

Pierrette eBook

Pierrette by Honoré de Balzac

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Page 1

PIERRETTE

After her grandfather and grandmother entered the sort of hospital in which they sadly expected to end their days, Pierrette, being young and proud, suffered so terribly at living there on charity that she was thankful when she heard she had rich relations. When Brigaut, the son of her mother's friend the major, and the companion of her childhood, who was learning his trade as a cabinet-maker at Nantes, heard of her departure he offered her the money to pay her way to Paris in the diligence,—sixty francs, the total of his *pour-boires* as an apprentice, slowly amassed, and accepted by Pierrette with the sublime indifference of true affection, showing that in a like case she herself would be affronted by thanks.

Brigaut was in the habit of going every Sunday to Saint-Jacques to play with Pierrette and try to console her. The vigorous young workman knew the dear delight of bestowing a complete and devoted protection on an object involuntarily chosen by his heart. More than once he and Pierrette, sitting on Sundays in a corner of the garden, had embroidered the veil of the future with their youthful projects; the apprentice, armed with his plane, scoured the world to make their fortune, while Pierrette waited.

In October, 1824, when the child had completed her eleventh year, she was entrusted by the two old people and by Brigaut, all three sorrowfully sad, to the conductor of the diligence from Nantes to Paris, with an entreaty to put her safely on the diligence from Paris to Provins and to take good care of her. Poor Brigaut! he ran like a dog after the coach looking at his dear Pierrette as long as he was able. In spite of her signs he ran over three miles, and when at last he was exhausted his eyes, wet with tears, still followed her. She, too, was crying when she saw him no longer running by her, and putting her head out of the window she watched him, standing stock-still and looking after her, as the lumbering vehicle disappeared.

The Lorrains and Brigaut knew so little of life that the girl had not a penny when she arrived in Paris. The conductor, to whom she had mentioned her rich friends, paid her expenses at the hotel, and made the conductor of the Provins diligence pay him, telling him to take good care of the girl and to see that the charges were paid by the family, exactly as though she were a case of goods. Four days after her departure from Nantes, about nine o'clock of a Monday night, a kind old conductor of the Messageries-royales, took Pierrette by the hand, and while the porters were discharging in the Grand'Rue the packages and passengers for Provins, he led the little girl, whose only baggage was a bundle containing two dresses, two chemises, and two pairs of stockings, to Mademoiselle Rogron's house, which was pointed out to him by the director at the coach office.



“Good-evening, mademoiselle and the rest of the company. I’ve brought you a cousin, and here she is; and a nice little girl too, upon my word. You have forty-seven francs to pay me, and sign my book.”



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Mademoiselle Sylvie and her brother were dumb with pleasure and amazement.

"Excuse me," said the conductor, "the coach is waiting. Sign my book and pay me forty-seven francs, sixty centimes, and whatever you please for myself and the conductor from Nantes; we've taken care of the little girl as if she were our own; and paid for her beds and her food, also her fare to Provins, and other little things."

"Forty-seven francs, twelve sous!" said Sylvie.

"You are not going to dispute it?" cried the man.

"Where's the bill?" said Rogron.

"Bill! look at the book."

"Stop talking, and pay him," said Sylvie, "You see there's nothing else to be done."

Rogron went to get the money, and gave the man forty-seven francs, twelve sous.

"And nothing for my comrade and me?" said the conductor.

Sylvie took two francs from the depths of the old velvet bag which held her keys.

"Thank you, no," said the man; "keep 'em yourself. We would rather care for the little one for her own sake." He picked up his book and departed, saying to the servant-girl: "What a pair! it seems there are crocodiles out of Egypt!"

"Such men are always brutal," said Sylvie, who overheard the words.

"They took good care of the little girl, anyhow," said Adele with her hands on her hips.

"We don't have to live with him," remarked Rogron.

"Where's the little one to sleep?" asked Adele.

Such was the arrival of Pierrette Lorrain in the home of her cousins, who gazed at her with stolid eyes; she was tossed to them like a package, with no intermediate state between the wretched chamber at Saint-Jacques and the dining-room of her cousins, which seemed to her a palace. She was shy and speechless. To all other eyes than those of the Rogrons the little Breton girl would have seemed enchanting as she stood there in her petticoat of coarse blue flannel, with a pink cambric apron, thick shoes, blue stockings, and a white kerchief, her hands being covered by red worsted mittens edged with white, bought for her by the conductor. Her dainty Breton cap (which had been washed in Paris, for the journey from Nantes had rumbled it) was like a halo round her happy little face. This national cap, of the finest lawn, trimmed with stiffened lace



pleated in flat folds, deserves description, it was so dainty and simple. The light coming through the texture and the lace produced a partial shadow, the soft shadow of a light upon the skin, which gave her the virginal grace that all painters seek and Leopold Robert found for the Raffaelesque face of the woman who holds a child in his picture of "The Gleaners." Beneath this fluted frame of light sparkled a white and rosy and artless face, glowing with vigorous health. The warmth of the room brought the blood to the cheeks, to the tips of the pretty ears, to the lips and the end of the delicate nose, making the natural white of the complexion whiter still.



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“Well, are you not going to say anything? I am your cousin Sylvie, and that is your cousin Rogron.”

“Do you want something to eat?” asked Rogron.

“When did you leave Nantes?” asked Sylvie.

“Is she dumb?” said Rogron.

“Poor little dear, she has hardly any clothes,” cried Adele, who had opened the child’s bundle, tied up in a handkerchief of the old Lorrains.

“Kiss your cousin,” said Sylvie.

Pierrette kissed Rogron.

“Kiss your cousin,” said Rogron.

Pierrette kissed Sylvie.

“She is tired out with her journey, poor little thing; she wants to go to sleep,” said Adele.

Pierrette was overcome with a sudden and invincible aversion for her two relatives,—a feeling that no one had ever before excited in her. Sylvie and the maid took her up to bed in the room where Brigaut afterwards noticed the white cotton curtain. In it was a little bed with a pole painted blue, from which hung a calico curtain; a walnut bureau without a marble top, a small table, a looking-glass, a very common night-table without a door, and three chairs completed the furniture of the room. The walls, which sloped in front, were hung with a shabby paper, blue with black flowers. The tiled floor, stained red and polished, was icy to the feet. There was no carpet except for a strip at the bedside. The mantelpiece of common marble was adorned by a mirror, two candelabra in copper-gilt, and a vulgar alabaster cup in which two pigeons, forming handles, were drinking.

“You will be comfortable here, my little girl?” said Sylvie.

“Oh, it’s beautiful!” said the child, in her silvery voice.

“She’s not difficult to please,” muttered the stout servant. “Sha’n’t I warm her bed?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Sylvie, “the sheets may be damp.”

Adele brought one of her own night-caps when she returned with the warming-pan, and Pierrette, who had never slept in anything but the coarsest linen sheets, was amazed at



the fineness and softness of the cotton ones. When she was fairly in bed and tucked up, Adele, going downstairs with Sylvie, could not refrain from saying, "All she has isn't worth three francs, mademoiselle."

Ever since her economical regime began, Sylvie had compelled the maid to sit in the dining-room so that one fire and one lamp could do for all; except when Colonel Gouraud and Vinet came, on which occasions Adele was sent to the kitchen.

Pierrette's arrival enlivened the rest of the evening.

"We must get her some clothes to-morrow," said Sylvie; "she has absolutely nothing."

"No shoes but those she had on, which weigh a pound," said Adele.

"That's always so, in their part of the country," remarked Rogron.

"How she looked at her room! though it really isn't handsome enough for a cousin of yours, mademoiselle."

"It is good enough; hold your tongue," said Sylvie.



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“Gracious, what chemises! coarse enough to scratch her skin off; not a thing can she use here,” said Adele, emptying the bundle.

Master, mistress, and servant were busy till past ten o’clock, deciding what cambric they should buy for the new chemises, how many pairs of stockings, how many under-petticoats, and what material, and in reckoning up the whole cost of Pierrette’s outfit.

“You won’t get off under three hundred francs,” said Rogron, who could remember the different prices, and add them up from his former shop-keeping habit.

“Three hundred francs!” cried Sylvie.

“Yes, three hundred. Add it up.”

The brother and sister went over the calculation once more, and found the cost would be fully three hundred francs, not counting the making.

“Three hundred francs at one stroke!” said Sylvie to herself as she got into bed.

* * * * *

Pierrette was one of those children of love whom love endows with its tenderness, its vivacity, its gaiety, its nobility, its devotion. Nothing had so far disturbed or wounded a heart that was delicate as that of a fawn, but which was now painfully repressed by the cold greeting of her cousins. If Brittany had been full of outward misery, at least it was full of love. The old Lorrains were the most incapable of merchants, but they were also the most loving, frank, caressing, of friends, like all who are incautious and free from calculation. Their little granddaughter had received no other education at Pen-Hoel than that of nature. Pierrette went where she liked, in a boat on the pond, or roaming the village and the fields with Jacques Brigaut, her comrade, exactly as Paul and Virginia might have done. Petted by everybody, free as air, they gaily chased the joys of childhood. In summer they ran to watch the fishing, they caught the many-colored insects, they gathered flowers, they gardened; in winter they made slides, they built snow-men or huts, or pelted each other with snowballs. Welcomed by all, they met with smiles wherever they went.

When the time came to begin their education, disasters came, too. Jacques, left without means at the death of his father, was apprenticed by his relatives to a cabinet-maker, and fed by charity, as Pierrette was soon to be at Saint-Jacques. Until the little girl was taken with her grandparents to that asylum, she had known nothing but fond caresses and protection from every one. Accustomed to confide in so much love, the little darling missed in these rich relatives, so eagerly desired, the kindly looks and ways which all the world, even strangers and the conductors of the coaches, had bestowed upon her. Her bewilderment, already great, was increased by the moral atmosphere she had

entered. The heart turns suddenly cold or hot like the body. The poor child wanted to cry, without knowing why; but being very tired she went to sleep.



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The next morning, Pierrette being, like all country children, accustomed to get up early, was awake two hours before the cook. She dressed herself, stepping on tiptoe about her room, looked out at the little square, started to go downstairs and was struck with amazement by the beauties of the staircase. She stopped to examine all its details: the painted walls, the brasses, the various ornamentations, the window fixtures. Then she went down to the garden-door, but was unable to open it, and returned to her room to wait until Adele should be stirring. As soon as the woman went to the kitchen Pierrette flew to the garden and took possession of it, ran to the river, was amazed at the kiosk, and sat down in it; truly, she had enough to see and to wonder at until her cousins were up. At breakfast Sylvie said to her:—

“Was it you, little one, who was trotting over my head by daybreak, and making that racket on the stairs? You woke me so that I couldn’t go to sleep again. You must be very good and quiet, and amuse yourself without noise. Your cousin doesn’t like noise.”

“And you must wipe your feet,” said Rogron. “You went into the kiosk with your dirty shoes, and they’ve tracked all over the floor. Your cousin likes cleanliness. A great girl like you ought to be clean. Weren’t you clean in Brittany? But I recollect when I went down there to buy thread it was pitiable to see the folks,—they were like savages. At any rate she has a good appetite,” added Rogron, looking at his sister; “one would think she hadn’t eaten anything for days.”

Thus, from the very start Pierrette was hurt by the remarks of her two cousins,—hurt, she knew not why. Her straightforward, open nature, hitherto left to itself, was not given to reflection. Incapable of thinking that her cousins were hard, she was fated to find it out slowly through suffering. After breakfast the brother and sister, pleased with Pierrette’s astonishment at the house and anxious to enjoy it, took her to the salon to show her its splendors and teach her not to touch them. Many celibates, driven by loneliness and the moral necessity of caring for something, substitute factitious affections for natural ones; they love dogs, cats, canaries, servants, or their confessor. Rogron and Sylvie had come to the pass of loving immoderately their house and furniture, which had cost them so dear. Sylvie began by helping Adele in the mornings to dust and arrange the furniture, under pretence that she did not know how to keep it looking as good as new. This dusting was soon a desired occupation to her, and the furniture, instead of losing its value in her eyes, became ever more precious. To use things without hurting them or soiling them or scratching the woodwork or clouding the varnish, that was the problem which soon became the mania of the old maid’s life. Sylvie had a closet full of bits of wool, wax, varnish, and brushes, which she had learned to use with the dexterity of a cabinet-maker; she had her feather dusters and her dusting-cloths; and she rubbed away without fear of hurting herself,—she was so strong. The glance of her cold blue eyes, hard as steel, was forever roving over the furniture and under it, and you could as soon have found a tender spot in her heart as a bit of fluff under the sofa.



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After the remarks made at Madame Tiphaine's, Sylvie dared not flinch from the three hundred francs for Pierrette's clothes. During the first week her time was wholly taken up, and Pierrette's too, by frocks to order and try on, chemises and petticoats to cut out and have made by a seamstress who went out by the day. Pierrette did not know how to sew.

"That's pretty bringing up!" said Rogron. "Don't you know how to do anything, little girl?"

Pierrette, who knew nothing but how to love, made a pretty, childish gesture.

"What did you do in Brittany?" asked Rogron.

"I played," she answered, naively. "Everybody played with me. Grandmamma and grandpapa they told me stories. Ah! they all loved me!"

"Hey!" said Rogron; "didn't you take it easy!"

Pierrette opened her eyes wide, not comprehending.

"She is as stupid as an owl," said Sylvie to Mademoiselle Borain, the best seamstress in Provins.

"She's so young," said the workwoman, looking kindly at Pierrette, whose delicate little muzzle was turned up to her with a coaxing look.

Pierrette preferred the sewing-women to her relations. She was endearing in her ways with them, she watched their work, and made them those pretty speeches that seem like the flowers of childhood, and which her cousin had already silenced, for that gaunt woman loved to impress those under her with salutary awe. The sewing-women were delighted with Pierrette. Their work, however, was not carried on without many and loud grumblings.

"That child will make us pay through the nose!" cried Sylvie to her brother.

"Stand still, my dear, and don't plague us; it is all for you and not for me," she would say to Pierrette when the child was being measured. Sometimes it was, when Pierrette would ask the seamstress some question, "Let Mademoiselle Borain do her work, and don't talk to her; it is not you who are paying for her time."

"Mademoiselle," said Mademoiselle Borain, "am I to back-stitch this?"

"Yes, do it firmly; I don't want to be making such an outfit as this every day."

Sylvie put the same spirit of emulation into Pierrette's outfit that she had formerly put into the house. She was determined that her cousin should be as well dressed as



Madame Garceland's little girl. She bought the child fashionable boots of bronzed kid like those the little Tiphaines wore, very fine cotton stockings, a corset by the best maker, a dress of blue reps, a pretty cape lined with white silk, —all this that she, Sylvie, might hold her own against the children of the women who had rejected her. The underclothes were quite in keeping with the visible articles of dress, for Sylvie feared the examining eyes of the various mothers. Pierrette's chemises were of fine Madapolam calico. Mademoiselle Borain had mentioned that the sub-prefect's little girls wore cambric drawers, embroidered and trimmed in the latest style. Pierrette had the same. Sylvie ordered for her a charming little drawn bonnet of blue velvet lined with white satin, precisely like the one worn by Dr. Martener's little daughter.



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Thus attired, Pierrette was the most enchanting little girl in all Provins. On Sunday, after church, all the ladies kissed her; Mesdames Tiphaine, Garceland, Galardon, Julliard, and the rest fell in love with the sweet little Breton girl. This enthusiasm was deeply flattering to old Sylvie's self-love; she regarded it as less due to Pierrette than to her own benevolence. She ended, however, in being affronted by her cousin's success. Pierrette was constantly invited out, and Sylvie allowed her to go, always for the purpose of triumphing over "those ladies." Pierrette was much in demand for games or little parties and dinners with their own little girls. She had succeeded where the Rogrons had failed; and Mademoiselle Sylvie soon grew indignant that Pierrette was asked to other children's houses when those children never came to hers. The artless little thing did not conceal the pleasure she found in her visits to these ladies, whose affectionate manners contrasted strangely with the harshness of her two cousins. A mother would have rejoiced in the happiness of her little one, but the Rogrons had taken Pierrette for their own sakes, not for hers; their feelings, far from being parental, were dyed in selfishness and a sort of commercial calculation.

The handsome outfit, the fine Sunday dresses, and the every-day frocks were the beginning of Pierrette's troubles. Like all children free to amuse themselves, who are accustomed to follow the dictates of their own lively fancies, she was very hard on her clothes, her shoes, and above all on those embroidered drawers. A mother when she reproves her child thinks only of the child; her voice is gentle; she does not raise it unless driven to extremities, or when the child is much in fault. But here, in this great matter of Pierrette's clothes, the cousins' money was the first consideration; their interests were to be thought of, not the child's. Children have the perceptions of the canine race for the sentiments of those who rule them; they know instinctively whether they are loved or only tolerated. Pure and innocent hearts are more distressed by shades of difference than by contrasts; a child does not understand evil, but it knows when the instinct of the good and the beautiful which nature has implanted in it is shocked. The lectures which Pierrette now drew upon herself on propriety of behavior, modesty, and economy were merely the corollary of the one theme, "Pierrette will ruin us."

These perpetual fault-findings, which were destined to have a fatal result for the poor child, brought the two celibates back to the old beaten track of their shop-keeping habits, from which their removal to Provins had parted them, and in which their natures were now to expand and flourish. Accustomed in the old days to rule and to make inquisitions, to order about and reprove their clerks sharply, Rogron and his sister had actually suffered for want of victims. Little minds need to practise despotism to relieve their nerves, just as great souls thirst for equality in friendship to exercise their hearts. Narrow natures expand by persecuting as much as others through beneficence; they prove their power over their fellows by cruel tyranny as others do by loving kindness; they simply go the way their temperaments drive them. Add to this the propulsion of self-interest and you may read the enigma of most social matters.



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Thenceforth Pierrette became a necessity to the lives of her cousins. From the day of her coming their minds were occupied,—first, with her outfit, and then with the novelty of a third presence. But every new thing, a sentiment and even a tyranny, is moulded as time goes on into fresh shapes. Sylvie began by calling Pierrette “my dear,” or “little one.” Then she abandoned the gentler terms for “Pierrette” only. Her reprimands, at first only cross, became sharp and angry; and no sooner were their feet on the path of fault-finding than the brother and sister made rapid strides. They were no longer bored to death! It was not their deliberate intention to be wicked and cruel; it was simply the blind instinct of an imbecile tyranny. The pair believed they were doing Pierrette a service, just as they had thought their harshness a benefit to their apprentices.

Pierrette, whose true and noble and extreme sensibility was the antipodes of the Rogrons’ hardness, had a dread of being scolded; it wounded her so sharply that the tears would instantly start in her beautiful, pure eyes. She had a great struggle with herself before she could repress the enchanting sprightliness which made her so great a favorite elsewhere. After a time she displayed it only in the homes of her little friends. By the end of the first month she had learned to be passive in her cousins’ house,—so much so that Rogron one day asked her if she was ill. At that sudden question, she ran to the end of the garden, and stood crying beside the river, into which her tears may have fallen as she herself was about to fall into the social torrent.

One day, in spite of all her care, she tore her best reps frock at Madame Tiphaine’s, where she was spending a happy day. The poor child burst into tears, foreseeing the cruel things which would be said to her at home. Questioned by her friends, she let fall a few words about her terrible cousin. Madame Tiphaine happened to have some reps exactly like that of the frock, and she put in a new breadth herself. Mademoiselle Rogron found out the trick, as she expressed it, which the little devil had played her. From that day forth she refused to let Pierrette go to any of “those women’s” houses.

The life the poor girl led in Provins was divided into three distinct phases. The first, already shown, in which she had some joy mingled with the cold kindness of her cousins and their sharp reproaches, lasted three months. Sylvie’s refusal to let her go to her little friends, backed by the necessity of beginning her education, ended the first phase of her life at Provins, the only period when that life was bearable to her.

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These events, produced at the Rogrons by Pierrette's presence, were studied by Vinet and the colonel with the caution of foxes preparing to enter a poultry-yard and disturbed by seeing a strange fowl. They both called from time to time,—but seldom, so as not to alarm the old maid; they talked with Rogron under various pretexts, and made themselves masters of his mind with an affectation of reserve and modesty which the great Tartuffe himself would have respected. The colonel and the lawyer were spending the evening with Rogron on the very day when Sylvie had refused in bitter language to let Pierrette go again to Madame Tiphaine's, or elsewhere. Being told of this refusal the colonel and the lawyer looked at each other with an air which seemed to say that they at least knew Provins well.

"Madame Tiphaine intended to insult you," said the lawyer. "We have long been warning Rogron of what would happen. There's no good to be got from those people."

"What can you expect from the anti-national party!" cried the colonel, twirling his moustache and interrupting the lawyer. "But, mademoiselle, if we had tried to warn you from those people you might have supposed we had some malicious motive in what we said. If you like a game of cards in the evening, why don't you have it at home; why not play your boston here, in your own house? Is it impossible to fill the places of those idiots, the Julliards and all the rest of them? Vinet and I know how to play boston, and we can easily find a fourth. Vinet might present his wife to you; she is charming, and, what is more, a Chargeboeuf. You will not be so exacting as those apes of the Upper town; *you* won't require a good little housewife, who is compelled by the meanness of her family to do her own work, to dress like a duchess. Poor woman, she has the courage of a lion and the meekness of a lamb."

Sylvie Rogron showed her long yellow teeth as she smiled on the colonel, who bore the sight heroically and assumed a flattered air.

"If we are only four we can't play boston every night," said Sylvie.

"Why not? What do you suppose an old soldier of the Empire like me does with himself? And as for Vinet, his evenings are always free. Besides, you'll have plenty of other visitors; I warrant you that," he added, with a rather mysterious air.

"What you ought to do," said Vinet, "is to take an open stand against the ministerialists of Provins and form an opposition to them. You would soon see how popular that would make you; you would have a society about you at once. The Tiphaines would be furious at an opposition salon. Well, well, why not laugh at others, if others laugh at you?—and they do; the clique doesn't mince matters in talking about you."

"How's that?" demanded Sylvie.



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In the provinces there is always a valve or a faucet through which gossip leaks from one social set to another. Vinet knew all the slurs cast upon the Rogrons in the salons from which they were now excluded. The deputy-judge and archaeologist Desfondrilles belonged to neither party. With other independents like him, he repeated what he heard on both sides and Vinet made the most of it. The lawyer's spiteful tongue put venom into Madame Tiphaine's speeches, and by showing Rogron and Sylvie the ridicule they had brought upon themselves he roused an undying spirit of hatred in those bitter natures, which needed an object for their petty passions.

A few days later Vinet brought his wife, a well-bred woman, neither pretty nor plain, timid, very gentle, and deeply conscious of her false position. Madame Vinet was fair-complexioned, faded by the cares of her poor household, and very simply dressed. No woman could have pleased Sylvie more. Madame Vinet endured her airs, and bent before them like one accustomed to subjection. On the poor woman's rounded brow and delicately timid cheek and in her slow and gentle glance, were the traces of deep reflection, of those perceptive thoughts which women who are accustomed to suffer bury in total silence.

The influence of the colonel (who now displayed to Sylvie the graces of a courtier, in marked contradiction to his usual military brusqueness), together with that of the astute Vinet, was soon to harm the Breton child. Shut up in the house, no longer allowed to go out except in company with her old cousin, Pierrette, that pretty little squirrel, was at the mercy of the incessant cry, "Don't touch that, child, let that alone!" She was perpetually being lectured on her carriage and behavior; if she stooped or rounded her shoulders her cousin would call to her to be as erect as herself (Sylvie was rigid as a soldier presenting arms to his colonel); sometimes indeed the ill-natured old maid enforced the order by slaps on the back to make the girl straighten up.

Thus the free and joyous little child of the Marais learned by degrees to repress all liveliness and to make herself, as best she could, an automaton.

V

History of poor cousins in the home of rich ones

One evening, which marked the beginning of Pierrette's second phase of life in her cousin's house, the child, whom the three guests had not seen during the evening, came into the room to kiss her relatives and say good-night to the company. Sylvie turned her cheek coldly to the pretty creature, as if to avoid kissing her. The motion was so cruelly significant that the tears sprang to Pierrette's eyes.

"Did you prick yourself, little girl?" said the atrocious Vinet.

"What is the matter?" asked Sylvie, severely.

“Nothing,” said the poor child, going up to Rogron.

“Nothing?” said Sylvie, “that’s nonsense; nobody cries for nothing.”



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“What is it, my little darling?” said Madame Vinet.

“My rich cousin isn’t as kind to me as my poor grandmother was,” sobbed Pierrette.

“Your grandmother took your money,” said Sylvie, “and your cousin will leave you hers.”

The colonel and the lawyer glanced at each other.

“I would rather be robbed and loved,” said Pierrette.

“Then you shall be sent back whence you came.”

“But what has the dear little thing done?” asked Madame Vinet.

Vinet gave his wife the terrible, fixed, cold look with which men enforce their absolute dominion. The hapless helot, punished incessantly for not having the one thing that was wanted of her, a fortune, took up her cards.

“What has she done?” said Sylvie, throwing up her head with such violence that the yellow wall-flowers in her cap nodded. “She is always looking about to annoy us. She opened my watch to see the inside, and meddled with the wheel and broke the mainspring. Mademoiselle pays no heed to what is said to her. I am all day long telling her to take care of things, and I might just as well talk to that lamp.”

Pierrette, ashamed at being reprovved before strangers, crept softly out of the room.

“I am thinking all the time how to subdue that child,” said Rogron.

“Isn’t she old enough to go to school?” asked Madame Vinet.

Again she was silenced by a look from her husband, who had been careful to tell her nothing of his own or the colonel’s schemes.

“This is what comes of taking charge of other people’s children!” cried the colonel. “You may still have some of your own, you or your brother. Why don’t you both marry?”

Sylvie smiled agreeably on the colonel. For the first time in her life she met a man to whom the idea that she could marry did not seem absurd.

“Madame Vinet is right,” cried Rogron; “perhaps teaching would keep Pierrette quiet. A master wouldn’t cost much.”

The colonel’s remark so preoccupied Sylvie that she made no answer to her brother.

“If you are willing to be security for that opposition journal I was talking to you about,” said Vinet, “you will find an excellent master for the little cousin in the managing editor;



we intend to engage that poor schoolmaster who lost his employment through the encroachments of the clergy. My wife is right; Pierrette is a rough diamond that wants polishing.”

“I thought you were a baron,” said Sylvie to the colonel, while the cards were being dealt, and after a long pause in which they had all been rather thoughtful.

“Yes; but when I was made baron, in 1814, after the battle of Nangis, where my regiment performed miracles, I had money and influence enough to secure the rank. But now my barony is like the grade of general which I held in 1815,—it needs a revolution to give it back to me.”

“If you will secure my endorsement by a mortgage,” said Rogron, answering Vinet after long consideration, “I will give it.”

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“That can easily be arranged,” said Vinet. “The new paper will soon restore the colonel’s rights, and make your salon more powerful in Provins than those of Tiphaine and company.”

“How so?” asked Sylvie.

While his wife was dealing and Vinet himself explaining the importance they would all gain by the publication of an independent newspaper, Pierrette was dissolved in tears; her heart and her mind were one in this matter; she felt and knew that her cousin was more to blame than she was. The little country girl instinctively understood that charity and benevolence ought to be a complete offering. She hated her handsome frocks and all the things that were made for her; she was forced to pay too dearly for such benefits. She wept with vexation at having given cause for complaint against her, and resolved to behave in future in such a way as to compel her cousins to find no further fault with her. The thought then came into her mind how grand Brigaut had been in giving her all his savings without a word. Poor child! she fancied her troubles were now at their worst; she little knew that other misfortunes were even now being planned for her in the salon.

A few days later Pierrette had a writing-master. She was taught to read, write, and cipher. Enormous injury was thus supposed to be done to the Rogrons’ house. Ink-spots were found on the tables, on the furniture, on Pierrette’s clothes; copy-books and pens were left about; sand was scattered everywhere, books were torn and dog’s-eared as the result of these lessons. She was told in harsh terms that she would have to earn her own living, and not be a burden to others. As she listened to these cruel remarks Pierrette’s throat contracted violently with acute pain, her heart throbbed. She was forced to restrain her tears, or she was scolded for weeping and told it was an insult to the kindness of her magnanimous cousins. Rogron had found the life that suited him. He scolded Pierrette as he used to scold his clerks; he would call her when at play, and compel her to study; he made her repeat her lessons, and became himself the almost savage master of the poor child. Sylvie, on her side, considered it a duty to teach Pierrette the little that she knew herself about women’s work. Neither Rogron nor his sister had the slightest softness in their natures. Their narrow minds, which found real pleasure in worrying the poor child, passed insensibly from outward kindness to extreme severity. This severity was necessitated, they believed, by what they called the self-will of the child, which had not been broken when young and was very obstinate. Her masters were ignorant how to give to their instructions a form suited to the intelligence of the pupil,—a thing, by the bye, which marks the difference between public and private education. The fault was far less with Pierrette than with her cousins. It took her an infinite length of time to learn the rudiments.



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She was called stupid and dull, clumsy and awkward for mere nothings. Incessantly abused in words, the child suffered still more from the harsh looks of her cousins. She acquired the doltish ways of a sheep; she dared not do anything of her own impulse, for all she did was misinterpreted, misjudged, and ill-received. In all things she awaited silently the good pleasure and the orders of her cousins, keeping her thoughts within her own mind and sheltering herself behind a passive obedience. Her brilliant colors began to fade. Sometimes she complained of feeling ill. When her cousin asked, "Where?" the poor little thing, who had pains all over her, answered, "Everywhere."

"Nonsense! who ever heard of any one suffering everywhere?" cried Sylvie. "If you suffered everywhere you'd be dead."

"People suffer in their chests," said Rogron, who liked to hear himself harangue, "or they have toothache, headache, pains in their feet or stomach, but no one has pains everywhere. What do you mean by everywhere? I can tell you; 'everywhere' means *nowhere*. Don't you know what you are doing?—you are complaining for complaining's sake."

Pierrette ended by total silence, seeing how all her girlish remarks, the flowers of her dawning intelligence, were replied to with ignorant commonplaces which her natural good sense told her were ridiculous.

"You complain," said Rogron, "but you've got the appetite of a monk."

The only person who did not bruise the delicate little flower was the fat servant woman, Adele. Adele would go up and warm her bed,—doing it on the sly after a certain evening when Sylvie had scolded her for giving that comfort to the child.

"Children should be hardened, to give them strong constitutions. Am I and my brother the worse for it?" said Sylvie. "You'll make Pierrette a *peakling*"; this was a word in the Rogron vocabulary which meant a puny and suffering little being.

The naturally endearing ways of the angelic child were treated as dissimulation. The fresh, pure blossoms of affection which bloomed instinctively in that young soul were pitilessly crushed. Pierrette suffered many a cruel blow on the tender flesh of her heart. If she tried to soften those ferocious natures by innocent, coaxing wiles they accused her of doing it with an object. "Tell me at once what you want?" Rogron would say, brutally; "you are not coaxing me for nothing."

Neither brother nor sister believed in affection, and Pierrette's whole being was affection. Colonel Gouraud, anxious to please Mademoiselle Rogron, approved of all she did about Pierrette. Vinet also encouraged them in what they said against her. He

attributed all her so-called misdeeds to the obstinacy of the Breton character, and declared that no power, no will, could ever conquer it. Rogron and his sister were so shrewdly flattered by the two manoeuvrers that the former agreed to go security for the "Courrier de Provins," and the latter invested five thousand francs in the enterprise.



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On this, the colonel and lawyer took the field. They got a hundred shares, of five hundred francs each, taken among the farmers and others called independents, and also among those who had bought lands of the national domains,—whose fears they worked upon. They even extended their operations throughout the department and along its borders. Each shareholder of course subscribed to the paper. The judicial advertisements were divided between the “Bee-hive” and the “Courrier.” The first issue of the latter contained a pompous eulogy on Rogron. He was presented to the community as the Laffitte of Provins. The public mind having thus received an impetus in this new direction, it was manifest, of course, that the coming elections would be contested. Madame Tiphaine, whose highest hope was to take her husband to Paris as deputy, was in despair. After reading an article in the new paper aimed at her and at Julliard junior, she remarked: “Unfortunately for me, I forgot that there is always a scoundrel close to a dupe, and that fools are magnets to clever men of the fox breed.”

As soon as the “Courrier” was fairly launched on a radius of fifty miles, Vinet bought a new coat and decent boots, waistcoats, and trousers. He set up the gray slouch hat sacred to liberals, and showed his linen. His wife took a servant, and appeared in public dressed as the wife of a prominent man should be; her caps were pretty. Vinet proved grateful—out of policy. He and his friend Cournant, the liberal notary and the rival of the ministerial notary Auffray, became the close advisers of the Rogrons, to whom they were able to do a couple of signal services. The leases granted by old Rogron to their father in 1815, when matters were at a low ebb, were about to expire. Horticulture and vegetable gardening had developed enormously in the neighborhood of Provins. The lawyer and notary set to work to enable the Rogrons to increase their rentals. Vinet won two lawsuits against two districts on a question of planting trees, which involved five hundred poplars. The proceeds of the poplars, added to the savings of the brother and sister, who for the last three years had laid by six thousand a year at high interest, was wisely invested in the purchase of improved lands. Vinet also undertook and carried out the ejection of certain peasants to whom the elder Rogron had lent money on their farms, and who had strained every nerve to pay off the debt, but in vain. The cost of the Rogrons’ fine house was thus in a measure recouped. Their landed property, lying around Provins and chosen by their father with the sagacious eye of an innkeeper, was divided into small holdings, the largest of which did not exceed five acres, and rented to safe tenants, men who owned other parcels of land, that were ample security for their leases. These investments brought in, by 1826, five thousand francs a year. Taxes were charged to the tenants, and there were no buildings needing insurance or repairs.

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By the end of the second period of Pierrette's stay in Provins life had become so hard for her, the cold indifference of all who came to the house, the silly fault-finding, and the total absence of affection on the part of her cousins grew so bitter, she was conscious of a chill dampness like that of a grave creeping round her, that the bold idea of escaping, on foot and without money, to Brittany and to her grandparents took possession of her mind. Two events hindered her from attempting it. Old Lorrain died, and Rogron was appointed guardian of his little cousin. If the grandmother had died first, we may believe that Rogron, advised by Vinet, would have claimed Pierrette's eight thousand francs and reduced the old man to penury.

"You may, perhaps, inherit from Pierrette," said Vinet, with a horrid smile. "Who knows who may live and who may die?"

Enlightened by that remark, Rogron gave old Madame Lorrain no peace until she had secured to Pierrette the reversion of the eight thousand francs at her death.

Pierrette was deeply shocked by these events. She was on the point of making her first communion,—another reason for resigning the hope of escape from Provins. This ceremony, simple and customary as it was, led to great changes in the Rogron household. Sylvie learned that Monsieur le cure Peroux was instructing the little Julliards, Lesourds, Garcelands, and the rest. She therefore made it a point of honor that Pierrette should be instructed by the vicar himself, Monsieur Habert, a priest who was thought to belong to the *Congregation*, very zealous for the interests of the Church, and much feared in Provins,—a man who hid a vast ambition beneath the austerity of stern principles. The sister of this priest, an unmarried woman about thirty years of age, kept a school for young ladies. Brother and sister looked alike; both were thin, yellow, black-haired, and bilious.

Like a true Breton girl, cradled in the practices and poetry of Catholicism, Pierrette opened her heart and ears to the words of this imposing priest. Sufferings predispose the mind to devotion, and nearly all young girls, impelled by instinctive tenderness, are inclined to mysticism, the deepest aspect of religion. The priest found good soil in which to sow the seed of the Gospel and the dogmas of the Church. He completely changed the current of the girl's thoughts. Pierrette loved Jesus Christ in the light in which he is presented to young girls at the time of their first communion, as a celestial bridegroom; her physical and moral sufferings gained a meaning for her; she saw the finger of God in all things. Her soul, so cruelly hurt although she could not accuse her cousins of actual wrong, took refuge in that sphere to which all sufferers fly on the wings of the cardinal virtues,—Faith, Hope, Charity. She abandoned her thoughts of escape. Sylvie, surprised by the transformation Monsieur Habert had effected

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in Pierrette, was curious to know how it had been done. And it thus came about that the austere priest, while preparing Pierrette for her first communion, also won to God the hitherto erring soul of Mademoiselle Sylvie. Sylvie became pious. Jerome Rogron, on whom the so-called Jesuit could get no grip (for just then the influence of His Majesty the late *Constitutionnel* the First was more powerful over weaklings than the influence of the Church), Jerome Rogron remained faithful to Colonel Gouraud, Vinet, and Liberalism.

Mademoiselle Rogron naturally made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Habert, with whom she sympathized deeply. The two spinsters loved each other as sisters. Mademoiselle Habert offered to take Pierrette into her school to spare Sylvie the annoyance of her education; but the brother and sister both declared that Pierrette's absence would make the house too lonely; their attachment to their little cousin seemed excessive.

When Gouraud and Vinet became aware of the advent of Mademoiselle Habert on the scene they concluded that the ambitious priest her brother had the same matrimonial plan for his sister that the colonel was forming for himself and Sylvie.

"Your sister wants to get you married," said Vinet to Rogron.

"With whom?" asked Rogron.

"With that old sorceress of a schoolmistress," cried the colonel, twirling his moustache.

"She hasn't said anything to me about it," said Rogron, naively.

So thorough an old maid as Sylvie was certain to make good progress in the way of salvation. The influence of the priest would as certainly increase, and in the end affect Rogron, over whom Sylvie had great power. The two Liberals, who were naturally alarmed, saw plainly that if the priest were resolved to marry his sister to Rogron (a far more suitable marriage than that of Sylvie to the colonel) he could then drive Sylvie in extreme devotion to the Church, and put Pierrette in a convent. They might therefore lose eighteen months' labor in flattery and meannesses of all sorts. Their minds were suddenly filled with a bitter, silent hatred to the priest and his sister, though they felt the necessity of living on good terms with them in order to track their manoeuvres. Monsieur and Mademoiselle Habert, who could play both whist and boston, now came every evening to the Rogrons. The assiduity of the one pair induced the assiduity of the other. The colonel and lawyer felt that they were pitted against adversaries who were fully as strong as they,—a presentiment that was shared by the priest and his sister. The situation soon became that of a battle-field. Precisely as the colonel was enabling Sylvie to taste the un hoped-for joys of being sought in marriage, so Mademoiselle

Habert was enveloping the timid Rogron in the cotton-wool of her attentions, words, and glances. Neither side could utter that grand word of statesmanship, "Let us divide!" for each wanted the whole prey.



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The two clever foxes of the Opposition made the mistake of pulling the first trigger. Vinet, under the spur of self-interest, bethought himself of his wife's only friends, and looked up Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf and her mother. The two women were living in poverty at Troyes on two thousand francs a year. Mademoiselle Bathilde de Chargeboeuf was one of those fine creatures who believe in marriage for love up to their twenty-fifth year, and change their opinion when they find themselves still unmarried. Vinet managed to persuade Madame de Chargeboeuf to join her means to his and live with his family in Provins, where Bathilde, he assured her, could marry a fool named Rogron, and, clever as she was, take her place in the best society of the place.

The arrival of Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf in the lawyer's household was a great reinforcement for the liberal party; and it created consternation among the aristocrats of Provins and also in the Tiphaine clique. Madame de Breautey, horrified to see two women of rank so misled, begged them to come to her. She was shocked that the royalists of Troyes had so neglected the mother and daughter, whose situation she now learned for the first time.

"How is it that no old country gentleman has married that dear girl, who is cut out for a lady of the manor?" she said. "They have let her run to seed, and now she is to be flung at the head of a Rogron!"

She ransacked the whole department but did not succeed in finding any gentleman willing to marry a girl whose mother had only two thousand francs a year. The "clique" and the subprefect also looked about them with the same object, but they were all too late. Madame de Breautey made terrible charges against the selfishness which degraded France, —the consequence, she said, of materialism, and of the importance now given by the laws to money: nobility was no longer of value! nor beauty either! Such creatures as the Rogrons, the Vinets, could stand up and fight with the King of France!

Bathilde de Chargeboeuf had not only the incontestable superiority of beauty over her rival, but that of dress as well. She was dazzlingly fair. At twenty-five her shoulders were fully developed, and the curves of her beautiful figure were exquisite. The roundness of her throat, the purity of its lines, the wealth of her golden hair, the charming grace of her smile, the distinguished carriage of her head, the character of her features, the fine eyes finely placed beneath a well-formed brow, her every motion, noble and high-bred, and her light and graceful figure,—all were in harmony. Her hands were beautiful, and her feet slender. Health gave her, perhaps, too much the look of a handsome barmaid. "But that can't be a defect in the eyes of a Rogron," sighed Madame Tiphaine. Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf's dress when she made her first appearance in Provins at the Rogrons' house was very simple. Her brown merino gown edged with green embroidery was



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worn low-necked; but a tulle fichu, carefully drawn down by hidden strings, covered her neck and shoulders, though it opened a little in front, where its folds were caught together with a *sevigne*. Beneath this delicate fabric Bathilde's beauties seemed all the more enticing and coquettish. She took off her velvet bonnet and her shawl on arriving, and showed her pretty ears adorned with what were then called "ear-drops" in gold. She wore a little *jeannette*—a black velvet ribbon with a heart attached—round her throat, where it shone like the jet ring which fantastic nature had fastened round the tail of a white angora cat. She knew all the little tricks of a girl who seeks to marry; her fingers arranged her curls which were not in the least out of order; she entreated Rogron to fasten a cuff-button, thus showing him her wrist, a request which that dazzled fool rudely refused, hiding his emotions under the mask of indifference. The timidity of the only love he was ever to feel in the whole course of his life took an external appearance of dislike. Sylvie and her friend Celeste Habert were deceived by it; not so Vinet, the wise head of this doltish circle, among whom no one really coped with him but the priest,—the colonel being for a long time his ally.

On the other hand the colonel was behaving to Sylvie very much as Bathilde behaved to Rogron. He put on a clean shirt every evening and wore velvet stocks, which set off his martial features and the spotless white of his collar. He adopted the fashion of white pique waistcoats, and caused to be made for him a new surtout of blue cloth, on which his red rosette glowed finely; all this under pretext of doing honor to the new guests Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf. He even refrained from smoking for two hours previous to his appearance in the Rogrons' salon. His grizzled hair was brushed in a waving line across a cranium which was ochre in tone. He assumed the air and manner of a party leader, of a man who was preparing to drive out the enemies of France, the Bourbons, on short, to beat of drum.

The satanic lawyer and the wily colonel played the priest and his sister a more cruel trick than even the importation of the beautiful Madame de Chargeboeuf, who was considered by all the Liberal party and by Madame de Breautey and her aristocratic circle to be far handsomer than Madame Tiphaine. These two great statesmen of the little provincial town made everybody believe that the priest was in sympathy with their ideas; so that before long Provins began to talk of him as a liberal ecclesiastic. As soon as this news reached the bishop Monsieur Habert was sent for and admonished to cease his visits to the Rogrons; but his sister continued to go there. Thus the salon Rogron became a fixed fact and a constituted power.



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Before the year was out political intrigues were not less lively than the matrimonial schemes of the Rogron salon. While the selfish interests hidden in these hearts were struggling in deadly combat the events which resulted from them had a fatal celebrity. Everybody knows that the Villele ministry was overthrown by the elections of 1826. Vinet, the Liberal candidate at Provins, who had borrowed money of his notary to buy a domain which made him eligible for election, came very near defeating Monsieur Tiphaine, who saved his election by only two votes. The headquarters of the Liberals was the Rogron salon; among the *habitués* were the notary Cournant and his wife, and Doctor Neraud, whose youth was said to have been stormy, but who now took a serious view of life; he gave himself up to study and was, according to all Liberals, a far more capable man than Monsieur Martener, the aristocratic physician. As for the Rogrons, they no more understood their present triumph than they had formerly understood their ostracism.

The beautiful Bathilde, to whom Vinet had explained Pierrette as an enemy, was extremely disdainful to the girl. It seemed as though everybody's selfish schemes demanded the humiliation of that poor victim. Madame Vinet could do nothing for her, ground as she herself was beneath those implacable self-interests which the lawyer's wife had come at last to see and comprehend. Her husband's imperious will had alone taken her to the Rogron's house, where she had suffered much at the harsh treatment of the pretty little creature, who would often press up against her as if divining her secret thoughts, sometimes asking the poor lady to show her a stitch in knitting or to teach her a bit of embroidery. The child proved in return that if she were treated gently she would understand what was taught her, and succeed in what she tried to do quite marvellously. But Madame Vinet was soon no longer necessary to her husband's plans, and after the arrival of Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf she ceased to visit the Rogrons.

Sylvie, who now indulged in the idea of marrying, began to consider Pierrette as an obstacle. The girl was nearly fourteen; the pallid whiteness of her skin, a symptom of illness entirely overlooked by the ignorant old maid, made her exquisitely lovely. Sylvie took it into her head to balance the cost which Pierrette had been to them by making a servant of her. All the *habitués* of the house to whom she spoke of the matter advised that she should send away Adele. Why shouldn't Pierrette take care of the house and cook? If there was too much work at any time Mademoiselle Rogron could easily employ the colonel's woman-of-all-work, an excellent cook and a most respectable person. Pierrette ought to learn how to cook, and rub floors, and sweep, said the lawyer; every girl should be taught to keep house properly and go to market and know the price of things. The poor little soul, whose self-devotion was equal to her generosity, offered herself willingly, pleased to think that she could earn the bitter bread which she ate in that house. Adele was sent away, and Pierrette thus lost the only person who might have protected her.



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In spite of the poor child's strength of heart she was henceforth crushed down physically as well as mentally. Her cousins had less consideration for her than for a servant; she belonged to them! She was scolded for mere nothings, for an atom of dust left on a glass globe or a marble mantelpiece. The handsome ornaments she had once admired now became odious to her. No matter how she strove to do right, her inexorable cousins always found something to reprove in whatever she did. In the course of two years Pierrette never received the slightest praise, or heard a kindly word. Happiness for her lay in not being scolded. She bore with angelic patience the morose ill-humor of the two celibates, to whom all tender feelings were absolutely unknown, and who daily made her feel her dependence on them.

Such a life for a young girl, pressed as it were between the two chops of a vise, increased her illness. She began to feel violent internal distresses, secret pangs so sudden in their attacks that her strength was undermined and her natural development arrested. By slow degrees and through dreadful, though hidden sufferings, the poor child came to the state in which the companion of her childhood found her when he sang to her his Breton ditty at the dawn of the October day.

VI

AN OLD MAID'S JEALOUSY

Before we relate the domestic drama which the coming of Jacques Brigaut was destined to bring about in the Rogron family it is best to explain how the lad came to be in Provins; for he is, as it were, a somewhat mute personage on the scene.

When he ran from the house Brigaut was not only frightened by Pierrette's gesture, he was horrified by the change he saw in his little friend. He could scarcely recognize the voice, the eyes, the gestures that were once so lively, gay, and withal so tender. When he had gained some distance from the house his legs began to tremble under him; hot flushes ran down his back. He had seen the shadow of Pierrette, but not Pierrette herself! The lad climbed to the Upper town till he found a spot from which he could see the square and the house where Pierrette lived. He gazed at it mournfully, lost in many thoughts, as though he were entering some grief of which he could not see the end. Pierrette was ill; she was not happy; she pined for Brittany—what was the matter with her? All these questions passed and repassed through his heart and rent it, revealing to his own soul the extent of his love for his little adopted sister.

It is extremely rare to find a passion existing between two children of opposite sexes. The charming story of Paul and Virginia does not, any more than this of Pierrette and Brigaut, answer the question put by that strange moral fact. Modern history offers only the illustrious instance of the Marchesa di Pescara and her husband. Destined to marry by their parents from their earliest years, they adored each other and were married, and their union gave



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to the sixteenth century the noble spectacle of a perfect conjugal love without a flaw. When the marchesa became a widow at the age of thirty-four, beautiful, intellectually brilliant, universally adored, she refused to marry sovereigns and buried herself in a convent, seeing and knowing thenceforth only nuns. Such was the perfect love that suddenly developed itself in the heart of the Breton workman. Pierrette and he had often protected each other; with what bliss had he given her the money for her journey; he had almost killed himself by running after the diligence when she left him. Pierrette had known nothing of all that; but for him the recollection had warmed and comforted the cold, hard life he had led for the last three years. For Pierrette's sake he had struggled to improve himself; he had learned his trade for Pierrette; he had come to Paris for Pierrette, intending to make his fortune for *her*. After spending a fortnight in the city, he had not been able to hold out against the desire to see her, and he had walked from Saturday night to Monday morning. He intended to return to Paris; but the moving sight of his little friend nailed him to Provins. A wonderful magnetism (still denied in spite of many proofs) acted upon him without his knowledge. Tears rolled from his eyes when they rose in hers. If to her he was Brittany and her happy childhood, to him she was life itself.

At sixteen years of age Brigaut did not yet know how to draw or to model a cornice; he was ignorant of much, but he had earned, by piece-work done in the leisure of his apprenticeship, some four or five francs a day. On this he could live in Provins and be near Pierrette; he would choose the best cabinet-maker in the town, and learn the rest of his trade in working for him, and thus keep watch over his darling.

Brigaut's mind was made up as he sat there thinking. He went back to Paris and fetched his certificate, tools, and baggage, and three days later he was a journeyman in the establishment of Monsieur Frappier, the best cabinet-maker in Provins. Active, steady workmen, not given to junketing and taverns, are so rare that masters hold to young men like Brigaut when they find them. To end Brigaut's history on this point, we will say here that by the end of the month he was made foreman, and was fed and lodged by Frappier, who taught him arithmetic and line drawing. The house and shop were in the Grand'Rue, not a hundred feet from the little square where Pierrette lived.

Brigaut buried his love in his heart and committed no imprudence. He made Madame Frappier tell him all she knew about the Rogrons. Among other things, she related to him the way in which their father had laid hands on the property of old Auffray, Pierrette's grandfather. Brigaut obtained other information as to the character of the brother and sister. He met Pierrette sometimes in the market with her cousin, and shuddered to see the heavy basket she was carrying



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on her arm. On Sundays he went to church to look for her, dressed in her best clothes. There, for the first time, he became aware that Pierrette was Mademoiselle Lorrain. Pierrette saw him and made him a hasty sign to keep out of sight. To him, there was a world of things in that little gesture, as there had been, a fortnight earlier, in the sign by which she told him from her window to run away. Ah! what a fortune he must make in the coming ten years in order to marry his little friend, to whom, he was told, the Rogrons were to leave their house, a hundred acres of land, and twelve thousand francs a year, not counting their savings!

The persevering Breton was determined to be thoroughly educated for his trade, and he set about acquiring all the knowledge that he lacked. As long as only the principles of his work were concerned he could learn those in Provins as well as in Paris, and thus remain near Pierrette, to whom he now became anxious to explain his projects and the sort of protection she could rely on from him. He was determined to know the reason of her pallor, and of the debility which was beginning to appear in the organ which is always the last to show the signs of failing life, namely the eyes; he would know, too, the cause of the sufferings which gave her that look as though death were near and she might drop at any moment beneath its scythe. The two signs, the two gestures—not denying their friendship but imploring caution—alarmed the young Breton. Evidently Pierrette wished him to wait and not attempt to see her; otherwise there was danger, there was peril for her. As she left the church she was able to give him one look, and Brigaut saw that her eyes were full of tears. But he could have sooner squared the circle than have guessed what had happened in the Rogrons' house during the fortnight which had elapsed since his arrival.

It was not without keen apprehension that Pierrette came downstairs on the morning after Brigaut had invaded her morning dreams like another dream. She was certain that her cousin Sylvie must have heard the song, or she would not have risen and opened her window; but Pierrette was ignorant of the powerful reasons that made the old maid so alert. For the last eight days, strange events and bitter feelings agitated the minds of the chief personages who frequented the Rogron salon. These hidden matters, carefully concealed by all concerned, were destined to fall in their results like an avalanche on Pierrette. Such mysterious things, which we ought perhaps to call the putrescence of the human heart, lie at the base of the greatest revolutions, political, social or domestic; but in telling of them it is desirable to explain that their subtle significance cannot be given in a matter-of-fact narrative. These secret schemes and calculations do not show themselves as brutally and undisguisedly while taking place as they must when the history of them is related. To set down in writing the circumlocutions, oratorical precautions, protracted conversations, and honeyed words glossed over the venom of intentions, would make as long a book as that magnificent poem called "Clarissa Harlowe."



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Mademoiselle Habert and Mademoiselle Sylvie were equally desirous of marrying, but one was ten years older than the other, and the probabilities of life allowed Celeste Habert to expect that her children would inherit all the Rogron property. Sylvie was forty-two, an age at which marriage is beset by perils. In confiding to each other their ideas, Celeste, instigated by her vindictive brother the priest, enlightened Sylvie as to the dangers she would incur. Sylvie trembled; she was terribly afraid of death, an idea which shakes all celibates to their centre. But just at this time the Martignac ministry came into power,—a Liberal victory which overthrew the Villele administration. The Vinet party now carried their heads high in Provins. Vinet himself became a personage. The Liberals prophesied his advancement; he would certainly be deputy and attorney-general. As for the colonel, he would be made mayor of Provins. Ah, to reign as Madame Garceland, the wife of the present mayor, now reigned! Sylvie could not hold out against that hope; she determined to consult a doctor, though the proceeding would only cover her with ridicule. To consult Monsieur Neraud, the Liberal physician and the rival of Monsieur Martener, would be a blunder. Celeste Habert offered to hide Sylvie in her dressing-room while she herself consulted Monsieur Martener, the physician of her establishment, on this difficult matter. Whether Martener was, or was not, Celeste's accomplice need not be discovered; at any rate, he told his client that even at thirty the danger, though slight, did exist. "But," he added, "with your constitution, you need fear nothing."

"But how about a woman over forty?" asked Mademoiselle Celeste.

"A married woman who has had children has nothing to fear."

"But I mean an unmarried woman, like Mademoiselle Rogron, for instance?"

"Oh, that's another thing," said Monsieur Martener. "Successful childbirth is then one of those miracles which God sometimes allows himself, but rarely."

"Why?" asked Celeste.

The doctor answered with a terrifying pathological description; he explained that the elasticity given by nature to youthful muscles and bones did not exist at a later age, especially in women whose lives were sedentary.

"So you think that an unmarried woman ought not to marry after forty?"

"Not unless she waits some years," replied the doctor. "But then, of course, it is not marriage, it is only an association of interests."

The result of the interview, clearly, seriously, scientifically and sensibly stated, was that an unmarried woman would make a great mistake in marrying after forty. When the



doctor had departed Mademoiselle Celeste found Sylvie in a frightful state, green and yellow, and with the pupils of her eyes dilated.

“Then you really love the colonel?” asked Celeste.

“I still hoped,” replied Sylvie.



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“Well, then, wait!” cried Mademoiselle Habert, Jesuitically, aware that time would rid her of the colonel.

Sylvie’s new devotion to the church warned her that the morality of such a marriage might be doubtful. She accordingly sounded her conscience in the confessional. The stern priest explained the opinions of the Church, which sees in marriage only the propagation of humanity, and rebukes second marriages and all passions but those with a social purpose. Sylvie’s perplexities were great. These internal struggles gave extraordinary force to her passion, investing it with that inexplicable attraction which, from the days of Eve, the thing forbidden possesses for women. Mademoiselle Rogron’s perturbation did not escape the lynx-eyed lawyer.

One evening, after the game had ended, Vinet approached his dear friend Sylvie, took her hand, and led her to a sofa.

“Something troubles you,” he said.

She nodded sadly. The lawyer let the others depart; Rogron walked home with the Chargeboeufs, and when Vinet was alone with the old maid he wormed the truth out of her.

“Cleverly played, abbe!” thought he. “But you’ve played into my hands.”

The foxy lawyer was more decided in his opinion than even the doctor. He advised marriage in ten years. Inwardly he was vowing that the whole Rogron fortune should go to Bathilde. He rubbed his hands, his pinched lips closed more tightly as he hurried home. The influence exercised by Monsieur Habert, physician of the soul, and by Vinet, doctor of the purse, balanced each other perfectly. Rogron had no piety in him; so the churchman and the man of law, the black-robed pair, were fairly matched.

On discovering the victory obtained by Celeste, in her anxiety to marry Rogron herself, over Sylvie, torn between the fear of death and the joy of being baronness and mayoress, the lawyer saw his chance of driving the colonel from the battlefield. He knew Rogron well enough to be certain he could marry him to Bathilde; Jerome had already succumbed inwardly to her charms, and Vinet knew that the first time the pair were alone together the marriage would be settled. Rogron had reached the point of keeping his eyes fixed on Celeste, so much did he fear to look at Bathilde. Vinet had now possessed himself of Sylvie’s secrets, and saw the force with which she loved the colonel. He fully understood the struggle of such a passion in the heart of an old maid who was also in the grasp of religious emotion, and he saw his way to rid himself of Pierrette and the colonel both by making each the cause of the other’s overthrow.

The next day, after the court had risen, Vinet met the colonel and Rogron talking a walk together, according to their daily custom.



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Whenever the three men were seen in company the whole town talked of it. This triumvirate, held in horror by the sub-prefect, the magistracy, and the Tiphaine clique, was, on the other hand, a source of pride and vanity to the Liberals of Provins. Vinet was sole editor of the "Courrier" and the head of the party; the colonel, the working manager, was its arm; Rogron, by means of his purse, its nerves. The Tiphaines declared that the three men were always plotting evil to the government; the Liberals admired them as the defenders of the people. When Rogron turned to go home, recalled by a sense of his dinner-hour, Vinet stopped the colonel from following him by taking Gouraud's arm.

"Well, colonel," he said, "I am going to take a fearful load off your shoulders; you can do better than marry Sylvie; if you play your cards properly you can marry that little Pierrette in two years' time."

He thereupon related the Jesuit's manoeuvre and its effect on Sylvie.

"What a skulking trick!" cried the colonel; "and spreading over years, too!"

"Colonel," said Vinet, gravely, "Pierrette is a charming creature; with her you can be happy for the rest of your life; your health is so sound that the difference in your ages won't seem disproportionate. But, all the same, you mustn't think it an easy thing to change a dreadful fate to a pleasant one. To turn a woman who loves you into a friend and confidant is as perilous a business as crossing a river under fire of the enemy. Cavalry colonel as you are, and daring too, you must study the position and manoeuvre your forces with the same wisdom you have displayed hitherto, and which has won us our present position. If I get to be attorney-general you shall command the department. Oh! if you had been an elector we should be further advanced than we are now; I should have bought the votes of those two clerks by threatening them with the loss of their places, and we should have had a majority."

The colonel had long been thinking about Pierrette, but he concealed his thoughts with the utmost dissimulation. His roughness to the child was only a mask; but she could not understand why the man who claimed to be her father's old comrade should usually treat her so ill, when sometimes, if he met her alone, he would chuck her under the chin and give her a friendly kiss. But after the conversation with Vinet relating to Sylvie's fears of marriage Gouraud began to seek opportunities to find Pierrette alone; the rough colonel made himself as soft as a cat; he told her how brave her father was and what a misfortune it had been for her that she lost him.



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A few days before Brigaut's arrival Sylvie had come suddenly upon Gouraud and Pierrette talking together. Instantly, jealousy rushed into her heart with monastic violence. Jealousy, eminently credulous and suspicious, is the passion in which fancy has most freedom, but for all that it does not give a person intelligence; on the contrary, it hinders them from having any; and in Sylvie's case jealousy only filled her with fantastic ideas. When (a few mornings later) she heard Brigaut's ditty, she jumped to the conclusion that the man who had used the words "Madam' le mariee," addressing them to Pierrette, must be the colonel. She was certain she was right, for she had noticed for a week past a change in his manners. He was the only man who, in her solitary life, had ever paid her any attention. Consequently she watched him with all her eyes, all her mind; and by giving herself up to hopes that were sometimes flourishing, sometimes blighted, she had brought the matter to such enormous proportions that she saw all things in a mental mirage. To use a common but excellent expression, by dint of looking intently she saw nothing. Alternately she repelled, admitted, and conquered the supposition of this rivalry. She compared herself with Pierrette; she was forty-two years old, with gray hair; Pierrette was delicately fair, with eyes soft enough to warm a withered heart. She had heard it said that men of fifty were apt to love young girls of just that kind. Before the colonel had come regularly to the house Sylvie had heard in the Tiphaines' salon strange stories of his life and morals. Old maids preserve in their love-affairs the exaggerated Platonic sentiments which young girls of twenty are wont to profess; they hold to these fixed doctrines like all who have little experience of life and no personal knowledge of how great social forces modify, impair, and bring to nought such grand and noble ideas. The mere thought of being jilted by the colonel was torture to Sylvie's brain. She lay in her bed going over and over her own desires, Pierrette's conduct, and the song which had awakened her with the word "marriage." Like the fool she was, instead of looking through the blinds to see the lover, she opened her window without reflecting that Pierrette would hear her. If she had had the common instinct of a spy she would have seen Brigaut, and the fatal drama then begun would never have taken place.

It was Pierrette's duty, weak as she was, to take down the bars that closed the wooden shutters of the kitchen, which she opened and fastened back; then she opened in like manner the glass door leading from the corridor to the garden. She took the various brooms that were used for sweeping the carpets, the dining-room, the passages and stairs, together with the other utensils, with a care and particularity which no servant, not even a Dutchwoman, gives to her work. She hated reproof. Happiness for her was in seeing the cold blue pallid eyes of her cousin,



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not satisfied (that they never were), but calm, after glancing about her with the look of an owner,—that wonderful glance which sees what escapes even the most vigilant eyes of others. Pierrette's skin was moist with her labor when she returned to the kitchen to put it in order, and light the stove that she might carry up hot water to her two cousins (a luxury she never had for herself) and the means of lighting fires in their rooms. After this she laid the table for breakfast and lit the stove in the dining-room. For all these various fires she had to fetch wood and kindling from the cellar, leaving the warm rooms for a damp and chilly atmosphere. Such sudden transitions, made with the quickness of youth, often to escape a harsh word or obey an order, aggravated the condition of her health. She did not know she was ill, and yet she suffered. She began to have strange cravings; she liked raw vegetables and salads, and ate them secretly. The innocent child was quite unaware that her condition was that of serious illness which needed the utmost care. If Neraud, the Rogrons' doctor, had told this to Pierrette before Brigaut's arrival she would only have smiled; life was so bitter she could smile at death. But now her feelings changed; the child, to whose physical sufferings was added the anguish of Breton homesickness (a moral malady so well-known that colonels in the army allow for it among their men), was suddenly content to be in Provins. The sight of that yellow flower, the song, the presence of her friend, revived her as a plant long without water revives under rain. Unconsciously she wanted to live, and even thought she did not suffer.

Pierrette slipped timidly into her cousin's bedroom, made the fire, left the hot water, said a few words, and went to wake Rogron and do the same offices for him. Then she went down to take in the milk, the bread, and the other provisions left by the dealers. She stood some time on the sill of the door hoping that Brigaut would have the sense to come to her; but by that time he was already on his way to Paris.

She had finished the arrangement of the dining-room and was busy in the kitchen when she heard her cousin Sylvie coming down. Mademoiselle Rogron appeared in a brown silk dressing-gown and a cap with bows; her false front was awry, her night-gown showed above the silk wrapper, her slippers were down at heel. She gave an eye to everything and then came straight to Pierrette, who was awaiting her orders to know what to prepare for breakfast.

"Ha! here you are, lovesick young lady!" said Sylvie, in a mocking tone.

"What is it, cousin?"

"You came into my room like a sly cat, and you crept out the same way, though you knew very well I had something to say to you."

"To me?"



“You had a serenade this morning, as if you were a princess.”

“A serenade!” exclaimed Pierrette.

“A serenade!” said Sylvie, mimicking her; “and you’ve a lover, too.”



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“What is a lover, cousin?”

Sylvie avoided answering, and said:—

“Do you dare to tell me, mademoiselle, that a man did not come under your window and talk to you of marriage?”

Persecution had taught Pierrette the wariness of slaves; so she answered bravely:—

“I don’t know what you mean,—”

“Who means?—your dog?” said Sylvie, sharply.

“I should have said ‘cousin,’” replied the girl, humbly.

“And didn’t you get up and go in your bare feet to the window?—which will give you an illness; and serve you right, too. And perhaps you didn’t talk to your lover, either?”

“No, cousin.”

“I know you have many faults, but I did not think you told lies. You had better think this over, mademoiselle; you will have to explain this affair to your cousin and to me, or your cousin will be obliged to take severe measures.”

The old maid, exasperated by jealousy and curiosity, meant to frighten the girl. Pierrette, like all those who suffer more than they have strength to bear, kept silence. Silence is the only weapon by which such victims can conquer; it baffles the Cossack charges of envy, the savage skirmishings of suspicion; it does at times give victory, crushing and complete,—for what is more complete than silence? it is absolute; it is one of the attributes of infinity. Sylvie watched Pierrette narrowly. The girl colored; but the color, instead of rising evenly, came out in patches on her cheekbones, in burning and significant spots. A mother, seeing that symptom of illness, would have changed her tone at once; she would have taken the child on her lap and questioned her; in fact, she would long ago have tenderly understood the signs of Pierrette’s pure and perfect innocence; she would have seen her weakness and known that the disturbance of the digestive organs and the other functions of the body was about to affect the lungs. Those eloquent patches would have warned her of an imminent danger. But an old maid, one in whom the family instincts have never been awakened, to whom the needs of childhood and the precautions required for adolescence were unknown, had neither the indulgence nor the compassionate intelligence of a mother; such sufferings as those of Pierrette, instead of softening her heart only made it more callous.

“She blushes, she is guilty!” thought Sylvie.

Pierrette’s silence was thus interpreted to her injury.



“Pierrette,” continued Sylvie, “before your cousin comes down we must have some talk together. Come,” she said, in a rather softer tone, “shut the street door; if any one comes they will rung and we shall hear them.”

In spite of the damp mist which was rising from the river, Sylvie took Pierrette along the winding gravel path which led across the lawn to the edge of the rock terrace,—a picturesque little quay, covered with iris and aquatic plants. She now changed her tactics, thinking she might catch Pierrette tripping by softness; the hyena became a cat.



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“Pierrette,” she said, “you are no longer a child; you are nearly fifteen, and it is not at all surprising that you should have a lover.”

“But, cousin,” said Pierrette, raising her eyes with angelic sweetness to the cold, sour face of her cousin, “What is a lover?”

It would have been impossible for Sylvie to define a lover with truth and decency to the girl’s mind. Instead of seeing in that question the proof of adorable innocence, she considered it a piece of insincerity.

“A lover, Pierrette, is a man who loves us and wishes to marry us.”

“Ah,” said Pierrette, “when that happens in Brittany we call the young man a suitor.”

“Well, remember that in owning your feelings for a man you do no wrong, my dear. The wrong is in hiding them. Have you pleased some of the men who visit here?”

“I don’t think so, cousin.”

“Do you love any of them?”

“No.”

“Certain?”

“Quite certain.”

“Look at me, Pierrette.”

Pierrette looked at Sylvie.

“A man called to you this morning in the square.”

Pierrette lowered her eyes.

“You went to your window, you opened it, and you spoke to him.”

“No cousin, I went to look out and I saw a peasant.”

“Pierrette, you have much improved since you made your first communion; you have become pious and obedient, you love God and your relations; I am satisfied with you. I don’t say this to puff you up with pride.”

The horrible creature had mistaken despondency, submission, the silence of wretchedness, for virtues!



The sweetest of all consolations to suffering souls, to martyrs, to artists, in the worst of that divine agony which hatred and envy force upon them, is to meet with praise where they have hitherto found censure and injustice. Pierrette raised her grateful eyes to her cousin, feeling that she could almost forgive her for the sufferings she had caused.

“But if it is all hypocrisy, if I find you a serpent that I have warmed in my bosom, you will be a wicked girl, an infamous creature!”

“I think I have nothing to reproach myself with,” said Pierrette, with a painful revulsion of her heart at the sudden change from unexpected praise to the tones of the hyena.

“You know that to lie is a mortal sin?”

“Yes, cousin.”

“Well, you are now under the eye of God,” said the old maid, with a solemn gesture towards the sky; “swear to me that you did not know that peasant.”

“I will not swear,” said Pierrette.

“Ha! he was no peasant, you little viper.”

Pierrette rushed away like a frightened fawn terrified at her tone. Sylvie called her in a dreadful voice.

“The bell is ringing,” she answered.

“Artful wretch!” thought Sylvie. “She is depraved in mind; and now I am certain the little adder has wound herself round the colonel. She has heard us say he was a baron. To be a baroness! little fool! Ah! I’ll get rid of her, I’ll apprentice her out, and soon too!”



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Sylvie was so lost in thought that she did not notice her brother coming down the path and bemoaning the injury the frost had done to his dahlias.

“Sylvie! what are you thinking about? I thought you were looking at the fish; sometimes they jump out of the water.”

“No,” said Sylvie.

“How did you sleep?” and he began to tell her about his own dreams. “Don’t you think my skin is getting *tabid*?”—a word in the Rogron vocabulary.

Ever since Rogron had been in love,—but let us not profane the word, —ever since he had desired to marry Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, he was very uneasy about himself and his health. At this moment Pierrette came down the garden steps and called to them from a distance that breakfast was ready. At sight of her cousin, Sylvie’s skin turned green and yellow, her bile was in commotion. She looked at the floor of the corridor and declared that Pierrette ought to rub it.

“I will rub it now if you wish,” said the little angel, not aware of the injury such work may do to a young girl.

The dining-room was irreproachably in order. Sylvie sat down and pretended all through breakfast to want this, that, and the other thing which she would never have thought of in a quieter moment, and which she now asked for only to make Pierrette rise again and again just as the child was beginning to eat her food. But such mere teasing was not enough; she wanted a subject on which to find fault, and was angry with herself for not finding one. She scarcely answered her brother’s silly remarks, yet she looked at him only; her eyes avoided Pierrette. Pierrette was deeply conscious of all this. She brought the milk mixed with cream for each cousin in a large silver goblet, after heating it carefully in the *bain-marie*. The brother and sister poured in the coffee made by Sylvie herself on the table. When Sylvie had carefully prepared hers, she saw an atom of coffee-grounds floating on the surface. On this the storm broke forth.

“What is the matter?” asked Rogron.

“The matter is that mademoiselle has put dust in my milk. Do you suppose I am going to drink coffee with ashes in it? Well, I am not surprised; no one can do two things at once. She wasn’t thinking of the milk! a blackbird might have flown through the kitchen to-day and she wouldn’t have seen it! how should she see the dust flying! and then it was my coffee, ha! that didn’t signify!”

As she spoke she was laying on the side of her plate the coffee-grounds that had run through the filter.

“But, cousin, that is coffee,” said Pierrette.



“Oh! then it is I who tell lies, is it?” cried Sylvie, looking at Pierrette and blasting her with a fearful flash of anger from her eyes.

Organizations which have not been exhausted by powerful emotions often have a vast amount of the vital fluid at their service. This phenomenon of the extreme clearness of the eye in moments of anger was the more marked in Mademoiselle Rogron because she had often exercised the power of her eyes in her shop by opening them to their full extent for the purpose of inspiring her dependents with salutary fear.



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“You had better dare to give me the lie!” continued Sylvie; “you deserve to be sent from the table to go and eat by yourself in the kitchen.”

“What’s the matter with you two?” cried Rogron, “you are as cross as bears this morning.”

“Mademoiselle knows what I have against her,” said Sylvie. “I leave her to make up her mind before speaking to you; for I mean to show her more kindness than she deserves.”

Pierrette was looking out of the window to avoid her cousin’s eyes, which frightened her.

“Look at her! she pays no more attention to what I am saying than if I were that sugar-basin! And yet mademoiselle has a sharp ear; she can hear and answer from the top of the house when some one talks to her from below. She is perversity itself,—perversity, I say; and you needn’t expect any good of her; do you hear me, Jerome?”

“What has she done wrong?” asked Rogron.

“At her age, too! to begin so young!” screamed the angry old maid.

Pierrette rose to clear the table and give herself something to do, for she could hardly bear the scene any longer. Though such language was not new to her, she had never been able to get used to it. Her cousin’s rage seemed to accuse her of some crime. She imagined what her fury would be if she came to know about Brigaut. Perhaps her cousin would have him sent away, and she should lose him! All the many thoughts, the deep and rapid thoughts of a slave came to her, and she resolved to keep absolute silence about a circumstance in which her conscience told her there was nothing wrong. But the cruel, bitter words she had been made to hear and the wounding suspicion so shocked her that as she reached the kitchen she was taken with a convulsion of the stomach and turned deadly sick. She dared not complain; she was not sure that any one would help her. When she returned to the dining-room she was white as a sheet, and, saying she was not well, she started to go to bed, dragging herself up step by step by the baluster and thinking that she was going to die. “Poor Brigaut!” she thought.

“The girl is ill,” said Rogron.

“She ill! That’s only *shamming*,” replied Sylvie, in a loud voice that Pierrette might hear. “She was well enough this morning, I can tell you.”

This last blow struck Pierrette to the earth; she went to bed weeping and praying to God to take her out of this world.



DOMESTIC TYRANNY

For a month past Rogron had ceased to carry the "Constitutionnel" to Gouraud; the colonel came obsequiously to fetch his paper, gossip a little, and take Rogron off to walk if the weather was fine. Sure of seeing the colonel and being able to question him, Sylvie dressed herself as coquettishly as she knew how. The old maid thought she was attractive in a green gown, a yellow shawl with a red border, and a white bonnet with straggling gray feathers. About the hour when the colonel usually came Sylvie stationed herself in the salon with her brother, whom she had compelled to stay in the house in his dressing-gown and slippers.



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“It is a fine day, colonel,” said Rogron, when Gouraud with his heavy step entered the room. “But I’m not dressed; my sister wanted to go out, and I was going to keep the house. Wait for me; I’ll be ready soon.”

So saying, Rogron left Sylvie alone with the colonel.

“Where were you going? you are dressed divinely,” said Gouraud, who noticed a certain solemnity on the pock-marked face of the old maid.

“I wanted very much to go out, but my little cousin is ill, and I cannot leave her.”

“What is the matter with her?”

“I don’t know; she had to go to bed.”

Gouraud’s caution, not to say his distrust, was constantly excited by the results of his alliance with Vinet. It certainly appeared that the lawyer had got the lion’s share in their enterprise. Vinet controlled the paper, he reigned as sole master over it, he took the revenues; whereas the colonel, the responsible editor, earned little. Vinet and Cournant had done the Rogrons great services; whereas Gouraud, a colonel on half-pay, could do nothing. Who was to be deputy? Vinet. Who was the chief authority in the party? Vinet. Whom did the liberals all consult? Vinet. Moreover, the colonel knew fully as well as Vinet himself the extent and depth of the passion suddenly aroused in Rogron by the beautiful Bathilde de Chargeboeuf. This passion had now become intense, like all the last passions of men. Bathilde’s voice made him tremble. Absorbed in his desires Rogron hid them; he dared not hope for such a marriage. To sound him, the colonel mentioned that he was thinking himself of asking for Bathilde’s hand. Rogron turned pale at the thought of such a formidable rival, and had since then shown coldness and even hatred to Gouraud.

Thus Vinet reigned supreme in the Rogron household while he, the colonel, had no hold there except by the extremely hypothetical tie of his mendacious affection for Sylvie, which it was not yet clear that Sylvie reciprocated. When the lawyer told him of the priest’s manoeuvre, and advised him to break with Sylvie and marry Pierrette, he certainly flattered Gouraud’s foible; but after analyzing the inner purpose of that advice and examining the ground all about him, the colonel thought he perceived in his ally the intention of separating him from Sylvie, and profiting by her fears to throw the whole Rogron property into the hands of Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf.

Therefore, when the colonel was left alone with Sylvie his perspicacity possessed itself immediately of certain signs which betrayed her uneasiness. He saw at once that she was under arms and had made this plan for seeing him alone. As he already suspected Vinet of playing him some trick, he attributed the conference to the instigation of the lawyer, and was instantly on his guard, as he would have been in an enemy’s country,



—with an eye all about him, an ear to the faintest sound, his mind on the qui vive, and his hand on a weapon. The colonel had the defect of never believing a single word said to him by a woman; so that when the old maid brought Pierrette on the scene, and told him she had gone to bed before midday, he concluded that Sylvie had locked her up by way of punishment and out of jealousy.



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“She is getting to be quite pretty, that little thing,” he said with an easy air.

“She will be pretty,” replied Mademoiselle Rogron.

“You ought to send her to Paris and put her in a shop,” continued the colonel. “She would make her fortune. The milliners all want pretty girls.”

“Is that really your advice?” asked Sylvie, in a troubled voice.

“Good!” thought the colonel, “I was right. Vinet advised me to marry Pierrette just to spoil my chance with the old harridan. But,” he said aloud, “what else can you do with her? There’s that beautiful girl Bathilde de Chargeboeuf, noble and well-connected, reduced to single-blessedness,—nobody will have her. Pierrette has nothing, and she’ll never marry. As for beauty, what is it? To me, for example, youth and beauty are nothing; for haven’t I been a captain of cavalry in the imperial guard, and carried my spurs into all the capitals of Europe, and known all the handsomest women of these capitals? Don’t talk to me; I tell you youth and beauty are devilishly common and silly. At forty-eight,” he went on, adding a few years to his age, to match Sylvie’s, “after surviving the retreat from Moscow and going through that terrible campaign of France, a man is broken down; I’m nothing but an old fellow now. A woman like you would pet me and care for me, and her money, joined to my poor pension, would give me ease in my old days; of course I should prefer such a woman to a little minx who would worry the life out of me, and be thirty years old, with passions, when I should be sixty, with rheumatism. At my age, a man considers and calculates. To tell you the truth between ourselves, I should not wish to have children.”

Sylvie’s face was an open book to the colonel during this tirade, and her next question proved to him Vinet’s perfidy.

“Then you don’t love Pierrette?” she said.

“Heavens! are you out of your mind, my dear Sylvie?” he cried. “Can those who have no teeth crack nuts? Thank God I’ve got some common-sense and know what I’m about.”

Sylvie thus reassured resolved not to show her own hand, and thought herself very shrewd in putting her own ideas into her brother’s mouth.

“Jerome,” she said, “thought of the match.”

“How could your brother take up such an incongruous idea? Why, it is only a few days ago that, in order to find out his secrets, I told him I loved Bathilde. He turned as white as your collar.”

“My brother! does he love Bathilde?” asked Sylvie.



“Madly,—and yet Bathilde is only after his money.” (“One for you, Vinet!” thought the colonel.) “I can’t understand why he should have told you that about Pierrette. No, Sylvie,” he said, taking her hand and pressing it in a certain way, “since you have opened this matter” (he drew nearer to her), “well” (he kissed her hand; as a cavalry captain he had already proved his courage), “let me tell you that I desire no wife but you. Though such a marriage may look like one of convenience, I feel, on my side, a sincere affection for you.”

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“But if I *wish* you to marry Pierrette? if I leave her my fortune —eh, colonel?”

“But I don’t want to be miserable in my home, and in less than ten years see a popinjay like Julliard hovering round my wife and addressing verses to her in the newspapers. I’m too much of a man to stand that. No, I will never make a marriage that is disproportionate in age.”

“Well, colonel, we will talk seriously of this another time,” said Sylvie, casting a glance upon him which she supposed to be full of love, though, in point of fact, it was a good deal like that of an ogress. Her cold, blue lips of a violet tinge drew back from the yellow teeth, and she thought she smiled.

“I’m ready,” said Rogron, coming in and carrying off the colonel, who bowed in a lover-like way to the old maid.

Gouraud determined to press on his marriage with Sylvie, and make himself master of the house; resolving to rid himself, through his influence over Sylvie during the honeymoon, of Bathilde and Celeste Habert. So, during their walk, he told Rogron he had been joking the other day; that he had no real intention of aspiring to Bathilde; that he was not rich enough to marry a woman without fortune; and then he confided to him his real wishes, declaring that he had long chosen Sylvie for her good qualities,—in short, he aspired to the honor of being Rogron’s brother-in-law.

“Ah, colonel, my dear baron! if nothing is wanting but my consent you have it with no further delay than the law requires,” cried Rogron, delighted to be rid of his formidable rival.

Sylvie spent the morning in her own room considering how the new household could be arranged. She determined to build a second storey for her brother and to furnish the rest for herself and her husband; but she also resolved, in the true old-maidish spirit, to subject the colonel to certain proofs by which to judge of his heart and his morals before she finally committed herself. She was still suspicious, and wanted to make sure that Pierrette had no private intercourse with the colonel.

Pierrette came down before the dinner-hour to lay the table. Sylvie had been forced to cook the dinner, and had sworn at that “cursed Pierrette” for a spot she had made on her gown,—wasn’t it plain that if Pierrette had done her own work Sylvie wouldn’t have got that grease-spot on her silk dress?

“Oh, here you are, *peakling*? You are like the dog of the marshal who woke up as soon as the saucepans rattled. Ha! you want us to think you are ill, you little liar!”



That idea: “You did not tell the truth about what happened in the square this morning, therefore you lie in everything,” was a hammer with which Sylvie battered the head and also the heart of the poor girl incessantly.



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To Pierrette's great astonishment Sylvie sent her to dress in her best clothes after dinner. The liveliest imagination is never up to the level of the activity which suspicion excites in the mind of an old maid. In this particular case, this particular old maid carried the day against politicians, lawyers, notaries, and all other self-interests. Sylvie determined to consult Vinet, after examining herself into all the suspicious circumstances. She kept Pierrette close to her, so as to find out from the girl's face whether the colonel had told her the truth.

On this particular evening the Chargeboeuf ladies were the first to arrive. Bathilde, by Vinet's advice, had become more elaborate in her dress. She now wore a charming gown of blue velveteen, with the same transparent fichu, garnet pendants in her ears, her hair in ringlets, the wily *jeannette* round her throat, black satin slippers, gray silk stockings, and *gants de Suede*; add to these things the manners of a queen and the coquetry of a young girl determined to capture Rogron. Her mother, calm and dignified, retained, as did her daughter, a certain aristocratic insolence, with which the two women hedged themselves and preserved the spirit of their caste. Bathilde was a woman of intelligence, a fact which Vinet alone had discovered during the two months' stay the ladies had made at his house. When he had fully fathomed the mind of the girl, wounded and disappointed as it was by the fruitlessness of her beauty and her youth, and enlightened by the contempt she felt for the men of a period in which money was the only idol, Vinet, himself surprised, exclaimed,—

"If I could only have married you, Bathilde, I should to-day be Keeper of the Seals. I should call myself Vinet de Chargeboeuf, and take my seat as deputy of the Right."

Bathilde had no vulgar idea in her marriage intentions. She did not marry to be a mother, nor to possess a husband; she married for freedom, to gain a responsible position, to be called "madame," and to act as men act. Rogron was nothing but a name to her; she expected to make something of the fool,—a voting deputy, for instance, whose instigator she would be; moreover, she longed to avenge herself on her family, who had taken no notice of a girl without money. Vinet had much enlarged and strengthened her ideas by admiring and approving them.

"My dear Bathilde," he said, while explaining to her the influence of women, and showing her the sphere of action in which she ought to work, "do you suppose that Tiphaine, a man of the most ordinary capacity, could ever get to be a judge of the Royal court in Paris by himself? No, it is Madame Tiphaine who has got him elected deputy, and it is she who will push him when they get to Paris. Her mother, Madame Roguin, is a shrewd woman, who does what she likes with the famous banker du Tillet, a crony of Nucingen, and both of them allies of the Kellers. The administration is on the best of terms with those



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lynxes of the bank. There is no reason why Tiphaine should not be judge, through his wife, of a Royal court. Marry Rogron; we'll have him elected deputy from Provins as soon as I gain another precinct in the Seine-et-Marne. You can then get him a place as receiver-general, where he'll have nothing to do but sign his name. We shall belong to the opposition *if* the Liberals triumph, but if the Bourbons remain —ah! then we shall lean gently, gently towards the centre. Besides, you must remember Rogron can't live forever, and then you can marry a titled man. In short, put yourself in a good position, and the Chargeboeufs will be ready enough to serve us. Your poverty has no doubt taught you, as mine did me, to know what men are worth. We must make use of them as we do of post-horses. A man, or a woman, will take us along to such or such a distance."

Vinet ended by making Bathilde a small edition of Catherine de Medicis. He left his wife at home, rejoiced to be alone with her two children, while he went every night to the Rogrons' with Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf. He arrived there in all the glory of better circumstances. His spectacles were of gold, his waistcoat silk; a white cravat, black trousers, thin boots, a black coat made in Paris, and a gold watch and chain, made up his apparel. In place of the former Vinet, pale and thin, snarling and gloomy, the present Vinet bore himself with the air and manner of a man of importance; he marched boldly forward, certain of success, with that peculiar show of security which belongs to lawyers who know the hidden places of the law. His sly little head was well-brushed, his chin well-shaved, which gave him a mincing though frigid look, that made him seem agreeable in the style of Robespierre. Certainly he would make a fine attorney-general, endowed with elastic, mischievous, and even murderous eloquence, or an orator of the shrewd type of Benjamin Constant. The bitterness and the hatred which formerly actuated him had now turned into soft-spoken perfidy; the poison was transformed into anodyne.

"Good-evening, my dear; how are you?" said Madame de Chargeboeuf, greeting Sylvie.

Bathilde went straight to the fireplace, took off her bonnet, looked at herself in the glass, and placed her pretty foot on the fender that Rogron might admire it.

"What is the matter with you?" she said to him, looking directly in his face. "You have not bowed to me. Pray why should we put on our best velvet gowns to please you?"

She pushed past Pierrette to lay down her hat, which the latter took from her hand, and which she let her take exactly as though she were a servant. Men are supposed to be ferocious, and tigers too; but neither tigers, vipers, diplomatists, lawyers, executioners or kings ever approach, in their greatest atrocities, the gentle cruelty, the poisoned sweetness, the savage disdain of one young woman for another, when she thinks

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herself superior in birth, or fortune, or grace, and some question of marriage, or precedence, or any of the feminine rivalries, is raised. The “Thank you, mademoiselle,” which Bathilde said to Pierrette was a poem in many strophes. She was named Bathilde, and the other Pierrette. She was a Chargeboeuf, the other a Lorrain. Pierrette was small and weak, Bathilde was tall and full of life. Pierrette was living on charity, Bathilde and her mother lived on their means. Pierrette wore a stuff gown with a chemisette, Bathilde made the velvet of hers undulate. Bathilde had the finest shoulders in the department, and the arm of a queen; Pierrette’s shoulder-blades were skin and bone. Pierrette was Cinderella, Bathilde was the fairy. Bathilde was about to marry, Pierrette was to die a maid. Bathilde was adored, Pierrette was loved by none. Bathilde’s hair was ravishingly dressed, she had so much taste; Pierrette’s was hidden beneath her Breton cap, and she knew nothing of the fashions. Moral, Bathilde was everything, Pierrette nothing. The proud little Breton girl understood this tragic poem.

“Good-evening, little girl,” said Madame de Chargeboeuf, from the height of her condescending grandeur, and in the tone of voice which her pinched nose gave her.

Vinet put the last touch to this sort of insult by looking fixedly at Pierrette and saying, in three keys, “Oh! oh! oh! how fine we are to-night, Pierrette!”

“Fine!” said the poor child; “you should say that to Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, not to me.”

“Oh! she is always beautifully dressed,” replied the lawyer. “Isn’t she, Rogron?” he added, turning to the master of the house, and grasping his hand.

“Yes,” said Rogron.

“Why do you force him to say what he does not think?” said Bathilde; “nothing about me pleases him. Isn’t that true?” she added, going up to Rogron and standing before him. “Look at me, and say if it isn’t true.”

Rogron looked at her from head to foot, and gently closed his eyes like a cat whose head is being scratched.

“You are too beautiful,” he said; “too dangerous.”

“Why?”

Rogron looked at the fire and was silent. Just then Mademoiselle Habert entered the room, followed by the colonel.



Celeste Habert, who had now become the common enemy, could only reckon Sylvie on her side; nevertheless, everybody present showed her the more civility and amiable attention because each was undermining her. Her brother, though no longer able to be on the scene of action, was well aware of what was going on, and as soon as he perceived that his sister's hopes were killed he became an implacable and terrible antagonist to the Rogrons.

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Every one will immediately picture to themselves Mademoiselle Habert when they know that if she had not kept an institution for young ladies she would still have had the air of a school-mistress. School-mistresses have a way of their own in putting on their caps. Just as old Englishwomen have acquired a monopoly in turbans, school-mistresses have a monopoly of these caps. Flowers nod above the frame-work, flowers that are more than artificial; lying by in closets for years the cap is both new and old, even on the day it is first worn. These spinsters make it a point of honor to resemble the lay figures of a painter; they sit on their hips, never on their chairs. When any one speaks to them they turn their whole busts instead of simply turning their heads; and when their gowns creak one is tempted to believe that the mechanism of these beings is out of order. Mademoiselle Habert, an ideal of her species, had a stern eye, a grim mouth, and beneath her wrinkled chin the strings of her cap, always limp and faded, floated as she moved. Two moles, rather large and brown, adorned that chin, and from them sprouted hairs which she allowed to grow rampant like clematis. And finally, to complete her portrait, she took snuff, and took it ungracefully.

The company went to work at their boston. Mademoiselle Habert sat opposite to Sylvie, with the colonel at her side opposite to Madame de Chargeboeuf. Bathilde was near her mother and Rogron. Sylvie placed Pierrette between herself and the colonel; Rogron had set out a second card-table, in case other company arrived. Two lamps were on the chimney-piece between the candelabra and the clock, and the tables were lighted by candles at forty sous a pound, paid for by the price of the cards.

“Come, Pierrette, take your work, my dear,” said Sylvie, with treacherous softness, noticing that the girl was watching the colonel’s game.

She usually affected to treat Pierrette well before company. This deception irritated the honest Breton girl, and made her despise her cousin. She took her embroidery, but as she drew her stitches she still watched Gouraud’s play. Gouraud behaved as if he did not know the girl was near him. Sylvie noticed this apparent indifference and thought it extremely suspicious. Presently she undertook a *grande misere* in hearts, the pool being full of counters, besides containing twenty-seven sous. The rest of the company had now arrived; among them the deputy-judge Desfondrilles, who for the last two months had abandoned the Tiphaine party and connected himself more or less with the Vinets. He was standing before the chimney-piece, with his back to the fire and the tails of his coat over his arms, looking round the fine salon of which Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf was the shining ornament; for it really seemed as if all the reds of its decoration had been made expressly to enhance her style of beauty. Silence reigned; Pierrette was watching the game, Sylvie’s attention was distracted from her by the interest of the *grande misere*.



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“Play that,” said Pierrette to the colonel, pointing to a heart in his hand.

The colonel began a sequence in hearts; the hearts all lay between himself and Sylvie; the colonel won her ace, though it was protected by five small hearts.

“That’s not fair!” she cried. “Pierrette saw my hand, and the colonel took her advice.”

“But, mademoiselle,” said Celeste, “it was the colonel’s game to play hearts after you began them.”

The scene made Monsieur Desfondrilles smile; his was a keen mind, which found much amusement in watching the play of all the self-interests in Provins.

“Yes, it was certainly the colonel’s game,” said Cournant the notary, not knowing what the question was.

Sylvie threw a look at Mademoiselle Habert,—one of those glances which pass from old maid to old maid, feline and cruel.

“Pierrette, you did see my hand,” said Sylvie fixing her eyes on the girl.

“No, cousin.”

“I was looking at you all,” said the deputy-judge, “and I can swear that Pierrette saw no one’s hand but the colonel’s.”

“Pooh!” said Gouraud, alarmed, “little girls know how to slide their eyes into everything.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Sylvie.

“Yes,” continued Gouraud. “I dare say she looked into your hand to play you a trick. Didn’t you, little one?”

“No,” said the truthful Breton, “I wouldn’t do such a thing; if I had, it would have been in my cousin’s interests.”

“You know you are a story-teller and a little fool,” cried Sylvie. “After what happened this morning do you suppose I can believe a word you say? You are a—”

Pierrette did not wait for Sylvie to finish her sentence; foreseeing a torrent of insults, she rushed away without a light and ran to her room. Sylvie turned white with anger and muttered between her teeth, “She shall pay for this!”

“Shall you pay for the *misere*?” said Madame de Chargeboeuf.



As she spoke Pierrette struck her head against the door of the passage which some one had left open.

“Good! I’m glad of it,” cried Sylvie, as they heard the blow.

“She must be hurt,” said Desfondrilles.

“She deserves it,” replied Sylvie.

“It was a bad blow,” said Mademoiselle Habert.

Sylvie thought she might escape paying her *misere* if she went to see after Pierrette, but Madame de Chargeboeuf stopped her.

“Pay us first,” she said, laughing; “you will forget it when you come back.”

The remark, based on the old maid’s trickery and her bad faith in paying her debts at cards was approved by the others. Sylvie sat down and thought no more of Pierrette, —an indifference which surprised no one. When the game was over, about half past nine o’clock, she flung herself into an easy chair at the corner of the fireplace and did not even rise as her guests departed. The colonel was torturing her; she did not know what to think of him.



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“Men are so false!” she cried, as she went to bed.

Pierrette had given herself a frightful blow on the head, just above the ear, at the spot where young girls part their hair when they put their “front hair” in curlpapers. The next day there was a large swelling.

“God has punished you,” said Sylvie at the breakfast table. “You disobeyed me; you treated me with disrespect in leaving the room before I had finished my sentence; you got what you deserved.”

“Nevertheless,” said Rogron, “she ought to put on a compress of salt and water.”

“Oh, it is nothing at all, cousin,” said Pierrette.

The poor child had reached a point where even such a remark seemed to her a proof of kindness.

VIII

THE LOVES OF JACQUES AND PIERRETTE

The week ended as it had begun, in continual torture. Sylvie grew ingenious, and found refinements of tyranny with almost savage cruelty; the red Indians might have taken a lesson from her. Pierrette dared not complain of her vague sufferings, nor of the actual pains she now felt in her head. The origin of her cousin’s present anger was the non-revelation of Brigaut’s arrival. With Breton obstinacy Pierrette was determined to keep silence,—a resolution that is perfectly explicable. It is easy to see how her thoughts turned to Brigaut, fearing some danger for him if he were discovered, yet instinctively longing to have him near her, and happy in knowing he was in Provins. What joy to have seen him! That single glimpse was like the look an exile casts upon his country, or the martyr lifts to heaven, where his eyes, gifted with second-sight, can enter while flames consume his body.

Pierrette’s glance had been so thoroughly understood by the major’s son that, as he planed his planks or took his measures or joined his wood, he was working his brains to find out some way of communicating with her. He ended by choosing the simplest of all schemes. At a certain hour of the night Pierrette must lower a letter by a string from her window. In the midst of the girl’s own sufferings, she too was sustained by the hope of being able to communicate with Brigaut. The same desire was in both hearts; parted, they understood each other! At every shock to her heart, every throb of pain in her head, Pierrette said to herself, “Brigaut is here!” and that thought enabled her to live without complaint.

One morning in the market, Brigaut, lying in wait, was able to get near her. Though he saw her tremble and turn pale, like an autumn leaf about to flutter down, he did not lose



his head, but quietly bought fruit of the market-woman with whom Sylvie was bargaining. He found his chance of slipping a note to Pierrette, all the while joking the woman with the ease of a man accustomed to such manoeuvres; so cool was he in action, though the blood hummed in his ears and rushed boiling through his veins and arteries. He had the firmness of a galley-slave without, and the shrinkings of innocence within him, —like certain mothers in their moments of mortal trial, when held between two dangers, two catastrophes.



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Pierrette's inward commotion was like Brigaut's. She slipped the note into the pocket of her apron. The hectic spots upon her cheekbones turned to a cherry-scarlet. These two children went through, all unknown to themselves, many more emotions than go to the make-up of a dozen ordinary loves. This moment in the market-place left in their souls a well-spring of passionate feeling. Sylvie, who did not recognize the Breton accent, took no notice of Brigaut, and Pierrette went home safely with her treasure.

The letters of these two poor children were fated to serve as documents in a terrible judicial inquiry; otherwise, without the fatal circumstances that occasioned that inquiry, they would never have been heard of. Here is the one which Pierrette read that night in her chamber:—

My dear Pierrette,—At midnight, when everybody is asleep but me, who am watching you, I will come every night under your window. Let down a string long enough to reach me; it will not make any noise; you must fasten to the end of it whatever you write to me. I will tie my letter in the same way. I hear *they* have taught you to read and write, —those wicked relations who were to do you good, and have done you so much harm. You, Pierrette, the daughter of a colonel who died for France, reduced by those monsters to be their servant! That is where all your pretty color and health have gone. My Pierrette, what has become of her? what have they done with her. I see plainly you are not the same, not happy. Oh! Pierrette, let us go back to Brittany. I can earn enough now to give you what you need; for you yourself can earn three francs a day and I can earn four or five; and thirty sous is all I want to live on. Ah! Pierrette, how I have prayed the good God for you ever since I came here! I have asked him to give me all your sufferings, and you all pleasures. Why do you stay with them? why do they keep you? Your grandmother is more to you than they. They are vipers; they have taken your gaiety away from you. You do not even walk as you once did in Brittany. Let us go back. I am here to serve you, to do your will; tell me what you wish. If you need money I have a hundred and fifty francs; I can send them up by the string, though I would like to kiss your dear hands and lay the money in them. Ah, dear Pierrette, it is a long time now that the blue sky has been overcast for me. I have not had two hours' happiness since I put you into that diligence of evil. And when I saw you the other morning, looking like a shadow, I could not reach you; that hag of a cousin came between us. But at least we can have the consolation of praying to God together every Sunday in church; perhaps he will hear us all the more when we pray together.

Not good-by, my dear, Pierrette, but *to-night*.

This letter so affected Pierrette that she sat for more than an hour reading and re-reading and gazing at it. Then she remembered with anguish that she had nothing to write with. She summoned courage to make the difficult journey from her garret to the dining-room, where she obtained pen, paper, and ink, and returned safely without waking her terrible cousin. A few minutes before midnight she had finished the following letter:—



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My Friend,—Oh! yes, my friend; for there is no one but you, Jacques, and my grandmother to love me. God forgive me, but you are the only two persons whom I love, both alike, neither more nor less. I was too little to know my dear mamma; but you, Jacques, and my grandmother, and my grandfather,—God grant him heaven, for he suffered much from his ruin, which was mine,—but you two who are left, I love you both, unhappy as I am. Indeed, to know how much I love you, you will have to know how much I suffer; but I don't wish that, it would grieve you too much. *They* speak to me as we would not speak to a dog; *they* treat me like the worst of girls; and yet I do examine myself before God, and I cannot find that I do wrong by them. Before you sang to me the marriage song I saw the mercy of God in my sufferings; for I had prayed to him to take me from the world, and I felt so ill I said to myself, "God hears me!" But, Jacques, now you are here, I want to live and go back to Brittany, to my grandmamma who loves me, though *they* say she stole eight thousand francs of mine. Jacques, is that so? If they are mine could you get them! But it is not true, for if my grandmother had eight thousand francs she would not live at Saint-Jacques. I don't want to trouble her last days, my kind, good grandmamma, with the knowledge of my troubles; she might die of it. Ah! if she knew they made her grandchild scrub the pots and pans,—she who used to say to me, when I wanted to help her after her troubles, "Don't touch that, my darling; leave it—leave it—you will spoil your pretty fingers." Ah! my hands are never clean now. Sometimes I can hardly carry the basket home from market, it cuts my arm. Still I don't think my cousins mean to be cruel; but it is their way always to scold, and it seems that I have no right to leave them. My cousin Rogron is my guardian. One day when I wanted to run away because I could not bear it, and told them so, my cousin Sylvie said the gendarmes would go after me, for the law was my master. Oh! I know now that cousins cannot take the place of father or mother, any more than the saints can take the place of God. My poor Jacques, what do you suppose I could do with your money? Keep it for our journey. Oh! how I think of you and Pen-Hoel, and the big pong,—that's where we had our only happy days. I shall have no more, for I feel I am going from bad to worse. I am very ill, Jacques. I have dreadful pains in my head, and in my bones, and back, which kill me, and I have no appetite except for horrid things,—roots and leaves and such things. Sometimes I cry, when I am all alone, for they won't let me do anything I like if they know it, not even cry. I have to hide to offer my tears to Him to whom we owe the mercies which we call afflictions. It must have been He who gave you the blessed thought to come and sing the marriage song beneath my window. Ah! Jacques, my cousin heard you, and she said I had a lover. If you wish to be my lover, love me well. I promise to love you always, as I did in the past, and to be

Your faithful servant,
Pierrette Lorrain.

You will love me always, won't you?



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She had brought a crust of bread from the kitchen, in which she now made a hole for the letter, and fastened it like a weight to her string. At midnight, having opened her window with extreme caution, she lowered the letter with the crust, which made no noise against either the wall of the house or the blinds. Presently she felt the string pulled by Brigaut, who broke it and then crept softly away. When he reached the middle of the square she could see him indistinctly by the starlight; but he saw her quite clearly in the zone of light thrown by the candle. The two children stood thus for over an hour, Pierrette making him signs to go, he starting, she remaining, he coming back to his post, and Pierrette again signing that he must leave her. This was repeated till the child closed her window, went to bed, and blew out the candle. Once in bed she fell asleep, happy in heart though suffering in body,—she had Brigaut's letter under her pillow. She slept as the persecuted sleep,—a slumber bright with angels; that slumber full of heavenly arabesques, in atmospheres of gold and lapis-lazuli, perceived and given to us by Raffaelle.

The moral nature had such empire over that frail physical nature that on the morrow Pierrette rose light and joyous as a lark, as radiant and as gay. Such a change could not escape the vigilant eye of her cousin Sylvie, who, this time, instead of scolding her, set about watching her with the scrutiny of a magpie. “What reason is there for such happiness?” was a thought of jealousy, not of tyranny. If the colonel had not been in Sylvie's mind she would have said to Pierrette as formerly, “Pierrette, you are very noise, and very regardless of what you have often been told.” But now the old maid resolved to spy upon her as only old maids can spy. The day was still and gloomy, like the weather that precedes a storm.

“You don't appear to be ill now, mademoiselle,” said Sylvie at dinner. “Didn't I tell you she put it all on to annoy us?” she cried, addressing her brother, and not waiting for Pierrette's answer.

“On the contrary, cousin, I have a sort of fever—”

“Fever! what fever? You are as gay as a lark. Perhaps you have seen some one again?”

Pierrette trembled and dropped her eyes on her plate.

“Tartufe!” cried Sylvie; “and only fourteen years old! what a nature! Do you mean to come to a bad end?”

“I don't know what you mean,” said Pierrette, raising her sweet and luminous brown eyes to her cousin.



“This evening,” said Sylvie, “you are to stay in the dining-room with a candle, and do your sewing. You are not wanted in the salon; I sha’n’t have you looking into my hand to help your favorites.”

Pierrette made no sign.

“Artful creature!” cried Sylvie, leaving the room.

Rogron, who did not understand his sister’s anger, said to Pierrette: “What is all this about? Try to please your cousin, Pierrette; she is very indulgent to you, very gentle, and if you put her out of temper the fault is certainly yours. Why do you squabble so? For my part I like to live in peace. Look at Mademoiselle Bathilde and take pattern by her.”



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Pierrette felt able to bear everything. Brigaut would come at midnight and bring her an answer, and that hope was the viaticum of her day. But she was using up her last strength. She did not go to bed, and stood waiting for the hour to strike. At last midnight sounded; softly she opened the window; this time she used a string made by tying bits of twine together. She heard Brigaut's step, and on drawing up the cord she found the following letter, which filled her with joy:—

My dear Pierrette,—As you are so ill you must not tire yourself by waiting for me. You will hear me if I cry like an owl. Happily my father taught me to imitate their note. So when you hear the cry three times you will know I am there, and then you must let down the cord. But I shall not come again for some days. I hope then to bring you good news. Oh! Pierrette, don't talk of dying! Pierrette, don't think such things! All my heart shook, I felt as though I were dead myself at the mere idea. No, my Pierrette, you must not die; you will live happy, and soon you shall be delivered from your persecutors. If I do not succeed in what I am undertaking for your rescue, I shall appeal to the law, and I shall speak out before heaven and earth and tell how your wicked relations are treating you. I am certain that you have not many more days to suffer; have patience, my Pierrette! Jacques is watching over you as in the old days when we slid on the pond and I pulled you out of the hole in which we were nearly drowned together. Adieu, my dear Pierrette; in a few days, if God wills, we shall be happy. Alas, I dare not tell you the only thing that may hinder our meeting. But God loves us! In a few days I shall see my dear Pierrette at liberty, without troubles, without any one to hinder my looking at you—for, ah! Pierrette, I hunger to see you—Pierrette, Pierrette, who deigns to love me and to tell me so. Yes, Pierrette, I will be your lover when I have earned the fortune you deserve; till then I will be to you only a devoted servant whose life is yours to do what you please with it. Adieu.

Jacques Brigaut.

Here is a letter of which the major's son said nothing to Pierrette. He wrote it to Madame Lorrain at Nantes:—

Madame Lorrain,—Your granddaughter will die, worn-out with ill-treatment, if you do not come to fetch her. I could scarcely recognize her; and to show you the state of things I enclose a letter I have received from Pierrette. You are thought here to have taken the money of your granddaughter, and you ought to justify yourself. If you can, come at once. We may still be happy; but if delay Pierrette will be dead.

I am, with respect, your devoted servant,
Jacques Brigaut.

At Monsieur Frappier's, Cabinet-maker, Grand'Rue, Provins.

Brigaut's fear was that the grandmother was dead.



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Though this letter of the youth whom in her innocence she called her lover was almost enigmatical to Pierrette, she believed in it with all her virgin faith. Her heart was filled with that sensation which travellers in the desert feel when they see from afar the palm-trees round a well. In a few days her misery would end—Jacques said so. She relied on this promise of her childhood's friend; and yet, as she laid the letter beside the other, a dreadful thought came to her in foreboding words.

"Poor Jacques," she said to herself, "he does not know the hole into which I have now fallen!"

Sylvie had heard Pierrette, and she had also heard Brigaut under her window. She jumped out of bed and rushed to the window to look through the blinds into the square and there she saw, in the moonlight, a man hurrying in the direction of the colonel's house, in front of which Brigaut happened to stop. The old maid gently opened her door, went upstairs, was amazed to find a light in Pierrette's room, looked through the keyhole, and could see nothing.

"Pierrette," she said, "are you ill?"

"No, cousin," said Pierrette, surprised.

"Why is your candle burning at this time of night? Open the door; I must know what this means."

Pierrette went to the door bare-footed, and as soon as Sylvie entered the room she saw the cord, which Pierrette had forgotten to put away, not dreaming of a surprise. Sylvie jumped upon it.

"What is that for?" she asked.

"Nothing, cousin."

"Nothing!" she cried. "Always lying; you'll never get to heaven that way. Go to bed; you'll take cold."

She asked no more questions and went away, leaving Pierrette terrified by her unusual clemency. Instead of exploding with rage, Sylvie had suddenly determined to surprise Pierrette and the colonel together, to seize their letters and confound the two lovers who were deceiving her. Pierrette, inspired by a sense of danger, sewed the letters into her corset and covered them with calico.

Here end the loves of Pierrette and Brigaut.

Pierrette rejoiced in the thought that Jacques had determined to hold no communication with her for some days, because her cousin's suspicions would be quieted by finding



nothing to feed them. Sylvie did in fact spend the next three nights on her legs, and each evening in watching the innocent colonel, without discovering either in him or in Pierrette, or in the house or out of it, anything that betrayed their understanding. She sent Pierrette to confession, and seized that moment to search the child's room, with the method and penetration of a spy or a custom-house officer. She found nothing. Her fury reached the apogee of human sentiments. If Pierrette had been there she would certainly have struck her remorselessly. To a woman of her temper, jealousy was less a sentiment than an occupation; she existed in it, it made her heart beat, she felt emotions hitherto completely unknown to her; the slightest sound or movement kept her on the qui vive; she watched Pierrette with gloomy intentness.



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“That miserable little wretch will kill me,” she said.

Sylvie’s severity to her cousin reached the point of refined cruelty, and made the deplorable condition of the poor girl worse daily. She had fever regularly, and the pains in her head became intolerable. By the end of the week even the visitors at the house noticed her suffering face, which would have touched to pity all selfishness less cruel than theirs. It happened that Doctor Neraud, possibly by Vinet’s advice, did not come to the house during that week. The colonel, knowing himself suspected by Sylvie, was afraid to risk his marriage by showing any solicitude for Pierrette. Bathilde explained the visible change in the girl by her natural growth. But at last, one Sunday evening, when Pierrette was in the salon, her sufferings overcame her and she fainted away. The colonel, who first saw her going, caught her in his arms and carried her to a sofa.

“She did it on purpose,” said Sylvie, looking at Mademoiselle Habert and the rest who were playing boston with her.

“I assure you that your cousin is very ill,” said the colonel.

“She seemed well enough in your arms,” Sylvie said to him in a low voice, with a savage smile.

“The colonel is right,” said Madame de Chargeboeuf. “You ought to send for a doctor. This morning at church every one was speaking, as they came out, of Mademoiselle Lorrain’s appearance.”

“I am dying,” said Pierrette.

Desfondrilles called to Sylvie and told her to unfasten her cousin’s gown. Sylvie went up to the girl, saying, “It is only a tantrum.”

She unfastened the gown and was about to touch the corset, when Pierrette, roused by the danger, sat up with superhuman strength, exclaiming, “No, no, I will go to bed.”

Sylvie had, however, touched the corset and felt the papers. She let Pierrette go, saying to the company:

“What do you think now of her illness? I tell you it is all a pretence. You have no idea of the perversity of that child.”

After the card-playing was over she kept Vinet from following the other guests; she was furious and wanted vengeance, and was grossly rude to the colonel when he bade her good-night. Gouraud threw a look at the lawyer which threatened him to the depths of his being and seemed to put a ball in his entrails. Sylvie told Vinet to remain. When they were alone, she said,—



“Never in my life, never in my born days, will I marry the colonel.”

“Now that you have come to that decision I may speak,” said the lawyer. “The colonel is my friend, but I am more yours than his. Rogron has done me services which I can never forget. I am as strong a friend as I am an enemy. Once in the Chamber I shall rise to power, and I will make your brother a receiver-general. Now swear to me, before I say more, that you will never repeat what I tell you.” (Sylvie made an affirmative sign.) “In the first place, the brave colonel is a gambler—”



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“Ah!” exclaimed Sylvie.

“If it had not been for the embarrassments this vice has brought upon him, he might have been a marshal of France,” continued Vinet. “He is capable of running through your property; but he is very astute; you cannot be sure of not having children, and you told me yourself the risks you feared. No, if you want to marry, wait till I am in the Chamber and then take that old Desfondrilles, who shall be made chief justice. If you want revenge on the colonel make your brother marry Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, —I can get her consent; she has two thousand francs a year, and you will be connected with the de Chargeboeufs as I am. Recollect what I tell you, the Chargeboeufs will be glad to claim us for cousins some day.”

“Gouraud loves Pierrette,” was Sylvie’s only answer.

“He is quite capable of it,” said Vinet, “and capable of marrying her after your death.”

“A fine calculation!” she said.

“I tell you that man has the shrewdness of the devil. Marry your brother and announce that you mean to remain unmarried and will leave your property to your nephews and nieces. That will strike a blow at Gouraud and Pierrette both! and you’ll see the faces they’ll make.”

“Ah! that’s true,” cried the old maid, “I can serve them both right. She shall go to a shop, and get nothing from me. She hasn’t a sou; let her do as we did,—work.”

Vinet departed, having put his plan into Sylvie’s head, her dogged obstinacy being well-known to him. The old maid, he was certain, would think the scheme her own, and carry it out.

The lawyer found the colonel in the square, smoking a cigar while he waited for him.

“Halt!” said Gouraud; “you have pulled me down, but stones enough came with me to bury you—”

“Colonel!—”

“Colonel or not, I shall give you your deserts. In the first place, you shall not be deputy —”

“Colonel!—”

“I control ten votes and the election depends on—”



“Colonel, listen to me. Is there no one to marry but that old Sylvie? I have just been defending you to her; you are accused and convicted of writing to Pierrette; she saw you leave your house at midnight and come to the girl’s window—”

“Stuff and nonsense!”

“She means to marry her brother to Bathilde and leave her fortune to their children.”

“Rogron won’t have any.”

“Yes he will,” replied Vinet. “But I promise to find you some young and agreeable woman with a hundred and fifty thousand francs? Don’t be a fool; how can you and I afford to quarrel? Things have gone against you in spite of all my care; but you don’t understand me.”

“Then we must understand each other,” said the colonel. “Get me a wife with a hundred and fifty thousand francs before the elections; if not —look out for yourself! I don’t like unpleasant bed-fellows, and you’ve pulled the blankets all over to your side. Good-evening.”



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"You shall see," said Vinet, grasping the colonel's hand affectionately.

* * * * *

About one o'clock that night three clear, sharp cries of an owl, wonderfully well imitated, echoed through the square. Pierrette heard them in her feverish sleep; she jumped up, moist with perspiration, opened her window, saw Brigaut, and flung down a ball of silk, to which he fastened a letter. Sylvie, agitated by the events of the day and her own indecision of mind, was not asleep; she heard the owl.

"Ah, bird of ill-omen!" she thought. "Why, Pierrette is getting up! What is she after?"

Hearing the attic window open softly, Sylvie rushed to her own window and heard the rustle of paper against her blinds. She fastened the strings of her bed-gown and went quickly upstairs to Pierrette's room, where she found the poor girl unwinding the silk and freeing the letter.

"Ha! I've caught you!" cried the old woman, rushing to the window, from which she saw Jacques running at full speed. "Give me that letter."

"No, cousin," said Pierrette, who, by one of those strong inspirations of youth sustained by her own soul, rose to a grandeur of resistance such as we admire in the history of certain peoples reduced to despair.

"Ha! you will not?" cried Sylvie, advancing upon the girl with a face full of hatred and fury.

Pierrette fell back to get time to put her letter in her hand, which she clenched with unnatural force. Seeing this manoeuvre Sylvie grasped the delicate white hand of the girl in her lobster claws and tried to open it. It was a frightful struggle, an infamous struggle; it was more than a physical struggle; it assailed the mind, the sole treasure of the human being, the thought, which God has placed beyond all earthly power and guards as the secret way between the sufferer and Himself. The two women, one dying, the other in the vigor of health, looked at each other fixedly. Pierrette's eyes darted on her executioner the look the famous Templar on the rack cast upon Philippe le Bel, who could not bear it and fled thunderstricken. Sylvie, a woman and a jealous woman, answered that magnetic look with malignant flashes. A dreadful silence reigned. The clenched hand of the Breton girl resisted her cousin's efforts like a block of steel. Sylvie twisted Pierrette's arm, she tried to force the fingers open; unable to do so she stuck her nails into the flesh. At last, in her madness, she set her teeth into the wrist, trying to conquer the girl by pain. Pierrette defied her still, with that same terrible glance of innocence. The anger of the old maid grew to such a pitch that it became blind fury. She seized Pierrette's arm and struck the closed fist upon the window-sill, and then upon the marble of the mantelpiece, as we crack a nut to get the kernel.

“Help! help!” cried Pierrette, “they are murdering me!”

“Ha! you may well scream, when I catch you with a lover in the dead of night.”



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And she beat the hand pitilessly.

“Help! help!” cried Pierrette, the blood flowing.

At that instant, loud knocks were heard at the front door. Exhausted, the two women paused a moment.

Rogron, awakened and uneasy, not knowing what was happening, had got up, gone to his sister’s room, and not finding her was frightened. Hearing the knocks he went down, unfastened the front door, and was nearly knocked over by Brigaut, followed by a sort of phantom.

At this moment Sylvie’s eyes chanced to fall on Pierrette’s corset, and she remembered the papers. Releasing the girl’s wrist she sprang upon the corset like a tiger on its prey, and showed it to Pierrette with a smile,—the smile of an Iroquois over his victim before he scalps him.

“I am dying,” said Pierrette, falling on her knees, “oh, who will save me?”

“I!” said a woman with white hair and an aged parchment face, in which two gray eyes glittered.

“Ah! grandmother, you have come too late,” cried the poor child, bursting into tears.

Pierrette fell upon her bed, her strength all gone, half-dead with the exhaustion which, in her feeble state, followed so violent a struggle. The tall gray woman took her in her arms, as a nurse lifts a child, and went out, followed by Brigaut, without a word to Sylvie, on whom she cast one glance of majestic accusation.

The apparition of that august old woman, in her Breton costume, shrouded in her coif (a sort of hooded mantle of black cloth), accompanied by Brigaut, appalled Sylvie; she fancied she saw death. She slowly went down the stairs, listened to the front door closing behind them, and came face to face with her brother, who exclaimed: “Then they haven’t killed you?”

“Go to bed,” said Sylvie. “To-morrow we will see what we must do.”

She went back to her own bed, ripped open the corset, and read Brigaut’s two letters, which confounded her. She went to sleep in the greatest perplexity,—not imagining the terrible results to which her conduct was to lead.

* * * * *

The letters sent by Brigaut to old Madame Lorrain reached her in a moment of ineffable joy, which the perusal of them troubled. The poor old woman had grieved deeply in



living without her Pierrette beside her, but she had consoled her loneliness with the thought that the sacrifice of herself was in the interests of her grandchild. She was blessed with one of those ever-young hearts which are upheld and invigorated by the idea of sacrifice. Her old husband, whose only joy was his little granddaughter, had grieved for Pierrette; every day he had seemed to look for her. It was an old man's grief,—on which such old men live, of which they die.



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Every one can now imagine the happiness which this poor old woman, living in a sort of almshouse, felt when she learned of a generous action, rare indeed but not impossible in France. The head of the house of Collinet, whose failure in 1814 had caused the Lorrains a loss of twenty-four thousand francs, had gone to America with his children after his disasters. He had too high a courage to remain a ruined man. After eleven years of untold effort crowned by success he returned to Nantes to recover his position, leaving his eldest son in charge of his transatlantic house. He found Madame Lorrain of Pen-Hoel in the institution of Saint-Jacques, and was witness of the resignation with which this most unfortunate of his creditors bore her misery.

“God forgive you!” said the old woman, “since you give me on the borders of my grave the means of securing the happiness of my dear granddaughter; but alas! it will not clear the debts of my poor husband!”

Monsieur Collinet made over to the widow both the capital and the accrued interest, amounting to about forty-two thousand francs. His other creditors, prosperous, rich, and intelligent merchants, had easily born their losses, whereas the misfortunes of the Lorrains seemed so irremediable to old Monsieur Collinet that he promised the widow to pay off her husband’s debts, to the amount of forty thousand francs more. When the Bourse of Nantes heard of this generous reparation they wished to receive Collinet to their board before his certificates were granted by the Royal court at Rennes; but the merchant refused the honor, preferring to submit to the ordinary commercial rule.

Madame Lorrain had received the money only the day before the post brought her Brigaut’s letter, enclosing that of Pierrette. Her first thought had been, as she signed the receipt: “Now I can live with my Pierrette and marry her to that good Brigaut, who will make a fortune with my money.”

Therefore the moment she had read the fatal letters she made instant preparations to start for Provins. She left Nantes that night by the mail; for some one had explained to her its celerity. In Paris she took the diligence for Troyes, which passes through Provins, and by half-past eleven at night she reached Frappier’s, where Brigaut, shocked at her despairing looks, told her of Pierrette’s state and promised to bring the poor girl to her instantly. His words so terrified the grandmother that she could not control her impatience and followed him to the square. When Pierrette screamed, the horror of that cry went to her heart as sharply as it did to Brigaut’s. Together they would have roused the neighborhood if Rogron, in his terror, had not opened the door. The scream of the young girl at bay gave her grandmother the sudden strength of anger with which she carried her dear Pierrette in her arms to Frappier’s house, where Madame Frappier hastily arranged Brigaut’s own room for the old woman and her treasure. In that poor room, on a bed half-made, the sufferer was deposited; and there she fainted away, holding her hand still clenched, wounded, bleeding, with the nails deep bedded in the flesh. Brigaut, Frappier, his wife, and the old woman stood looking at Pierrette in silence, all four of them in a state of indescribable amazement.



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“Why is her hand bloody?” said the grandmother at last.

Pierrette, overcome by the sleep which follows all abnormal displays of strength, and dimly conscious that she was safe from violence, gradually unbent her fingers. Brigaut’s letter fell from them like an answer.

“They tried to take my letter from her,” said Brigaut, falling on his knees and picking up the lines in which he had told his little friend to come instantly and softly away from the house. He kissed with pious love the martyr’s hand.

It was a sight that made those present tremble when they saw the old gray woman, a sublime spectre, standing beside her grandchild’s pillow. Terror and vengeance wrote their fierce expressions in the wrinkles that lined her skin of yellow ivory; her forehead, half hidden by the straggling meshes of her gray hair, expressed a solemn anger. She read, with a power of intuition given to the aged when near their grave, Pierrette’s whole life, on which her mind had dwelt throughout her journey. She divined the illness of her darling, and knew that she was threatened with death. Two big tears painfully rose in her wan gray eyes, from which her troubles had worn both lashes and eyebrows, two pearls of anguish, forming within them and giving them a dreadful brightness; then each tear swelled and rolled down the withered cheek, but did not wet it.

“They have killed her!” she said at last, clasping her hands.

She fell on her knees which struck sharp blows on the brick-laid floor, making a vow no doubt to Saint Anne d’Auray, the most powerful of the madonnas of Brittany.

“A doctor from Paris,” she said to Brigaut. “Go and fetch one, Brigaut, go!”

She took him by the shoulder and gave him a despotic push to send him from the room.

“I was coming, my lad, when you wrote me; I am rich,—here, take this,” she cried, recalling him, and unfastening as she spoke the strings that tied her short-gown. Then she drew a paper from her bosom in which were forty-two bank-bills, saying, “Take what is necessary, and bring back the greatest doctor in Paris.”

“Keep those,” said Frappier; “he can’t change thousand franc notes now. I have money, and the diligence will be passing presently; he can certainly find a place on it. But before he goes we had better consult Doctor Martener; he will tell us the best physician in Paris. The diligence won’t pass for over an hour,—we have time enough.”

Brigaut woke up Monsieur Martener, and brought him at once. The doctor was not a little surprised to find Mademoiselle Lorrain at Frappier’s. Brigaut told him of the scene that had just taken place at the Rogrons’; but even so the doctor did not at first suspect the horror of it, nor the extent of the injury done. Martener gave the address of the celebrated Horace Bianchon, and Brigaut started for Paris by the diligence. Monsieur

Martener then sat down and examined first the bruised and bloody hand which lay outside the bed.



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“She could not have given these wounds herself,” he said.

“No; the horrible woman to whom I had the misfortune to trust her was murdering her,” said the grandmother. “My poor Pierrette was screaming ‘Help! help! I’m dying,’—enough to touch the heart of an executioner.”

“But why was it?” said the doctor, feeling Pierrette’s pulse. “She is very ill,” he added, examining her with a light. “She must have suffered terribly; I don’t understand why she has not been properly cared for.”

“I shall complain to the authorities,” said the grandmother. “Those Rogrons asked me for my child in a letter, saying they had twelve thousand francs a year and would take care of her; had they the right to make her their servant and force her to do work for which she had not the strength?”

“They did not choose to see the most visible of all maladies to which young girls are liable. She needed the utmost care,” cried Monsieur Martener.

Pierrette was awakened by the light which Madame Frappier was holding near her face, and by the horrible sufferings in her head caused by the reaction of her struggle.

“Ah! Monsieur Martener, I am very ill,” she said in her pretty voice.

“Where is the pain, my little friend?” asked the doctor.

“Here,” she said, touching her head above the left ear.

“There’s an abscess,” said the doctor, after feeling the head for a long time and questioning Pierrette on her sufferings. “You must tell us all, my child, so that we may know how to cure you. Why is your hand like this? You could not have given yourself that wound.”

Pierrette related the struggle between herself and her cousin Sylvie.

“Make her talk,” said the doctor to the grandmother, “and find out the whole truth. I will await the arrival of the doctor from Paris; and we will send for the surgeon in charge of the hospital here, and have a consultation. The case seems to me a very serious one. Meantime I will send you a quieting draught so that mademoiselle may sleep; she needs sleep.”

Left alone with her granddaughter the old Breton woman exerted her influence over the child and made her tell all; she let her know that she had money enough now for all three, and promised that Brigaut should live with them. The poor girl admitted her martyrdom, not imagining the events to which her admissions would give rise. The monstrosity of two beings without affection and without conception of family life opened



to the old woman a world of woe as far from her knowledge as the morals of savages may have seemed to the first discoverers who set foot in America.

The arrival of her grandmother, the certainty of living with her in comfort soothed Pierrette's mind as the sleeping draught soothed her body. The old woman watched her darling, kissing her forehead, hair, and hands, as the holy women of old kissed the hands of Jesus when they laid him in the tomb.



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IX

THE FAMILY COUNCIL

At nine o'clock that morning Monsieur Martener went to see Monsieur Tiphaine, and related to him the scene between Pierrette and Sylvie, and the tortures of all kinds, moral and physical, to which the Rogrons had subjected their cousin, and the two alarming forms of illness which their cruelty had developed. Monsieur Tiphaine sent for Auffray the notary, one of Pierrette's own relations on the maternal side.

At this particular time the war between the Vinet party and the Tiphaine party was at its height. The scandals which the Rogrons and their adherents were disseminating through the town about the liaison of Madame Tiphaine's mother with the banker du Tillet, and the bankruptcy of her father (a forger, they said), were all the more exasperating to the Tiphaines because these things were malicious truths, not libels. Such wounds cut deep; they go to the quick of feelings and of interests. These speeches, repeated to the partisans of the Tiphaines by the same mouths which told the Rogrons of the sneers of "those women" of the Tiphaine clique, fed the hatreds of both sides, now increased by the political element. The animosities caused at this time in France by the spirit of party, the violences of which were excessive, were everywhere mixed up, as in Provins, with selfish schemes and wounded or vindictive individual interests. Each party eagerly seized on whatever might injure the rival party. Personal hatreds and self-love mingled as much as political animosity in even the smallest matters, and were carried to hitherto unheard-of lengths. A whole town would be roused to excitement over some private struggle, until it took the character of a political debate.

Monsieur Tiphaine at once perceived in the case of Pierrette against the Rogrons a means of humbling, mortifying, and dishonoring the masters of that salon where plans against the monarchy were made and an opposition journal born. The public prosecutor was called in; and together with Monsieur Auffray the notary, Pierrette's relation, and Monsieur Martener, a cautious consultation was held in the utmost secrecy as to the proper course to follow. Monsieur Martener agreed to advise Pierrette's grandmother to apply to the courts to have Auffray appointed guardian to his young relation. The guardian could then convene a "Family Council," and, backed by the testimony of three doctors, demand the girl's release from the authority of the Rogrons. The affair thus managed would have to go before the courts, and the public prosecutor, Monsieur Lesourd, would see that it was taken to a criminal court by demanding an inquiry.

Towards midday all Provins was roused by the strange news of what had happened during the night at the Rogrons'. Pierrette's cries had been faintly heard, though they were soon over. No one had risen to inquire what they meant, but every one said the next day, "Did you hear those screams about one in the morning?" Gossip and comments soon magnified the horrible drama, and a crowd collected in front of

Frappier's shop, asking the worthy cabinet-maker for information, and hearing from him how Pierrette was brought to his house with her fingers broken and the hand bloody.



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Towards one in the afternoon the post-chaise of Doctor Bianchon, who was accompanied by Brigaut, stopped before the house, and Madame Frappier went at once to summon Monsieur Martener and the surgeon in charge of the hospital. Thus the gossip of the town received confirmation. The Rogrons were declared to have ill-used their cousin deliberately, and to have come near killing her. Vinet heard the news while attending to his business in the law courts; he left everything and hurried to the Rogrons. Rogron and his sister had just finished breakfast. Sylvie was reluctant to tell her brother of her discomfiture of the night before; but he pressed her with questions, to which she would make no answer than, "That's not your business." She went and came from the kitchen to the dining-room on pretence of preparing the breakfast, but chiefly to avoid discussion. She was alone when Vinet entered.

"You know what's happened?" said the lawyer.

"No," said Sylvie.

"You will be arrested on a criminal charge," replied Vinet, "from the way things are now going about Pierrette."

"A criminal charge!" cried Rogron, who had come into the room. "Why? What for?"

"First of all," said the lawyer, looking at Sylvie, "explain to me without concealment and as if you stood before God, what happened in this house last night—they talk of amputating Pierrette's hand."

Sylvie turned livid and shuddered.

"Then there is some truth in it?" said Vinet.

Mademoiselle Rogron related the scene, trying to excuse herself; but, prodded with questions, she acknowledged the facts of the horrible struggle.

"If you have only injured her fingers you will be taken before the police court for a misdemeanor; but if they cut off her hand you may be tried at the Assizes for a worse offence. The Tiphaines will do their best to get you there."

Sylvie, more dead than alive, confessed her jealousy, and, what was harder to do, confessed also that her suspicions were unfounded.

"Heavens, what a case this will make!" cried the lawyer. "You and your brother may be ruined by it; you will be abandoned by most people whether you win or lose. If you lose, you will have to leave Provins."

"Oh, my dear Monsieur Vinet, you who are such a great lawyer," said Rogron, terrified, "advise us! save us!"



The crafty Vinet worked the terror of the two imbeciles to its utmost, declaring that Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf might be unwilling to enter their house again. To be abandoned by women of their rank would be a terrible condemnation. At length, after an hour of adroit manoeuvring, it was agreed that Vinet must have some powerful motive in taking the case, that would impress the minds of all Provins and explain his efforts on behalf of the Rogrons. This motive they determined should be Rogron's marriage to Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf; it should

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be announced that very day and the banns published on Sunday. The contract could be drawn immediately. Mademoiselle Rogron agreed, in consideration of the marriage, to appear in the contract as settling her capital on her brother, retaining only the income of it. Vinet made Rogron and his sister comprehend the necessity of antedating the document by two or three days, so as to commit the mother and daughter in the eyes of the public and give them a reason for continuing their visits.

“Sign that contract and I’ll take upon myself to get you safely out of this affair,” said the lawyer. “There will be a terrible fight; but I will put my whole soul into it—you’ll have to make me a votive offering.”

“Oh, yes, yes,” said Rogron.

By half-past eleven the lawyer had plenary powers to draw the contract and conduct the defence of the Rogrons. At twelve o’clock application was made to Monsieur Tiphaine, as a judge sitting in chambers, against Brigaut and the widow Lorrain for having abducted Pierrette Lorrain, a minor, from the house of her legal guardian. In this way the bold lawyer became the aggressor and made Rogron the injured party. He spoke of the matter from this point of view in the court-house.

The judge postponed the hearing till four o’clock. Needless to describe the excitement in the town. Monsieur Tiphaine knew that by three o’clock the consultation of doctors would be over and their report drawn up; he wished Auffray, as surrogate-guardian, to be at the hearing armed with that report.

The announcement of Rogron’s marriage and the sacrifices made to it by Sylvie in the contract alienated two important supporters from the brother and sister, namely,—Mademoiselle Habert and the colonel, whose hopes were thus annihilated. They remained, however, ostensibly on the Rogron side for the purpose of injuring it. Consequently, as soon as Monsieur Martener mentioned the alarming condition of Pierrette’s head, Celeste and the colonel told of the blow she had given herself during the evening when Sylvie had forced her to leave the salon; and they related the old maid’s barbarous and unfeeling comments, with other statements proving her cruelty to her suffering cousin. Vinet had foreseen this storm; but he had secured the entire fortune of the Rogrons for Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, and he promised himself that in a few weeks she should be mistress of the Rogron house, and reign with him over Provins, and even bring about a fusion with the Breauteys and the aristocrats in the interests of his ambition.

From midday to four o’clock all the ladies of the Tiphaine clique sent to inquire after Mademoiselle Lorrain. She, poor girl, was wholly ignorant of the commotion she was causing in the little town. In the midst of her sufferings she was ineffably happy in

recovering her grandmother and Brigaut, the two objects of her affection. Brigaut's eyes were constantly full of tears. The old grandmother



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sat by the bed and caressed her darling. To the three doctors she told every detail she had obtained from Pierrette as to her life in the Rogron house. Horace Bianchon expressed his indignation in vehement language. Shocked at such barbarity he insisted on all the physicians in the town being called in to see the case; the consequence was that Dr. Neraud, the friend of the Rogrons, was present. The report was unanimously signed. It is useless to give a text of it here. If Moliere's medical terms were barbarous, those of modern science have the advantage of being so clear that the explanation of Pierrette's malady, though natural and unfortunately common, horrified all ears.

At four o'clock, after the usual rising of the court, president Tiphaine again took his seat, when Madame Lorrain, accompanied by Monsieur Auffray and Brigaut and a crowd of interested persons, entered the court-room. Vinet was alone. This contrast struck the minds of those present. The lawyer, who still wore his robe, turned his cold face to the judge, settled his spectacles on his pallid green eyes, and then in a shrill, persistent voice he stated that two strangers had forced themselves at night into the Rogron domicile and had abducted therefrom the minor Lorrain. The legal rights were with the guardian, who now demanded the restoration of his ward.

Monsieur Auffray rose, as surrogate-guardian, and requested to be heard.

"If the judge," he said, "will admit the report, which I hold in my hand, signed by one of the most famous physicians in Paris, and by all the physicians in Provins, he will understand not only that the demand of the Sieur Rogron is senseless, but also that the grandmother of the minor had grave cause to instantly remove her from her persecutors. Here are the facts. The report of these physicians attribute the almost dying condition of the said minor to the ill-treatment she has received from the Sieur Rogron and his sister. We shall, as the law directs, convoke a Family Council with the least possible delay, and discuss the question as to whether or not the guardian should be deposed. And we now ask that the minor be not returned to the domicile of the said guardian but that she be confided to some member of her family who shall be designated by the judge."

Vinet replied, declaring that the physicians' report ought to have been submitted to him in order that he might have disproved it.

"Not submitted to your side," said the judge, severely, "but possibly to the *procureur du roi*. The case is heard."

The judge then wrote at the bottom of the petition the following order:—



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“Whereas it appears, from a deliberate and unanimous report of all the physicians of this town, together with Doctor Bianchon of the medical faculty of Paris, that the minor Lorrain, claimed by Jerome-Denis Rogron, her guardian, is extremely ill in consequence of ill-treatment and personal assault in the house of the said guardian and his sister: “We, president of the court of Provins, passing upon the said petition, order that until the Family Council is held the minor Lorrain is not to be returned to the household of her said guardian, but shall be kept in that of her surrogate-guardian.” And further, considering the state in which the said minor now is, and the traces of violence which, according to the report of the physicians, are now upon her person, we commission the attending physician and the surgeon in charge of the hospital of Provins to visit her, and in case the injuries from the said assault become alarming, the matter will be held to await the action of the criminal courts; and this without prejudice to the civil suit undertaken by Auffray the surrogate-guardian.”

This severe judgment was read out by President Tiphaine in a loud and distinct voice.

“Why not send them to the galleys at once?” said Vinet. “And all this fuss about a girl who was carrying on an intrigue with an apprentice to a cabinet-maker! If the case goes on in this way,” he cried, insolently, “we shall demand other judges on the ground of legitimate suspicion.”

Vinet left the court-room, and went among the chief men of his party to explain Rogron’s position, declaring that he had never so much as given a flip to his cousin, and that the judge had viewed him much less as Pierrette’s guardian than as a leading elector in Provins.

To hear Vinet, people might have supposed that the Tiphaines were making a great fuss about nothing; the mounting was bringing forth a mouse. Sylvie, an eminently virtuous and pious woman, had discovered an intrigue between her brother’s ward and a workman, a Breton named Brigaut. The scoundrel knew very well that the girl would have her grandmother’s money, and he wished to seduce her (Vinet to talk of that!). Mademoiselle Rogron, who had discovered letters proving the depravity of the girl, was not as much to blame as the Tiphaines were trying to make out. If she did use some violence to get possession of those letters (which was no wonder, when we consider what Breton obstinacy is), how could Rogron be considered responsible for all that?

The lawyer went on to make the matter a partisan affair, and to give it a political color.

“They who listen to only one bell hear only one sound,” said the wise men. “Have you heard what Vinet says? Vinet explains things clearly.”

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Frappier's house being thought injurious to Pierrette, owing to the noise in the street which increased the sufferings in her head, she was taken to that of her surrogate guardian, the change being as necessary medically as it was judicially. The removal was made with the utmost caution, and was calculated to produce a great public effect. Pierrette was laid on a mattress and carried on a stretcher by two men; a Gray Sister walked beside her with a bottle of sal volatile in her hand, while the grandmother, Brigaut, Madame Auffray, and her maid followed. People were at their windows and doors to see the procession pass. Certainly the state in which they saw Pierrette, pale as death, gave immense advantage to the party against the Rogrons. The Auffrays were determined to prove to the whole town that the judge was right in the decision he had given. Pierrette and her grandmother were installed on the second floor of Monsieur Auffray's house. The notary and his wife gave her every care with the greatest hospitality, which was not without a little ostentation in it. Pierrette had her grandmother to nurse her; and Monsieur Martener and the head-surgeon of the hospital attended her.

On the evening of this day exaggerations began on both sides. The Rogron salon was crowded. Vinet had stirred up the whole Liberal party on the subject. The Chargeboeuf ladies dined with the Rogrons, for the contract was to be signed that evening. Vinet had had the banns posted at the mayor's office in the afternoon. He made light of the Pierrette affair. If the Provins court was prejudiced, the Royal courts would appreciate the facts, he said, and the Auffrays would think twice before they flung themselves into such a suit. The alliance of the Rogrons with the Chargeboeufs was an immense consideration in the minds of a certain class of people. To them it made the Rogrons as white as snow and Pierrette an evilly disposed little girl, a serpent warmed in their bosom.

In Madame Tiphaine's salon vengeance was had for all the mischievous scandals that the Vinet party had disseminated for the past two years. The Rogrons were monsters, and the guardian should undergo a criminal trial. In the Lower town, Pierrette was quite well; in the Upper town she was dying; at the Rogrons' she scratched her wrist; at Madame Tiphaine's her fingers were fractured and one was to be cut off. The next day the "Courrier de Provins," had a plausible article, extremely well-written, a masterpiece of insinuations mixed with legal points, which showed that there was no case whatever against Rogron. The "Bee-hive," which did not appear till two days later, could not answer without becoming defamatory; it replied, however, that in an affair like this it was best to wait until the law took its course.

The Family Council was selected by the *juge de paix* of the canton of Provins, and consisted of Rogron and the two Messieurs Auffray, the nearest relatives, and Monsieur Ciprey, nephew of Pierrette's maternal grandmother. To these were joined Monsieur Habert, Pierrette's confessor, and Colonel Gouraud, who had always professed himself a comrade and friend of her father, Colonel Lorrain. The impartiality of the judge in

these selections was much applauded,—Monsieur Habert and Colonel Gouraud being considered the firm friends of the Rogrons.



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The serious situation in which Rogron found himself made him ask for the assistance of a lawyer (and he named Vinet) at the Family Council. By this manoeuvre, evidently advised by Vinet himself, Rogron succeeded in postponing the meeting of the council till the end of December. At that time Monsieur Tiphaine and his wife would be settled in Paris for the opening of the Chambers; and the ministerial party would be left without its head. Vinet had already worked upon Desfondrilles, the deputy-judge, in case the matter should go, after the hearing before the council, to the criminal courts.

Vinet spoke for three hours before the Family Council; he proved the existence of an intrigue between Pierrette and Brigaut, which justified all Mademoiselle Rogron's severity. He showed how natural it was that the guardian should have left the management of his ward to a woman; he dwelt on the fact that Rogron had not interfered with Pierrette's education as planned by his sister Sylvie. But in spite of Vinet's efforts the Council were unanimous in removing Rogron from the guardianship. Monsieur Auffray was appointed in his place, and Monsieur Ciprey was made surrogate. The Council summoned before it and examined Adele, the servant-woman, who testified against her late masters; also Mademoiselle Habert, who related the cruel remarks made by Mademoiselle Rogron on the evening when Pierrette had given herself a frightful blow, heard by all the company, and the speech of Madame de Chargeboeuf about the girl's health. Brigaut produced the letter he had received from Pierrette, which proved their innocence and stated her ill-treatment. Proof was given that the condition of the minor was the result of neglect on the part of the guardian, who was responsible for all that concerned his ward. Pierrette's illness had been apparent to every one, even to persons in the town who were strangers to the family, yet the guardian had done nothing for her. The charge of ill-treatment was therefore sustained against Rogron; and the case would now go before the public.

Rogron, advised by Vinet, opposed the acceptance of the report of the Council by the court. The authorities then intervened in consequence of Pierrette's state, which was daily growing worse. The trial of the case, though placed at once upon the docket, was postponed until the month of March, 1828, to wait events.

X

VERDICTS—LEGAL AND OTHER

Meantime Rogron's marriage with Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf took place. Sylvie moved to the second floor of the house, which she shared with Madame de Chargeboeuf, for the first floor was entirely taken up by the new wife. The beautiful Madame Rogron succeeded to the social place of the beautiful Madame Tiphaine. The influence of the marriage was immense. No one now came to visit Sylvie, but Madame Rogron's salon was always full.



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Sustained by the influence of his mother-in-law and the bankers du Tillet and Nucingen, Monsieur Tiphaine was fortunate enough to do some service to the administration; he became one of its chief orators, was made judge in the civil courts, and obtained the appointment of his nephew Lesourd to his own vacant place as president of the court of Provins. This appointment greatly annoyed Desfondrilles. The Keeper of the Seals sent down one of his own proteges to fill Lesourd's place. The promotion of Monsieur Tiphaine and his translation to Paris were therefore of no benefit at all to the Vinet party; but Vinet nevertheless made a clever use of the result. He had always told the Provins people that they were being used as a stepping-stone to raise the crafty Madame Tiphaine into grandeur; Tiphaine himself had tricked them; Madame Tiphaine despised both Provins and its people in her heart, and would never return there again. Just at this crisis Monsieur Tiphaine's father died; his son inherited a fine estate and sold his house in Provins to Monsieur Julliard. The sale proved to the minds of all how little the Tiphaines thought of Provins. Vinet was right; Vinet had been a true prophet. These things had great influence on the question of Pierrette's guardianship.

Thus the dreadful martyrdom brutally inflicted on the poor child by two imbecile tyrants (which led, through its consequences, to the terrible operation of trepanning, performed by Monsieur Martener under the advice of Doctor Bianchon),—all this horrible drama reduced to judicial form was left to float in the vile mess called in legal parlance the calendar. The case was made to drag through the delays and the interminable labyrinths of the law, by the shufflings of an unprincipled lawyer; and during all this time the calumniated girl languished in the agony of the worst pain known to science.

Monsieur Martener, together with the Auffray family, were soon charmed by the beauty of Pierrette's nature and the character of her old grandmother, whose feelings, ideas, and ways bore the stamp of Roman antiquity,—this matron of the Marais was like a woman in Plutarch.

Doctor Martener struggled bravely with death, which already grasped its prey. From the first, Bianchon and the hospital surgeon had considered Pierrette doomed; and there now took place between the doctor and the disease, the former relying on Pierrette's youth, one of those struggles which physicians alone comprehend,—the reward of which, in case of success, is never found in the venal pay nor in the patients themselves, but in the gentle satisfaction of conscience, in the invisible ideal palm gathered by true artists from the contentment which fills their soul after accomplishing a noble work. The physician strains towards good as an artist towards beauty, each impelled by that grand sentiment which we call virtue. This daily contest wiped out of Doctor Martener's mind the petty irritations of that other contest of the Tiphaines and the Vinets,—as always happens to men when they find themselves face to face with a great and real misery to conquer.



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Monsieur Martener had begun his career in Paris; but the cruel activity of the city and its insensibility to its masses of suffering had shocked his gentle soul, fitted only for the quiet life of the provinces. Moreover, he was under the yoke of his beautiful native land. He returned to Provins, where he married and settled, and cared almost lovingly for the people, who were to him like a large family. During the whole of Pierrette's illness he was careful not to speak of her. His reluctance to answer the questions of those who asked about her was so evident that persons soon ceased to put them. Pierrette was to him, what indeed she truly was, a poem, mysterious, profound, vast in suffering, such as doctors find at times in their terrible experience. He felt an admiration for this delicate young creature which he would not share with any one.

This feeling of the physician for his patient was, however, unconsciously communicated (like all true feelings) to Monsieur and Madame Auffray, whose house became, so long as Pierrette was in it, quiet and silent. The children, who had formerly played so joyously with her, agreed among themselves with the loving grace of childhood to be neither noisy nor troublesome. They made it a point of honor to be good because Pierrette was ill. Monsieur Auffray's house was in the Upper town, beneath the ruins of the Chateau, and it was built upon a sort of terrace formed by the overthrow of the old ramparts. The occupants could have a view of the valley from the little fruit-garden enclosed by walls which overlooked the town. The roofs of the other houses came to about the level of the lower wall of this garden. Along the terrace ran a path, by which Monsieur Auffray's study could be entered through a glass door; at the other end of the path was an arbor of grape vines and a fig-tree, beneath which stood a round table, a bench and some chairs, painted green. Pierrette's bedroom was above the study of her new guardian. Madame Lorrain slept in a cot beside her grandchild. From her window Pierrette could see the whole of the glorious valley of Provins, which she hardly knew, so seldom had she left that dreadful house of the Rogrons. When the weather was fine she loved to drag herself, resting on her grandmother's arm, to the vine-clad arbor. Brigaut, unable to work, came three times a day to see his little friend; he was gnawed by a grief which made him indifferent to life. He lay in wait like a dog for Monsieur Martener, and followed him when he left the house. The old grandmother, drunk with grief, had the courage to conceal her despair; she showed her darling the smiling face she formerly wore at Pen-Hoel. In her desire to produce that illusion in the girl's mind, she made her a little Breton cap like the one Pierrette had worn on her first arrival in Provins; it made the darling seem more like her childlike self; in it she was delightful to look upon, her sweet face circled with a halo of cambric and fluted lace.



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Her skin, white with the whiteness of unglazed porcelain, her forehead, where suffering had printed the semblance of deep thought, the purity of the lines refined by illness, the slowness of the glances, and the occasional fixity of the eyes, made Pierrette an almost perfect embodiment of melancholy. She was served by all with a sort of fanaticism; she was felt to be so gentle, so tender, so loving. Madame Martener sent her piano to her sister Madame Auffray, thinking to amuse Pierrette who was passionately fond of music. It was a poem to watch her listening to a theme of Weber, or Beethoven, or Herold,—her eyes raised, her lips silent, regretting no doubt the life escaping her. The cure Peroux and Monsieur Habert, her two religious comforters, admired her saintly resignation. Surely the seraphic perfection of young girls and young men marked with the hectic of death, is a wonderful fact worthy of the attention alike of philosophers and of heedless minds. He who has ever seen one of these sublime departures from this life can never remain, or become, an unbeliever. Such beings exhale, as it were, a celestial fragrance; their glances speak of God; the voices are eloquent in the simplest words; often they ring like some seraphic instrument revealing the secrets of the future. When Monsieur Martener praised her for having faithfully followed a harsh prescription the little angel replied, and with what a glance!—

“I want to live, dear Monsieur Martener; but less for myself than for my grandmother, for my Brigaut, for all of you who will grieve at my death.”

The first time she went into the garden on a beautiful sunny day in November attended by all the household, Madame Auffray asked her if she was tired.

“No, now that I have no sufferings but those God sends I can bear all,” she said. “The joy of being loved gives me strength to suffer.”

That was the only time (and then vaguely) that she ever alluded to her horrible martyrdom at the Rogrons, whom she never mentioned, and of whom no one reminded her, knowing well how painful the memory must be.

“Dear Madame Auffray,” she said one day at noon on the terrace, as she gazed at the valley, warmed by a glorious sun and colored with the glowing tints of autumn, “my death in your house gives me more happiness than I have had since I left Brittany.”

Madame Auffray whispered in her sister Martener’s ear:—

“How she would have loved!”

In truth, her tones, her looks gave to her words a priceless value.

Monsieur Martener corresponded with Doctor Bianchon, and did nothing of importance without his advice. He hoped in the first place to regular the functions of nature and to



draw away the abscess in the head through the ear. The more Pierrette suffered, the more he hoped. He gained some slight success at times, and that was a great triumph. For several days Pierrette's appetite returned and enabled



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her to take nourishing food for which her illness had given her a repugnance; the color of her skin changed; but the condition of her head was terrible. Monsieur Martener entreated the great physician his adviser to come down. Bianchon came, stayed two days, and resolved to undertake an operation. To spare the feelings of poor Martener he went to Paris and brought back with him the celebrated Desplein. Thus the operation was performed by the greatest surgeon of ancient or modern times; but that terrible diviner said to Martener as he departed with Bianchon, his best-loved pupil:—

“Nothing but a miracle can save her. As Horace told you, caries of the bone has begun. At her age the bones are so tender.”

The operation was performed at the beginning of March, 1828. During all that month, distressed by Pierrette’s horrible sufferings, Monsieur Martener made several journeys to Paris; there he consulted Desplein and Bianchon, and even went so far as to propose to them an operation of the nature of lithotrity, which consists in passing into the head a hollow instrument by the help of which an heroic remedy can be applied to the diseased bone, to arrest the progress of the caries. Even the bold Desplein dared not attempt that high-handed surgical measure, which despair alone had suggested to Martener. When he returned home from Paris he seemed to his friends morose and gloomy. He was forced to announce on that fatal evening to the Auffrays and Madame Lorrain and to the two priests and Brigaut that science could do no more for Pierrette, whose recovery was now in God’s hands only. The consternation among them was terrible. The grandmother made a vow, and requested the priests to say a mass every morning at daybreak before Pierrette rose,—a mass at which she and Brigaut might be present.

The trial came on. While the victim lay dying, Vinet was calumniating her in court. The judge approved and accepted the report of the Family Council, and Vinet instantly appealed. The newly appointed *procureur du roi* made a requisition which necessitated fresh evidence. Rogron and his sister were forced to give bail to avoid going to prison. The order for fresh evidence included that of Pierrette herself. When Monsieur Desfondrilles came to the Auffrays’ to receive it, Pierrette was dying, her confessor was at her bedside about to administer extreme unction. At that moment she entreated all present to forgive her cousins as she herself forgave them, saying with her simple good sense that the judgment of these things belonged to God alone.

“Grandmother,” she said, “leave all you have to Brigaut” (Brigaut burst into tears); “and,” continued Pierrette, “give a thousand francs to that kind Adele who warmed my bed. If Adele had remained with my cousins I should not now be dying.”

It was at three o’clock on the Tuesday of Easter week, on a beautiful, bright day, that the angel ceased to suffer. Her heroic grandmother wished to watch all that night with the



priests, and to sew with her stiff old fingers her darling's shroud. Towards evening Brigaut left the Auffray's house and went to Frappier's.



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"I need not ask you, my poor boy, for news," said the cabinet-maker.

"Pere Frappier, yes, it is ended for her—but not for me."

He cast a look upon the different woods piled up around the shop,—a look of painful meaning.

"I understand you, Brigaut," said his worthy master. "Take all you want." And he showed him the oaken planks of two-inch thickness.

"Don't help me, Monsieur Frappier," said the Breton, "I wish to do it alone."

He passed the night in planing and fitting Pierrette's coffin, and more than once his plane took off at a single pass a ribbon of wood which was wet with tears. The good man Frappier smoked his pipe and watched him silently, saying only, when the four pieces were joined together,—

"Make the cover to slide; her poor grandmother will not hear the nails."

At daybreak Brigaut went out to fetch the lead to line the coffin. By a strange chance, the sheets of lead cost just the sum he had given Pierrette for her journey from Nantes to Provins. The brave Breton, who was able to resist the awful pain of himself making the coffin of his dear one and lining with his memories those burial planks, could not bear up against this strange reminder. His strength gave way; he was not able to lift the lead, and the plumber, seeing this, came with him, and offered to accompany him to the house and solder the last sheet when the body had been laid in the coffin.

The Breton burned the plane and all the tools he had used. Then he settled his accounts with Frappier and bade him farewell. The heroism with which the poor lad personally performed, like the grandmother, the last offices for Pierrette made him a sharer in the awful scene which crowned the tyranny of the Rogrons.

Brigaut and the plumber reached the house of Monsieur Auffray just in time to decide by their own main force an infamous and shocking judicial question. The room where the dead girl lay was full of people, and presented to the eyes of the two men a singular sight. The Rogron emissaries were standing beside the body of their victim, to torture her even after death. The corpse of the child, solemn in its beauty, lay on the cot-bed of her grandmother. Pierrette's eyes were closed, the brown hair smoothed upon her brow, the body swathed in a coarse cotton sheet.

Before the bed, on her knees, her hair in disorder, her hands stretched out, her face on fire, the old Lorrain was crying out, "No, no, it shall not be done!"

At the foot of the bed stood Monsieur Auffray and the two priests. The tapers were still burning.



Opposite to the grandmother was the surgeon of the hospital, with an assistant, and near him stood Doctor Neraud and Vinet. The surgeon wore his dissecting apron; the assistant had opened a case of instruments and was handing him a knife.

This scene was interrupted by the noise of the coffin which Brigaut and the plumber set down upon the floor. Then Brigaut, advancing, was horrified at the sight of Madame Lorrain, who was now weeping.



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“What is the matter?” he asked, standing beside her and grasping the chisel convulsively in his hand.

“This,” said the old woman, “*this*, Brigaut: they want to open the body of my child and cut into her head, and stab her heart after her death as they did when she was living.”

“Who?” said Brigaut, in a voice that might have deafened the men of law.

“The Rogrons.”

“In the sacred name of God!—”

“Stop, Brigaut,” said Monsieur Auffray, seeing the lad brandish his chisel.

“Monsieur Auffray,” said Brigaut, as white as his dead companion, “I hear you because you are Monsieur Auffray, but at this moment I will not listen to—”

“The law!” said Auffray.

“Is there law? is there justice?” cried the Breton. “Justice, this is it!” and he advanced to the lawyer and the doctors, threatening them with his chisel.

“My friend,” said the curate, “the law has been invoked by the lawyer of Monsieur Rogron, who is under the weight of a serious accusation; and it is impossible for us to refuse him the means of justification. The lawyer of Monsieur Rogron claims that if the poor child died of an abscess in her head her former guardian cannot be blamed, for it is proved that Pierrette concealed the effects of the blow which she gave to herself—”

“Enough!” said Brigaut.

“My client—” began Vinet.

“Your client,” cried the Breton, “shall go to hell and I to the scaffold; for if one of you dares to touch her whom your client has killed, I will kill him if my weapon does its duty.”

“This is interference with the law,” said Vinet. “I shall instantly inform the court.”

The five men left the room.

“Oh, my son!” cried the old woman, rising from her knees and falling on Brigaut’s neck, “let us bury her quick,—they will come back.”

“If we solder the lead,” said the plumber, “they may not dare to open it.”

Monsieur Auffray hastened to his brother-in-law, Monsieur Lesourd, to try and settle the matter. Vinet was not unwilling. Pierrette being dead the suit about the guardianship



fell, of course, to the ground. All the astute lawyer wanted was the effect produced by his request.

At midday Monsieur Desfondrilles made his report on the case, and the court rendered a decision that there was no ground for further action.

Rogron dared not go to Pierrette's funeral, at which the whole town was present. Vinet wished to force him there, but the miserable man was afraid of exciting universal horror.



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Brigaut left Provins after watching the filling up of the grave where Pierrette lay, and went on foot to Paris. He wrote a petition to the Dauphiness asking, in the name of his father, that he might enter the Royal guard, to which he was at once admitted. When the expedition to Algiers was undertaken he wrote to her again, to obtain employment in it. He was then a sergeant; Marshal Bourmont gave him an appointment as sub-lieutenant in a line regiment. The major's son behaved like a man who wished to die. Death has, however, respected Jacques Brigaut up to the present time; although he has distinguished himself in all the recent expeditions he has never yet been wounded. He is now major in a regiment of infantry. No officer is more taciturn or more trustworthy. Outside of his duty he is almost mute; he walks alone and lives mechanically. Every one divines and respects a hidden sorrow. He possesses forty-six thousand francs, which old Madame Lorrain, who died in Paris in 1829, bequeathed to him.

At the elections of 1830 Vinet was made a deputy. The services he rendered the new government have now earned him the position of *procureur-general*. His influence is such that he will always remain a deputy. Rogron is receiver-general in the same town where Vinet fulfils his legal functions; and by one of those curious tricks of chance which do so often occur, Monsieur Tiphaine is president of the Royal court in the same town, —for the worthy man gave in his adhesion to the dynasty of July without the slightest hesitation. The ex-beautiful Madame Tiphaine lives on excellent terms with the beautiful Madame Rogron. Vinet is hand in glove with Madame Tiphaine.

As to the imbecile Rogron, he makes such remarks as, "Louis-Philippe will never be really king till he is able to make nobles."

The speech is evidently not his own. His health is failing, which allows Madame Rogron to hope she may soon marry the General Marquis de Montriveau, peer of France, who commands the department, and is paying her attentions. Vinet is in his element, seeking victims; he never believes in the innocence of an accused person. This thoroughbred prosecutor is held to be one of the most amiable men on the circuit; and he is no less liked in Paris and in the Chamber; at court he is a charming courtier.

According to a certain promise made by Vinet, General Baron Gouraud, that noble relic of our glorious armies, married a Mademoiselle Matifat, twenty-five years old, daughter of a druggist in the rue des Lombards, whose dowry was a hundred thousand francs. He commands (as Vinet prophesied) a department in the neighborhood of Paris. He was named peer of France for his conduct in the riots which occurred during the ministry of Casimir Perier. Baron Gouraud was one of the generals who took the church of Saint-Merry, delighted to rap those rascally civilians who had vexed him for years over the knuckles; for which service he was rewarded with the grand cordon of the Legion of honor.



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None of the personages connected with Pierrette's death ever felt the slightest remorse about it. Monsieur Desfondrilles is still archaeological, but, in order to compass his own election, the *procureur general* Vinet took pains to have him appointed president of the Provins court. Sylvie has a little circle, and manages her brother's property; she lends her own money at high interest, and does not spend more than twelve hundred francs a year.

From time to time, when some former son or daughter of Provins returns from Paris to settle down, you may hear them ask, as they leave Mademoiselle Rogron's house, "Wasn't there a painful story against the Rogrons,—something about a ward?"

"Mere prejudice," replies Monsieur Desfondrilles. "Certain persons tried to make us believe falsehoods. Out of kindness of heart the Rogrons took in a girl named Pierrette, quite pretty but with no money. Just as she was growing up she had an intrigue with a young man, and stood at her window barefooted talking to him. The lovers passed notes to each other by a string. She took cold in this way and died, having no constitution. The Rogrons behaved admirably. They made no claim on certain property which was to come to her,—they gave it all up to the grandmother. The moral of it was, my good friend, that the devil punishes those who try to benefit others."

"Ah! that is quite another story from the one old Frappier told me."

"Frappier consults his wine-cellar more than he does his memory," remarked another of Mademoiselle Rogron's visitors.

"But that old priest, Monsieur Habert says—"

"Oh, he! don't you know why?"

"No."

"He wanted to marry his sister to Monsieur Rogron, the receiver-general."

* * * * *

Two men think of Pierrette daily: Doctor Martener and Major Brigaut; they alone know the hideous truth.

To give that truth its true proportions we must transport the scene to the Rome of the middle ages, where a sublime young girl, Beatrice Cenci, was brought to the scaffold by motives and intrigues that were almost identical with those which laid our Pierrette in her grave. Beatrice Cenci had but one defender,—an artist, a painter. In our day history, and living men, on the faith of Guido Reni's portrait, condemn the Pope, and know that Beatrice was a most tender victim of infamous passions and base feuds.

We must all agree that legality would be a fine thing for social scoundrelism IF THERE WERE NO GOD.

ADDENDUM

The following personages appear in other stories of the Human Comedy.

Bianchon, Horace

Father Goriot

The Atheist's Mass

Cesar Birotteau

The Commission in Lunacy

Lost Illusions

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

A Bachelor's Establishment

The Secrets of a Princess



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The Government Clerks
A Study of Woman
Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
Honorine
The Seamy Side of History
The Magic Skin
A Second Home
A Prince of Bohemia
Letters of Two Brides
The Muse of the Department
The Imaginary Mistress
The Middle Classes
Cousin Betty
The Country Parson
In addition, M. Bianchon narrated the following:
Another Study of Woman
La Grande Breteche

Brigaut, Major
The Chouans

Desplein
The Atheist's Mass
Cousin Pons
Lost Illusions
The Thirteen
The Government Clerks
A Bachelor's Establishment
The Seamy Side of History
Modeste Mignon
Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
Honorine

Gouraud, General, Baron
Cousin Pons

Keller, Adolphe
The Middle Classes
Cesar Birotteau



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Father Goriot
Lost Illusions
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Another Study of Woman
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Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
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The Secrets of a Princess
A Man of Business
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Roguin
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Eugenie Grandet
A Bachelor's Establishment
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Roguin, Madame
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At the Sign of the Cat and Racket
A Second Home
A Daughter of Eve

Tillet, Ferdinand du
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Tiphaine, Madame
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Vinet
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