find the money instantly. The poor child hesitated; he gave her a cuff on the side of the head. With silent tears streaming down her cheeks she would pick up the sous and toss them from hand to hand to cool them as she went down the long flights of stairs.

There was no limit to the strange ingenuity of the man. One afternoon, for example, Lalie had completed playing with the children. The window was open, and the air shook the door so that it sounded like gentle raps.

"It is Mr Wind," said Lalie; "come in, Mr Wind. How are you today?"

And she made a low curtsy to Mr Wind. The children did the same in high glee, and she was quite radiant with happiness, which was not often the case.

"Come in, Mr Wind!" she repeated, but the door was pushed open by a rough hand and Bijard entered. Then a sudden change came over the scene. The two children crouched in a corner, while Lalie stood in the center of the floor, frozen stiff with terror, for Bijard held in his hand a new whip with a long and wicked-looking lash. He laid this whip on the bed and did not kick either one of the children but smiled in the most vicious way, showing his two lines of blackened, irregular teeth. He was very drunk and very noisy.

"What is the matter with you fools? Have you been struck dumb? I heard you all talking and laughing merrily enough before I came in. Where are your tongues now? Here! Take off my shoes!"

Lalie, considerably disheartened at not having received her customary kick, turned very pale as she obeyed. He was sitting on the side of the bed. He lay down without undressing and watched the child as she moved about the room. Troubled by this strange conduct, the child ended by breaking a cup. Then without disturbing himself he took up the whip and showed it to her.

"Look here, fool," he said grimly: "I bought this for you, and it cost me fifty sous, but I expect to get a good deal more than fifty sous' worth of good out of it. With this long lash I need not run about after you, for I can reach you in every corner of the room. You will break the cups, will you? Come, now, jump about a little and say good morning to Mr Wind again!"

He did not even sit up in the bed but, with his head buried in the

pillow, snapped the whip with a noise like that made by a postilion. The lash curled round Lalie's slender body; she fell to the floor, but he lashed her again and compelled her to rise.

"This is a very good thing," he said coolly, "and saves my getting chilled on cold mornings. Yes, I can reach you in that corner—and in that! Skip now! Skip!"

A light foam was on his lips, and his suffused eyes were starting from their sockets. Poor little Lalie darted about the room like a terrified bird, but the lash tingled over her shoulders, coiled around her slender legs and stung like a viper. She was like an India-rubber ball bounding from the floor, while her beast of a father laughed aloud and asked her if she had had enough.

The door opened and Gervaise entered. She had heard the noise. She stood aghast at the scene and then was seized with noble rage.

"Let her be!" she cried. "I will go myself and summon the police."

Bijard growled like an animal who is disturbed over his prey.

"Why do you meddle?" he exclaimed. "What business is it of yours?"

And with another adroit movement he cut Lalie across the face. The blood gushed from her lip. Gervaise snatched a chair and flew at the brute, but the little girl held her skirts and said it did not hurt much; it would be over soon, and she washed the blood away, speaking gently to the frightened children.

When Gervaise thought of Lalie she was ashamed to complain. She wished she had the courage of this child. She knew that she had lived on dry bread for weeks and that she was so weak she could hardly stand, and the tears came to the woman's eyes as she saw the precocious mite who had known nothing of the innocent happiness of her years. And Gervaise took this slender creature for example, whose eyes alone told the story of her misery and hardships, for in the Coupeau family the vitriol of the Assommoir was doing its work of destruction. Gervaise had seen a whip. Gervaise had learned to dread it, and this dread inspired her with tenderest pity for Lalie. Coupeau had lost the flesh and the bloated look which had been his, and he was thin and emaciated. His complexion was gradually acquiring a leaden hue. His appetite was utterly gone. It was with difficulty that he swallowed a mouthful of bread. His stomach turned against all solid food, but he took his brandy every day. This was his meat as well as his drink, and he touched nothing else.

When he crawled out of his bed in the morning he stood for a good fifteen minutes, coughing and spitting out a bitter liquid that rose in his throat and choked him.

He did not feel any better until he had taken what he called "a good drink," and later in the day his strength returned. He felt strange prickings in the skin of his hands and feet. But lately his limbs had grown heavy. This pricking sensation gave place to the most excruciating cramps, which he did not find very amusing. He rarely laughed now but often stopped short and stood still on the sidewalk, troubled by a strange buzzing in his ears and by flashes of light before his eyes. Everything looked yellow to him; the houses seemed to be moving away from him. At other times, when the sun was full on his back, he shivered as if a stream of ice water had been poured down between his shoulders. But the thing he liked the least about himself was a nervous trembling in his hands, the right hand especially.

Had he become an old woman then? he asked himself with sudden fury. He tried with all his strength to lift his glass and command his nerves enough to hold it steady. But the glass had a regular tremulous movement from right to left and left to right again, in spite of all his efforts.

Then he emptied it down his throat, saying that when he had swallowed a dozen more he would be all right and as steady as a monument. Gervaise told him, on the contrary, that he must leave off drinking if he wished to leave off trembling.

He grew very angry and drank quarts in his eagerness to test the question, finally declaring that it was the passing omnibusses that jarred the house and shook his hand.

In March Coupeau came in one night drenched to the skin. He had been caught out in a shower. That night he could not sleep for coughing. In the morning he had a high fever, and the physician who was sent for advised Gervaise to send him at once to the hospital.

And Gervaise made no objection; once she had refused to trust her husband to these people, but now she consigned him to their tender

mercies without a regret; in fact, she regarded it as a mercy.

Nevertheless, when the litter came she turned very pale and, if she had had even ten francs in her pocket, would have kept him at home. She walked to the hospital by the side of the litter and went into the ward where he was placed. The room looked to her like a miniature Père-Lachaise, with its rows of beds on either side and its path down the middle. She went slowly away, and in the street she turned and looked up. How well she remembered when Coupeau was at work on those gutters, cheerily singing in the morning air! He did not drink in those days, and she, at her window in the Hôtel Boncœur, had watched his athletic form against the sky, and both had waved their handkerchiefs. Yes, Coupeau had worked more than a year on this hospital, little thinking that he was preparing a place for himself. Now he was no longer on the roof—he had built a dismal nest within. Good God, was she and the once-happy wife and mother one and the same? How long ago those days seemed!

The next day when Gervaise went to make inquiries she found the bed empty. A sister explained that her husband had been taken to the asylum of Sainte-Anne, because the night before he had suddenly become unmanageable from delirium and had uttered such terrible howls that it disturbed the inmates of all the beds in that ward. It was the alcohol in his system, she said, which attacked his nerves now, when he was so reduced by the inflammation on his lungs that he could not resist it.

The clearstarcher went home, but how or by what route she never knew. Her husband was mad—she heard these words reverberating through her brain. Life was growing very strange. Nana simply said that he must, of course, be left at the asylum, for he might murder them both.

On Sunday only could Gervaise go to Sainte-Anne. It was a long distance off. Fortunately there was an omnibus which went very near. She got out at La Rue Sante and bought two oranges that she might not go quite empty-handed.

But when she went in, to her astonishment she found Coupeau sitting up. He welcomed her gaily.

"You are better!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, nearly well," he replied, and they talked together awhile, and she gave him the oranges, which pleased and touched him, for he was a different man now that he drank tisane instead of liquor. She did not dare allude to his delirium, but he spoke of it himself.

"Yes," he said, "I was in a pretty state! I saw rats running all over the floor and the walls, and you were calling me, and I saw all sorts of horrible things! But I am all right now. Once in a while I have a bad dream, but everybody does, I suppose."

Gervaise remained with him until night. When the house surgeon made his rounds at six o'clock he told him to hold out his hands. They scarcely trembled—an almost imperceptible motion of the tips of his fingers was all. But as the room grew darker Coupeau became restless. Two or three times he sat up and peered into the remote corners.

Suddenly he stretched out his arms and seemed to crush some creature on the wall.

"What is it?" asked Gervaise, terribly frightened.

"Rats!" he said quietly. "Only rats!"

After a long silence he seemed to be dropping off to sleep, with disconnected sentences falling from his lips.

"Dirty beasts! Look out, one is under your skirts!" He pulled the covering hastily over his head, as if to protect himself against the creature he saw.

Then starting up in mad terror, he screamed aloud. A nurse ran to the bed, and Gervaise was sent away, mute with horror at this scene.

But when on the following Sunday she went again to the hospital, Coupeau was really well. All his dreams had vanished. He slept like a child, ten hours without lifting a finger. His wife, therefore, was allowed to take him away. The house surgeon gave him a few words of advice before he left, assuring him if he continued to drink he would be a dead man in three months. All depended on himself. He could live at home just as he had lived at Sainte-Anne's and must forget that such things as wine and brandy existed.

"He is right," said Gervaise as they took their seats in the omnibus.

"Of course he is right," answered her husband. But after a moment's silence he added:

"But then, you know, a drop of brandy now and then never hurts a man: it aids digestion."

That very evening he took a tiny drop and for a week was very moderate; he had no desire, he said, to end his days at Bicetre. But he was soon off his guard, and one day his little drop ended in a full glass, to be followed by a second, and so on. At the end of a fortnight he had fallen back in the old rut.

Gervaise did her best, but, after all, what can a wife do in such circumstances?

She had been so startled by the scene at the asylum that she had fully determined to begin a regular life again and hoped that he would assist her and do the same himself. But now she saw that there was no hope, that even the knowledge of the inevitable results could not restrain her husband now.

Then the hell on earth began again; hopeless and intolerant, Nana asked indignantly why he had not remained in the asylum. All the money she made, she said, should be spent in brandy for her father, for the sooner it was ended, the better for them all.

Gervaise blazed out one day when he lamented his marriage and told him that it was for her to curse the day when she first saw him. He must remember that she had refused him over and over again. The scene was a frightful one and one unexampled in the Coupeau annals.

Gervaise, now utterly discouraged, grew more indolent every day. Her room was rarely swept. The Lorilleuxs said they could not enter it, it was so dirty. They talked all day long over their work of the downfall of Wooden Legs. They gloated over her poverty and her rags.

"Well! Well!" they murmured. "A great change has indeed come to that beautiful blonde who was so fine in her blue shop."

Gervaise suspected their comments on her and her acts to be most unkind, but she determined to have no open quarrel. It was for her interest to speak to them when they met, but that was all the intercourse between them.

On Saturday Coupeau had told his wife he would take her to the circus; he had earned a little money and insisted on indulging himself. Nana was obliged to stay late at the place where she worked and would sleep with her aunt Mme Lerat.

Seven o'clock came, but no Coupeau. Her husband was drinking with his comrades probably. She had washed a cap and mended an old gown with the hope of being presentable. About nine o'clock, in a towering rage, she sallied forth on an empty stomach to find Coupeau.

"Are you looking for your husband?" said Mme Boche. "He is at the Assommoir. Boche has just seen him there."

Gervaise muttered her thanks and went with rapid steps to the Assommoir.

A fine rain was falling. The gas in the tavern was blazing brightly, lighting up the mirrors, the bottles and glasses. She stood at the window and looked in. He was sitting at a table with his comrades. The atmosphere was thick with smoke, and he looked stupefied and half asleep.

She shivered and wondered why she should stay there and, so thinking, turned away, only to come back twice to look again.

The water lay on the uneven sidewalk in pools, reflecting all the lights from the Assommoir. Finally she determined on a bold step: she opened the door and deliberately walked up to her husband. After all, why should she not ask him why he had not kept his promise of taking her to the circus? At any rate, she would not stay out there in the rain and melt away like a cake of soap.

"She is crazy!" said Coupeau when he saw her. "I tell you, she is crazy!"

He and all his friends shrieked with laughter, but no one condescended to say what it was that was so very droll. Gervaise stood still, a little bewildered by this unexpected reception. Coupeau was so amiable that she said:

"Come, you know it is not too late to see something."

"Sit down a minute," said her husband, not moving from his seat.

Gervaise saw she could not stand there among all those men, so she accepted the offered chair. She looked at the glasses, whose contents glittered like gold. She looked at these dirty, shabby men and at the others crowding around the counter. It was very warm, and the pipe smoke thickened the air.

Gervaise felt as if she were choking; her eyes smarted, and her head was heavy with the fumes of alcohol. She turned around and saw the

still, the machine that created drunkards. That evening the copper was dull and glittered only in one round spot. The shadows of the apparatus on the wall behind were strange and weird—creatures with tails, monsters opening gigantic jaws as if to swallow the whole world.

"What will you take to drink?" said Coupeau.

"Nothing," answered his wife. "You know I have had no dinner!"

"You need it all the more then! Have a drop of something!"

As she hesitated Mes-Bottes said gallantly:

"The lady would like something sweet like herself."

"I like men," she answered angrily, "who do not get tipsy and talk like fools! I like men who keep their promises!"

Her husband laughed.

"You had better drink your share," he said, "for the devil a bit of a circus will you see tonight."

She looked at him fixedly. A heavy frown contracted her eyebrows. She answered slowly:

"You are right; it is a good idea. We can drink up the money together."

Bibi brought her a glass of anisette. As she sipped it she remembered all at once the brandied fruit she had eaten in the same place with Coupeau when he was courting her. That day she had left the brandy and took only the fruit, and now she was sitting there drinking liqueur.

But the anisette was good. When her glass was empty she refused another, and yet she was not satisfied.

She looked around at the infernal machine behind her—a machine that should have been buried ten fathoms deep in the sea. Nevertheless, it had for her a strange fascination, and she longed to quench her thirst with that liquid fire.

"What is that you have in your glasses?" she asked.

"That, my dear," answered her husband, "is Father Colombe's own especial brew. Taste it."

And when a glass of the vitriol was brought to her Coupeau bade her swallow it down, saying it was good for her.

After she had drunk this glass Gervaise was no longer conscious of the hunger that had tormented her. Coupeau told her they could go to the circus another time, and she felt she had best stay where she was. It did not rain in the Assommoir, and she had come to look upon the scene as rather amusing. She was comfortable and sleepy. She took a third glass and then put her head on her folded arms, supporting them on the table, and listened to her husband and his friends as they talked.

Behind her the still was at work with constant drip-drip, and she felt a mad desire to grapple with it as with some dangerous beast and tear out its heart. She seemed to feel herself caught in those copper fangs and fancied that those coils of pipe were wound around her own body, slowly but surely crushing out her life.

The whole room danced before her eyes, for Gervaise was now in the condition which had so often excited her pity and indignation with others. She vaguely heard a quarrel arise and a crash of chairs and tables, and then Father Colombe promptly turned everyone into the street.

It was still raining and a cold, sharp wind blowing. Gervaise lost Coupeau, found him and then lost him again. She wanted to go home, but she could not find her way. At the corner of the street she took her seat by the side of the gutter, thinking herself at her washtub. Finally she got home and endeavored to walk straight past the door of the concierge, within whose room she was vaguely conscious of the Poissons and Lorilleuxs holding up their hands in disgust at her condition.

She never knew how she got up those six flights of stairs. But when she turned into her own corridor little Lalie ran toward her with loving, extended arms.

"Dear Madame Gervaise," she cried, "Papa has not come in; please come and see my children. They are sleeping so sweetly!"

But when she looked up in the face of the clearstarcher she recoiled, trembling from head to foot. She knew only too well that alcoholic smell, those wandering eyes and convulsed lips.

Then as Gervaise staggered past her without speaking the child's arms fell at her side, and she looked after her friend with sad and solemn eyes.

CHAPTER XI
LITTLE NANA

Nana was growing fast—fair, fresh and dimpled—her skin velvety, like a peach, and eyes so bright that men often asked her if they might not light their pipes at them. Her mass of blonde hair—the color of ripe wheat—looked around her temples as if it were powdered with gold. She had a quaint little trick of sticking out the tip of her tongue between her white teeth, and this habit, for some reason, exasperated her mother.

She was very fond of finery and very coquettish. In this house, where bread was not always to be got, it was difficult for her to indulge her caprices in the matter of costume, but she did wonders. She brought home odds and ends of ribbons from the shop where she worked and made them up into bows and knots with which she ornamented her dirty dresses. She was not overparticular in washing her feet, but she wore her boots so tight that she suffered martyrdom in honor of St Crispin, and if anyone asked her what the matter was when the pain flushed her face suddenly, she always and promptly laid it to the score of the colic.

Summer was the season of her triumphs. In a calico dress that cost five or six francs she was as fresh and sweet as a spring morning and made the dull street radiant with her youth and her beauty. She went by the name of "The Little Chicken." One gown, in particular, suited her to perfection. It was white with rose-colored dots, without trimming of any kind. The skirt was short and showed her feet. The sleeves were very wide and displayed her arms to the elbows. She turned the neck away and fastened it with pins—in a corner in the corridor, dreading her father's jests—to exhibit her pretty rounded throat. A rose-colored ribbon, knotted in the rippling masses of her hair, completed her toilet. She was a charming combination of child and woman.

Sundays at this period of her life were her days for coquetting with the public. She looked forward to them all the week through with a longing for liberty and fresh air.

Early in the morning she began her preparations and stood for hours in her chemise before the bit of broken mirror nailed by the window, and as everyone could see her, her mother would be very much vexed and ask how long she intended to show herself in that way.

But she, quite undisturbed, went on fastening down the little curls on her forehead with a little sugar and water and then sewed the buttons on her boots or took a stitch or two in her frock, barefooted all this time and with her chemise slipping off her rounded shoulders.

Her father declared he would exhibit her as the "Wild Girl," at two sous a head.

She was very lovely in this scanty costume, the color flushing her cheeks in her indignation at her father's sometimes coarse remarks. She did not dare answer him, however, but bit off her thread in silent rage. After breakfast she went down to the courtyard. The house was wrapped in Sunday quiet; the workshops on the lower floor were closed. Through some of the open windows the tables were seen laid for dinners, the families being on the fortifications "getting an appetite."

Five or six girls—Nana, Pauline and others—lingered in the courtyard for a time and then took flight altogether into the streets and thence to the outer boulevards. They walked in a line, filling up the whole sidewalk, with ribbons fluttering in their uncovered hair.

They managed to see everybody and everything through their downcast lids. The streets were their native heath, as it were, for they had grown up in them.

Nana walked in the center and gave her arm to Pauline, and as they were the oldest and tallest of the band, they gave the law to the others and decided where they should go for the day and what they should do.

Nana and Pauline were deep ones. They did nothing without premeditation. If they ran it was to show their slender ankles, and when they stopped and panted for breath it was sure to be at the side of some youths—young workmen of their acquaintance—who smoked in their faces as they talked. Nana had her favorite, whom she always saw at a great distance—Victor Fauconnier—and Pauline adored a young cabinetmaker, who gave her apples.

Toward sunset the great pleasure of the day began. A band of mountebanks would spread a well-worn carpet, and a circle was formed to look on. Nana and Pauline were always in the thickest of the crowd, their pretty fresh dresses crushed between dirty blouses, but insensible

to the mingled odors of dust and alcohol, tobacco and dirt. They heard vile language; it did not disturb them; it was their own tongue—they heard little else. They listened to it with a smile, their delicate cheeks unflushed.

The only thing that disturbed them was the appearance of their fathers, particularly if these fathers seemed to have been drinking. They kept a good lookout for this disaster.

"Look!" cried Pauline. "Your father is coming, Nana."

Then the girl would crouch on her knees and bid the others stand close around her, and when he had passed on after an inquiring look she would jump up and they would all utter peals of laughter.

But one day Nana was kicked home by her father, and Boche dragged Pauline away by her ear.

The girls would ordinarily return to the courtyard in the twilight and establish themselves there with the air of not having been away, and each invented a story with which to greet their questioning parents. Nana now received forty sous per day at the place where she had been apprenticed. The Coupeaus would not allow her to change, because she was there under the supervision of her aunt, Mme Lerat, who had been employed for many years in the same establishment.

The girl went off at an early hour in her little black dress, which was too short and too tight for her, and Mme Lerat was bidden, whenever she was after her time, to inform Gervaise, who allowed her just twenty minutes, which was quite long enough. But she was often seven or eight minutes late, and she spent her whole day coaxing her aunt not to tell her mother. Mme Lerat, who was fond of the girl and understood the follies of youth, did not tell, but at the same time she read Nana many a long sermon on her follies and talked of her own responsibility and of the dangers a young girl ran in Paris.

"You must tell me everything," she said. "I am too indulgent to you, and if evil should come of it I should throw myself into the Seine. Understand me, my little kitten; if a man should speak to you you must promise to tell me every word he says. Will you swear to do this?"

Nana laughed an equivocal little laugh. Oh yes, she would promise. But men never spoke to her; she walked too fast for that. What could they say to her? And she explained her irregularity in coming—her five or ten minutes delay—with an innocent little air. She had stopped at a window to look at pictures or she had stopped to talk to Pauline. Her aunt might follow her if she did not believe her.

"Oh, I will watch her. You need not be afraid!" said the widow to her brother. "I will answer for her, as I would for myself!"

The place where the aunt and niece worked side by side was a large room with a long table down the center. Shelves against the wall were piled with boxes and bundles—all covered with a thick coating of dust. The gas had blackened the ceiling. The two windows were so large that the women, seated at the table, could see all that was going on in the street below.

Mme Lerat was the first to make her appearance in the morning, but in another fifteen minutes all the others were there. One morning in July Nana came in last, which, however, was the usual case.

"I shall be glad when I have a carriage!" she said as she ran to the window without even taking off her hat—a shabby little straw.

"What are you looking at?" asked her aunt suspiciously. "Did your father come with you?"

"No indeed," answered Nana carelessly; "nor am I looking at anything. It is awfully warm, and of all things in the world, I hate to be in a hurry."

The morning was indeed frightfully hot. The workwomen had closed the blinds, leaving a crack, however, through which they could inspect the street, and they took their seats on each side of the table—Mme Lerat at the farther end. There were eight girls, four on either side, each with her little pot of glue, her pincers and other tools; heaps of wires of different lengths and sizes lay on the table, spools of cotton and of different-colored papers, petals and leaves cut out of silk, velvet and satin. In the center, in a goblet, one of the girls had placed a two-sou bouquet,—which was slowly withering in the heat.

"Did you know," said Leonie as she picked up a rose leaf with her pincers, "how wretched poor Caroline is with that fellow who used to call for her regularly every night?"

Before anyone could answer Leonie added:

"Hush! Here comes Madame."

And in sailed Mme Titreville, a tall, thin woman, who usually remained

below in the shop. Her employees stood in dread terror of her, as she was never known to smile. She went from one to another, finding fault with all; she ordered one woman to pull a marguerite to pieces and make it over and then went out as stiffly and silently as she had come in.

"Houp! Houp!" said Nana under her breath, and a giggle ran round the table.

"Really, young ladies," said Mme Lerat, "you will compel me to severe measures."

But no one was listening, and no one feared her. She was very tolerant. They could say what they pleased, provided they put it in decent language.

Nana was certainly in a good school! Her instincts, to be sure, were vicious, but these instincts were fostered and developed in this place, as is too often the case when a crowd of girls are herded together. It was the story of a basket of apples, the good ones spoiled by those that were already rotten. If two girls were whispering in a corner, ten to one they were telling some story that could not be told aloud.

Nana was not yet thoroughly perverted, but the curiosity which had been her distinguishing characteristic as a child had not deserted her, and she scarcely took her eyes from a girl by the name of Lisa, about whom strange stories were told.

"How warm it is!" she exclaimed, suddenly rising and pushing open the blinds. Leonie saw a man standing on the sidewalk opposite.

"Who is that old fellow?" she said. "He has been there a full quarter of an hour."

"Some fool who has nothing better to do, I suppose," said Mme Lerat. "Nana, will you come back to your work? I have told you that you should not go to that window."

Nana took up her violets, and they all began to watch this man. He was well dressed, about fifty, pale and grave. For a full hour he watched the windows.

"Look!" said Leonie. "He has an eyeglass. Oh, he is very chic. He is waiting for Augustine." But Augustine sharply answered that she did not like the old man.

"You make a great mistake then," said Mme Lerat with her equivocal smile.

Nana listened to the conversation which followed—reveling in indecency—as much at home in it as a fish is in water. All the time her fingers were busy at work. She wound her violet stems and fastened in the leaves with a slender strip of green paper. A drop of gum—and then behold a bunch of delicate fresh verdure which would fascinate any lady. Her fingers were especially deft by nature. No instruction could have imparted this quality.

The gentleman had gone away, and the workshop settled down into quiet once more. When the bell rang for twelve Nana started up and said she would go out and execute any commissions. Leonie sent for two sous' worth of shrimp, Augustine for some fried potatoes, Sophie for a sausage and Lisa for a bunch of radishes. As she was going out, her aunt said quietly:

"I will go with you. I want something."

Lo, in the lane running up by the shop was the mysterious stranger. Nana turned very red, and her aunt drew her arm within her own and hurried her along.

So then he had come for her! Was not this pretty behavior for a girl of her age? And Mme Lerat asked question after question, but Nana knew nothing of him, she declared, though he had followed her for five days.

Mme Lerat looked at the man out of the corners of her eyes. "You must tell me everything," she said.

While they talked they went from shop to shop, and their arms grew full of small packages, but they hurried back, still talking of the gentleman.

"It may be a good thing," said Mme Lerat, "if his intentions are only honorable."

The workwomen ate their breakfast on their knees; they were in no hurry, either, to return to their work, when suddenly Leonie uttered a low hiss, and like magic each girl was busy. Mme Titreville entered the room and again made her rounds.

Mme Lerat did not allow her niece after this day to set foot on the street without her. Nana at first was inclined to rebel, but, on the whole, it rather flattered her vanity to be guarded like a treasure. They had

discovered that the man who followed her with such persistency was a manufacturer of buttons, and one night the aunt went directly up to him and told him that he was behaving in a most improper manner. He bowed and, turning on his heel, departed—not angrily, by any means—and the next day he did as usual.

One day, however, he deliberately walked between the aunt and the niece and said something to Nana in a low voice. This frightened Mme Lerat, who went at once to her brother and told him the whole story, whereupon he flew into a violent rage, shook the girl until her teeth chattered and talked to her as if she were the vilest of the vile.

"Let her be!" said Gervaise with all a woman's sense. "Let her be! Don't you see that you are putting all sorts of things into her head?"

And it was quite true; he had put ideas into her head and had taught her some things she did not know before, which was very astonishing. One morning he saw her with something in a paper. It was *poudre de riz*, which, with a most perverted taste, she was plastering upon her delicate skin. He rubbed the whole of the powder into her hair until she looked like a miller's daughter. Another time she came in with red ribbons to retrim her old hat; he asked her furiously where she got them.

Whenever he saw her with a bit of finery her father flew at her with insulting suspicion and angry violence. She defended herself and her small possessions with equal violence. One day he snatched from her a little cornelian heart and ground it to dust under his heel.

She stood looking on, white and stern; for two years she had longed for this heart. She said to herself that she would not bear such treatment long. Coupeau occasionally realized that he had made a mistake, but the mischief was done.

He went every morning with Nana to the shop door and waited outside for five minutes to be sure that she had gone in. But one morning, having stopped to talk with a friend on the corner for some time, he saw her come out again and vanish like a flash around the corner. She had gone up two flights higher than the room where she worked and had sat down on the stairs until she thought him well out of the way.

When he went to Mme Lerat she told him that she washed her hands of the whole business; she had done all she could, and now he must take care of his daughter himself. She advised him to marry the girl at once or she would do worse.

All the people in the neighborhood knew Nana's admirer by sight. He had been in the courtyard several times, and once he had been seen on the stairs.

The Lorilleuxs threatened to move away if this sort of thing went on, and Mme Boche expressed great pity for this poor gentleman whom this scamp of a girl was leading by the nose.

At first Nana thought the whole thing a great joke, but at the end of a month she began to be afraid of him. Often when she stopped before the jeweler's he would suddenly appear at her side and ask her what she wanted.

She did not care so much for jewelry or ornaments as she did for many other things. Sometimes as the mud was spattered over her from the wheels of a carriage she grew faint and sick with envious longings to be better dressed, to go to the theater, to have a pretty room all to herself. She longed to see another side of life, to know something of its pleasures. The stranger invariably appeared at these moments, but she always turned and fled, so great was her horror of him.

But when winter came existence became well-nigh intolerable. Each evening Nana was beaten, and when her father was tired of this amusement her mother scolded. They rarely had anything to eat and were always cold. If the girl bought some trifling article of dress it was taken from her.

No! This life could not last. She no longer cared for her father. He had thoroughly disgusted her, and now her mother drank too. Gervaise went to the Assommoir nightly—for her husband, she said—and remained there. When Nana saw her mother sometimes as she passed the window, seated among a crowd of men, she turned livid with rage, because youth has little patience with the vice of intemperance. It was a dreary life for her—a comfortless home and a drunken father and mother. A saint on earth could not have remained there; that she knew very well, and she said she would make her escape some fine day, and then perhaps her parents would be sorry and would admit that they had pushed her out of the nest.

One Saturday Nana, coming in, found her mother and father in a deplorable condition—Coupeau lying across the bed and Gervaise sitting

in a chair, swaying to and fro. She had forgotten the dinner, and one untrimmed candle lighted the dismal scene.

"Is that you, girl?" stammered Gervaise. "Well, your father will settle with you!"

Nana did not reply. She looked around the cheerless room, at the cold stove, at her parents. She did not step across the threshold. She turned and went away.

And she did not come back! The next day when her father and mother were sober, they each reproached the other for Nana's flight.

This was really a terrible blow to Gervaise, who had no longer the smallest motive for self-control, and she abandoned herself at once to a wild orgy that lasted three days. Coupeau gave his daughter up and smoked his pipe quietly. Occasionally, however, when eating his dinner, he would snatch up a knife and wave it wildly in the air, crying out that he was dishonored and then, laying it down as suddenly, resumed eating his soup.

In this great house, whence each month a girl or two took flight, this incident astonished no one. The Lorilleuxs were rather triumphant at the success of their prophecy. Lantier defended Nana.

"Of course," he said, "she has done wrong, but bless my heart, what would you have? A girl as pretty as that could not live all her days in such poverty!"

"You know nothing about it!" cried Mme Lorilleux one evening when they were all assembled in the room of the concierge. "Wooden Legs sold her daughter out and out. I know it! I have positive proof of what I say. The time that the old gentleman was seen on the stairs he was going to pay the money. Nana and he were seen together at the Ambigu the other night! I tell you, I know it!"

They finished their coffee. This tale might or might not be true; it was not improbable, at all events. And after this it was circulated and generally believed in the *Quartier* that Gervaise had sold her daughter.

The clearstarcher, meanwhile, was going from bad to worse. She had been dismissed from Mme Fauconnier's and in the last few weeks had worked for eight laundresses, one after the other—dismissed from all for her untidiness.

As she seemed to have lost all skill in ironing, she went out by the day to wash and by degrees was entrusted with only the roughest work. This hard labor did not tend to beautify her either. She continued to grow stouter and stouter in spite of her scanty food and hard labor.

Her womanly pride and vanity had all departed. Lantier never seemed to see her when they met by chance, and she hardly noticed that the liaison which had stretched along for so many years had ended in a mutual disenchantment.

Lantier had done wisely, so far as he was concerned, in counseling Virginie to open the kind of shop she had. He adored sweets and could have lived on pralines and gumdrops, sugarplums and chocolate.

Sugared almonds were his especial delight. For a year his principal food was bonbons. He opened all the jars, boxes and drawers when he was left alone in the shop; and often, with five or six persons standing around, he would take off the cover of a jar on the counter and put in his hand and crunch down an almond. The cover was not put on again, and the jar was soon empty. It was a habit of his, they all said; besides, he was subject to a tickling in his throat!

He talked a great deal to Poisson of an invention of his which was worth a fortune—an umbrella and hat in one; that is to say, a hat which, at the first drops of a shower, would expand into an umbrella.

Lantier suggested to Virginie that she should have Gervaise come in once each week to wash the floors, shop and the rooms. This she did and received thirty sous each time. Gervaise appeared on Saturday mornings with her bucket and brush, without seeming to suffer a single pang at doing this menial work in the house where she had lived as mistress.

One Saturday Gervaise had hard work. It had rained for three days, and all the mud of the streets seemed to have been brought into the shop. Virginie stood behind the counter with collar and cuffs trimmed with lace. Near her on a low chair lounged Lantier, and he was, as usual, eating candy.

"Really, Madame Coupeau," cried Virginie, "can't you do better than that? You have left all the dirt in the corners. Don't you see? Oblige me by doing that over again."

Gervaise obeyed. She went back to the corner and scrubbed it again. She was on her hands and knees, with her sleeves rolled up over her

arms. Her old skirt clung close to her stout form, and the sweat poured down her face.

"The more elbow grease she uses, the more she shines," said Lantier sententiously with his mouth full.

Virginie, leaning back in her chair with the air of a princess, followed the progress of the work with half-closed eyes.

"A little more to the right. Remember, those spots must all be taken out. Last Saturday, you know, I was not pleased."

And then Lantier and Virginie fell into a conversation, while Gervaise crawled along the floor in the dirt at their feet.

Mme Poisson enjoyed this, for her cat's eyes sparkled with malicious joy, and she glanced at Lantier with a smile. At last she was avenged for that mortification at the lavatory, which had for years weighed heavy on her soul.

"By the way," said Lantier, addressing himself to Gervaise, "I saw Nana last night."

Gervaise started to her feet with her brush in her hand.

"Yes, I was coming down La Rue des Martyrs. In front of me was a young girl on the arm of an old gentleman. As I passed I glanced at her face and assure you that it was Nana. She was well dressed and looked happy."

"Ah!" said Gervaise in a low, dull voice.

Lantier, who had finished one jar, now began another.

"What a girl that is!" he continued. "Imagine that she made me a sign to follow with the most perfect self-possession. She got rid of her old gentleman in a cafe and beckoned me to the door. She asked me to tell her about everybody."

"Ah!" repeated Gervaise.

She stood waiting. Surely this was not all. Her daughter must have sent her some especial message. Lantier ate his sugarplums.

"I would not have looked at her," said Virginie. "I sincerely trust, if I should meet her, that she would not speak to me for, really, it would mortify me beyond expression. I am sorry for you, Madame Gervaise, but the truth is that Poisson arrests every day a dozen just such girls."

Gervaise said nothing; her eyes were fixed on vacancy. She shook her head slowly, as if in reply to her own thoughts.

"Pray make haste," exclaimed Virginie fretfully. "I do not care to have this scrubbing going on until midnight."

Gervaise returned to her work. With her two hands clasped around the handle of the brush she pushed the water before her toward the door. After this she had only to rinse the floor after sweeping the dirty water into the gutter.

When all was accomplished she stood before the counter waiting for her money. When Virginie tossed it toward her she did not take it up instantly.

"Then she said nothing else?" Gervaise asked.

"She?" Lantier exclaimed. "Who is she? Ah yes, I remember. Nana! No, she said nothing more."

And Gervaise went away with her thirty sous in her hand, her skirts dripping and her shoes leaving the mark of their broad soles on the sidewalk.

In the *Quartier* all the women who drank like her took her part and declared she had been driven to intemperance by her daughter's misconduct. She, too, began to believe this herself and assumed at times a tragic air and wished she were dead. Unquestionably she had suffered from Nana's departure. A mother does not like to feel that her daughter will leave her for the first person who asks her to do so.

But she was too thoroughly demoralized to care long, and soon she had but one idea: that Nana belonged to her. Had she not a right to her own property?

She roamed the streets day after day, night after night, hoping to see the girl. That year half the *Quartier* was being demolished. All one side of the Rue des Poissonnièrs lay flat on the ground. Lantier and Poisson disputed day after day on these demolitions. The one declared that the emperor wanted to build palaces and drive the lower classes out of Paris, while Poisson, white with rage, said the emperor would pull down the whole of Paris merely to give work to the people.

Gervaise did not like the improvements, either, or the changes in the dingy *Quartier*, to which she was accustomed. It was, in fact, a little hard

for her to see all these embellishments just when she was going downhill so fast over the piles of brick and mortar, while she was wandering about in search of Nana.

She heard of her daughter several times. There are always plenty of people to tell you things you do not care to hear. She was told that Nana had left her elderly friend for the sake of some young fellow.

She heard, too, that Nana had been seen at a ball in the Grand Salon, Rue de la Chapelle, and Coupeau and she began to frequent all these places, one after another, whenever they had the money to spend.

But at the end of a month they had forgotten Nana and went for their own pleasure. They sat for hours with their elbows on a table, which shook with the movements of the dancers, amused by the sight.

One November night they entered the Grand Salon, as much to get warm as anything else. Outside it was hailing, and the rooms were naturally crowded. They could not find a table, and they stood waiting until they could establish themselves. Coupeau was directly in the mouth of the passage, and a young man in a frock coat was thrown against him. The youth uttered an exclamation of disgust as he began to dust off his coat with his handkerchief. The blouse worn by Coupeau was assuredly none of the cleanest.

"Look here, my good fellow," cried Coupeau angrily, "those airs are very unnecessary. I would have you to know that the blouse of a workingman can do your coat no harm if it has touched it!"

The young man turned around and looked at Coupeau from head to foot.

"Learn," continued the angry workman, "that the blouse is the only wear for a man!"

Gervaise endeavored to calm her husband, who, however, tapped his ragged breast and repeated loudly:

"The only wear for a man, I tell you!"

The youth slipped away and was lost in the crowd.

Coupeau tried to find him, but it was quite impossible; the crowd was too great. The orchestra was playing a quadrille, and the dancers were bringing up the dust from the floor in great clouds, which obscured the gas.

"Look!" said Gervaise suddenly.

"What is it?"

"Look at that velvet bonnet!"

Quite at the left there was a velvet bonnet, black with plumes, only too suggestive of a hearse. They watched these nodding plumes breathlessly.

"Do you not know that hair?" murmured Gervaise hoarsely. "I am sure it is she!"

In one second Coupeau was in the center of the crowd. Yes, it was Nana, and in what a costume! She wore a ragged silk dress, stained and torn. She had no shawl over her shoulders to conceal the fact that half the buttonholes on her dress were burst out. In spite of all her shabbiness the girl was pretty and fresh. Nana, of course, danced on unsuspiciously. Her airs and graces were beyond belief. She curtsied to the very ground and then in a twinkling threw her foot over her partner's head. A circle was formed, and she was applauded vociferously.

At this moment Coupeau fell on his daughter.

"Don't try and keep me back," he said, "for have her I will!"

Nana turned and saw her father and mother.

Coupeau discovered that his daughter's partner was the young man for whom he had been looking. Gervaise pushed him aside and walked up to Nana and gave her two cuffs on her ears. One sent the plumed hat on the side; the other left five red marks on that pale cheek. The orchestra played on. Nana neither wept nor moved.

The dancers began to grow very angry. They ordered the Coupeau party to leave the room.

"Go," said Gervaise, "and do not attempt to leave us, for so sure as you do you will be given in charge of a policeman."

The young man had prudently disappeared.

Nana's old life now began again, for after the girl had slept for twelve hours on a stretch, she was very gentle and sweet for a week. She wore a plain gown and a simple hat and declared she would like to work at home. She rose early and took a seat at her table by five o'clock the first morning and tried to roll her violet stems, but her fingers had lost their cunning in the six months in which they had been idle.

Then the gluepot dried up; the petals and the paper were dusty and spotted; the mistress of the establishment came for her tools and materials and made more than one scene. Nana relapsed into utter indolence, quarreling with her mother from morning until night. Of course an end must come to this, so one fine evening the girl disappeared.

The Lorilleuxs, who had been greatly amused by the repentance and return of their niece, now nearly died laughing. If she returned again they would advise the Coupeaus to put her in a cage like a canary.

The Coupeaus pretended to be rather pleased, but in their hearts they raged, particularly as they soon learned that Nana was frequently seen in the *Quartier*. Gervaise declared this was done by the girl to annoy them.

Nana adorned all the balls in the vicinity, and the Coupeaus knew that they could lay their hands on her at any time they chose, but they did not choose and they avoided meeting her.

But one night, just as they were going to bed, they heard a rap on the door. It was Nana, who came to ask as coolly as possible if she could sleep there. What a state she was in! All rags and dirt. She devoured a crust of dried bread and fell asleep with a part of it in her hand. This continued for some time, the girl coming and going like a will-o'-the-wisp. Weeks and months would elapse without a sign from her, and then she would reappear without a word to say where she had been, sometimes in rags and sometimes well dressed. Finally her parents began to take these proceedings as a matter of course. She might come in, they said, or stay out, just as she pleased, provided she kept the door shut. Only one thing exasperated Gervaise now, and that was when her daughter appeared with a bonnet and feathers and a train. This she would not endure. When Nana came to her it must be as a simple workingwoman! None of this dearly bought finery should be exhibited there, for these trained dresses had created a great excitement in the house.

One day Gervaise reproached her daughter violently for the life she led and finally, in her rage, took her by the shoulder and shook her.

"Let me be!" cried the girl. "You are the last person to talk to me in that way. You did as you pleased. Why can't I do the same?"

"What do you mean?" stammered the mother.

"I have never said anything about it because it was none of my business, but do you think I did not know where you were when my father lay snoring? Let me alone. It was you who set me the example."

Gervaise turned away pale and trembling, while Nana composed herself to sleep again.

Coupeau's life was a very regular one—that is to say, he did not drink for six months and then yielded to temptation, which brought him up with a round turn and sent him to Sainte-Anne's. When he came out he did the same thing, so that in three years he was seven times at Sainte-Anne's, and each time he came out the fellow looked more broken and less able to stand another orgy.

The poison had penetrated his entire system. He had grown very thin; his cheeks were hollow and his eyes inflamed. Those who knew his age shuddered as they saw him pass, bent and decrepit as a man of eighty. The trembling of his hands had so increased that some days he was obliged to use them both in raising his glass to his lips. This annoyed him intensely and seemed to be the only symptom of his failing health which disturbed him. He sometimes swore violently at these unruly members and at others sat for hours looking at these fluttering hands as if trying to discover by what strange mechanism they were moved. And one night Gervaise found him sitting in this way with great tears pouring down his withered cheeks.

The last summer of his life was especially trying to Coupeau. His voice was entirely changed; he was deaf in one ear, and some days he could not see and was obliged to feel his way up– and downstairs as if he were blind. He suffered from maddening headaches, and sudden pains would dart through his limbs, causing him to snatch at a chair for support. Sometimes after one of these attacks his arm would be paralyzed for twenty-four hours.

He would lie in bed with even his head wrapped up, silent and moody, like some suffering animal. Then came incipient madness and fever—tearing everything to pieces that came in his way—or he would weep and moan, declaring that no one loved him, that he was a burden to his wife. One evening when his wife and daughter came in he was not in his bed; in his place lay the bolster carefully tucked in. They found him at last

crouched on the floor under the bed, with his teeth chattering with cold and fear. He told them he had been attacked by assassins.

The two women coaxed him back to bed as if he had been a baby.

Coupeau knew but one remedy for all this, and that was a good stout morning dram. His memory had long since fled; his brain had softened. When Nana appeared after an absence of six weeks he thought she had been on an errand around the corner. She met him in the street, too, very often now, without fear, for he passed without recognizing her. One night in the autumn Nana went out, saying she wanted some baked pears from the fruiterer's. She felt the cold weather coming on, and she did not care to sit before a cold stove. The winter before she went out for two sous' worth of tobacco and came back in a month's time; they thought she would do the same now, but they were mistaken. Winter came and went, as did the spring, and even when June arrived they had seen and heard nothing of her.

She was evidently comfortable somewhere, and the Coupeaus, feeling certain that she would never return, had sold her bed; it was very much in their way, and they could drink up the six francs it brought.

One morning Virginie called to Gervaise as the latter passed the shop and begged her to come in and help a little, as Lantier had had two friends to supper the night before, and Gervaise washed the dishes while Lantier sat in the shop smoking. Presently he said:

"Oh, Gervaise, I saw Nana the other night."

Virginie, who was behind the counter, opening and shutting drawer after drawer, with a face that lengthened as she found each empty, shook her fist at him indignantly.

She had begun to think he saw Nana very often. She did not speak, but Mme Lerat, who had just come in, said with a significant look:

"And where did you see her?"

"Oh, in a carriage," answered Lantier with a laugh. "And I was on the sidewalk." He turned toward Gervaise and went on:

"Yes, she was in a carriage, dressed beautifully. I did not recognize her at first, but she kissed her hand to me. Her friend this time must be a vicomte at the least. She looked as happy as a queen."

Gervaise wiped the plate in her hands, rubbing it long and carefully, though it had long since been dry. Virginie, with wrinkled brows, wondered how she could pay two notes which fell due the next day, while Lantier, fat and hearty from the sweets he had devoured, asked himself if these drawers and jars would be filled up again or if the ruin he anticipated was so near at hand that he would be compelled to pull up stakes at once. There was not another praline for him to crunch, not even a gumdrop.

When Gervaise went back to her room she found Coupeau sitting on the side of the bed, weeping and moaning. She took a chair near by and looked at him without speaking.

"I have news for you," she said at last. "Your daughter has been seen. She is happy and comfortable. Would that I were in her place!"

Coupeau was looking down on the floor intently. He raised his head and said with an idiotic laugh:

"Do as you please, my dear; don't let me be any hindrance to you. When you are dressed up you are not so bad looking after all."

CHAPTER XII
POVERTY AND DEGRADATION

The weather was intensely cold about the middle of January. Gervaise had not been able to pay her rent, due on the first. She had little or no work and consequently no food to speak of. The sky was dark and gloomy and the air heavy with the coming of a storm. Gervaise thought it barely possible that her husband might come in with a little money. After all, everything is possible, and he had said that he would work. Gervaise after a little, by dint of dwelling on this thought, had come to consider it a certainty. Yes, Coupeau would bring home some money, and they would have a good, hot, comfortable dinner. As to herself, she had given up trying to get work, for no one would have her. This did not much trouble her, however, for she had arrived at that point when the mere exertion of moving had become intolerable to her. She now lay stretched on the bed, for she was warmer there.

Gervaise called it a bed. In reality it was only a pile of straw in the corner, for she had sold her bed and all her furniture. She occasionally swept the straw together with a broom, and, after all, it was neither dustier nor dirtier than everything else in the place. On this straw, therefore, Gervaise now lay with her eyes wide open. How long, she wondered, could people live without eating? She was not hungry, but there was a strange weight at the pit of her stomach. Her haggard eyes wandered about the room in search of anything she could sell. She vaguely wished someone would buy the spider webs which hung in all the corners. She knew them to be very good for cuts, but she doubted if they had any market value.

Tired of this contemplation, she got up and took her one chair to the window and looked out into the dingy courtyard.

Her landlord had been there that day and declared he would wait only one week for his money, and if it were not forthcoming he would turn them into the street. It drove her wild to see him stand in his heavy overcoat and tell her so coldly that he would pack her off at once. She hated him with a vindictive hatred, as she did her fool of a husband and the Lorilleuxs and Poissons. In fact, she hated everyone on that especial day.

Unfortunately people can't live without eating, and before the woman's famished eyes floated visions of food. Not of dainty little dishes. She had long since ceased to care for those and ate all she could get without being in the least fastidious in regard to its quality. When she had a little money she bought a bullock's heart or a bit of cheese or some beans, and sometimes she begged from a restaurant and made a sort of panada of the crusts they gave her, which she cooked on a neighbor's stove. She was quite willing to dispute with a dog for a bone. Once the thought of such things would have disgusted her, but at that time she did not—for three days in succession—go without a morsel of food. She remembered how last week Coupeau had stolen a half loaf of bread and sold it, or rather exchanged it, for liquor.

She sat at the window, looking at the pale sky, and finally fell asleep. She dreamed that she was out in a snowstorm and could not find her way home. She awoke with a start and saw that night was coming on. How long the days are when one's stomach is empty! She waited for Coupeau and the relief he would bring.

The clock struck in the next room. Could it be possible? Was it only three? Then she began to cry. How could she ever wait until seven? After another half-hour of suspense she started up. Yes, they might say what they pleased, but she, at least, would try to borrow ten sous from the Lorilleuxs.

There was a continual borrowing of small sums in this corridor during the winter, but no matter what was the emergency no one ever dreamed of applying to the Lorilleuxs. Gervaise summoned all her courage and rapped at the door.

"Come in!" cried a sharp voice.

How good it was there! Warm and bright with the glow of the forge. And Gervaise smelled the soup, too, and it made her feel faint and sick.

"Ah, it is you, is it?" said Mme Lorilleux. "What do you want?"

Gervaise hesitated. The application for ten sous stuck in her throat, because she saw Boche seated by the stove.

"What do you want?" asked Lorilleux, in his turn.

"Have you seen Coupeau?" stammered Gervaise. "I thought he was

here."

His sister answered with a sneer that they rarely saw Coupeau. They were not rich enough to offer him as many glasses of wine as he wanted in these days.

Gervaise stammered out a disconnected sentence.

He had promised to come home. She needed food; she needed money.

A profound silence followed. Mme Lorilleux fanned her fire, and her husband bent more closely over his work, while Boche smiled with an expectant air.

"If I could have ten sous," murmured Gervaise.

The silence continued.

"If you would lend them to me," said Gervaise, "I would give them back in the morning."

Mme Lorilleux turned and looked her full in the face, thinking to herself that if she yielded once the next day it would be twenty sous, and who could tell where it would stop?

"But, my dear," she cried, "you know we have no money and no prospect of any; otherwise, of course, we would oblige you."

"Certainly," said Lorilleux, "the heart is willing, but the pockets are empty."

Gervaise bowed her head, but she did not leave instantly. She looked at the gold wire on which her sister-in-law was working and at that in the hands of Lorilleux and thought that it would take a mere scrap to give her a good dinner. On that day the room was very dirty and filled with charcoal dust, but she saw it resplendent with riches like the shop of a money-changer, and she said once more in a low, soft voice:

"I will bring back the ten sous. I will, indeed!" Tears were in her eyes, but she was determined not to say that she had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours.

"I can't tell you how much I need it," she continued.

The husband and wife exchanged a look. Wooden Legs begging at their door! Well! Well! Who would have thought it? Why had they not known it was she when they rashly called out, "Come in?" Really, they could not allow such people to cross their threshold; there was too much that was valuable in the room. They had several times distrusted Gervaise; she looked about so queerly, and now they would not take their eyes off her.

Gervaise went toward Lorilleux as she spoke.

"Take care!" he said roughly. "You will carry off some of the particles of gold on the soles of your shoes. It looks really as if you had greased them!"

Gervaise drew back. She leaned against the *étagère* for a moment and, seeing that her sister-in-law's eyes were fixed on her hands, she opened them and said in a gentle, weary voice—the voice of a woman who had ceased to struggle:

"I have taken nothing. You can look for yourself."

And she went away; the warmth of the place and the smell of the soup were unbearable.

The Lorilleuxs shrugged their shoulders as the door closed. They hoped they had seen the last of her face. She had brought all her misfortunes on her own head, and she had, therefore, no right to expect any assistance from them. Boche joined in these animadversions, and all three considered themselves avenged for the blue shop and all the rest.

"I know her!" said Mme Lorilleux. "If I had lent her the ten sous she wanted she would have spent it in liquor."

Gervaise crawled down the corridor with slipshod shoes and slouching shoulders, but at her door she hesitated; she could not go in: she was afraid. She would walk up and down a little—that would keep her warm. As she passed she looked in at Father Bru, but to her surprise he was not there, and she asked herself with a pang of jealousy if anyone could possibly have asked him out to dine. When she reached the Bijards' she heard a groan. She went in.

"What is the matter?" she said.

The room was very clean and in perfect order. Lalie that very morning had swept and arranged everything. In vain did the cold blast of poverty blow through that chamber and bring with it dirt and disorder. Lalie was always there; she cleaned and scrubbed and gave to everything a look of gentility. There was little money but much cleanliness within those four walls.

The two children were cutting out pictures in a corner, but Lalie was in

bed, lying very straight and pale, with the sheet pulled over her chin.

"What is the matter?" asked Gervaise anxiously.

Lalie slowly lifted her white lids and tried to speak.

"Nothing," she said faintly; "nothing, I assure you!" Then as her eyes closed she added:

"I am only a little lazy and am taking my ease."

But her face bore the traces of such frightful agony that Gervaise fell on her knees by the side of the bed. She knew that the child had had a cough for a month, and she saw the blood trickling from the corners of her mouth.

"It is not my fault," Lalie murmured. "I thought I was strong enough, and I washed the floor. I could not finish the windows though. Everything but those are clean. But I was so tired that I was obliged to lie down—"

She interrupted herself to say:

"Please see that my children are not cutting themselves with the scissors."

She started at the sound of a heavy step on the stairs. Her father noisily pushed open the door. As usual he had drunk too much, and in his eyes blazed the lurid flames kindled by alcohol.

When he saw Lalie lying down he walked to the corner and took up the long whip, from which he slowly unwound the lash.

"This is a good joke!" he said. "The idea of your daring to go to bed at this hour. Come, up with you!"

He snapped the whip over the bed, and the child murmured softly:

"Do not strike me, Papa. I am sure you will be sorry if you do. Do not strike me!"

"Up with you!" he cried. "Up with you!"

Then she answered faintly:

"I cannot, for I am dying."

Gervaise had snatched the whip from Bijard, who stood with his under jaw dropped, glaring at his daughter. What could the little fool mean? Whoever heard of a child dying like that when she had not even been sick? Oh, she was lying!

"You will see that I am telling you the truth," she replied. "I did not tell you as long as I could help it. Be kind to me now, Papa, and say good-by as if you loved me."

Bijard passed his hand over his eyes. She did look very strangely—her face was that of a grown woman. The presence of death in that cramped room sobered him suddenly. He looked around with the air of a man who had been suddenly awakened from a dream. He saw the two little ones clean and happy and the room neat and orderly.

He fell into a chair.

"Dear little mother!" he murmured. "Dear little mother!"

This was all he said, but it was very sweet to Lalie, who had never been spoiled by overpraise. She comforted him. She told him how grieved she was to go away and leave him before she had entirely brought up her children. He would watch over them, would he not? And in her dying voice she gave him some little details in regard to their clothes. He—the alcohol having regained its power—listened with round eyes of wonder.

After a long silence Lalie spoke again:

"We owe four francs and seven sous to the baker. He must be paid. Madame Goudron has an iron that belongs to us; you must not forget it. This evening I was not able to make the soup, but there are bread and cold potatoes."

As long as she breathed the poor little mite continued to be the mother of the family. She died because her breast was too small to contain so great a heart, and that he lost this precious treasure was entirely her father's fault. He, wretched creature, had kicked her mother to death and now, just as surely, murdered his daughter.

Gervaise tried to keep back her tears. She held Lalie's hands, and as the bedclothes slipped away she rearranged them. In doing so she caught a glimpse of the poor little figure. The sight might have drawn tears from a stone. Lalie wore only a tiny chemise over her bruised and bleeding flesh; marks of a lash striped her sides; a livid spot was on her right arm, and from head to foot she was one bruise.

Gervaise was paralyzed at the sight. She wondered, if there were a God above, how He could have allowed the child to stagger under so heavy a cross.

"Madame Coupeau," murmured the child, trying to draw the sheet over

her. She was ashamed, ashamed for her father.

Gervaise could not stay there. The child was fast sinking. Her eyes were fixed on her little ones, who sat in the corner, still cutting out their pictures. The room was growing dark, and Gervaise fled from it. Ah, what an awful thing life was! And how gladly would she throw herself under the wheels of an omnibus, if that might end it!

Almost unconsciously Gervaise took her way to the shop where her husband worked or, rather, pretended to work. She would wait for him and get the money before he had a chance to spend it.

It was a very cold corner where she stood. The sounds of the carriages and footsteps were strangely muffled by reason of the fast-falling snow. Gervaise stamped her feet to keep them from freezing. The people who passed offered few distractions, for they hurried by with their coat collars turned up to their ears. But Gervaise saw several women watching the door of the factory quite as anxiously as herself—they were wives who, like herself, probably wished to get hold of a portion of their husbands' wages. She did not know them, but it required no introduction to understand their business.

The door of the factory remained firmly shut for some time. Then it opened to allow the egress of one workman; then two, three, followed, but these were probably those who, well behaved, took their wages home to their wives, for they neither retreated nor started when they saw the little crowd. One woman fell on a pale little fellow and, plunging her hand into his pocket, carried off every sou of her husband's earnings, while he, left without enough to pay for a pint of wine, went off down the street almost weeping.

Some other men appeared, and one turned back to warn a comrade, who came gamely and fearlessly out, having put his silver pieces in his shoes. In vain did his wife look for them in his pockets; in vain did she scold and coax—he had no money, he declared.

Then came another noisy group, elbowing each other in their haste to reach a cabaret, where they could drink away their week's wages. These fellows were followed by some shabby men who were swearing under their breath at the trifle they had received, having been tipsy and absent more than half the week.

But the saddest sight of all was the grief of a meek little woman in black, whose husband, a tall, good-looking fellow, pushed her roughly aside and walked off down the street with his boon companions, leaving her to go home alone, which she did, weeping her very heart out as she went.

Gervaise still stood watching the entrance. Where was Coupeau? She asked some of the men, who teased her by declaring that he had just gone by the back door. She saw by this time that Coupeau had lied to her, that he had not been at work that day. She also saw that there was no dinner for her. There was not a shadow of hope—nothing but hunger and darkness and cold.

She toiled up La Rue des Poissonnièrs when she suddenly heard Coupeau's voice and, glancing in at the window of a wineshop, she saw him drinking with Mes-Bottes, who had had the luck to marry the previous summer a woman with some money. He was now, therefore, well clothed and fed and altogether a happy mortal and had Coupeau's admiration. Gervaise laid her hands on her husband's shoulders as he left the cabaret.

"I am hungry," she said softly.

"Hungry, are you? Well then, eat your fist and keep the other for tomorrow."

"Shall I steal a loaf of bread?" she asked in a dull, dreary tone.

Mes-Bottes smoothed his chin and said in a conciliatory voice:

"No, no! Don't do that; it is against the law. But if a woman manages—"

Coupeau interrupted him with a coarse laugh.

Yes, a woman, if she had any sense, could always get along, and it was her own fault if she starved.

And the two men walked on toward the outer boulevard. Gervaise followed them. Again she said:

"I am hungry. You know I have had nothing to eat. You must find me something."

He did not answer, and she repeated her words in a tone of agony.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, turning upon her furiously. "What can I do? I have nothing. Be off with you, unless you want to be beaten."

He lifted his fist; she recoiled and said with set teeth:

"Very well then; I will go and find some man who has a sou."

Coupeau pretended to consider this an excellent joke. Yes of course she could make a conquest; by gaslight she was still passably goodlooking. If she succeeded he advised her to dine at the Capucin, where there was very good eating.

She turned away with livid lips; he called after her:

"Bring some dessert with you, for I love cake. And perhaps you can induce your friend to give me an old coat, for I swear it is cold tonight."

Gervaise, with this infernal mirth ringing in her ears, hurried down the street. She was determined to take this desperate step. She had only a choice between that and theft, and she considered that she had a right to dispose of herself as she pleased. The question of right and wrong did not present itself very clearly to her eyes. "When one is starving is hardly the time," she said to herself, "to philosophize." She walked slowly up and down the boulevard. This part of Paris was crowded now with new buildings, between whose sculptured facades ran narrow lanes leading to haunts of squalid misery, which were cheek by jowl with splendor and wealth.

It seemed strange to Gervaise that among this crowd who elbowed her there was not one good Christian to divine her situation and slip some sous into her hand. Her head was dizzy, and her limbs would hardly bear her weight. At this hour ladies with hats and well-dressed gentlemen who lived in these fine new houses were mingled with the people—with the men and women whose faces were pale and sickly from the vitiated air of the workshops in which they passed their lives. Another day of toil was over, but the days came too often and were too long. One hardly had time to turn over in one's sleep when the everlasting grind began again.

Gervaise went with the crowd. No one looked at her, for the men were all hurrying home to their dinner. Suddenly she looked up and beheld the Hôtel Boncœur. It was empty, the shutters and doors covered with placards and the whole facade weather-stained and decaying. It was there in that hotel that the seeds of her present life had been sown. She stood still and looked up at the window of the room she had occupied and recalled her youth passed with Lantier and the manner in which he had left her. But she was young then and soon recovered from the blow. That was twenty years ago, and now what was she?

The sight of the place made her sick, and she turned toward Montmartre. She passed crowds of workwomen with little parcels in their hands and children who had been sent to the baker's, carrying four-pound loaves of bread as tall as themselves, which looked like shining brown dolls.

By degrees the crowd dispersed, and Gervaise was almost alone. Everyone was at dinner. She thought how delicious it would be to lie down and never rise again—to feel that all toil was over. And this was the end of her life! Gervaise, amid the pangs of hunger, thought of some of the fete days she had known and remembered that she had not always been miserable. Once she was pretty, fair and fresh. She had been a kind and admired mistress in her shop. Gentlemen came to it only to see her, and she vaguely wondered where all this youth and this beauty had fled.

Again she looked up; she had reached the abattoirs, which were now being torn down; the fronts were taken away, showing the dark holes within, the very stones of which reeked with blood. Farther on was the hospital with its high, gray walls, with two wings opening out like a huge fan. A door in the wall was the terror of the whole Quartier—the Door of the Dead, it was called—through which all the bodies were carried.

She hurried past this solid oak door and went down to the railroad bridge, under which a train had just passed, leaving in its rear a floating cloud of smoke. She wished she were on that train which would take her into the country, and she pictured to herself open spaces and the fresh air and expanse of blue sky; perhaps she could live a new life there.

As she thought this her weary eyes began to puzzle out in the dim twilight the words on a printed handbill pasted on one of the pillars of the arch. She read one—an advertisement offering fifty francs for a lost dog. Someone must have loved the creature very much.

Gervaise turned back again. The street lamps were being lit and defined long lines of streets and avenues. The restaurants were all crowded, and people were eating and drinking. Before the Assommoir stood a crowd waiting their turn and room within, and as a respectable tradesman passed he said with a shake of the head that many a man would be drunk that night in Paris. And over this scene hung the dark sky, low and clouded.

Gervaise wished she had a few sous: she would, in that case, have gone

into this place and drunk until she ceased to feel hungry, and through the window she watched the still with an angry consciousness that all her misery and all her pain came from that. If she had never touched a drop of liquor all might have been so different.

She started from her reverie; this was the hour of which she must take advantage. Men had dined and were comparatively amiable. She looked around her and toward the trees where—under the leafless branches—she saw more than one female figure. Gervaise watched them, determined to do what they did. Her heart was in her throat; it seemed to her that she was dreaming a bad dream.

She stood for some fifteen minutes; none of the men who passed looked at her. Finally she moved a little and spoke to one who, with his hands in his pockets, was whistling as he walked.

"Sir," she said in a low voice, "please listen to me."

The man looked at her from head to foot and went on whistling louder than before.

Gervaise grew bolder. She forgot everything except the pangs of hunger. The women under the trees walked up and down with the regularity of wild animals in a cage.

"Sir," she said again, "please listen."

But the man went on. She walked toward the Hôtel Boncœur again, past the hospital, which was now brilliantly lit. There she turned and went back over the same ground—the dismal ground between the slaughterhouses and the place where the sick lay dying. With these two places she seemed to feel bound by some mysterious tie.

"Sir, please listen!"

She saw her shadow on the ground as she stood near a street lamp. It was a grotesque shadow—grotesque because of her ample proportions. Her limp had become, with time and her additional weight, a very decided deformity, and as she moved the lengthening shadow of herself seemed to be creeping along the sides of the houses with bows and curtsies of mock reverence. Never before had she realized the change in herself. She was fascinated by this shadow. It was very droll, she thought, and she wondered if the men did not think so too.

"Sir, please listen!"

It was growing late. Man after man, in a beastly state of intoxication, reeled past her; quarrels and disputes filled the air.

Gervaise walked on, half asleep. She was conscious of little except that she was starving. She wondered where her daughter was and what she was eating, but it was too much trouble to think, and she shivered and crawled on. As she lifted her face she felt the cutting wind, accompanied by the snow, fine and dry, like gravel. The storm had come.

People were hurrying past her, but she saw one man walking slowly. She went toward him.

"Sir, please listen!"

The man stopped. He did not seem to notice what she said but extended his hand and murmured in a low voice:

"Charity, if you please!"

The two looked at each other. Merciful heavens! It was Father Bru begging and Mme Coupeau doing worse. They stood looking at each other—equals in misery. The aged workman had been trying to make up his mind all the evening to beg, and the first person he stopped was a woman as poor as himself! This was indeed the irony of fate. Was it not a pity to have toiled for fifty years and then to beg his bread? To have been one of the most flourishing laundresses in Paris and then to make her bed in the gutter? They looked at each other once more, and without a word each went their own way through the fast-falling snow, which blinded Gervaise as she struggled on, the wind wrapping her thin skirts around her legs so that she could hardly walk.

Suddenly an absolute whirlwind struck her and bore her breathless and helpless along—she did not even know in what direction. When at last she was able to open her eyes she could see nothing through the blinding snow, but she heard a step and saw the outlines of a man's figure. She snatched him by the blouse.

"Sir," she said, "please listen."

The man turned. It was Goujet.

Ah, what had she done to be thus tortured and humiliated? Was God in heaven an angry God always? This was the last dreg of bitterness in her cup. She saw her shadow: her limp, she felt, made her walk like an intoxicated woman, which was indeed hard, when she had not swallowed

a drop.

Goujet looked at her while the snow whitened his yellow beard.

"Come!" he said.

And he walked on, she following him. Neither spoke.

Poor Mme Goujet had died in October of acute rheumatism, and her son continued to reside in the same apartment. He had this night been sitting with a sick friend.

He entered, lit a lamp and turned toward Gervaise, who stood humbly on the threshold.

"Come in!" he said in a low voice, as if his mother could have heard him.

The first room was that of Mme Goujet, which was unchanged since her death. Near the window stood her frame, apparently ready for the old lady. The bed was carefully made, and she could have slept there had she returned from the cemetery to spend a night with her son. The room was clean, sweet and orderly.

"Come in," repeated Goujet.

Gervaise entered with the air of a woman who is startled at finding herself in a respectable place. He was pale and trembling. They crossed his mother's room softly, and when Gervaise stood within his own he closed the door.

It was the same room in which he had lived ever since she knew him—small and almost virginal in its simplicity. Gervaise dared not move.

Goujet snatched her in his arms, but she pushed him away faintly.

The stove was still hot, and a dish was on the top of it. Gervaise looked toward it. Goujet understood. He placed the dish on the table, poured her out some wine and cut a slice of bread.

"Thank you," she said. "How good you are!"

She trembled to that degree that she could hardly hold her fork. Hunger gave her eyes the fierceness of a famished beast and to her head the tremulous motion of senility. After eating a potato she burst into tears but continued to eat, with the tears streaming down her cheeks and her chin quivering.

"Will you have some more bread?" he asked. She said no; she said yes; she did not know what she said.

And he stood looking at her in the clear light of the lamp. How old and shabby she was! The heat was melting the snow on her hair and clothing, and water was dripping from all her garments. Her hair was very gray and roughened by the wind. Where was the pretty white throat he so well remembered? He recalled the days when he first knew her, when her skin was so delicate and she stood at her table, briskly moving the hot irons to and fro. He thought of the time when she had come to the forge and of the joy with which he would have welcomed her then to his room. And now she was there!

She finished her bread amid great silent tears and then rose to her feet.

Goujet took her hand.

"I love you, Madame Gervaise; I love you still," he cried.

"Do not say that," she exclaimed, "for it is impossible."

He leaned toward her.

"Will you allow me to kiss you?" he asked respectfully.

She did not know what to say, so great was her emotion.

He kissed her gravely and solemnly and then pressed his lips upon her gray hair. He had never kissed anyone since his mother's death, and Gervaise was all that remained to him of the past.

He turned away and, throwing himself on his bed, sobbed aloud. Gervaise could not endure this. She exclaimed:

"I love you, Monsieur Goujet, and I understand. Farewell!"

And she rushed through Mme Goujet's room and then through the street to her home. The house was all dark, and the arched door into the courtyard looked like huge, gaping jaws. Could this be the house where she once desired to reside? Had she been deaf in those days, not to have heard that wail of despair which pervaded the place from top to bottom? From the day when she first set her foot within the house she had steadily gone downhill.

Yes, it was a frightful way to live—so many people herded together, to become the prey of cholera or vice. She looked at the courtyard and fancied it a cemetery surrounded by high walls. The snow lay white within it. She stepped over the usual stream from the dyer's, but this

time the stream was black and opened for itself a path through the white snow. The stream was the color of her thoughts. But she remembered when both were rosy.

As she toiled up the six long flights in the darkness she laughed aloud. She recalled her old dream—to work quietly, have plenty to eat, a little home to herself, where she could bring up her children, never to be beaten, and to die in her bed! It was droll how things had turned out. She worked no more; she had nothing to eat; she lived amid dirt and disorder. Her daughter had gone to the bad, and her husband beat her whenever he pleased. As for dying in her bed, she had none. Should she throw herself out of the window and find one on the pavement below?

She had not been unreasonable in her wishes, surely. She had not asked of heaven an income of thirty thousand francs or a carriage and horses. This was a queer world! And then she laughed again as she remembered that she had once said that after she had worked for twenty years she would retire into the country.

Yes, she would go into the country, for she should soon have her little green corner in Père-Lachaise.

Her poor brain was disturbed. She had bidden an eternal farewell to Goujet. They would never see each other again. All was over between them—love and friendship too.

As she passed the Bijards' she looked in and saw Lalie lying dead, happy and at peace. It was well with the child.

"She is lucky," muttered Gervaise.

At this moment she saw a gleam of light under the undertaker's door. She threw it wide open with a wild desire that he should take her as well as Lalie. Bazonge had come in that night more tipsy than usual and had thrown his hat and cloak in the corner, while he lay in the middle of the floor.

He started up and called out:

"Shut that door! And don't stand there—it is too cold. What do you want?"

Then Gervaise, with arms outstretched, not knowing or caring what she said, began to entreat him with passionate vehemence:

"Oh, take me!" she cried. "I can bear it no longer. Take me, I implore you!"

And she knelt before him, a lurid light blazing in her haggard eyes.

Father Bazonge, with garments stained by the dust of the cemetery, seemed to her as glorious as the sun. But the old man, yet half asleep, rubbed his eyes and could not understand her.

"What are you talking about?" he muttered.

"Take me," repeated Gervaise, more earnestly than before. "Do you remember one night when I rapped on the partition? Afterward I said I did not, but I was stupid then and afraid. But I am not afraid now. Here, take my hands—they are not cold with terror. Take me and put me to sleep, for I have but this one wish now."

Bazonge, feeling that it was not proper to argue with a lady, said:

"You are right. I have buried three women today, who would each have given me a jolly little sum out of gratitude, if they could have put their hands in their pockets. But you see, my dear woman, it is not such an easy thing you are asking of me."

"Take me!" cried Gervaise. "Take me! I want to go away!"

"But there is a certain little operation first, you know—" And he pretended to choke and rolled up his eyes.

Gervaise staggered to her feet. He, too, rejected her and would have nothing to do with her. She crawled into her room and threw herself on her straw. She was sorry she had eaten anything and delayed the work of starvation.

CHAPTER XIII
THE HOSPITAL

The next day Gervaise received ten francs from her son Etienne, who had steady work. He occasionally sent her a little money, knowing that there was none too much of that commodity in his poor mother's pocket.

She cooked her dinner and ate it alone, for Coupeau did not appear, nor did she hear a word of his whereabouts for nearly a week. Finally a printed paper was given her which frightened her at first, but she was soon relieved to find that it simply conveyed to her the information that her husband was at Sainte-Anne's again.

Gervaise was in no way disturbed. Coupeau knew the way back well enough; he would return in due season. She soon heard that he and Mes-Bottes had spent the whole week in dissipation, and she even felt a little angry that they had not seen fit to offer her a glass of wine with all their feasting and carousing.

On Sunday, as Gervaise had a nice little repast ready for the evening, she decided that an excursion would give her an appetite. The letter from the asylum stared her in the face and worried her. The snow had melted; the sky was gray and soft, and the air was fresh. She started at noon, as the days were now short and Sainte-Anne's was a long distance off, but as there were a great many people in the street, she was amused.

When she reached the hospital she heard a strange story. It seems that Coupeau—how, no one could say—had escaped from the hospital and had been found under the bridge. He had thrown himself over the parapet, declaring that armed men were driving him with the point of their bayonets.

One of the nurses took Gervaise up the stairs. At the head she heard terrific howls which froze the marrow in her bones.

"It is he!" said the nurse.

"He? Whom do you mean?"

"I mean your husband. He has gone on like that ever since day before yesterday, and he dances all the time too. You will see!"

Ah, what a sight it was! The cell was cushioned from the floor to the ceiling, and on the floor were mattresses on which Coupeau danced and howled in his ragged blouse. The sight was terrific. He threw himself wildly against the window and then to the other side of the cell, shaking hands as if he wished to break them off and fling them in defiance at the whole world. These wild motions are sometimes imitated, but no one who has not seen the real and terrible sight can imagine its horror.

"What is it? What is it?" gasped Gervaise.

A house surgeon, a fair and rosy youth, was sitting, calmly taking notes. The case was a peculiar one and had excited a great deal of attention among the physicians attached to the hospital.

"You can stay awhile," he said, "but keep very quiet. He will not recognize you, however."

Coupeau, in fact, did not seem to notice his wife, who had not yet seen his face. She went nearer. Was that really he? She never would have known him with his bloodshot eyes and distorted features. His skin was so hot that the air was heated around him and was as if it were varnished—shining and damp with perspiration. He was dancing, it is true, but as if on burning plowshares; not a motion seemed to be voluntary.

Gervaise went to the young surgeon, who was beating a tune on the back of his chair.

"Will he get well, sir?" she said.

The surgeon shook his head.

"What is he saying? Hark! He is talking now."

"Just be quiet, will you?" said the young man. "I wish to listen."

Coupeau was speaking fast and looking all about, as if he were examining the underbrush in the Bois de Vincennes.

"Where is it now?" he exclaimed and then, straightening himself, he looked off into the distance.

"It is a fair," he exclaimed, "and lanterns in the trees, and the water is running everywhere: fountains, cascades and all sorts of things."

He drew a long breath, as if enjoying the delicious freshness of the air.

By degrees, however, his features contracted again with pain, and he

ran quickly around the wall of his cell.

"More trickery," he howled. "I knew it!"

He started back with a hoarse cry; his teeth chattered with terror.

"No, I will not throw myself over! All that water would drown me! No, I will not!"

"I am going," said Gervaise to the surgeon. "I cannot stay another moment."

She was very pale. Coupeau kept up his infernal dance while she tottered down the stairs, followed by his hoarse voice.

How good it was to breathe the fresh air outside!

That evening everyone in the huge house in which Coupeau had lived talked of his strange disease. The concierge, crazy to hear the details, condescended to invite Gervaise to take a glass of cordial, forgetting that he had turned a cold shoulder upon her for many weeks.

Mme Lorilleux and Mme Poisson were both there also. Boche had heard of a cabinetmaker who had danced the polka until he died. He had drunk absinthe.

Gervaise finally, not being able to make them understand her description, asked for the table to be moved and there, in the center of the loge, imitated her husband, making frightful leaps and horrible contortions.

"Yes, that was what he did!"

And then everybody said it was not possible that man could keep up such violent exercise for even three hours.

Gervaise told them to go and see if they did not believe her. But Mme Lorilleux declared that nothing would induce her to set foot within Sainte-Anne's, and Virginie, whose face had grown longer and longer with each successive week that the shop got deeper into debt, contented herself with murmuring that life was not always gay—in fact, in her opinion, it was a pretty dismal thing. As the wine was finished, Gervaise bade them all good night. When she was not speaking she had sat with fixed, distended eyes. Coupeau was before them all the time.

The next day she said to herself when she rose that she would never go to the hospital again; she could do no good. But as midday arrived she could stay away no longer and started forth, without a thought of the length of the walk, so great were her mingled curiosity and anxiety.

She was not obliged to ask a question; she heard the frightful sounds at the very foot of the stairs. The keeper, who was carrying a cup of tisane across the corridor, stopped when he saw her.

"He keeps it up well!" he said.

She went in but stood at the door, as she saw there were people there. The young surgeon had surrendered his chair to an elderly gentleman wearing several decorations. He was the chief physician of the hospital, and his eyes were like gimlets.

Gervaise tried to see Coupeau over the bald head of that gentleman. Her husband was leaping and dancing with undiminished strength. The perspiration poured more constantly from his brow now; that was all. His feet had worn holes in the mattress with his steady tramp from window to wall.

Gervaise asked herself why she had come back. She had been accused the evening before of exaggerating the picture, but she had not made it strong enough. The next time she imitated him she could do it better. She listened to what the physicians were saying: the house surgeon was giving the details of the night with many words which she did not understand, but she gathered that Coupeau had gone on in the same way all night. Finally he said this was the wife of the patient. Wherefore the surgeon in chief turned and interrogated her with the air of a police judge.

"Did this man's father drink?"

"A little, sir. Just as everybody does. He fell from a roof when he had been drinking and was killed."

"Did his mother drink?"

"Yes sir—that is, a little now and then. He had a brother who died in convulsions, but the others are very healthy."

The surgeon looked at her and said coldly:

"You drink too?"

Gervaise attempted to defend herself and deny the accusation.

"You drink," he repeated, "and see to what it leads. Someday you will be here, and like this."

She leaned against the wall, utterly overcome. The physician turned away. He knelt on the mattress and carefully watched Coupeau; he wished to see if his feet trembled as much as his hands. His extremities vibrated as if on wires. The disease was creeping on, and the peculiar shivering seemed to be under the skin—it would cease for a minute or two and then begin again. The belly and the shoulders trembled like water just on the point of boiling.

Coupeau seemed to suffer more than the evening before. His complaints were curious and contradictory. A million pins were pricking him. There was a weight under the skin; a cold, wet animal was crawling over him. Then there were other creatures on his shoulder.

"I am thirsty," he groaned; "so thirsty."

The house surgeon took a glass of lemonade from a tray and gave it to him. He seized the glass in both hands, drank one swallow, spilling the whole of it at the same time. He at once spat it out in disgust.

"It is brandy!" he exclaimed.

Then the surgeon, on a sign from his chief, gave him some water, and Coupeau did the same thing.

"It is brandy!" he cried. "Brandy! Oh, my God!"

For twenty-four hours he had declared that everything he touched to his lips was brandy, and with tears begged for something else, for it burned his throat, he said. Beef tea was brought to him; he refused it, saying it smelled of alcohol. He seemed to suffer intense and constant agony from the poison which he vowed was in the air. He asked why people were allowed to rub matches all the time under his nose, to choke him with their vile fumes.

The physicians watched Coupeau with care and interest. The phantoms which had hitherto haunted him by night now appeared before him at midday. He saw spiders' webs hanging from the wall as large as the sails of a man-of-war. Then these webs changed to nets, whose meshes were constantly contracting only to enlarge again. These nets held black balls, and they, too, swelled and shrank. Suddenly he cried out:

"The rats! Oh, the rats!"

The balls had been transformed to rats. The vile beasts found their way through the meshes of the nets and swarmed over the mattress and then disappeared as suddenly as they came.

The rats were followed by a monkey, who went in and came out from the wall, each time so near his face that Coupeau started back in disgust. All this vanished in the twinkling of an eye. He apparently thought the walls were unsteady and about to fall, for he uttered shriek after shriek of agony.

"Fire! Fire!" he screamed. "They can't stand long. They are shaking! Fire! Fire! The whole heavens are bright with the light! Help! Help!"

His shrieks ended in a convulsed murmur. He foamed at the mouth. The surgeon in chief turned to the assistant.

"You keep the temperature at forty degrees?" he asked.

"Yes sir."

A dead silence ensued. Then the surgeon shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, continue the same treatment—beef tea, milk, lemonade and quinine as directed. Do not leave him, and send for me if there is any change."

And he left the room, Gervaise following close at his heels, seeking an opportunity of asking him if there was no hope. But he stalked down the corridor with so much dignity that she dared not approach him.

She stood for a moment, undecided whether she should go back to Coupeau or not, but hearing him begin again the lamentable cry for water:

"Water, not brandy!"

She hurried on, feeling that she could endure no more that day. In the streets the galloping horses made her start with a strange fear that all the inmates of Sainte-Anne's were at her heels. She remembered what the physician had said, with what terrors he had threatened her, and she wondered if she already had the disease.

When she reached the house the concierge and all the others were waiting and called her into the loge.

Was Coupeau still alive? they asked.

Boche seemed quite disturbed at her answer, as he had made a bet that he would not live twenty-four hours. Everyone was astonished. Mme Lorilleux made a mental calculation:

"Sixty hours," she said. "His strength is extraordinary."

Then Boche begged Gervaise to show them once more what Coupeau did.

The demand became general, and it was pointed out to her that she ought not to refuse, for there were two neighbors there who had not seen her representation the night previous and who had come in expressly to witness it.

They made a space in the center of the room, and a shiver of expectation ran through the little crowd.

Gervaise was very reluctant. She was really afraid—afraid of making herself ill. She finally made the attempt but drew back again hastily.

No, she could not; it was quite impossible. Everyone was disappointed, and Virginie went away.

Then everyone began to talk of the Poissons. A warrant had been served on them the night before. Poisson was to lose his place. As to Lantier, he was hovering around a woman who thought of taking the shop and meant to sell hot tripe. Lantier was in luck, as usual.

As they talked someone caught sight of Gervaise and pointed her out to the others. She was at the very back of the loge, her feet and hands trembling, imitating Coupeau, in fact. They spoke to her. She stared wildly about, as if awaking from a dream, and then left the room.

The next day she left the house at noon, as she had done before. And as she entered Sainte-Anne's she heard the same terrific sounds.

When she reached the cell she found Coupeau raving mad! He was fighting in the middle of the cell with invisible enemies. He tried to hide himself; he talked and he answered, as if there were twenty persons. Gervaise watched him with distended eyes. He fancied himself on a roof, laying down the sheets of zinc. He blew the furnace with his mouth, and he went down on his knees and made a motion as if he had soldering irons in his hand. He was troubled by his shoes: it seemed as if he thought they were dangerous. On the next roofs stood persons who insulted him by letting quantities of rats loose. He stamped here and there in his desire to kill them and the spiders too! He pulled away his clothing to catch the creatures who, he said, intended to burrow under his skin. In another minute he believed himself to be a locomotive and puffed and panted. He darted toward the window and looked down into the street as if he were on a roof.

"Look!" he said. "There is a traveling circus. I see the lions and the panthers making faces at me. And there is Clémence. Good God, man, don't fire!"

And he gesticulated to the men who, he said, were pointing their guns at him.

He talked incessantly, his voice growing louder and louder, higher and higher.

"Ah, it is you, is it? But please keep your hair out of my mouth."

And he passed his hand over his face as if to take away the hair.

"Who is it?" said the keeper.

"My wife, of course."

He looked at the wall, turning his back to Gervaise, who felt very strange, and looked at the wall to see if she were there! He talked on.

"You look very fine. Where did you get that dress? Come here and let me arrange it for you a little. You devil! There he is again!"

And he leaped at the wall, but the soft cushions threw him back.

"Whom do you see?" asked the young doctor.

"Lantier! Lantier!"

Gervaise could not endure the eyes of the young man, for the scene brought back to her so much of her former life.

Coupeau fancied, as he had been thrown back from the wall in front, that he was now attacked in the rear, and he leaped over the mattress with the agility of a cat. His respiration grew shorter and shorter, his eyes starting from their sockets.

"He is killing her!" he shrieked. "Killing her! Just see the blood!"

He fell back against the wall with his hands wide open before him, as if he were repelling the approach of some frightful object. He uttered two long, low groans and then fell flat on the mattress.

"He is dead! He is dead!" moaned Gervaise.

The keeper lifted Coupeau. No, he was not dead; his bare feet quivered with a regular motion. The surgeon in chief came in, bringing two colleagues. The three men stood in grave silence, watching the man for

some time. They uncovered him, and Gervaise saw his shoulders and back.

The tremulous motion had now taken complete possession of the body as well as the limbs, and a strange ripple ran just under the skin.

"He is asleep," said the surgeon in chief, turning to his colleagues.

Coupeau's eyes were closed, and his face twitched convulsively. Coupeau might sleep, but his feet did nothing of the kind.

Gervaise, seeing the doctors lay their hands on Coupeau's body, wished to do the same. She approached softly and placed her hand on his shoulder and left it there for a minute.

What was going on there? A river seemed hurrying on under that skin. It was the liquor of the Assommoir, working like a mole through muscle, nerves, bone and marrow.

The doctors went away, and Gervaise, at the end of another hour, said to the young surgeon:

"He is dead, sir."

But the surgeon, looking at the feet, said: "No," for those poor feet were still dancing.

Another hour, and yet another passed. Suddenly the feet were stiff and motionless, and the young surgeon turned to Gervaise.

"He is dead," he said.

Death alone had stopped those feet.

When Gervaise went back she was met at the door by a crowd of people who wished to ask her questions, she thought.

"He is dead," she said quietly as she moved on.

But no one heard her. They had their own tale to tell then. How Poisson had nearly murdered Lantier. Poisson was a tiger, and he ought to have seen what was going on long before. And Boche said the woman had taken the shop and that Lantier was, as usual, in luck again, for he adored tripe.

In the meantime Gervaise went directly to Mme Lerat and Mme Lorilleux and said faintly:

"He is dead—after four days of horror."

Then the two sisters were in duty bound to pull out their handkerchiefs. Their brother had lived a most dissolute life, but then he was their brother.

Boche shrugged his shoulders and said in an audible voice:

"Pshaw! It is only one drunkard the less!"

After this day Gervaise was not always quite right in her mind, and it was one of the attractions of the house to see her act Coupeau.

But her representations were often involuntary. She trembled at times from head to foot and uttered little spasmodic cries. She had taken the disease in a modified form at Sainte-Anne's from looking so long at her husband. But she never became altogether like him in the few remaining months of her existence.

She sank lower day by day. As soon as she got a little money from any source whatever she drank it away at once. Her landlord decided to turn her out of the room she occupied, and as Father Bru was discovered dead one day in his den under the stairs, M. Marescot allowed her to take possession of his quarters. It was there, therefore, on the old straw bed, that she lay waiting for death to come. Apparently even Mother Earth would have none of her. She tried several times to throw herself out of the window, but death took her by bits, as it were. In fact, no one knew exactly when she died or exactly what she died of. They spoke of cold and hunger.

But the truth was she died of utter weariness of life, and Father Bazonge came the day she was found dead in her den.

Under his arm he carried a coffin, and he was very tipsy and as gay as a lark.

"It is foolish to be in a hurry, because one always gets what one wants finally. I am ready to give you all your good pleasure when your time comes. Some want to go, and some want to stay. And here is one who wanted to go and was kept waiting."

And when he lifted Gervaise in his great, coarse hands he did it tenderly. And as he laid her gently in her coffin he murmured between two hiccups:

"It is I—my dear, it is I," said this rough consoler of women. "It is I. Be happy now and sleep quietly, my dear!"

THE END.

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