The Works of Guy de Maupassant, Volume 4 (of 8) eBook

The Works of Guy de Maupassant, Volume 4 (of 8) by Guy De Maupassant

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THE OLD MAID

Count Eustache d'Etchegorry's solitary country house had the appearance of a poor man's home, where people do not have enough to eat every day in the week, where the bottles are more frequently filled at the pump than in the cellar, and where they wait until it is dark before lighting the candles.

It was an old and sordid building; the walls were crumbling to pieces, the grated, iron gates were eaten away by rust, the holes in the broken windows had been mended with old newspapers, and the ancestral portraits which hung against the walls, showed that it was no tiller of the soil, nor miserable laborer whose strength had gradually worn out and bent his back, who lived there. Great, knotty elm trees sheltered it, as if they had been a tall, green screen, and a large garden, full of wild rose-trees and of straggling plants, as well as of sickly-looking vegetables, which sprang up half-withered from the sandy soil, went down as far as the bank of the river.

From the house, one could hear the monotonous sound of the water, which at one time rushed yellow and impetuous towards the sea, and then again flowed back, as if driven by some invisible force towards the town which could be seen in the distance, with its pointed spires, its ramparts, and its ships at anchor by the side of the quay, and its citadel built on the top of a hill.

A strong smell of the sea came from the offing, mingled with the resinous smell of pine logs, and of the large nets with great pieces of sea-weed clinging to them, which were drying in the sun.

Why had Monsieur d'Etchegorry, who did not like the country, who was of a sociable rather than of a solitary nature, for he never walked alone, but kept step with the retired officers who lived there, and frequently played game after game at *piquet* at the *cafe*, when he was in town, buried himself in such a solitary place, by the side of a dusty road at Boucau, a village close to the town, where on Sundays the soldiers took off their tunics, and sat in their shirt sleeves in the public-houses, drank the thin wine of the country, and teased the girls.

What secret reasons had he for selling the mansion which he had possessed at Bayonne, close to the bishop's palace, and condemning his daughter, a girl of nineteen, to such a dull, listless, solitary life; counting the minutes far from everybody, as if she had been a nun, no one knew, but most people said that he had lost immense sums in gambling, and had wasted his fortune and ruined his credit in doubtful speculations. They wondered whether he still regretted the tender, sweet woman whom he had lost, who died one evening, after years of suffering, like a church lamp whose oil has been consumed to the last drop. Was he seeking for perfect oblivion, for that soothing repose in nature, in which a man becomes enervated, and which envelopes him like a moist,

warm cloth? How could he be satisfied with such an existence? With the bad cooking, and the careless, untidy ways of a char-woman, and with the shabby clothes, that were discolored by use!

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His numerous relations had been anxious about it at first, and had tried to cure him of his apparent hypochondria, and to persuade him to employ himself with something, but as he was obstinate, avoided them, rejected their friendly offers with arrogance and self-sufficiency, even his brothers had abandoned him, and almost renounced him. All their affection had been transferred to the poor child who shared his solitude, and who endured all that wretchedness with the resignation of a saint. Thanks to them, she had a few gleams of pleasure in their exile, and was not dressed like a beggar girl, but received invitations, and appeared here and there at some ball, concert or tennis party, and the girl was extremely grateful to them for it all, although she would much have preferred that nobody should have held out a helping hand to her, but have left her to her dull life, without any day dreams or homesickness, so that she might grow used to her lot, and day by day lose all that remained to her of her pride of race and of her youth.

With her sensitive and proud mind, she felt that she was treated exactly like others were in society, that people showed her either too much pity or too much indifference, that they knew all about her side life of undeserved poverty, and that in the folds of her muslin dress they could smell the mustiness of her home. If she was animated, or buoyed up with secret hopes in her heart, if there was a smile on her lips, and her eyes were bright when she went out at the gate, and the horses carried her off to town at a rapid trot, she was all the more low-spirited and tearful when she returned home, and she used to shut herself up in her room and find fault with her destiny, declared to herself that she would imitate her father, show relations and friends politely out, with a passive and resigned gesture, and make herself so unpleasant and embarrassing that they would grow tired of it in the end, leave long intervals between their visits, and finally would not come to see her at all, but would turn away from her, as if from a hospital where incurable patients were dying.

Nevertheless, the older the count grew, the more the supplies in the small country house diminished, and the more painful and harder existence became. If a morsel of bread was left uneaten on the table, if an unexpected dish was served up at table, if she put a piece of ribbon into her hair, he used to heap violent, spiteful reproaches on her, torrents of rage which defile the mouth, and violent threats like those of a madman, who is tormented by some fixed idea. Monsieur d'Etchegorry had dismissed the servant and engaged a char-woman, whom he intended to pay, merely by small sums on account, and he used to go to market with a basket on his arm.

He locked up every morsel of food, used to count the lumps of sugar and charcoal, and bolted himself in all day long in a room that was larger than the rest, and which for a long time had served as a drawing-room. At times he would be rather more gentle, as if he were troubled by vague thoughts, and used to say to his daughter, in an agonized voice, and trembling all over: "You will never ask me for any accounts, I say?... You will never demand your mother's fortune?"

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She always gave him the required promise, did not worry him with any questions, nor give vent to any complaints, and thinking of her cousins, who would have good dowries, who were growing up happily and peacefully, amidst careful and affectionate surroundings and beautiful old furniture, who were certain to be loved, and to get married some day, and she asked herself why fate was so cruel to some, and so kind to others, and what she had done to deserve such disfavor.

Marie-des-Anges d'Etchegorry, without being absolutely pretty, possessed all the charm of her age, and everybody liked her. She was as tall and slim as a lily, with beautiful, fine, soft fair hair, eyes of a dark, undecided color, which reminded one of those springs in the depths of the forests, in which a ray of the sun is but rarely reflected—mirrors which changed now to violet, then to the color of leaves, but most frequently of a velvety blackness—and her whole being exhaled a freshness of childhood, and something that could not be described, but which was pleasant, wholesome and frank.

She lived on through a long course of years, growing old, faithful to the man who might have given her his name, honorable, having resisted temptations and snares, worthy of the motto which used to be engraved on the tombs of Roman matrons before the Caesars: "*She spun wool, and kept at home*."

When she was just twenty-one, Marie-des-Anges fell in love, and her beautiful, dark, restless eyes for the first time became illuminated with a look of dreamy happiness. For someone seemed to have noticed her; he waltzed with her more frequently than he did with the other girls, spoke to her in a low voice, dangled at her petticoats, and discomposed her so much, that she flushed deeply as soon as she heard the sound of his voice.

His name was Andre de Gedre; he had just returned from Senegal, where after several months of daily fighting in the desert, he had won his sub-lieutenant's epaulets.

With his thin, surnburnt, yellow face, looking awkward in his tight coat, in which his broad shoulders could not distend themselves comfortably, and in which his arms, which had formerly been used to cut right and left, were cramped in their tight sleeves, he looked like one of those pirates of old, who used to scour the seas, pillaging, killing, hanging their prisoners to the yard-arms, who were ready to engage a whole fleet, and who returned to the port laden with booty, and occasionally with waifs and strays picked up at sea.

He belonged to a race of buccaneers or of heroes, according to the breeze which swelled his sails and carried him North or South. Over head and ears in debt, reduced to discounting doubtful legacies, to gambling at Casinos, and to mortgaging the few acres of land that he had remaining at much below their value, he nevertheless managed to make a pretty good figure in his hand to mouth existence; he never gave in, never showed the blows that he had received, and waited for the last struggle in a state

of blissful inactivity, while he sought for renewed strength and philosophy from the caressing lips of women.

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Marie-des-Anges seemed to him to be a toy which he could do with as he liked. She had the flavor of unripe fruit; left to herself, and sentimental as she was, she would only offer a very brief resistance to his attacks, and would soon yield to his will, and when he was tired of her and threw her off, she would bow to the inevitable, and would not worry him with violent scenes, nor stand in his way, with threats on her lips. And so he was kind, and used to wheedle her, and by degrees enveloped her in the meshes of a net, which continually hemmed her in closer and closer. He gained entire possession of her heart and confidence, and without expressing any wish or making any promises, managed so to establish his influence over her, that she did nothing but what he wished.

Long before Monsieur de Gedre had addressed any passionate words to her, or any avowal which immediately introduces warmth and danger into a flirtation, Marie-des-Anges had betrayed herself with the candor of a little girl, who does not think she is doing any wrong, and cannot hide what she thinks, what she is dreaming about, and the tenderness which lies hidden at the bottom of her heart, and she no longer felt that horror of life which had formerly tortured her. She no longer felt herself alone, as she had done formerly—so alone, so lost, even among her own people, that everything had become indifferent to her.

It was very pleasant and soothing to love and to think that she was loved, to have a furtive and secret understanding with another heart, to imagine that he was thinking of her at the same time that she was thinking of him, to shelter herself timidly under his protection, to feel more unhappy each time she left him, and to experience greater happiness every time they met.

She wrote him long letters, which she did not venture to send him when they were written, for she was timid and feared that he would make fun of them, and she sang the whole day through, like a lark that is intoxicated with the sun, so that Monsieur d'Etchegorry scarcely recognized her any longer.

Soon they made appointments together in some secluded spot, meeting for a few minutes in the aisles of the cathedral and behind the ramparts, or on the promenade of the *Allees-Marines*, which was always dark, on account of the dense foliage.

And at last, one evening in June, when the sky was so studded with stars that it might have been taken for a triumphal route of some sovereign, strewn with precious stones and rare flowers, Monsieur de Gedre went into the large, neglected garden.

Marie-des-Anges was waiting for him in a somber walk with witch elms on either side and listening for the least noise, looking at the closed windows of the house, and nearly fainting, as much from fear as from happiness. They spoke in a low voice. She was close to him and he must have heard the beating of her heart, into which he had cast the first seeds of love, and he put his arms around her and clasped her gently, as if she

had been some little bird that he was afraid of hurting, but which he did not wish to allow to escape.

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She no longer knew what she was doing, but was in a state of entire intense, supreme happiness. She shivered, and yet something burning seemed to permeate her whole being under her skin, from the nape of her neck to her feet, like a stream of burning spirit, and she would not have had the strength to disengage herself or to take a step forward, so she leant her head instinctively and very tenderly against Andre's shoulder. He kissed her hair, touched her forehead with his lips, and at last put them against hers. The girl felt as if she were going to die, and remained inert and motionless, with her eyes full of tears.

He came nearly every evening for two months. She had not the courage to repel him and to speak to him seriously of the future, and could not understand why he had not yet asked her father for her hand and had not fulfilled his former promises, until, one Sunday, as she was coming from High Mass, walking on before her cousins, Marie-des-Anges heard the following words, from a group in which Andre was standing, and he was the speaker: "Oh! no," he said, "you are altogether mistaken; I should never do anything so foolish.... One does not marry a girl without a halfpenny; one takes her for one's mistress."

The unhappy girl mastered her feelings, went down the steps of the porch quite steadily, but feeling utterly crushed, as if by the news of some terrible disaster, and joined the servant, who was waiting for her, to accompany her back to Boucau. The effects of what she had heard were to give her a serious illness and for some time she hovered between life and death, consumed and wasted by a violent fever; and when after a fortnight's suffering, she grew convalescent, and looked at herself in the glass, she recoiled, as if she had been face to face with an apparition, for there was nothing left of her former self.

Her eyes were dull, her cheeks pale and hollow, and there were white streaks in her silky, light hair. Why had she not succumbed to her illness? Why had destiny reserved her for such a trial, and increased her unhappy lot, that of disappointed hopes, thus? But when that rebellious feeling was over, she accepted her cross, fell into a state of ardent devotion and became crystallized in the torpor of an old woman, tried with all her might to rid her memory of any recollections that had become incrusted in it, and to put a thick black veil between herself and the past.

She never walked in the garden now, and never went to Bayonne, and she would have liked to have choked herself, and to have beaten herself, when, in spite of her efforts and of her will, she remembered her lost happiness, and when some sensual feeling and a longing for past pleasures agitated her body afresh.

That lasted for four years, which finished her and altogether destroyed her good looks and she had the figure and the appearance of an old maid, when her father suddenly died, just as he was going to sit down to dinner; and when the lawyer, who was summoned immediately, had ransacked the cupboards and drawers, discovered a mass

of securities, of bank-notes, and of gold, which Count d'Etchegorry, who was eaten up with avarice, had amassed eagerly, and hidden away, it was found that Mademoiselle Marie-des-Anges, who was his sole heiress, possessed an income of fifty thousand francs.

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She received the news without any emotion, for of what use was such a fortune to her now, and what should she do with it? Her eyes, alas! had been too much opened by all the tears that had fallen from them for her to delude herself with visionary hopes, and her heart had been too cruelly wounded to warm itself by lying illusions, and she was seized by melancholy when she thought that in future she would be coveted, she who had been kept at arm's length, as if she had been a leper; that men would come after her money with odious impatience, that now that she was worn out and ugly, tired of everything and everybody, she would most certainly have plenty of suitors to refuse, and that perhaps he would come back to her, attracted by that amount of money, like a hawk hovering over its prey, that he would try to re-kindle the dead cinders, to revive some spark in them and to obtain pardon for his cowardice.

Oh! With what bitter pleasure she could have thrown those millions into the road to the ragged beggars, or scattered them about like manna to all who were suffering and dying of hunger, and who had neither roof nor hearth! She naturally soon became the target at which everyone aimed, the goal for which all those who had formerly disdained her most, now eagerly tried.

Monsieur de Gedre was not long before he was in the ranks of her suitors, as she had foreseen, and caused her that last heart-burning of seeing him humble, kneeling at her feet, acting a comedy, trying every means of overcoming her resistance, and to regain possession of that heart, which was closed against him, after having been entirely his, in all its adorable virginity.

And Marie-des-Anges had loved him so deeply that his letters in which he recalled the past, and stirred up all the recollections of their love, their kisses, and their dreams, softened her in spite of herself, and came across her profound, incurable sadness, like a factitious light, the reflection of a bonfire, which, from a distance, illuminates a prison cell for a moment.

He was poor himself and had not wished, so he said, to drag her into his life of privation and shifts, and she thought to herself that perhaps he had been right; and thus sensibly, like a mother or an elder sister, who has become indulgent and wishes to close her eyes and her ears against everything, to forgive again, to forgive always, she excused him, and tried to remember nothing but those months of tenderness and of ecstacy, those months of happiness, and that he had been the first, the only man who, in the course of her unhappy, wasted life, had given her a moment's peace, had caused her to dream, and had made her happy, and youthful and loving.

He had been charitable towards her and she would be so a hundred fold towards him; and so she grew happy again, when she said to herself that she would be his benefactress, that even with his hard heart, he could not accept the sacrifice from a woman, who, like so many others, might have returned him evil for evil, but who

preferred to be kind and maternal, after having been in love with him, without some feelings of gratitude and emotion.

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And that resolution transfigured her, restored to her temporarily, something of her youth, which had so soon fled away, and a poor, heroic saint amongst all the saints, she took refuge in a Carmelite convent, so as to escape from this returning temptation, and to bequeath everything of which she could lawfully dispose, to Monsieur de Gedre.

THE AWAKENING

During the three years that she had been married, she had not left the *Val de Cire*, where her husband possessed two cotton-mills. She led a quiet life, and although she had no children, she was quite happy in her house among the trees, which the work-people called the *chateau*.

Although Monsieur Vasseur was considerably older than she was, he was very kind. She loved him, and no guilty thought had ever entered her mind.

Her mother came and spent every summer at Cire, and then returned to Paris for the winter, as soon as the leaves began to fall.

Jeanne coughed a little every autumn, for the narrow valley through which the river wound, grew foggy for five months. First of all, slight mists hung over the meadows, making all the low-lying ground look like a large pond, out of which the roof of the houses rose.

Then that white vapor, which rose like a tide, enveloped everything, and turned the valley into a land of phantoms, through which men moved about like ghosts, without recognizing each other ten yards off, and the trees, wreathed in mist, and dripping with moisture, rose up through it.

But the people who went along the neighboring hills, and who looked down upon the deep, white depression of the valley, saw the two huge chimneys of Monsieur Vasseur's factories, rising above the mist below. Day and night they vomited forth two long trails of black smoke, and that alone indicated that people were living in that hollow, which looked as if it were filled with a cloud of cotton.

That year, when October came, the medical men advised the young woman to go and spend the winter in Paris with her mother, as the air of the valley was dangerous for her weak chest, and she went. For a month or so, she thought continually of the house which she had left, to which she seemed rooted, and whose well-known furniture and quiet ways she loved so much, but by degrees she grew accustomed to her new life, and got to liking entertainments, dinners and evening parties, and balls.

Till then, she had retained her girlish manners, she had been undecided and rather sluggish; she walked languidly, and had a tired smile, but now she became animated and merry, and was always ready for pleasure. Men paid her marked attentions, and

she was amused at their talk, and made fun of their gallantries, as she felt sure that she could resist them, for she was rather disgusted with love, from what she had learned of it in marriage.

The idea of giving up her body to the coarse caresses of such bearded creatures, made her laugh with pity, and shudder a little with ignorance.

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She asked herself how women could consent to those degrading contacts with strangers, as they were already obliged to endure them with their legitimate husbands. She would have loved her husband much more if they had lived together like two friends, and had restricted themselves to chaste kisses, which are the caresses of the soul.

But she was much amused by their compliments, by the desire which showed itself in their eyes, and which she did not share, by their declarations of love, which they whispered into her ear as they were returning to the drawing-room after some grand dinner, by their words, which were murmured so low that she almost had to guess them, and which left her blood quite cool, and her heart untouched, while they gratified her unconscious coquetry, while they kindled a flame of pleasure within her, and while they made her lips open, her eyes glow bright, and her woman's heart, to which homage was due, quiver with delight.

She was fond of those *tete-a-tetes* when it was getting dusk, when a man grows pressing, stammers, trembles and falls on his knees. It was a delicious and new pleasure to her to know that they felt that passion which left her quite unmoved, to say *no*, by a shake of the head, and with her lips, to withdraw her hands, to get up and calmly ring for lights, and to see the man who had been trembling at her feet, get up, confused and furious when he heard the footman coming.

She often had a hard laugh, which froze the most burning words, and said harsh things, which fell like a jet of icy water on the most ardent protestations, while the intonations of her voice were enough to make any man who really loved her, kill himself, and there were two especially who made obstinate love to her, although they did not at all resemble one another.

One of them, Paul Peronel, was a tall man of the world, gallant and enterprising, a man who was accustomed to successful love affairs, and who knew how to wait, and when to seize his opportunity.

The other, Monsieur d'Avancelle, quivered when he came near her, scarcely ventured to express his love, but followed her like a shadow, and gave utterance to his hopeless desire by distracted looks, and the assiduity of his attentions to her, and she made him a kind of slave who followed her steps, and whom she treated as if he had been her servant.

She would have been much amused if anybody had told her that she would love him, and yet she did love him, after a singular fashion. As she saw him continually, she had grown accustomed to his voice, to his gestures, and to his manner, as one grows accustomed to those with whom one meets continually. Often his face haunted her in her dreams, and she saw him as he really was; gentle, delicate in all his actions, humble, but passionately in love, and she awoke full of those dreams, fancying that she

still heard him, and felt him near her, until one night (most likely she was feverish), she saw herself alone with him in a small wood, where they were both of them sitting on the grass. He was saying charming things to her, while he pressed and kissed her hands.

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She could feel the warmth of his skin and of his breath, and she was stroking his hair, in a very natural manner.

We are quite different in our dreams to what we are in real life. She felt full of love for him, full of calm and deep love, and was happy in stroking his forehead and in holding him against her. Gradually he put his arms round her, kissed her eyes and her cheeks without her attempting to get away from him; their lips met, and she yielded.

When she saw him again, unconscious of the agitation that he had caused her, she felt that she grew red, and while he was telling her of his love, she was continually recalling to mind their previous meeting, without being able to get rid of the recollection.

She loved him, loved him with refined tenderness, which arose chiefly from the remembrance of her dream, although she dreaded the accomplishment of the desires which had arisen in her mind.

At last, he perceived it, and then she told him everything, even to the dread of his kisses, and she made him swear that he would respect her, and he did so. They spent long hours of transcendental love together, during which their souls alone embraced, and when they separated, they were enervated, weak and feverish.

Sometimes their lips met, and with closed eyes they reveled in that long, yet chaste caress; she felt, however, that she could not resist much longer, and as she did not wish to yield, she wrote and told her husband that she wanted to come to him, and to return to her tranquil, solitary life. But in reply, he wrote her a very kind letter, and strongly advised her not to return in the middle of the winter, and so expose herself to a sudden change of climate, and to the icy mists of the valley, and she was thunderstruck, and angry with that confiding man, who did not guess, who did not understand, the struggles of her heart.

February was a warm, bright month, and although she now avoided being alone with Monsieur Avancelle, she sometimes accepted his invitation to drive round the lake in the *Bois de Boulogne* with him, when it was dusk.

On one of those evenings, it was so warm that it seemed as if the sap in every tree and plant were rising. Their cab was going at a walk; it was growing dusk, and they were sitting close together, holding each others' hands, and she said to herself:

"It is all over, I am lost!" for she felt her desires rising in her again, the imperious want for that supreme embrace, which she had undergone in her dream. Every moment their lips sought each other, clung together and separated, only to meet again immediately.

He did not venture to go into the house with her, but left her at her door, more in love with him than ever, and half fainting.

Monsieur Paul Peronel was waiting for her in the little drawing-room, without a light, and when he shook hands with her, he felt how feverish she was. He began to talk in a low, tender voice, lulling her worn-out mind with the charm of amorous words.

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She listened to him without replying, for she was thinking of the other; she thought she was listening to the other, and thought she felt him leaning against her, in a kind of hallucination. She saw only him, and did not remember that any other man existed on earth, and when her ears trembled at those three syllables: "I love you," it was he, the other man, who uttered them, who kissed her hands, who strained her to his breast, like the other had done shortly before in the cab. It was he who pressed victorious kisses on her lips, it was his lips, it was he whom she held in her arms and embraced, whom she was calling to, with all the longings of her heart, with all the over-wrought ardor of her body.

When she awoke from her dream, she uttered a terrible cry. Captain Fracasse was kneeling by her, and thanking her, passionately, while he covered her disheveled hair with kisses, and she almost screamed out: "Go away! go away! go away!"

And as he did not understand what she meant, and tried to put his arm round her waist again, she writhed, as she stammered out:

"You are a wretch, and I hate you! Go away! go away!" And he got up in great surprise, took up his hat, and went.

The next day she returned to *Val de Cire*, and her husband, who had not expected her for some time, blamed her for a freak.

"I could not live away from you any longer," she said.

He found her altered in character, and sadder than formerly, but when he said to her:

"What is the matter with you? You seem unhappy. What do you want?" she replied:

"Nothing. Happiness exists only in our dreams, in this world."

Avancelle came to see her the next summer, and she received him without any emotion, and without regret, for she suddenly perceived that she had never loved him, except in a dream, from which Paul Peronel had brutally roused her.

But the young man, who still adored her, thought as he returned to Paris:

"Women are really very strange, complicated and inexplicable beings."

IN THE SPRING

When the first fine spring days come, and the earth awakes and assumes its garment of verdure, when the perfumed warmth of the air blows on our faces and fills our lungs, and even appears to penetrate to our heart, we feel vague longings for undefined

happiness, a wish to run, to walk at random, to inhale the spring. As the winter had been very severe the year before, this longing assumed an intoxicating feeling in May; it was like a superabundance of sap.

Well, one morning on waking, I saw from my window the blue sky glowing in the sun above the neighboring houses. The canaries hanging in the windows were singing loudly, and so were the servants on every floor; a cheerful noise rose up from the streets, and I went out, with my spirits as bright as the day was, to go—I did not exactly know where. Everybody I met seemed to be smiling; an air of happiness appeared to pervade everything, in the warm light of returning spring. One might almost have said that a breeze of love was blowing through the city, and the young women whom I saw in the streets in their morning toilettes, in the depths of whose eyes there lurked a hidden tenderness, and who walked with languid grace, filled my heart with agitation.

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Without knowing how or why, I found myself on the banks of the Seine. Steamboats were starting for Suresnes, and suddenly I was seized by an unconquerable wish to have a walk through the woods. The deck of the *mouche*[1] was crowded with passengers, for the sun in early spring draws you out of the house, in spite of yourself, and everybody moves about, goes and comes, and talks to his neighbor.

[Footnote 1: Fly.]

I had a female neighbor; a little work-girl, no doubt, who possessed the true Parisian charm; a little head, with light curly hair, which looked like frizzed light, came down to her ears and descended to the nape of her neck, danced in the wind, and then became such fine, such light-colored down, that one could scarcely see it, but on which one felt an irresistible desire to impress a shower of kisses.

Under the magnetism of my looks, she turned her head towards me, and then immediately looked down, while a slight fold, which looked as if she were ready to break out into a smile, also showed that fine, silky, pale down which the sun was gilding a little.

The calm river grew wider; the atmosphere was warm and perfectly still, but a murmur of life seemed to fill all space.

My neighbor raised her eyes again, and, this time, as I was still looking at her, she smiled, decidedly. She was charming like that, and in her passing glance, I saw a thousand things, which I had hitherto been ignorant of, for I saw unknown depths, all the charm of tenderness, all the poetry which we dream of, all the happiness which we are continually in search of, in it. I felt an insane longing to open my arms and to carry her off somewhere, so as to whisper the sweet music of words of love into her ears.

I was just going to speak to her, when somebody touched me on the shoulder, and when I turned round in some surprise, I saw an ordinary looking man, who was neither young nor old, and who gazed at me sadly:

“I should like to speak to you,” he said.

I made a grimace, which he no doubt saw, for he added:

“It is a matter of importance.”

I got up, therefore, and followed him to the other end of the boat, and then he said:

“Monsieur, when winter comes, with its cold, wet and snowy weather, your doctor says to you constantly: ’Keep your feet warm, guard against chills, colds, bronchitis, rheumatism and pleurisy.’

“Then you are very careful, you wear flannel, a heavy great coat and thick shoes, but all this does not prevent you from passing two months in bed. But when spring returns, with its leaves and flowers, its warm, soft breezes, and its smell of the fields, which cause you vague disquiet and causeless emotion, nobody says to you:

“Monsieur, beware of love! It is lying in ambush everywhere; it is watching for you at every corner; all its snares are laid, all its weapons are sharpened, all its guiles are prepared! Beware of love.... Beware of love. It is more dangerous than brandy, bronchitis, or pleurisy! It never forgives, and makes everybody commit irreparable follies.”

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“Yes, Monsieur, I say that the French Government ought to put large public notices on the walls, with these words: ’*Return of Spring. French citizens, beware of love!*’ just as they put: ‘*Beware of paint.*’

“However, as the government will not do this, I must supply its place, and I say to you: ‘Beware of love,’ for it is just going to seize you, and it is my duty to inform you of it, just as in Russia they inform anyone that his nose is frozen.”

I was much astonished at this individual, and assuming a dignified manner, I said:

“Really, Monsieur, you appear to me to be interfering in a matter which is no business of yours.”

He made an abrupt movement, and replied:

“Ah! Monsieur! Monsieur! If I see that a man is in danger of being drowned at a dangerous spot, ought I to let him perish? So just listen to my story, and you will see why I ventured to speak to you like this.

“It was about this time last year that it occurred. But, first of all, I must tell you that I am a clerk in the Admirality, where our chiefs, the commissioners, take their gold lace and quill-driving officers seriously, and treat us like fore-top men on board a ship. Well, from my office I could see a small bit of blue sky and the swallows, and I felt inclined to dance among my portfolios.

“My yearning for freedom grew so intense, that, in spite of my repugnance, I went to see my chief, who was a short, bad-tempered man, who was always in a rage. When I told him that I was not well, he looked at me, and said: ’I do not believe it, Monsieur, but be off with you! Do you think that any office can go on, with clerks like you?’ I started at once, and went down the Seine. It was a day like this, and I took the *mouche*, to go as far as Saint Cloud. Ah! What a good thing it would have been if my chief had refused me permission to leave the office for the day!

“I seemed to myself to expand in the sun. I loved it all; the steamer, the river, the trees, the houses, my fellow-passengers, everything. I felt inclined to kiss something, no matter what; it was love, laying its snare. Presently, at the Trocadero, a girl, with a small parcel in her hand, came on board and sat down opposite to me. She was certainly pretty; but it is surprising, Monsieur, how much prettier women seem to us when it is fine, at the beginning of the spring. Then they have an intoxicating charm, something quite peculiar about them. It is just like drinking wine after the cheese.

“I looked at her, and she also looked at me, but only occasionally, like that girl did at you, just now; but at last, by dint of looking at each other constantly, it seemed to me

that we knew each other well enough to enter into conversation, and I spoke to her, and she replied. She was decidedly pretty and nice, and she intoxicated me, Monsieur!

“She got out at Saint-Cloud, and I followed her. She went and delivered her parcel, and when she returned, the boat had just started. I walked by her side, and the warmth of the air made us both sigh. ’It would be very nice in the woods,’ I said. ‘Indeed, it would!’ she replied. ’Shall we go there for a walk, Mademoiselle?’

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“She gave me a quick, upward look, as if to see exactly what I was like, and then, after a little hesitation, she accepted my proposal, and soon we were there, walking side by side. Under the foliage, which was still rather thin, the tall, thick, bright, green grass, was inundated by the sun, and full of small insects that also made love to one another, and birds were singing in all directions. My companion began to jump and to run, intoxicated by the air, and the smell of the country, and I ran and jumped behind her. How stupid we are at times, Monsieur!

“Then she wildly sang a thousand things; opera airs, and the song of *Musette*! The song of *Musette*! How poetical it seemed to me, then! I almost cried over it. Ah! Those silly songs make us lose our heads; and, believe me, never marry a woman who sings in the country, especially if she sings the song of *Musette*!

“She soon grew tired, and sat down on a grassy slope, and I sat down at her feet, and took her hands, her little hands, that were so marked with the needle, and that moved me. I said to myself: ’These are the sacred marks of toil.’ Oh! Monsieur, do you know what those sacred marks of labor mean? They mean all the gossip of the workroom, the whispered blackguardism, the mind soiled by all the filth that is talked; they mean lost chastity, foolish chatter, all the wretchedness of daily bad habits, all the narrowness of ideas which belongs to women of the lower orders, united in the girl whose sacred fingers bear *the sacred marks of toil*.

“Then we looked into each other’s eyes for a long while. Oh! What power a woman’s eye has! How it agitates us, how it invades our very being, takes possession of us, and dominates us. How profound it seems, how full of infinite promises! People call that looking into each other’s souls! Oh! Monsieur, what humbug! If we could see into each other’s souls, we should be more careful of what we did. However, I was caught, and crazy after her, and tried to take her into my arms, but she said: ‘Paws off!’ Then I knelt down, and opened my heart to her, and poured out all the affection that was suffocating me, on her knees. She seemed surprised at my change of manner, and gave me a sidelong glance, as if to say: ’Ah! So that is the way women make a fool of you, old fellow! Very well, we will see. In love, Monsieur, we are all artists, and women are the dealers.’

“No doubt I could have had her, and I saw my own stupidity later, but what I wanted was not a woman’s person; it was love, it was the ideal. I was sentimental, when I ought to have been using my time to a better purpose.

“As soon as she had had enough of my declarations of affection, she got up, and we returned to Saint-Cloud, and I did not leave her until we got to Paris; but she had looked so sad as we were returning, that at last I asked her what was the matter. ‘I am thinking,’ she replied, ’that this has been one of those days of which we have but few in life.’ And my heart beat so that it felt as if it would break my ribs.

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“I saw her on the following Sunday, and the next Sunday, and every Sunday. I took her to Bougival, Saint-Germain, Maisons-Lafitte, Poissy; to every suburban resort of lovers.

“The little jade, in turn, pretended to love me, until, at last, I altogether lost my head, and three months later I married her.

“What can you expect, Monsieur, when a man is a clerk, living alone, without any relations, or anyone to advise him? One says to oneself: ’How sweet life would be with a wife!’

“And so one gets married, and she calls you names from morning till night, understands nothing, knows nothing, chatters continually, sings the song of *Musette* at the top of her voice (oh! that song of *Musette*, how tired one gets of it!); quarrels with the charcoal dealer, tells the porter of all her domestic details, confides all the secrets of her bedroom to the neighbor’s servant, discusses her husband with the trades-people, and has her head so stuffed with such stupid stories, with such idiotic superstitions, with such extraordinary ideas and such monstrous prejudices, that I—for what I have said, applies more particularly to myself—shed tears of discouragement every time I talked to her.”

He stopped, as he was rather out of breath, and very much moved, and I looked at him, for I felt pity for this poor, artless devil, and I was just going to give him some sort of answer, when the boat stopped. We were at Saint-Cloud.

The little woman who had so taken my fancy, got up in order to land. She passed close to me, and gave me a side glance and a furtive smile; one of those smiles that drive you mad; then she jumped on the landing-stage. I sprang forward to follow her, but my neighbor laid hold of my arm, I shook myself loose, however, whereupon he seized the skirt of my coat, and pulled me back, exclaiming:

“You shall not go! You shall not go!” in such a loud voice, that everybody turned round and laughed, and I remained standing motionless and furious, but without venturing to face scandal and ridicule, and the steamboat started.

The little woman on the landing-stage looked at me as I went off with an air of disappointment, while my persecutor rubbed his hands, and whispered to me:

“I have done you a great service, you must acknowledge.”

THE JENNET

Every time he held an inspection on the review ground, General Daumont de Croisailles was sure of a small success, and of receiving a whole packet of letters from women the next day.

Some were almost illegible, scribbled on paper with a love emblem at the top, by some sentimental milliner; the others ardent, as if saturated with curry, letters which excited him, and suggested the delights of kisses to him.

Among them, also, there were some which evidently came from a woman of the world, who was tired of her monotonous life, had lost her head, and let her pen run on, without exactly knowing what she was writing, with those mistakes in spelling here and there which seemed to be in unison with the disordered beating of her heart.

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He certainly looked magnificent on horseback; there was something of the fighter, something bold and mettlesome about him, *a valiant look*, as our grandmothers used to say, when they threw themselves into the arms of the conquerors, between two campaigns, though the same conquerors had loud, rough voices, even when they were making love, as they had to dominate the noise of the firing, and violent gestures, as if they were using their swords and issuing orders, who did not waste time over useless refinements, and in squandering the precious hours which were counted so avariciously, in minor caresses, but sounded the charge immediately, and made the assault, without meeting with any more resistance than they did from a redoubt.

As soon as he appeared, preceded by dragoons, with his sword in his hand, amidst the clatter of hoofs and jingle of scabbards and bridles, while plumes waved and uniforms glistened in the sun, a little in front of his staff, sitting perfectly upright in the saddle, and with his cocked hat with its black plumes, slightly on one side, the surging crowd, which was kept in check by the police officers, cheered him as if he had been some popular minister, whose journey had been given notice of beforehand by posters and proclamations.

That tumult of strident voices that went from one end of the great square to the other, which was prolonged like the sound of the rising tide, which beats against the shore with ceaseless noise, that rattle of rifles, and the sound of the music that alternated with blasts of the trumpets all along the line, made the General's heart swell with unspeakable pride.

He attudinized in spite of himself, and thought of nothing but ostentation, and of being noticed. He continually touched his horse with his spurs, and worried it, so as to make it appear restive, and to prance and rear, to champ its bit, and to cover it with foam, and then he would continue his inspection, galloping from regiment to regiment with a satisfied smile, while the good old infantry captains, sitting on their thin Arab horses, with their toes well stuck out, said to one another:

"I should not like to have to ride a confounded, restive brute like that, I know!"

But the General's aide-de-camp, little Jacques de Montboron, could easily have reassured them, for he knew those famous thoroughbreds, as he had had to break them in, and had received a thousand trifling instructions about them.

They were generally more or less spavined brutes, which he had bought at Tattersall's auctions for a ridiculous price, and so quiet and well in hand that they might have been held with a silk thread, but with a good shape, bright eyes, and coats that glistened like silk. They seemed to know their part, and stepped out, pranced and reared, and made way for themselves, as if they had just come out of the riding-school at Saumur.

That was his daily task, his obligatory service.

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He broke them in, one after another, and transformed them into veritable mechanical horses, accustomed them to bear the noise of trumpets and drums, and of firing, without starting, tired them out by long rides the evening before every review, and bit his lips to prevent himself from laughing when people declared that General Daumont de Croisailles was a first-rate rider, who was really fond of danger.

A rider! That was almost like writing history! But the aide-de-camp discreetly kept up the illusion, outdid the others in flattery, and related unheard-of feats of the General's horsemanship.

And, after all, breaking in horses was not more irksome than carrying on a monotonous and dull correspondence about the buttons on the gaiters, or than thinking over projects of mobilization, or than going through accounts in which he lost himself like in a labyrinth. He had not, from the very first day that he entered the military academy at Saint-Cyr, learned that sentence which begins the rules of the *Interior Service*, in vain:

"As discipline constitutes the principal strength of an army, it is very important for every superior to obtain absolute respect, and instant obedience from his inferiors."

He did not resist, but accustomed himself thus to become a sort of Monsieur Loyal, spoke to his chief in the most flattering manner, and reckoned on being promoted over the heads of his fellow officers.

General Daumont de Croisailles was not married and did not intend to disturb the tranquillity of his bachelor life as long as he lived, for he loved all women, whether they were dark, fair or red-haired, too passionately to love only one, who would grow old, and worry him with useless complaints.

Gallant, as they used to be called in the good old days, he kissed the hands of those women who refused him their lips, and as he did not wish to compromise his dignity, and be the talk of the town, he had rented a small house just outside it.

It was close to the canal, in a quiet street with courtyards and shady gardens, and as nothing is less amusing than the racket of jealous husbands, or the brawling of excited women who are disputing or raising their voices in lamentation, and as it is always necessary to foresee some unfortunate incident or other in the amorous life, some unlucky mishap, some absurdly imprudent action, some forgotten love appointment, the house had five different doors.

So discreet, that he reassured even the most timid, and certainly not given to melancholy, he understood extremely well how to vary his kisses and his ways of proceeding; how to work on women's feelings, and to overcome their scruples, to obtain a hold over them through their curiosity to learn something new, by the temptation of a comfortable, well-furnished, warm room, that was fragrant with flowers, and where a

little supper was already served as a prologue to the entertainment. His female pupils would certainly have deserved the first prize in a love competition.

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So men mistrusted that ancient Lovelace as if he had been the plague, when they had plucked some rare and delicious fruit, and had sketched out some charming adventure, for he always managed to discover the weak spot, and to penetrate into the place.

To some, he held out the lure of debauch without any danger attached to it, the desire of finishing their amorous education, of reveling in perverted enjoyment, and to others he held out the irresistible argument that seduced Danae, that of gold.

Others, again, were attracted by his cocked hat and feathers, and by the conceited hope of seeing him at their knees, of throwing their arms round him as if he had been an ordinary lover, although he was a general who rode so imposingly, who was covered with decorations, and to whom all the regiments presented arms simultaneously, the chief whose orders could not be commented on or disputed, and who had such a martial and haughty look.

His pay, allowances and his private income of fifteen thousand francs,[2] all went in this way, like water that runs out drop by drop, from a cracked bottle.

[Footnote 2: L600.]

He was continually on the alert, and looked out for intrigues with the acuteness of a policeman, followed women about, had all the impudence and all the cleverness of the fast man who has made love for forty years, without ever meaning anything serious, who knows all its lies, tricks and illusions, and who can still do a march without halting on the road, or requiring too much music to put him in proper trim. And in spite of his age and gray hairs, he could have given a sub-lieutenant points, and was very often loved for himself, which is the dream of men who have passed forty, and do not intend to give up the game just yet.

And there were not a dozen in the town who could, without lying, have declared to a jealous husband or a suspicious lover, that they had not, at any rate, once staid late in the little house in the Eglisottes quarter, who could have denied that they had not returned more thoughtful. Not a dozen, certainly, and, perhaps, not six!

Among that dozen or six, however, was Jacques de Montboron's mistress. She was a little marvel, that Madame Courtade, whom the Captain had unearthed in an ecclesiastical warehouse in the Faubourg Saint-Exupere, and not yet twenty. They had begun by smiling at each other, and by exchanging those long looks when they met, which seemed to ask for charity.

Montboron used to pass in front of the shop at the same hours, stopped for a moment with the appearance of a lounger who was loitering about the streets, but immediately her supple figure appeared, pink and fair, shedding the brightness of youth and almost childhood round her, while her looks showed that she was delighted at little gallant

incidents which dispelled the monotony and weariness of her life for a time, and gave rise to vague but delightful hopes.

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Was love, that love which she had so constantly invoked, really knocking at her door at last, and taking pity on her unhappy isolation? Did that officer, whom she met whenever she went out, as if he had been faithfully watching her, when coming out of church, or when out for a walk in the evening, who said so many delightful things to her with his wheedling eyes, really love her as she wished to be loved, or was he merely amusing himself at that game, because he had nothing better to do in their quiet little town?

But in a short time he wrote to her, and she replied to him, and at last they managed to meet in secret, to make appointments, and talk together.

She knew all the cunning tricks of a simple girl, who has tasted the most delicious of sweets with the tip of her tongue, and acting in concert, and giving each other the word, so that there might be no awkward mistake, they managed to make the husband their unwitting accomplice, without his having the least idea of what was going on.

Courtade was an excellent fellow, who saw no further than the tip of his nose, incapable of rebelling, flabby, fat, steeped in devotion, and thinking too much about heaven to see what a plot was being hatched against him, in our unhappy vale of tears, as the psalters say.

In the good old days of confederacies, he would have made an excellent chief of a corporation; he loved his wife more like a father than a husband, considering that at his age a man ought no longer to think of such trifles, and that, after all, the only real happiness in life was to keep a good table and to have a good digestion, and so he ate like four canons, and drank in proportion.

Only once during his whole life had he shown anything like energy—but he used to relate that occurrence with all the pride of a conqueror, recalling his most heroic battle—and that was on the evening when he refused to allow the bishop to take his cook away, quite regardless of any of the consequences of such a daring deed.

In a few weeks, the Captain became his regular table companion, and his best friend. He had begun by telling him in a boastful manner that, in order to keep a vow that he had made to St. George, during the charge up the slope at Yron, during the battle of Gravelotte, he wished to send two censers and a sanctuary lamp to his village church.

Courtade did his utmost, and all the more readily as this unexpected customer did not appear to pay any regard to money. He sent for several goldsmiths, and showed Montboron models of all kinds; he hesitated, however, and did not seem able to make up his mind, and discussed the subject, designed ornaments himself, gained time, and thus managed to spend several hours every day in the shop.

In fact, he was quite at home in the place, shook hands with Courtade, called him “my dear fellow,” and did not wince when he took his arm familiarly before other people, and

introduced him to his customers as, “My excellent friend, the Marquis de Montboron.” He could go in and out of the house as he pleased, whether the husband was at home or not.

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The censers and the lamp were sent in due course to Montboron's chateau at Pacy-sur-Romanche (in Normandy), and when the package was undone, it caused the greatest surprise to Jacques' mother, who was more accustomed to receiving requests for money from her son, than ecclesiastical objects.

Suddenly, however, without rhyme or reason, little Madame Courtade became insupportable and enigmatical. Her husband could not understand it at all, and grew uneasy, and continually consulted his friend the Captain.

Etiennette's character seemed to have completely changed; she found fifty pretexts for deserting the shop, for coming late, for avoiding *tete-a-tetes*, in which people come to explanations, and mutually become irritated, though such matters usually end in a reconciliation, amidst a torrent of kisses.

She disappeared for days at a time, and soon, Montboron, who was not fitted to play the part of a Sganarelle, either by age or temperament, became convinced that his mistress was making him wear the horns, that she was hobnobbing with the General, and that she was in possession of one of the five keys of the house in the Eglisottes quarter; and as he was as jealous as an Andalusian, and felt a horror for that kind of pleasantry, he swore that he would make his rival pay a hundred fold for the trick which he had played him.

The Fourteenth of July was approaching, when there was to be a grand parade of the whole garrison on the large review ground, and all along the paling, which divided the spectators from the soldiers, itinerant dealers had put up their stalls, and there were mountebanks' and somnambulists' booths, menageries, and a large circus, which had gone through the town in caravans, with a great noise of trumpets and of drums.

He had given his aide-de-camp his instructions beforehand, for he was more anxious than ever to surprise people, and to have a horse like an equestrian statue, an animal which should outdo that famous black horse of General Boulanger's, about which the Parisian loungers had talked so much, and told Montboron not to mind what the price was, as long as he found him a suitable charger.

When the Captain, a few days before the review, brought him a chestnut jennet, with a long tail and flowing mane, which would not keep quiet for five seconds, but kept on shaking its head, had extraordinary action, answered the slightest touch of the leg, and stepped out as if it knew no other motion, General Daumont de Croisailles showered compliments upon him, and assured him that he knew few officers who possessed his intelligence and his value, and that he should not forget him when the proper time came for recommending him for promotion.

Not a muscle of the Marquis de Montboron's face moved, and when the day of the review arrived, he was at his post on the staff that followed the General, who sat as

upright as a dart in the saddle, and looked at the crowd to see whether he could not recognize some old or new female friend there, while his horse pranced and plunged.

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He rode onto the review ground, amidst the increasing noise of applause, with a smile upon his lips, when, suddenly, at the moment that he galloped up into the large square, formed by the troops drawn up in a line, the band of the fifty-third regiment struck up a quick march, and, as if obeying a preconcerted signal, the jennet began to turn round, and to accelerate its speed, in spite of the furious tugs at the bridle which the rider gave.

The horse performed beautifully, followed the rhythm of the music, and appeared to be acting under some invisible impulse, and the General had such a comical look on his face, he looked so disconcerted, rolled his eyes, and seemed to be the prey to such terrible exasperation, that he might have been taken for some character in a pantomime, while his staff followed him, without being able to comprehend this fresh fancy of his.

The soldiers presented arms, the music did not stop, though the instrumentalists were much astonished at this interminable ride.

The General at last became out of breath, and could scarcely keep in the saddle, and the women, in the crowded ranks of the spectators, gave prolonged, nervous laughs, which made the old *roue's* ears tingle with excitement.

The horse did not stop until the music ceased, and then it knelt down with bent head, and put its nostrils into the dust.

It nearly gave General de Croisailles an attack of the jaundice, especially when he found out that it was his aide-de-camp's *tit for tat*, and that the horse came from a circus which was giving performances in the town. And what irritated him all the more was, that he could not even set it down against Montboron and have him sent to some terrible out-of-the-way hole, for the Captain sent in his resignation, wisely considering that sooner or later he should have to pay the costs of that little trick, and that the chances were that he should not get any further promotion, but remain stationary, like a cab which some bilker has left standing for hours at one end of an arcade, while he has made his escape at the other.

RUST

During nearly his whole life, he had had an insatiable love for sport. He went out every day, from morning till night, with the greatest ardor, in summer and winter, spring and autumn, on the marshes, when it was close time on the plains and in the woods. He shot, he hunted, he coursed, he ferreted; he spoke of nothing but shooting and hunting, he dreamt of it, and continually repeated:

"How miserable any man must be who does not care for sport!"

And now that he was past fifty, he was well, robust, stout and vigorous, though rather bald, and he kept his moustache cut quite short, so that it might not cover his lips, and interfere with his blowing the horn.

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He was never called by anything but his first Christian name, Monsieur Hector, but his full name was Baron Hector Gontran de Coutelier, and he lived in a small manor house which he had inherited, in the middle of the woods; and though he knew all the nobility of the department, and met its male representatives out shooting and hunting, he only regularly visited one family, the Courvilles, who were very pleasant neighbors, and had been allied to his race for centuries, and in their house he was liked, and taken the greatest care of, and he used to say: "If I were not a sportsman, I should like to be here always."

Monsieur de Courville had been his friend and comrade from childhood, and lived quietly as a gentleman farmer with his wife, daughter and son-in-law, Monsieur de Darnetot, who did nothing, under the pretext of being devoted to historical studies.

Baron de Coutelier often went and dined with his friends, as much with the object of telling them of the shots he had made, as of anything else. He had long stories about dogs and ferrets, of which he spoke as if they were persons of note, whom he knew very well. He analyzed them, and explained their thoughts and intentions:

"When Medor saw that the corn-crake was leading him such a dance, he said to himself: 'Wait a bit, my friend, we will have a joke.' And then, with a jerk of the head to me, to make me go into the corner of the clover field, he began to quarter the sloping ground, noisily brushing through the clover to drive the bird into a corner from which it could not escape.

"Everything happened as he had foreseen. Suddenly, the corn-crake found itself on the borders of the clover, and it could not go any further without showing itself; Medor stood and pointed, half-looking round at me, but at a sign from me, he drew up to it, flushed the corn-crake; *bang*! down it came, and Medor, as he brought it to me, wagged his tail, as much as to say: 'How about that, Monsieur Hector?'"

Courville, Darnetot, and the two ladies laughed very heartily at those picturesque descriptions into which the Baron threw his whole heart. He grew animated, moved his arms about, and gesticulated with his whole body; and when he described the death of anything he had killed, he gave a formidable laugh, and said:

"Was not that a good shot?"

As soon as they began to speak about anything else, he left off listening, and hummed a hunting song, or a few notes to imitate a hunting horn, to himself.

He had only lived for field sports, and was growing old, without thinking about it, or guessing it, when he had a severe attack of rheumatism, and was confined to his bed for two months, and nearly died of grief and weariness.

As he kept no female servant, for an old footman did all the cooking, he could not get any hot poultices, nor could he have any of those little attentions, nor anything that an invalid requires. His gamekeeper was his sick nurse, and as the servant found the time hang just as heavily on his hands as it did on his master's, he slept nearly all day and all night in any easy chair, while the Baron was swearing and flying into a rage between the sheets.

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The ladies of the De Courville family came to see him occasionally, and those were hours of calm and comfort for him. They prepared his herb tea, attended to the fire, served him his breakfast up daintily, by the side of his bed, and when they were going again, he used to say:

“By Jove! You ought to come here altogether,” which made them laugh heartily.

When he was getting better, and was beginning to go out shooting again, he went to dine with his friends one evening; but he was not at all in his usual spirits. He was tormented by one continual fear—that he might have another attack before shooting began, and when he was taking his leave at night, when the women were wrapping him up in a shawl, and tying a silk handkerchief round his neck, which he allowed to be done for the first time in his life, he said in a disconsolated voice:

“If it goes on like this, I shall be done for.”

As soon as he had gone, Madame Darnetot said to her mother:

“We ought to try and get the Baron married.”

They all raised their hands at the proposal. How was it that they had never thought of it before? And during all the rest of the evening they discussed the widows whom they knew, and their choice fell on a woman of forty, who was still pretty, fairly rich, very good-tempered and in excellent health, whose name was Madame Berthe Vilers, and, accordingly, she was invited to spend a month at the chateau. She was very dull at home, and was very glad to come; she was lively and active, and Monsieur de Coutelier took her fancy immediately. She amused herself with him as if he had been a living toy, and spent hours in asking him slyly about the sentiments of rabbits and the machinations of foxes, and he gravely distinguished between the various ways of looking at things which different animals had, and ascribed plans and subtle arguments to them, just as he did to men of his acquaintance.

The attention she paid him, delighted him, and one evening, to show his esteem for her, he asked her to go out shooting with him, which he had never done to any woman before, and the invitation appeared so funny to her that she accepted it.

It was quite an amusement for them to fit her out; everybody offered her something, and she came out in a sort of short riding habit, with boots and men’s breeches, a short petticoat, a velvet jacket, which was too tight for her across the chest, and a huntsman’s black velvet cap.

The Baron seemed as excited as if he were going to fire his first shot. He minutely explained to her the direction of the wind, and how different dogs worked. Then he took

her into a field, and followed her as anxiously as a nurse does when her charge is trying to walk for the first time.

Medor soon made a point, and stopped with his tail out stiff and one paw up, and the Baron, standing behind his pupil, was trembling like a leaf, and whispered:

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“Look out, they are par ... par ... partridges.” And almost before he had finished, there was a loud *whirr—whirr*, and a covey of large birds flew up in the air, with a tremendous noise.

Madame Vilers was startled, shut her eyes, fired off both barrels and staggered at the recoil of the gun; but when she had recovered her self-possession, she saw that the Baron was dancing about like a madman, and that Medor was bringing back the first of the two partridges which she had killed.

From that day, Monsieur de Coutelier was in love with her, and used to say, raising his eyes: “What a woman!” And he used to go and see them every evening now, and talked about shooting.

One day, Monsieur de Courville, who was walking part of the way with him, asked him, suddenly:

“Why don’t you marry her?”

The Baron was altogether taken by surprise, and said:

“What? I? Marry her? ... Well ... really....”

And he said no more for a while, but then, suddenly shaking hands with his companion, he said:

“Good-bye, my friend,” and quickly disappeared in the darkness.

He did not go again for three days, but when he reappeared, he was pale from thinking the matter over, and graver than usual. Taking Monsieur de Courville aside, he said:

“That was a capital idea of yours; try and persuade her to accept me, for one might say that a woman like she is, was made for me, and you and I shall be able to have some sort of sport together, all the year round.”

As Monsieur de Courville felt certain that his friend would not meet with a refusal, he replied:

“Propose to her immediately, my dear fellow, or would you rather that I did it for you?”

But the Baron grew suddenly nervous, and said, with some hesitation:

“No, ... no.... I must go to Paris for ... for a few days. As soon as I come back, I will give you a definite answer.” No other explanation was forthcoming, and he started the next morning.

He made a long stay. One, two, three weeks passed, but Monsieur de Coutelier did not return, and the Courvilles, who were surprised and uneasy, did not know what to say to their friend, whom they had informed of the Baron's wishes. Every other day they sent to his house for news of him, but none of his servants had a line.

But one evening, while Madame Vilers was singing, and accompanying herself on the piano, a servant came with a mysterious air, and told Monsieur de Courville that a gentleman wanted to see him. It was the Baron, in a traveling suit, who looked much altered and older, and as soon as he saw his old friend, he seized both his hands, and said, in a somewhat tired voice: "I have just returned, my dear friend, and I have come to you immediately; I am thoroughly knocked up."

Then he hesitated in visible embarrassment, and presently said:

"I wished to tell you ... immediately ... that ... that business ... you know what I mean ... must come to nothing."

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Monsieur de Courville looked at him in stupefaction. “Must come to nothing?... Why?”

“Oh! Do not ask me, please; it would be too painful for me to tell you; but you may rest assured that I am acting like an honorable man. I cannot ... I have no right ... no right, you understand, to marry this lady, and I will wait until she has gone, to come here again; it would be too painful for me to see her. Good-bye.” And he absolutely ran away.

The whole family deliberated and discussed the matter, surmising a thousand things. The conclusion they came to was, that the Baron’s past life concealed some great mystery, that, perhaps, he had natural children, or some connection of long standing. At any rate, the matter seemed serious, and so as to avoid any difficult complications, they adroitly informed Madame Vilers of the state of affairs, who returned home just as much of a widow as she had come.

Three months more passed, when one evening, when he had dined rather too well, and was rather unsteady on his legs, Monsieur de Coutelier, while he was smoking his pipe with Monsieur de Courville, said to him:

“You would really pity me, if you only knew how continually I am thinking about your friend.”

But the other, who had been rather vexed at the Baron’s behavior in the circumstances, told him exactly what he thought of him:

“By Jove, my good friend, when a man has any secrets in his existence, like you have, he does not make advances to a woman, immediately, as you did, for you must surely have foreseen the reason why you had to draw back.”

The Baron left off smoking in some confusion.

“Yes, and no; at any rate, I could not have believed what actually happened.”

Whereupon, Monsieur de Courville lost his patience, and replied:

“One ought to foresee everything.”

But Monsieur de Coutelier replied in a low voice, in case anybody should be listening: “I see that I have hurt your feelings, and will tell you everything, so that you may forgive me. You know that for twenty years I have lived only for sport; I care for nothing else, and think about nothing else. Consequently, when I was on the point of undertaking certain obligations with regard to this lady, I felt some scruples of conscience. Since I have given up the habit of ... of love, there! I have not known whether I was still capable of ... you know what I mean ... Just think! It is exactly sixteen years since ... I for the last time ... you understand what I mean. In this neighborhood, it is not easy to ... you

know. And then, I had other things to do. I prefer to use my gun, and so before entering into an engagement before the Mayor[3] and the Priest to ... well, I was frightened. I said to myself: 'Confound it; suppose I missed fire!' An honorable man always keeps his engagements, and in this case, I was undertaking sacred duties with regard to this lady, and so, to feel sure, I made up my mind to go and spend a week in Paris.

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[Footnote 3: Civil marriage is obligatory in France, whether a religious ceremony takes place or not.—TRANSLATOR.]

“At the end of that time, nothing, absolutely nothing occurred. I always lost the game.... I waited for a fortnight, three weeks, continually hoping. In the restaurants, I ate a number of highly seasoned dishes, which upset my stomach, and ... and it was still the same thing ... or rather, nothing. You will, therefore, understand, that, in such circumstances, and having assured myself of the fact, the only thing I could do was ... was ... to withdraw; and I did so.”

Monsieur de Courville had to struggle very hard not to laugh, and he shook hands with the Baron, saying:

“I am very sorry for you,” and accompanied him half-way home.

When he got back, and was alone with his wife, he told her everything, nearly choking with laughter; she, however, did not laugh, but listened very attentively, and when her husband had finished, she said, very seriously:

“The Baron is a fool, my dear; he was frightened, that is all. I will write and ask Berthe to come back here as soon as possible.”

And when Monsieur de Courville observed that their friend had made such long and useless attempts, she merely said:

“Nonsense! When a man loves his wife, you know ... that sort of thing adjusts itself to the situation.”

And Monsieur de Courville made no reply, as he felt rather confused himself.

THE SUBSTITUTE

“Madame Bonderoi?”

“Yes, Madame Bonderoi.”

“Impossible.”

“I tell you it is.”

Madame Bonderoi, the old lady in a lace cap, the devout, the holy, the honorable Madame Bonderoi, whose little false curls looked as if they were glued round her head.

“That is the very woman.”

“Oh! Come, you must be mad.”

“I swear to you that it is Madame Bonderoi.”

“Then please give me the details.”

“Here they are. During the life of Monsieur Bonderoi, the lawyer, people said that she utilized his clerks for her own particular service. She is one of those respectable middle-class women, with secret vices, and inflexible principles, of whom there are so many. She liked good-looking young fellows, and I should like to know what is more natural than that? Do not we all like pretty girls?”

“As soon as old Bonderoi was dead, his widow began to live the peaceful and irreproachable life of a woman with a fair, fixed income. She went to church assiduously, and spoke evil of her neighbors, but gave no handle to anyone for speaking ill of her, and when she grew old she became the little wizened, sour-faced, mischievous woman whom you know. Well, this adventure, which you would scarcely believe, happened last Friday.

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“My friend, Jean d’Anglemare, is, as you know, a captain in a dragoon regiment, who is quartered in the barracks in the *Rue de la Rivette*, and when he got to his quarters the other morning, he found that two men of his squadron had had a terrible quarrel. The rules about military honor are very severe, and so a duel took place between them. After the duel they became reconciled, and when their officer questioned them, they told him what their quarrel had been about. They had fought on Madame Bonderoi’s account.”

“Oh!”

“Yes, my dear fellow, about Madame Bonderoi.”

“But I will let Trooper Siballe speak.”

“This is how it was, Captain. About a year and a half ago, I was lounging about the barrack-yard, between six and seven o’clock in the evening, when a woman came up and spoke to me, and said, just as if she had been asking her way: ’Soldier, would you like to earn ten francs a week, honestly?’ Of course, I told her that I decidedly should, and so she said: ’Come and see me at twelve o’clock to-morrow morning. I am Madame Bonderoi, and my address is No. 6, *Rue de la Tranchee*.’ ’You may rely upon my being there, Madame.’ And then she went away, looking very pleased, and she added: ‘I am very much obliged to you, soldier.’ ’I am obliged to you, Madame,’ I replied. But I plagued my head about the matter, until the time came, all the same.

“At twelve o’clock, exactly, I rang the bell, and she let me in herself. She had a lot of ribbons on her head.

“‘We must make haste,’ she said; ‘as my servant might come in.’

“‘I am quite willing to make haste,’ I replied, ‘but what am I to do?’

“But she only laughed, and replied: ’Don’t you understand, you great knowing fellow?’

“I was no nearer her meaning, I give you my word of honor, Captain, but she came and sat down by me, and said:

“’If you mention this to anyone, I will have you put in prison, so swear that you will never open your lips about it.’

“I swore whatever she liked, though I did not at all understand what she meant, and my forehead was covered with perspiration, so I took my pocket-handkerchief out of my helmet, and she took it and wiped my brow with it; then she kissed me, and whispered: ‘Then you will?’ ’I will do anything you like, Madame,’ I replied, ‘as that is what I came for.’

“Then she made herself clearly understood by her actions, and when I saw what it was, I put my helmet onto a chair, and showed her that in the dragoons a man never retires, Captain.

“Not that I cared much about it, for she was certainly not in her prime, but it is no good being too particular in such a matter, as ten francs are scarce, and then I have relations whom I like to help, and I said to myself: ‘There will be five francs for my father, out of that.’

“When I had done my allotted task, Captain, I got ready to go, though she wanted me to stop longer, but I said to her:

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“’To everyone their due, Madame. A small glass of brandy costs two sous, and two glasses cost four.’

“She understood my meaning, and put a gold ten-franc piece into my hand. I do not like that coin, because it is so small that if your pockets are not very well made, and come at all unsewn, one is apt to find it in one’s boots, or not to find it at all, and so, while I was looking at it, she was looking at me. She got red in the face, as she had misunderstood my looks, and she said: ‘Is not that enough?’

“’I did not mean that, Madame,’ I replied; ’but if it is all the same to you, I would rather have two five-franc pieces.’ And she gave them to me, and I took my leave. This has been going on for a year and a half, Captain. I go every Tuesday evening, when you give me leave to go out of barracks; she prefers that, as her servant has gone to bed then, but last week I was not well, and I had to go into the infirmary. When Tuesday came, I could not get out, and I was very vexed, because of the ten francs which I had been receiving every week, and I said to myself:

“’If anybody goes there, I shall be done; and she will be sure to take an artilleryman, and that made me very angry. So I sent for Paumelle, who comes from my part of the country, and I told him how matters stood:

“’There will be five francs for you, and five for me,’ I said. He agreed, and went, as I had given him full instructions. She opened the door as soon as he knocked, and let him in, and as she did not look at his face, she did not perceive that it was not I, for, you know, Captain, one dragoon is very like another, with their helmets on.

“Suddenly, however, she noticed the change, and she asked, angrily: ’Who are you? What do you want? I do not know you.’

“Then Paumelle explained matters; he told her that I was not well, and that I had sent him as my substitute; so she looked at him, made him also swear to keep the matter secret, and then she accepted him, as you may suppose, for Paumelle is not a bad-looking fellow, either. But when he came back, Captain, he would not give me my five francs. If they had been for myself, I should not have said a word, but they were for my father, and on that score, I would stand no nonsense, and I said to him:

“’You are not particular in what you do, for a dragoon; you are a discredit to your uniform.’

“He raised his fist, Captain, saying that fatigue duty like that was worth double. Of course, everybody has his own ideas, and he ought not to have accepted it. You know the rest.”

“Captain d’Anglemare laughed until he cried as he told me the story, but he also made me promise to keep the matter a secret, just as he had promised the two soldiers. So, above all, do not betray me, but promise me to keep it to yourself.”

“Oh! You may be quite easy about that. But how was it all arranged, in the end?”

“How? It is a joke in a thousand!... Mother Bonderoi keeps her two dragoons, and reserves his own particular day for each of them, and in that way everybody is satisfied.”

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“Oh! That is capital! Really capital!”

“And he can send his old father and mother the money as usual, and thus morality is satisfied.”

THE RELIC

To the Abbe Louis d’Ennemare, at Soissons.

“My Dear Abbe:

“My marriage with your cousin is broken off in the stupidest manner, on account of a stupid trick which I almost involuntarily played my intended, in my embarrassment, and I turn to you, my old schoolfellow, for you may be able to help me out of the difficulty. If you can, I shall be grateful to you until I die.

“You know Gilberte, or rather you think you know her, for do we ever understand women? All their opinions, their ideas, their creeds, are a surprise to us. They are all full of twists and turns, of the unforeseen, of unintelligible arguments, or defective logic and of obstinate ideas, which seem final, but which they alter because a little bird came and perched on the window ledge.

“I need not tell you that your cousin is very religious, as she was brought up by the *White* (or was it the *Black*?) *Ladies* at Nancy. You know that better than I do, but what you perhaps do not know, is, that she is just as excitable about other matters as she is about religion. Her head flies away, just like a leaf being whirled away by the wind; and she is a woman, or rather a girl, more so than many are, for she is moved, or made angry in a moment, starting off at a gallop after affection, just as she does after hatred, and returning in the same manner; and she is as pretty ... as you know, and more charming than I can say ... as you will never know.

“Well, we became engaged, and I adored her, as I adore her still, and she appeared to love me.

“One evening, I received a telegram summoning me to Cologne for a consultation, which might be followed by a serious and difficult operation, and as I had to start the next morning, I went to wish Gilberte goodbye, and tell her why I could not dine with them on Wednesday, but on Friday, the day of my return. Ah! Take care of Fridays, for I assure you they are unlucky!

“When I told her that I had to go to Germany, I saw that her eyes filled with tears, but when I said I should be back very soon, she clapped her hands, and said:

“’I am very glad you are going, then! You must bring me back something; a mere trifle, just a souvenir, but a souvenir that you have chosen for me. You must find out what I should like best, do you hear? And then I shall see whether you have any imagination.’

“She thought for a few moments, and then added:

“’I forbid you to spend more than twenty francs on it. I want it for the intention, and for the remembrance of your penetration, and not for its intrinsic value.’

“And then, after another moment’s silence, she said, in a low voice, and with downcast eyes.

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"'If it costs you nothing in money, and if it is something very ingenious and pretty, I will ... I will kiss you.'

"The next day, I was in Cologne. It was the case of a terrible accident, which had thrown a whole family into despair, and a difficult amputation was necessary. They put me up; I might say, they almost locked me up, and I saw nobody but people in tears, who almost deafened me with their lamentations; I operated on a man who appeared to be in a moribund state, and who nearly died under my hands, and with whom I remained two nights, and then, when I saw that there was a chance for his recovery, I drove to the station. I had, however, made a mistake in the trains, and I had an hour to wait, and so I wandered about the streets, still thinking of my poor patient, when a man accosted me. I do not know German, and he was totally ignorant of French, but at last I made out that he was offering me some relics. I thought of Gilberte, for I knew her fanatical devotion, and here was my present ready to hand, so I followed the man into a shop where religious objects were for sale, and I bought *a small piece of a bone of one of the Eleven Thousand Virgins*.

"The pretended relic was enclosed in a charming, old silver box, and that determined my choice, and putting my purchase into my pocket, I went to the railway station, and so to Paris.

"As soon as I got home, I wished to examine my purchase again, and on taking hold of it, I found that the box was open, and the relic lost! It was no good to hunt in my pocket, and to turn it inside out; the small bit of bone, which was no bigger than half a pin, had disappeared.

"You know, my dear little Abbe, that my faith is not very great, but, as my friend, you are magnanimous enough to put up with my coldness, and to leave me alone, and to wait for the future, so you say. But I absolutely disbelieve in the relics of second-hand dealers in piety, and you share my doubts in that respect. Therefore, the loss of that bit of sheep's carcass did not grieve me, and I easily procured a similar fragment, which I carefully fastened inside my jewel, and then I went to see my intended.

"As soon as she saw me, she ran up to me, smiling and anxious, and said to me:

"'What have you brought me?'

"I pretended to have forgotten, but she did not believe me, and I made her beg me, and beseech me, even. But when I saw that she was devoured by curiosity, I gave her the sacred silver box. She appeared over-joyed.

"'A relic! Oh! A relic!'

“And she kissed the box passionately, so that I was ashamed of my deception. She was not quite satisfied, however, and her uneasiness soon turned to terrible fear, and looking straight into my eyes, she said:

“‘Are you sure that it is authentic?’

“‘Absolutely certain.’

“‘How can you be so certain?’

“I was caught, for to say that I had bought it through a man in the streets, would be my destruction. What was I to say? A wild idea struck me, and I said, in a low, mysterious voice:

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"'I stole it for you.'

"She looked at me with astonishment and delight in her large eyes.

"'Oh! You stole it? Where?'

"'In the cathedral; in the very shrine of the Eleven Thousand Virgins.'

"Her heart beat with pleasure, and she murmured:

"'Oh! Did you really do that ... for me? Tell me ... all about it!'

"There was an end of it, and I could not go back. I made up a fanciful story, with precise details. I had given the custodian of the building a hundred francs to be allowed to go about the building by myself; the shrine was being repaired, but I happened to be there at the breakfast time of the workmen and clergy; by removing a small panel, I had been enabled to seize a small piece of bone (oh! so small), among a quantity of others, (I said a quantity, as I thought of the amount that the remains of the skeletons of eleven thousand virgins must produce). Then I went to a goldsmith's and bought a casket worthy of the relic; and I was not sorry to let her know that the silver box cost me five hundred francs.

"But she did not think of that; she listened to me, trembling; in an ecstasy, and whispering:

"'How I love you!' she threw herself into my arms.

"Just note this: I had committed sacrilege for her sake. I had committed a theft; I had violated a shrine; violated and stolen holy relics, and for that she adored me, thought me loving, tender, divine. Such is woman, my dear Abbe.

"For two months I was the best of lovers. In her room, she had made a kind of magnificent chapel in which to keep this bit of mutton chop, which, as she thought, had made me commit that love-crime, and she worked up her religious enthusiasm in front of it every morning and evening. I had asked her to keep the matter secret, for fear, as I said, that I might be arrested, condemned and given over to Germany, and she kept her promise.

"Well, at the beginning of the summer, she was seized with an irresistible wish to see the scene of my exploit, and she begged her father so persistently (without telling him her secret reason), that he took her to Cologne, but without telling me of their trip, according to his daughter's wish.

“I need not tell you that I had not seen the interior of the cathedral. I do not know where the tomb (if there be a tomb), of the Eleven Thousand Virgins is, and then, it appears that it is unapproachable, alas!

“A week afterwards, I received ten lines, breaking off our engagement, and then an explanatory letter from her father, whom she had, somewhat late, taken into her confidence.

“At the sight of the shrine, she had suddenly seen through my trickery and my lie, and had also found out that I was innocent of any other crime. Having asked the keeper of the relics whether any robbery had been committed, the man began to laugh, and pointed out to them how impossible such a crime was, but from the moment I had plunged my profane hand into venerable relics, I was no longer worthy of my fair-haired and delicate betrothed.

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“I was forbidden the house; I begged and prayed in vain, nothing could move the fair devotee, and I grew ill from grief. Well, last week, her cousin, Madame d’Arville, who is yours also, sent word to me that she should like to see me, and when I called, she told me on what conditions I might obtain my pardon, and here they are. I must bring her a relic, a real, authentic relic, certified to be such by Our Holy Father, the Pope, of some virgin and martyr, and I am going mad from embarrassment and anxiety.

“I will go to Rome, if needful, but I cannot call on the Pope unexpectedly, and tell him my stupid adventure; and, besides, I doubt whether they let private individuals have relics. Could not you give me an introduction to some cardinal, or only to some French prelate, who possesses some remains of a female saint? Or perhaps you may have the precious object she wants in your collection?

“Help me out of my difficulty, my dear Abbe, and I promise you that I will be converted ten years sooner than I otherwise should be!

“Madame d’Arville, who takes the matter seriously, said to me the other day:

“‘Poor Gilberte will never marry.’

“My dear old schoolfellow, will you allow your cousin to die the victim of a stupid piece of business on my part? Pray prevent her from being the eleventh thousand and one virgin.

“Pardon me, I am unworthy, but I embrace you, and love you with all my heart.

“Your old friend,

“Henri Fontal.”

THE MAN WITH THE BLUE EYES

Monsieur Pierre Agenor de Vargnes, the Examining Magistrate, was the exact opposite of a practical joker. He was dignity, staidness, correctness personified. As a sedate man, he was quite incapable of being guilty, even in his dreams, of anything resembling a practical joke, however remotely. I know nobody to whom he could be compared, unless it be the present president of the French Republic. I think it is useless to carry the analogy any further, and having said thus much, it will be easily understood that a cold shiver passed through me when Monsieur Pierre Agenor de Vargnes did me the honor of sending a lady to wait on me.

At about eight o’clock, one morning last winter, as he was leaving the house to go to the *Palais de Justice*, his footman handed him a card, on which was printed:

DOCTOR JAMES FERDINAND, *Member of the Academy of Medicine, Port-au-Prince, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.*

At the bottom of the card, there was written in pencil:

From Lady Frogere

Monsieur de Vargnes knew the lady very well, who was a very agreeable Creole from Haiti, and whom he had met in many drawing-rooms, and, on the other hand, though the doctor's name did not awaken any recollections in him, his quality and titles alone required that he should grant him an interview, however short it might be. Therefore, although he was in a hurry to get out, Monsieur de Vargnes told the footman to show in his early visitor, but to tell him beforehand that his master was much pressed for time, as he had to go to the Law Courts.

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When the doctor came in, in spite of his usual imperturbability, he could not restrain a movement of surprise, for the doctor presented that strange anomaly of being a negro of the purest, blackest type, with the eyes of a white man, of a man from the North, pale, cold, clear, blue eyes, and his surprise increased when, after a few words of excuse for his untimely visit, he added, with an enigmatical smile:

“My eyes surprise you, do they not? I was sure that they would, and, to tell you the truth, I came here in order that you might look at them well, and never forget them.”

His smile, and his words, even more than his smile, seemed to be those of a madman. He spoke very softly, with that childish, lisping voice, which is peculiar to negroes, and his mysterious, almost menacing words, consequently, sounded all the more as if they were uttered at random by a man bereft of his reason. But his looks, the looks of those pale, cold, clear, blue eyes, were certainly not those of a madman. They clearly expressed menace, yes, menace, as well as irony, and, above all, implacable ferocity, and their glance was like a flash of lightning, which one could never forget.

“I have seen,” Monsieur de Vargnes used to say, when speaking about it, “the looks of many murderers, but in none of them have I ever observed such a depth of crime, and of impudent security in crime.”

And this impression was so strong, that Monsieur de Vargnes thought that he was the sport of some hallucination, especially as when he spoke about his eyes, the doctor continued with a smile, and in his most childish accents: “Of course, Monsieur, you cannot understand what I am saying to you, and I must beg your pardon for it. To-morrow, you will receive a letter which will explain it at all to you, but, first all, it was necessary that I should let you have a good, a careful look at my eyes, my eyes which are myself, my only and true self, as you will see.”

With these words, and with a polite bow, the doctor went out, leaving Monsieur de Vargnes extremely surprised, and a prey to this doubt, as he said to himself:

“Is he merely a madman? The fierce expression, and the criminal depths of his looks are perhaps caused merely by the extraordinary contrast between his fierce looks and his pale eyes.”

And absorbed in these thoughts, Monsieur de Vargnes unfortunately allowed several minutes to elapse, and then he thought to himself suddenly:

“No, I am not the sport of any hallucination, and this is no case of an optical phenomenon. This man is evidently some terrible criminal, and I have altogether failed in my duty in not arresting him myself at once, illegally, even at the risk of my life.”

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The judge ran downstairs in pursuit of the doctor, but it was too late; he had disappeared. In the afternoon, he called on Madame Frogere, to ask her whether she could tell him anything about the matter. She, however, did not know the negro doctor in the least, and was even able to assure him that he was a fictitious personage, for, as she was well acquainted with the upper classes in Haiti, she knew that the Academy of Medicine at Port-au-Prince had no doctor of that name among its members. As Monsieur de Vargnes persisted, and gave descriptions of the doctor, especially mentioning his extraordinary eyes, Madame Frogere began to laugh, and said:

“You have certainly had to do with a hoaxer, my dear Monsieur. The eyes which you have described, are certainly those of a white man, and the individual must have been painted.”

On thinking it over, Monsieur de Vargnes remembered that the doctor had nothing of the negro about him, but his black skin, his woolly hair and beard, and his way of speaking, which was easily imitated, but nothing of the negro, not even the characteristic, undulating walk. Perhaps, after all, he was only a practical joker, and during the whole day, Monsieur de Vargnes took refuge in that view, which rather wounded his dignity as a man of consequence, but which appeased his scruples as a magistrate.

The next day, he received the promised letter, which was written, as well as addressed, in letters cut out of the newspapers. It was as follows:

* * * * *

“MONSIEUR,—

“Doctor James Ferdinand does not exist, but the man whose eyes you saw does, and you will certainly recognize his eyes. This man has committed two crimes, for which he does not feel any remorse, but, as he is a psychologist, he is afraid of some day yielding to the irresistible temptation of confessing his crimes. You know better than anyone (and that is your most powerful aid), with what imperious force criminals, especially intellectual ones, feel this temptation. That great Poet, Edgar Poe, has written masterpieces on this subject, which express the truth exactly, but he has omitted to mention the last phenomenon, which *I* will tell you. Yes, I, a criminal, feel a terrible wish for somebody to know of my crimes, and, when this requirement is satisfied, my secret has been revealed to a confidant, I shall be tranquil for the future, and be freed from this demon of perversity, which only tempts us once. Well! Now that is accomplished. You shall have *my* secret; from the day that you recognize me by my eyes, you will try and find out what I am guilty of, and how I was guilty, and you will discover it, being a master of your profession, which, by-the-bye, has procured you the honor of having been chosen by me to bear the weight of this secret, which now is shared by us, and by us two alone. I say, advisedly, *by us two alone*. You could not, as a matter of fact, prove

the reality of this secret to anyone, unless I were to confess it, and I defy you to obtain my public confession, as I have confessed it to you, *and without danger to myself*."

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* * * * *

Three months later, Monsieur de Vargnes met Monsieur X—— at an evening party and at first sight, and without the slightest hesitation, he recognized in him those very pale, very cold, and very clear blue eyes, eyes which it was impossible to forget.

The man himself remained perfect impassive, so that Monsieur de Vargnes was forced to say to himself:

“Probably I am the sport of a hallucination at this moment, or else there are two pairs of eyes that are perfectly similar, in the world. And what eyes! Can it be possible?”

The magistrate instituted inquiries into his life, and he discovered this, which removed all his doubts.

Five years previously, Monsieur X—— had been a very poor, but very brilliant medical student, who, although he never took his doctor’s degree, had already made himself remarkable by his microbiological researches.

A young and very rich widow had fallen in love with him and married him. She had one child by her first marriage, and in the space of six months, first the child and then the mother died of typhoid fever, and thus Monsieur X—— had inherited a large fortune, in due form, and without any possible dispute. Everybody said that he had attended to the two patients with the utmost devotion. Now, were these two deaths the two crimes mentioned in his letter?

But then, Monsieur X—— must have poisoned his two victims with the microbes of typhoid fever, which he had skillfully cultivated in them, so as to make the disease incurable, even by the most devoted care and attention. Why not?

“Do you believe it?” I asked Monsieur de Vargnes. “Absolutely,” he replied. “And the most terrible thing about it is, that the villain is right when he defies me to force him to confess his crime publicly for I see no means of obtaining a confession, none whatever. For a moment, I thought of magnetism, but who could magnetize that man with those pale, cold, bright eyes? With such eyes, he would force the magnetizer to denounce himself as the culprit.”

And then he said, with a deep sigh:

“Ah! Formerly there was something good about justice!”

And when he saw my inquiring looks, he added in a firm and perfectly convinced voice:

“Formerly, justice had torture at its command.”

“Upon my word,” I replied, with all an author’s unconscious and simple egotism, “it is quite certain that without the torture, this strange tale would have no conclusion, and that is very unfortunate, as far as regards the story I intended to make of it.”

ALLOUMA

I

One of my friends had said to me:—

“If you happen to be near Bordj-Ebbaba while you are in Algeria, be sure and go to see my old friend Auballe, who has settled there.”

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I had forgotten the name of Auballe and of Ebbaba, and I was not thinking of this planter, when I arrived at his house by pure accident. For a month, I had been wandering on foot through that magnificent district which extends from Algiers to Cherchell, Orleansville, and Tiaret. It is at the same time wooded and bare, grand and charming. Between two hills, one comes across large pine forests in narrow valleys, through which torrents rush in the winter. Enormous trees, which have fallen across the ravine, serve as a bridge for the Arabs, and also for the tropical creepers, which twine round the dead stems, and adorn them with new life. There are hollows, in little known recesses of the mountains, of a terribly beautiful character, and the sides of the brooks, which are covered with oleanders, are indescribably lovely.

But what has left behind it the most pleasant recollections of that excursion, is the long after-dinner walks along the slightly wooded roads on those undulating hills, from which one can see an immense tract of country from the blue sea as far as the chain of the Quarsenis, on whose summit there is the cedar forest of Teniet-el-Haad.

On that day I lost my way. I had just climbed to the top of a hill, whence, beyond a long extent of rising ground, I had seen the extensive plain of Metidja, and then, on the summit of another chain, almost invisible in the distances that strange monument which is called *The Tomb of the Christian Woman*, and which was said to be the burial-place of the kings of Mauritana. I went down again, going southward, with a yellow landscape before me, extending as far as the fringe of the desert, as yellow as if all those hills were covered with lions' skins sewn together, sometimes a pointed yellow peak would rise out of the midst of them, like the bristly back of a camel.

I walked quickly and lightly, like as one does when following tortuous paths on a mountain slope. Nothing seems to weigh on one in those short, quick walks through the invigorating air of those heights, neither the body, nor the heart, nor the thoughts, nor even cares. On that day I felt nothing of all that crushes and tortures our life; I only felt the pleasure of that descent. In the distance I saw an Arab encampment, brown pointed tents, which seemed fixed to the earth, like limpets are to a rock, or else *gourbis*, huts made of branches, from which a gray smoke rose. White figures, men and women, were walking slowly about, and the bells of the flocks sounded vaguely through the evening air.

The arbutus trees on my road hung down under the weight of their purple fruit, which was falling on the ground. They looked like martyred trees, from which blood-colored sweat was falling, for at the top of every tier there was a red spot, like a drop of blood.

The earth all round them was covered with it, and as my feet crushed the fruit, they left blood-colored traces behind them, and sometimes, as I went along, I would jump and pick one, and eat it.

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All the valleys were by this time filled with a white vapor, which rose slowly, like the steam from the flanks of an ox, and on the chain of mountains that bordered the horizon, on the outskirts of the desert of Sahara, the sky was in flames. Long streaks of gold alternated with streaks of blood—blood again! Blood and gold, the whole of human history—and sometimes between the two there was a small opening in the greenish azure, far away like a dream.

How far away I was from all those persons and things with which one occupies oneself on the boulevards, far from myself also, for I had become a kind of wandering being, without thought or consciousness, far from any road, of which I was not even thinking, for as night came on, I found that I had lost my way.

The shades of night were falling onto the earth like a shower of darkness, and I saw nothing before me but the mountains, in the far distance. Presently, I saw some tents in the valley, into which I descended, and tried to make the first Arab I met understand in which direction I wanted to go. I do not know whether he understood me, but he gave me a long answer, which I did not in the least understand. In despair, I was about to make up my mind to pass the night wrapped up in a rug near the encampment, when among the strange words he uttered, I fancied that I heard the name, *Bordj-Ebbaba*, and so I repeated:

"*Bordj-Ebbaba.*"

"Yes, yes."

I showed him two francs that were a fortune to him, and he started off, while I followed him. Ah! I followed that pale phantom which strode on before me bare-footed along stony paths, on which I stumbled continually, for a long time, and then suddenly I saw a light, and we soon reached the door of a white house, a kind of fortress with straight walls, and without any outside windows. When I knocked, dogs began to bark inside, and a voice asked in French:

"Who is there?"

"Does Monsieur Auballe live here?" I asked.

"Yes."

The door was opened for me, and I found myself face to face with Monsieur Auballe himself, a tall man in slippers, with a pipe in his mouth and the looks of a jolly Hercules.

As soon as I mentioned my name, he put out both his hands and said:

"Consider yourself at home here, Monsieur."

A quarter of an hour later I was dining ravenously, opposite to my host, who went on smoking.

I knew his history. After having wasted a great amount of money on women, he had invested the remnants of his fortune in Algerian landed property and taken to money-making. It turned out prosperously; he was happy, and had the calm look of a happy and contented man. I could not understand how this fast Parisian could have grown accustomed to that monstrous life in such a lonely spot, and I asked him about it.

“How long have you been here?” I asked him.

“For nine years.”

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“And have you not been intolerably dull and miserable?”

“No, one gets used to this country, and ends by liking it. You cannot imagine how it lays hold on people by those small, animal instincts that we are ignorant of ourselves. We first become attached to it by our organs, to which it affords secret gratifications which we do not inquire into. The air and the climate overcome our flesh, in spite of ourselves, and the bright light with which it is inundated keeps the mind clear and fresh, at but little cost. It penetrates us continually by our eyes, and one might really say that it cleanses the somber nooks of the soul.”

“But what about women?”

“Ah...! There is rather a dearth of them!”

“Only *rather*?”

“Well, yes ... rather. For one can always, even among the Arabs, find some complaisant, native women, who think of the nights of Roumi.”

He turned to the Arab, who was waiting on me, who was a tall, dark fellow, with bright, black eyes, that flashed beneath his turban, and said to him:

“I will call you when I want you, Mohammed.” And then, turning to me, he said:

“He understands French, and I am going to tell you a story in which he plays a leading part.”

As soon as the man had left the room, he began:

“I had been here about four years, and scarcely felt quite settled yet in this country, whose language I was beginning to speak, and forced, in order not to break altogether with those passions that had been fatal to me in other places, to go to Algiers for a few days, from time to time.

“I had bought this farm, this *bordj*, which had been a fortified post, and was within a few hundred yards from the native encampment, whose man I employ to cultivate my land. Among the tribe that had settled here, and which formed a portion of the Oulad-Taadja, I chose, as soon as I arrived here, that tall fellow whom you have just seen, Mohammed ben Lam’har, who soon became greatly attached to me. As he would not sleep in a house, not being accustomed to it, he pitched his tent a few yards from my house, so that I might be able to call him from my window.

“You can guess what my life was, I dare say? Every day I was busy with cleanings and plantations; I hunted a little, I used to go and dine with the officers of the neighboring fortified posts, or else they came and dined with me. As for pleasures ... I have told you

what they consisted in. Algiers offered me some which were rather more refined, and from time to time a complaisant and compassionate Arab would stop me when I was out for a walk, and offer to bring one of the women of his tribe to my house at night. Sometimes I accepted, but more frequently I refused, from fear of the disagreeable consequences and troubles it might entail upon me.

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“One evening, at the beginning of summer, as I was going home, after going over the farm, as I wanted Mohammed, I went into his tent without calling him, as I frequently did, and there I saw a woman, a girl, sleeping almost naked, with her arms crossed under her head, on one of those thick, red carpets, made of the fine wool of Djebel-Amour, and which are as soft and as thick as a feather bed. Her body, which was beautifully white under the ray of light that came in through the raised covering of the tent, appeared to me to be one of the most perfect specimens of the human race that I had ever seen, and most of the women about here are beautiful and tall, and are a rare combination of features and shape. I let the edge of the tent fall in some confusion, and returned home.

“I love women! The sudden flash of this vision had penetrated and scorched me, and had rekindled in my veins that old, formidable ardor to which I owe my being here. It was very hot for it was July, and I spent nearly the whole night at my window, with my eyes fixed on the black Mohammed’s tent made on the ground.

“When he came into my room the next morning, I looked him closely in the face, and he hung his head, like a man who was guilty and in confusion. Did he guess that I knew? I, however, asked him, suddenly:

“‘So you are married, Mohammed?’ and I saw that he got red, and he stammered out: ‘No, *mo’ssieuia*!’

“I used to make him speak French to me, and to give me Arabic lessons, which was often productive of a most incoherent mixture of languages; however, I went on:

“‘Then why is there a woman in your tent?’

“‘She comes from the South,’ he said, in a low, apologetic voice.

“’Oh! So she comes from the South? But that does not explain to me how she comes to be in your tent.’

“Without answering my question, he continued:

“‘She is very pretty.’

“’Oh! Indeed. Another time, please, when you happen to receive a pretty woman from the South, you will take care that she comes to my *gourbi*, and not to yours. You understand me, Mohammed?’

“‘Yes, *mo’ssieuia*,’ he repeated, seriously.

“I must acknowledge that during the whole day I was in a state of aggressive excitement at the recollection of that Arab girl lying on the red carpet, and when I went in at dinner

time, I felt very strongly inclined to go to Mohammed's tent again. During the evening, he waited on me just as usual, and hovered round me with his impassive face, and several times I was very nearly asking him whether he intended to keep that girl from the South, who was very pretty, in his camel skin tent for a long time.

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“Towards nine o’clock, still troubled with that longing for female society which is as tenacious as the hunting instinct in dogs, I went out to get some fresh air, and to stroll about a little round that cone of brown skin through which I could see a brilliant speck of light. I did not remain long, however, for fear of being surprised by Mohammed in the neighborhood of his dwelling. When I went in an hour later, I clearly saw his outline in the tent, and then, taking the key out of my pocket, I went into the *bordj*, where besides myself, there slept my steward, two French laborers, and an old cook whom I had picked up in the Algiers. As I went up stairs, I was surprised to see a streak of light under my door, and when I opened it, I saw a girl with the face of a statue sitting on a straw chair by the side of the table, on which a wax candle was burning; she was bedizened with all those silver gew-gaws which women in the South wear on their legs, arms, breast, and even on their stomach. Her eyes, which were tinged with kohl, to make them look larger, regarded me earnestly, and four little blue spots, finely tatooed on her skin, marked her forehead, her cheeks, and her chin. Her arms, which were loaded with bracelets, were resting on her thighs, which were covered by the long, red silk skirt that she wore.

“When she saw me come in, she got up and remained standing in front of me, covered with her barbaric jewels, in an attitude of proud submission.

“‘What are you doing here?’ I said to her in Arabic.

“‘I am here because Mohammed told me to come.’

“‘Very well, sit down.’

“So she sat down and lowered her eyes, while I examined her attentively.

“She had a strange, regular, delicate, and rather bestial face, but mysterious as that of a Buddha. Her lips, which were rather thick and covered with a reddish efflorescence, which I discovered on the rest of her body as well, indicated a slight admixture of negro blood, although her hands and arms were of an irreproachable whiteness.

“I hesitated what to do with her, and felt excited, tempted and rather confused, so in order to gain time and to give myself an opportunity for reflection, I put other questions to her, about her birth, how she came into this part of the country, and what her connection with Mohammed was. But she only replied to those that interested me the least, and it was impossible for me to find out why she had come, with what intention, by whose orders, nor what had taken place between her and my servant. However, just as I was about to say to her: ‘Go back to Mohammed’s tent,’ she seemed to guess my intention, for getting up suddenly, and raising her two bare arms, on which the jingling bracelets slipped down to her shoulders, she crossed her hands behind my neck and drew me towards her with an irresistible air of suppliant longing.

“Her eyes, which were bright from emotion, from that necessity of conquering man, which makes the looks of an impure woman as seductive as those of the feline tribe, allured me, enchained me, deprived me of all the power of resistance, and filled me with impetuous ardor. It was a short, sharp struggle of the eyes only, that eternal struggle between those two human brutes, the male and the female, in which the male is always beaten.

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“Her hands, which had clasped behind my head, drew me irresistibly, with a gentle, increasing pressure, as if by mechanical force towards her red lips, on which I suddenly laid mine while, at the same moment, I clasped her body, that was covered with jingling silver rings, in an ardent embrace.

“She was as strong, as healthy, and as supple as a wild animal, with all the motions, the ways, the grace, and even something of the odor of a gazelle, which made me find a rare, unknown zest in her kisses, which was as strange to my senses as the taste of tropical fruits.

“Soon—I say soon, although it may have been towards morning—I wished to send her away, as I thought that she would go in the same way that she had come; I did not, even, at the moment, ask myself what I should do with her, or what she would do with me, but as soon as she guessed my intention, she whispered:

“’What do you expect me to do if you get rid of me now? I shall have to sleep on the ground in the open air at night. Let me sleep on the carpet, at the foot of your bed.’

“What answer could I give her, or what could I do? I thought that no doubt Mohammed also would be watching the window of my room, in which a light was burning, and questions of various natures, that I had not put to myself during the first minutes, formulated themselves clearly in my brain.

“‘Stop here,’ I replied, ‘and we will talk.’

“My resolution was taken in a moment. As this girl had been thrown into my arms, in this manner, I would keep her; I would make her a kind of slave-mistress, hidden in my house, like women in a harem are. When the time should come that I no longer cared for her, it would be easy for me to get rid of her in some way or another, for on African soil those sort of creatures almost belong to us, body and soul, and so I said to her:

“’I wish to be kind to you, and I will treat you so that you shall not be unhappy, but I want to know who you are and where you come from?’

“She saw clearly that she must say something, and she told me her story, or rather a story, for no doubt she was lying from beginning to end, like all Arabs always do, with or without any motive.

“That is one of the most surprising and incomprehensible signs of the native character—the Arabs always lie. Those people in whom Islam has become so incarnate that it has become part of themselves, to such an extent as to model their instincts and modifies the entire race, and to differentiate it from others in morals just as much as the color of the skin differentiates a negro from a white man, are liars to the backbone, so that one can never trust a word that they say. I do not know whether they owe that to

their religion, but one must have lived among them in order to know the extent to which lying forms part of their being, of their heart and soul, until it has become a kind of second nature, a very necessity of life, with them.

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“Well, she told me that she was the daughter of a *Caidi* of the *Ouled Sidi Cheik*, and of a woman whom he had carried off in a raid against the Touaregs. The woman must have been a black slave, or, at any rate, have sprung from a first cross of Arab and negro blood. It is well known that negro women are in great request for harems, where they act as aphrodisiacs. Nothing of such an origin was to be noticed, however, except the purple color of her lips, and the dark nipples of her elongated breasts, which were as supple as if they were on springs. Nobody who knew anything about the matter, could be mistaken in that. But all the rest of her belonged to the beautiful race from the South, fair, supple and with a delicate face which was formed on straight and simple lines like those of a Hindoo figure. Her eyes, which were very far apart, still further heightened the somewhat god-like looks of this desert marauder.

“I knew nothing exactly about her real life. She related it to me in incoherent fragments, that seemed to rise up at random from a disordered memory, and she mixed up deliciously childish observations with them; a whole vision of a Nomad world, born of a squirrel’s brain that had leapt from tent to tent, from encampment to encampment, from tribe to tribe. And all this was done with the severe looks that this reserved people always preserve, with the appearance of a brass idol, and rather comic gravity.

“When she had finished, I perceived that I had not remembered anything of that long story, full of insignificant events, that she had stored up in her flighty brain, and I asked myself whether she had not simply been making fun of me by her empty and would-be serious chatter, which told me nothing about her, nor about any real facts connected with her life.

“And I thought of that conquered race, among whom we have encamped, or, rather, who are encamping among us, whose language we are beginning to speak, whom we see every day, living under the transparent linen of their tents, on whom we have imposed our laws, our regulations, and our customs, and about whom we know nothing, nothing more whatever, I assure you, than if we were not here, and solely occupied in looking at them, for nearly sixty years. We know no more about what is going on in those huts made of branches, and under those small canvas cones that are fastened to the ground by stakes, which are within twenty yards of our doors, than we know what the so-called civilized Arabs of the Moorish houses in Algiers do, think, and are. Behind the white-washed walls of their town houses, behind the partition of their *gourbi*, which is made of branches, or behind that thin, brown, camel-haired curtain which the wind moves, they live close to us, unknown, mysterious, cunning, submissive, smiling, impenetrable. What if I were to tell you, that when I look at the neighboring encampment through my field glasses, I guess that there are superstitions, customs, ceremonies, a thousand practices of which we know nothing, and which we do not even suspect! Never previously, in all probability, did a conquered race know so well how to escape so completely from the real domination, the moral influence and the inveterate, but useless, investigations of the conquerors.

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“Now I suddenly felt the insurmountable, secret barrier which incomprehensible nature had set up between the two races, more than I had ever felt it before, between this girl and myself, between this woman who had just given herself to me, who had yielded herself to my caresses and to me, who had possessed her, and, thinking of it for the first time, I said to her: ‘What is your name?’

“She did not speak for some moments, and I saw her start, as if she had forgotten that I was there, and then, in her eyes that were raised to mine, I saw that that moment had sufficed for her to be overcome by sleep, by irresistible, sudden, almost overwhelming sleep, like everything that lays hold of the mobile senses of women, and she answered, carelessly, suppressing a yawn:

“‘Allouma.’

“‘Do you want to go sleep?’

“‘Yes,’ she replied.

“‘Very well then, go to sleep!’

“She stretched herself out tranquilly by my side, lying on her stomach, with her forehead resting on her folded arms, and I felt almost immediately that fleeting, untutored thoughts were lulled in repose, while I began to ponder, as I lay by her side, and tried to understand it all. Why had Mohammed given her to me? Had he acted the part of a magnanimous servant, who sacrifices himself for his master, even to the extent of giving up the woman whom he had brought into his own tent, to him? Or had he, on the other hand, obeyed a more complex and more practical, though less generous impulse, in handing over this girl who had taken my fancy, to my embrace? An Arab, when it is a question of women, is rigorously modest and unspeakably complaisant, and one can no more understand his rigorous and easy morality, than one can all the rest of his sentiments. Perhaps, when I accidentally went to his tent, I had merely forestalled the benevolent intentions of this thoughtful servant, who had intended this woman, who was his friend and accomplice, or perhaps even his mistress, for me.

“All these suppositions assailed me, and fatigued me so much, that, at last, in my turn, I fell into a profound sleep, from which I was roused by the creaking of my door, and Mohammed came in, to call me as usual. He opened the window, through which a flood of light streamed in, and fell onto Allouma who was still asleep; then he picked up my trousers, coat and waistcoat from the floor in order to brush them. He did not look at the woman who was lying by my side, did not seem to know or remark that she was there, and preserved his ordinary gravity, demeanor and looks. But the light, the movement, the slight noise which his bare feet made, the feeling of the fresh air on her skin and in her lungs, roused Allouma from her lethargy. She stretched out her arms, turned over,

opened her eyes, and looked at me and then Mohammed with the same indifference; then she sat up in bed and said: ‘I am hungry.’

“‘What would you like?’

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"'Kahoua.'

"'Coffee and bread and butter.'

"'Yes.'

"Mohammed remained standing close to our bed, with my clothes under his arm, waiting for my orders.

"'Bring breakfast for Allouma and me,' I said to him.

"He went out, without his face betraying the slightest astonishment or anger, and as soon as he had left the room, I said to the girl:

"'Will you live in my house?'

"'I should like to, very much.'

"'I will give you a room to yourself, and a woman to wait on you.'

"'You are very generous, and I am grateful to you.'

"'But if you behave badly, I shall send you away immediately.'

"'I will do everything that you wish me to.'

"She took my hand, and kissed it as a token of submission, and just then Mohammed came in, carrying a tray with our breakfast on it, and I said to him:—

"'Allouma is going to live here. You must spread a carpet on the floor of the room at the end of the passage, and get Abd-El-Kader-El-Hadara's wife to come and wait on her.'

"'Yes, *mo'ssieuia*.'

"That was all.

"An hour later, my beautiful Arab was installed in a large, airy, light room, and when I went in to see that everything was in order, she asked me in a supplicating voice, to give her a wardrobe with a looking-glass in the doors. I promised her one, and then I left her squatting on the carpet from Djebel-Amour, with a cigarette in her mouth, and gossiping with the old Arab woman I had sent for, as if they had known each other for years."

II

“For a month I was very happy with her, and I got strangely attached to this creature belonging to another race, who seemed to me almost to belong to some other species, and to have been born on a neighboring planet.

“I did not love her; no, one does not love the women of that primitive continent. This small, pale blue flower of Northern countries never unfolds between them and us, or even between them and their natural males, the Arabs. They are too near to human animalism, their hearts are too rudimentary, their feelings are not refined enough to rouse that sentimental exaltation in us, which is the poetry of love. Nothing intellectual, no intoxication of thought or feeling is mingled with that sensual intoxication which those charming nonentities excite in us. Nevertheless, they captivate us like the others do, but in a different fashion, which is less tenacious, and, at the same time, less cruel and painful.

“I cannot even now explain precisely what I felt for her. I said to you just now that this country, this bare Africa, without any arts, void of all intellectual pleasures, gradually captivates us by its climate, by the continual mildness of the dawn and sunset, by its delightful light, and by the feeling of well-being with which it fills all our organs. Well, then! Allouma captivated me in the same manner, by a thousand hidden, physical, alluring charms, and by the procreative seductiveness, not of her embraces, for she was of thoroughly oriental supineness in that respect, but of her sweet self-surrender.

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“I left her absolutely free to come and go as she liked, and she certainly spent one afternoon out of two with the wives of my native agricultural laborers. Often also, she would remain for nearly a whole day admiring herself in front of a mahogany wardrobe with a large looking-glass in the doors that I had got from Miliana.

“She admired herself conscientiously, standing before the glass doors, in which she followed her own movements with profound and serious attention. She walked with her head somewhat thrown back, in order to be able to see whether her hips and loins swayed properly; went away, came back again, and then, tired with her own movements, she sat down on a cushion and remained opposite to her own reflection, with her eyes fixed on her face in the glass, and her whole soul absorbed in that picture.

“Soon, I began to notice that she went out nearly every morning after breakfast, and that she disappeared altogether until evening, and as I felt rather anxious about this, I asked Mohammed whether he knew what she could be doing during all these long hours of absence, but he replied very calmly:

“’Do not be uneasy. It will be the Feast of Ramadan soon, and so she goes to say her prayers.’

“He also seemed delighted at having Allouma in the house, but I never once saw anything suspicious between them, and so I accepted the situation as it was, and let time, accident, and life act for themselves.

“Often, after I had inspected my farm, my vineyards, and my clearings, I used to take long walks. You know the magnificent forests in this part of Algeria, those almost impenetrable ravines, where fallen pine trees hem the mountain torrents, and those little valleys filled with oleanders, which look like oriental carpets stretching along the banks of the streams. You know that at every moment, in these woods and on these hills, where one would think that nobody had ever penetrated, one suddenly sees the white dome of a shrine that contains the bones of a humble, solitary marabout, which was scarcely visited from time to time, even by the most confirmed believers, who had come from the neighboring villages with a wax candle in their pocket, to set up before the tomb of the saint.

“Now one evening as I was going home, I was passing one of these Mohammedan chapels, and, looking in through the door, which was always open, I saw a woman praying before the altar. That Arab woman, sitting on the ground in that dilapidated building, into which the wind entered as it pleased, and heaped up the fine, dry pine needles in yellow heaps in the corners. I went near to see better, and recognized Allouma. She neither saw nor heard me, so absorbed was she with the saint, to whom she was speaking in a low voice, as she thought that she was alone with him, and telling this servant of God all her troubles. Sometimes she stopped for a short time to think, to try and recollect what more she had to say, so that she might not forget

anything that she wished to confide to him; then, again, she would grow animated, as if he had replied to her, as if he had advised her to do something that she did not want to do, and the reasons for which she was impugning, and I went away as I had come, without making any noise, and returned home to dinner.

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“That evening, when I sent for her, I saw that she had a thoughtful look, which was not usual with her.

“‘Sit down there,’ I said, pointing to her place on the couch by my side. As soon as she had sat down, I stooped to kiss her, but she drew her head away quickly, and, in great astonishment, I said to her:

“‘Well, what is the matter?’

“‘It is the Ramadan,’ she said.

“I began to laugh, and said: ’And the Marabout has forbidden you to allow yourself to be kissed during the Ramadan?’

“Oh, yes; I am an Arab woman, and you are a Roumi!’

“‘And it would be a great sin?’

“‘Oh, yes!’

“‘So you ate nothing all day, until sunset?’

“‘No, nothing.’

“‘But you had something to eat after sundown?’

“‘Yes.’

“’Well, then, as it is quite dark now, you ought not to be more strict about the rest than you are about your mouth.’

“She seemed irritated, wounded, and offended, and replied with an amount of pride that I had never noticed in her before:—

“’If an Arab girl were to allow herself to be touched by a Roumi during the Ramadan, she would be cursed for ever.’

“‘And that is to continue for a whole month?’

“‘Yes, for the whole of the month of Ramadan,’ she replied, with great determination.

“I assumed an irritated manner and said:—’Very well, then, you can go and spend the Ramadan with your family.’

“She seized my hands, and, laying them on my heart, she said:—

“’Oh! Please do not be unkind, and you shall see how nice I will be. We will keep Ramadan together, if you like. I will look after you, and spoil you, but don’t be unkind.’

“I could not help smiling at her funny manner and her unhappiness, and I sent her to go to sleep at home, but, an hour later, just as I was thinking about going to bed, there came two little taps at my door, which were so slight, however, that I scarcely heard them; but when I said:—’Come in,’ Allouma appeared carrying a large tray covered with Arab dainties; fried balls of rice, covered with sugar, and a variety of other strange, Nomad pastry.

“She laughed, showing her white teeth, and repeated:—’Come, we will keep Ramadan together.’

“You know that the fast, which begins at dawn and ends at twilight, at the moment when the eye can no longer distinguish a black from a white thread, is followed every evening by small, friendly entertainments, at which eating is kept up until the morning, and the result is that for such of the natives as are not very scrupulous, Ramadan consists of turning day into night, and night into day. But Allouma carried her delicacy of conscience further than this. She placed her tray between us on the divan, and taking a small, sugared ball between her long, slender fingers, she put it into my mouth, and whispered:—’Eat it, it is very good.’

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“I munched the light cake, which was really excellent, and asked her:—’Did you make that?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘For me?’

“‘Yes, for you.’

“‘To enable me to support Ramadan?’

“‘Oh! Don’t be so unkind! I will bring you some every day.’

“Oh! the terrible month that I spent! A sugared, insipidly sweet month; a month that nearly drove me mad; a month of spoiling and of temptation, of anger and of vain efforts against an invincible resistance, but at last the three days of Beiram came, which I celebrated in my own fashion, and Ramadan was forgotten.

“The summer went on, and it was very hot, and in the first days of autumn, Allouma appeared to me to be pre-occupied and absent-minded, and, seemingly, taking no interest in anything, and, at last, when I sent for her one evening, she was not to be found in her room. I thought that she was roaming about the house, and I gave orders to look for her. She had not come in, however, and so I opened my window, and called out:—

“‘Mohammed,’ and the voice of the man, who was lying in his tent, replied:—

“‘Yes, *mo’ssieuia*.’

“‘Do you know where Allouma is?’

“‘No, *mo’ssieuia* ... it is not possible ... is Allouma lost?’

“A few moments later, my Arab came into my room, so agitated that he could not master his feelings, and I said:

“‘Is Allouma lost?’

“‘Yes, she is lost.’

“‘It is impossible.’

“‘Go and look for her,’ I said.

“He remained standing where he was, thinking, seeking for her motives, and unable to understand anything about it. Then he went into the empty room, where Allouma’s

clothes were lying about, in oriental disorder. He examined everything, as if he had been a police officer, or, rather, he smelt like a dog, and then, incapable of a lengthened effort, he murmured, resignedly:—

"'She has gone, she has gone!'

"I was afraid that some accident had happened to her; that she had fallen into some ravine and sprained herself, and I immediately sent all the men about the place off with orders to look for her until they should find her, and they hunted for her all that night, all the next day, and all the week long, but nothing was discovered that could put us upon her track. I suffered, for I missed her very much; my house seemed empty, and my existence a void. And then, disgusting thoughts entered my mind. I feared that she might have been carried off, or even murdered, but when I spoke about it to Mohammed, and tried to make him share my fears, he invariably replied:

"'No; gone away.'

"Then he added the Arab word *r'ezale*, which means *gazelle*, as if he meant to say that she could run quickly, and that she was far away.

"Three weeks passed, and I had given up all hopes of seeing my Arab mistress again, when one morning Mohammed came into my room, with every sign of joy in his face, and said to me:

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"'*Mo'ssieuia*, Allouma has come back.'

"I jumped out of bed and said:

"'Where is she?'

"'She does not dare to come in! There she is, under the tree.'

"And stretching out his arm, he pointed out to me, through the window, a whitish spot at the foot of an olive tree.

"I got up immediately, and went out to where she was. As I approached what looked like a mere bundle of linen thrown against the gnarled trunk of the tree, I recognized the large, dark eyes, the tattooed stars, and the long, regular features of that semi-wild girl who had so captivated my senses. As I advanced towards her, I felt inclined to strike her, to make her suffer pain, and to have my revenge, and so I called out to her from a little distance:

"'Where have you been?'

"She did not reply, but remained motionless and inert, as if she were scarcely alive, resigned to my violence, and ready to receive my blows. I was standing up, close to her, looking in stupefaction at the rags with which she was covered, at those bits of silk and muslin, covered with dust, torn and dirty, and I repeated, raising my hand, as if she had been a dog:

"'Where have you come from?'

"'From yonder,' she said, in a whisper.

"'Where is that?'

"'From the tribe.'

"'What tribe?'

"'Mine.'

"'Why did you go away?'

"When she saw that I was not going to beat her, she grew rather bolder, and said in a low voice: "'I was obliged to do it.... I was forced to go, I could not stop in the house any longer.'

“I saw tears in her eyes, and immediately felt softened. I leaned over her, and when I turned round to sit down, I noticed Mohammed, who was watching us at a distance, and I went on, very gently:

“‘Come, tell me why you ran away?’

“Then she told me, that for a long time in her Nomad’s heart she had felt the irresistible desire to return to the tents, to lie, to run, to roll on the sand; to wander about the plains with the flocks, to feel nothing over her head, between the yellow stars in the sky and the blue stars in her face, except the thin, threadbare, patched stuff, through which she could see spots of fire in the sky, when she awoke during the night.

“She made me understand all that in such simple and powerful words, that I felt quite sure that she was not lying, and pitied her, and I asked her:

“‘Why did you not tell me that you wished to go away for a time?’

“‘Because you would not have allowed me...’

“‘If you had promised to come back, I should have consented.’

“‘You would not have believed me.’

“Seeing that I was not angry, she began to laugh, and said:

“’You see that is all over; I have come home again, and here I am. I only wanted a few days there. I have had enough of it now, it is finished and passed; the feeling is cured. I have come back, and have not that longing any more. I am very glad, and you are very kind.’

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"'Come into the house,' I said to her.

"She got up, and I took her hand, her delicate hand, with its slender fingers, and triumphant in her rags, with her bracelets and her necklace ringing, she went gravely towards my house, where Mohammed was waiting for us, but before going in, I said:

"'Allouma, whenever you want to return to your own people, tell me, and I will allow you to go.'

"'You promise?'

"'Yes, I promise.'

"'And I will make you a promise also. When I feel ill or unhappy'—and here she put her hand to her forehead, with a magnificent gesture—'I shall say to you: "I must go yonder," and you will let me go.'

"I went with her to her room, followed by Mohammed, who was carrying some water, for there had been no time to tell the wife of Abd-el-Kader-el-Hadam that her mistress had returned. As soon as she got into the room, and saw the wardrobe with the looking-glass in the door, she ran up to it, like a child does when it sees its mother. She looked at herself for a few seconds, made a grimace, and then in a rather cross voice, she said to the looking-glass:

"'Just you wait a moment; I have some silk dresses in the wardrobe. I shall be beautiful in a few minutes.'

"And I left her alone, to act the coquette to herself.

"Our life began its usual course again, as formerly, and I felt more and more under the influence of the strange, merely physical attractions of that girl, for whom, at the same time, I felt a kind of paternal contempt. For two months all went well, and then I felt that she was again becoming nervous, agitated, and rather low-spirited, and one day I said to her:—

"'Do you want to return home again?'

"'Yes.'

"'And you did not dare to tell me?'

"'I did not venture to.'

"'Go, if you wish to; I give you leave.'

“She seized my hands and kissed them, as she did in all her outbursts of gratitude, and the same morning she disappeared.

“She came back, as she had done the first time, at the end of about three weeks, in rags, covered with dust, and satiated with her Nomad life of sand and liberty. In two years she returned to her own people four times in this fashion.

“I took her back, gladly, without any feelings of jealousy, for with me jealousy can only spring from love as we Europeans understand it. I might very likely have killed her if I had surprised her in the act of deceiving me, but I should have done it, just as one half kills a disobedient dog, from sheer violence. I should not have felt those torments, that consuming fire—Northern jealousy. I have just said that I should have killed her like a disobedient dog, and, as a matter of fact, I loved her somewhat in the same manner as one loves some very highly bred horse or dog, which it is impossible to replace. She was a splendid animal, a sensual animal, an animal made for pleasure, and which possessed the body of a woman.

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“I cannot tell you what an immeasurable distance separated our two souls, although our hearts perhaps occasionally warmed towards each other. She was something belonging to my house, she was part of my life, she had become a very agreeable, daily, regular requirement with me, to which I clung, and which the sensual man in me loved, that in me which was only eyes and sensuality.

“Well, one morning, Mohammed came into my room with a strange look on his face, that uneasy look of the Arabs, which resembles the furtive look of a cat, face to face with a dog, and when I noticed his expression, I said:

“‘What is the matter, now?’

“‘Allouma has gone away.’

“I began to laugh, and said:—’Where has she gone to?’

“‘Gone away altogether, *mo’ssieuia*!’

“‘What do you mean by *gone away altogether*; you are mad, my man.’

“‘No, *mo’ssieuia*.’

“‘Why has she gone away? Just explain yourself; come!’

“He remained motionless, and evidently did not wish to speak, and then he had one of those explosions of Arab rage, which make us stop in streets in front of two demoniacs, whose oriental silence and gravity suddenly give place to the most violent gesticulations, and the most ferocious vociferations, and I gathered, amidst his shouts, that Allouma had run away with my shepherd, and when I had partially succeeded in calming him, I managed to extract the facts from him one by one.

“It was a long story, but at last I gathered that he had been watching my mistress, who used to meet a sort of vagabond whom my steward had hired the month before, behind the neighboring cactus woods, or in the ravine where the oleanders flourished. The night before, Mohammed had seen her go out without seeing her return, and he repeated, in an exasperated manner:—’Gone, *mo’ssieuia*; she has gone away!’

“I do not know why, but his conviction, the conviction that she had run away with this vagabond, laid hold of me irresistibly in a moment. It was absurd, unlikely, and yet certain in virtue of that very unreasonableness, which constitutes female logic.

“Boiling over with indignation, I tried to recall the man’s features, and I suddenly remembered having seen him the previous week, standing on a mound amidst his flock, and watching me. He was a tall Bedouin, the color of whose bare limbs was blended with that of his rags; he was a type of a barbarous brute, with high cheek bones, and a

hooked nose, a retreating chin, thin legs, and a tall carcass in rags, with the shifty eyes of a jackal.

“I did not doubt for a moment that she had run away with that beggar. Why? Because she was Allouma, a daughter of the desert. A girl from the pavement in Paris would have run away with my coachman, or some thief in the suburbs.

“‘Very well,’ I said to Mohammed. Then I got up, opened my window, and began to draw in the stifling South wind, for the sirocco was blowing, and I thought to myself:—

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“Good heavens! she is ... a woman, like so many others. Does anybody know what makes them act, what makes them love, what makes them follow, or throw over a man? One certainly does know, occasionally; but often one does not, and sometimes one is in doubt. Why did she run away with that repulsive brute? Why? Perhaps, because the wind had been blowing regularly from the South, for a month; that was enough; a breath of wind! Does she know, do they know, even the cleverest of them, why they act? No more than a weather-cock that turns with the wind. An imperceptible breeze, makes the iron, brass, zinc, or wooden arrow revolve, just in the same manner as some imperceptible influence, some undiscernible impression moves the female heart, and urges it on to resolutions, and it does not matter whether they belong to town or country, the suburbs or the desert.

“They can then feel, provided that they reason and understand, why they have done one thing rather than another, but, for the moment, they do not know, for they are the playthings of their own sensibility, the thoughtless, giddy-headed slaves of events, of their surroundings, of chance meetings, and of all the sensations with which their soul and their body trembles!”

Monsieur Auballe had risen, and, after walking up and down the room once or twice, he looked at me, and said, with a smile:—

“That is love in the desert!”

“Suppose she were to come back?” I asked him.

“Horrid girl!” he replied.

“But I should be very glad if she did return to me.”

“And you would pardon the shepherd?”

“Good heavens, yes! With women, one must always pardon ... or else pretend not to see things.”

A FAMILY AFFAIR

The Neuilly steam-tram had just passed the *Porte Maillot*, and was going along the broad avenue that terminates at the Seine. The small engine that was attached to the car whistled to warn any obstacle to get out of its way, sent out its steam, and panted like a person out of breath from running does, and its pistons made a rapid noise, like iron legs that were running. The oppressive heat of the end of a July day lay over the whole city, and from the road, although there was not a breath of wind stirring, there arose a white, chalky, opaque, suffocating, and warm dust, which stuck to the moist

skin, filled the eyes, and got into the lungs, and people were standing in the doors of their houses in search of a little air.

The windows of the steam-tram were down, and the curtains fluttered in the wind, and there were very few passengers inside, because on such warm days people preferred the top or the platforms. Those few consisted of stout women in strange toilets, of those shopkeepers' wives from the suburbs, who made up for the distinguished looks which they did not possess, by ill-timed dignity; of gentlemen who were tired of the office, with yellow-faces,

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who stooped rather, and with one shoulder higher than the other, in consequence of their long hours of work bending over the desk. Their uneasy and melancholy faces also spoke of domestic troubles, of constant want of money, of former hopes, that had been finally disappointed; for they all belonged to that army of poor, threadbare devils who vegetate economically in mean, plastered houses, with a tiny piece of neglected garden in the midst of those fields where night soil is deposited, which are on the outskirts of Paris.

A short, fat man, with a puffy face and a big stomach, dressed all in black, and wearing a decoration in his button-hole, was talking to a tall, thin man, dressed in a dirty, white linen suit, that was all unbuttoned, with a white Panama hat on. The former spoke so slowly and hesitatingly, that it occasionally almost seemed as if he stammered; he was Monsieur Caravan, chief clerk in the Admiralty. The other, who had formerly been surgeon on board a merchant ship, had set up in practice in Courbevoie, where he applied the vague remnants of medical knowledge which he had retained after an adventurous life, to the wretched population of that district. His name was Chenet, and strange rumors were current as to his morality.

Monsieur Caravan had always led the normal life of a man in a Government office. For the last thirty years he had invariably gone the same way to his office every morning, and had met the same men going to business at the same time and nearly on the same spot, and he returned home every evening the same way, and again met the same faces which he had seen growing old. Every morning, after buying his halfpenny paper at the corner of the *Faubourg Saint Honore*, he bought his two rolls, and then he went into his office, like a culprit who is giving himself up to justice, and he got to his desk as quickly as possible, always feeling uneasy, as he was expecting a rebuke for some neglect of duty of which he might have been guilty.

Nothing had ever occurred to change the monotonous order of his existence, for no event affected him except the work of his office, perquisites, gratuities, and promotion. He never spoke of anything but of his duties, either at the Admiralty or at home, for he had married the portionless daughter of one of his colleagues. His mind, which was in a state of atrophy from his depressing daily work, had no other thoughts, hopes or dreams than such as related to the office, and there was a constant source of bitterness that spoilt every pleasure that he might have had, and that was the employment of so many commissioners of the navy, *tinmen*, as they were called, because of their silver-lace, as first-class clerks; and every evening at dinner he discussed the matter hotly with his wife, who shared his angry feelings, and proved to their own satisfaction that it was in every way unjust to give places in Paris, to men who ought to be employed in the navy.

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He was old now, and had scarcely noticed how his life was passing, for school had merely been exchanged, without any transition, for the office, and the ushers, at whom he had formerly trembled, were replaced by his chiefs, whom he was terribly afraid of. When he had to go into the rooms of these official despots, it made him tremble from head to foot, and that constant fear had given him a very awkward manner in their presence, a humble demeanor, and a kind of nervous stammering.

He knew nothing more about Paris than a blind man could know, who was led to the same spot by his dog every day, and if he read the account of any uncommon events, or of scandals, in his halfpenny paper, they appeared to him like fantastic tales, which some pressman had made up out of his own head, in order to amuse the inferior *employes*. He did not read the political news, which his paper frequently altered, as the cause which subsidized them might require, for he was not fond of innovations, and when he went through the Avenue of the *Champs-Elysees* every evening, he looked at the surging crowd of pedestrians, and at the stream of carriages, like a traveler who has lost his way in a strange country.

As he had completed his thirty years of obligatory service that year, on the first of January, he had had the cross of the *Legion of Honor* bestowed upon him, which, in the semi-military public offices, is a recompense for the miserable slavery—the official phrase is, *loyal services* of unfortunate convicts who are riveted to their desk. That unexpected dignity gave him a high and new idea of his own capacities, and altogether altered him. He immediately left off wearing light trousers and fancy waistcoats, and wore black trousers and long coats, on which his *ribbon*, which was very broad, showed off better. He got shaved every morning, trimmed his nails more carefully, changed his linen every two days, from a legitimate sense of what was proper, and of respect for the national *Order*, of which he formed a part, and from that day he was another Caravan, scrupulously clean, majestic and condescending.

At home, he said, “my cross,” at every moment, and he had become so proud of it, that he could not bear to see other men wearing any other ribbon in their button-holes. He got especially angry on seeing strange orders:—“Which nobody ought to be allowed to wear in France,” and he bore Chenet a particular grudge, as he met him on a tramcar every evening, wearing a decoration of some sort or another, white, blue, orange, or green.

The conversation of the two men, from the *Arc de Triomphe* to Neuilly, was always the same, and on that day they discussed, first of all, various local abuses which disgusted them both, and the Mayor of Neuilly received his full share of their blame. Then, as invariably happens in the company of a medical man, Caravan began to enlarge on the chapter of illness, as, in that manner, he hoped to obtain a little gratuitous advice, if he was careful not to show his book. His mother had been causing him no little anxiety for some time; she had frequent and prolonged fainting fits, and, although she was ninety, she would not take care of herself.

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Caravan grew quite tender-hearted when he mentioned her great age, and more than once asked Doctor Chenet, emphasizing the word *doctor*—although he had no right to the title, being only an *Officier de Sante*, and, as such, not fully qualified—whether he had often met anyone as old as that. And he rubbed his hands with pleasure; not, perhaps, that he cared very much about seeing the good woman last for ever here on earth, but because the long duration of his mother's life was, as it were, an earnest of old age for himself, and he continued:

"Oh! In my family, we last long, and I am sure that, unless I meet with an accident, I shall not die until I am very old."

The *medico* looked at him with pity, and glanced for a moment at his neighbor's red face, his short, thick neck, his "corporation," as Chenet called it to himself, that hung down between two flaccid, fat legs, and his apoplectic rotundity of the old, flabby official, and, lifting the white Panama hat which he wore, from his head, he said, with a snigger:—

"I am not so sure of that, old fellow; your mother is as tough as nails, and I should say that your life is not a very good one."

This rather upset Caravan, who did not speak again until the tram put them down at their destination, where the two friends got out, and Chenet asked his friend to have a glass of vermouth at the *Cafe du Globe*, opposite, which both of them were in the habit of frequenting. The proprietor, who was a friend of theirs, held out two fingers to them, which they shook across the bottles on the counter, and then they joined three of their friends, who were playing at dominoes, and who had been there since midday. They exchanged cordial greetings, with the usual inquiries:—"Anything fresh?" and then the three players continued their game, and held out their hands without looking up, when the others wished them "Good-night," and then they both went home to dinner.

Caravan lived in a small, two-storied house in Courbevoie, near where the roads meet; the ground floor was occupied by a hair-dresser. Two bedrooms, a dining-room and a kitchen, formed the whole of their apartments, and Madame Caravan spent nearly her whole time in cleaning them up, while her daughter, Marie-Louise, who was twelve, and her son, Philippe-Auguste, were running about with all the little, dirty, mischievous brats of the neighborhood, and playing in the gutters.

Caravan had installed his mother, whose avarice was notorious in the neighborhood, and who was terribly thin, in the room above them. She was always in a bad temper, and she never passed a day without quarreling and flying into furious tempers. She used to apostrophize the neighbors, who were standing at their own doors, the coster-mongers, the street-sweepers, and the street-boys, in the most violent language, and the latter, to have their revenge, used to follow her at a distance when she went out, and call out rude things after her.

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A little servant from Normandy, who was incredibly giddy and thoughtless, performed the household work, and slept on the second floor, in the same room as the old woman, for fear of anything happening to her in the night.

When Caravan got in, his wife, who suffered from a chronic passion for cleaning, was polishing up the mahogany chairs that were scattered about the room, with a piece of flannel. She always wore cotton gloves, and adorned her head with a cap, which was ornamented with many colored ribbons, which was always tilted on one ear, and whenever anyone caught her polishing, sweeping, or washing, she used to say:—

“I am not rich; everything is very simple in my house, but cleanliness is my luxury, and that is worth quite as much as any other.”

As she was gifted with sound, obstinate, practical common sense, she led her husband in everything. Every evening during dinner, and afterwards, when they were in bed, they talked over the business in the office for a long time, and, although she was twenty years younger than he, he confided everything to her, as if she had had the direction, and followed her advice in every matter.

She had never been pretty, and now she had grown ugly; in addition to that, she was short and thin, while her careless and tasteless way of dressing herself, hid her few, small feminine attributes, which might have been brought out if she had possessed any skill in dress. Her petticoats were always awry, and she frequently scratched herself, no matter on what place, totally indifferent as to who might see her, and so persistently that anybody who saw her, would think that she was suffering from something like the itch. The only ornaments that she allowed herself were silk ribbons, which she had in great profusion, and of various colors mixed together, in the pretentious caps which she wore at home.

As soon as she saw her husband she got up and said, as she kissed his whiskers:

“Did you remember Potin, my dear?”

He fell into a chair, in consternation, for that was the fourth time on which he had forgotten a commission that he had promised to do for her.

“It is a fatality,” he said; “it is no good for me to think of it all day long, for I am sure to forget it in the evening.”

But as she seemed really so very sorry, she merely said, quietly:

“You will think of it to-morrow, I daresay. Anything fresh at the office?”

“Yes, a great piece of news: another tinman has been appointed second chief clerk,” and she became very serious.

“So he succeeds Ramon, this was the very post that I wanted you to have. And what about Ramon?”

“He retires on his pension.”

She grew furious, and her cap slid down on her shoulder, and she continued:

“There is nothing more to be done in that shop now. And what is the name of the new commissioner?”

“Bonassot.”

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She took up the *Naval Year Book*, which she always kept close at hand, and looked him up.

"'Bonassot—Toulon. Born in 1851. Student-Commissioner in 1871. Sub-Commissioner in 1875.' Has he been to sea?" she continued, and at that question Caravan's looks cleared up, and he laughed until his sides shook.

"Just like Balin—just like Balin, his chief." And he added an old office joke, and laughed more than ever:

"It would not even do to send them by water to inspect the *Point-du-Jour*, for they would be sick on the penny steamboats on the Seine."

But she remained as serious as if she had not heard him, and then she said in a low voice, while she scratched her chin:

"If only we had a Deputy to fall back upon. When the Chamber hears everything that is going on at the Admiralty, the Minister will be turned out..."

She was interrupted by a terrible noise on the stairs. Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste, who had just come in from the gutter, were giving each other slaps all the way upstairs. Their mother rushed at them furiously, and taking each of them by an arm, she dragged them into the room, shaking them vigorously, but as soon as they saw their father, they rushed up to him, and he kissed them affectionately, and taking one of them on each knee, he began to talk to them.

Philippe-Auguste was an ugly, ill-kempt little brat, dirty from head to foot, with the face of an idiot, and Marie-Louise was already like her mother—spoke like her, repeated her words, and even imitated her movements. She also asked him whether there was anything fresh at the office, and he replied merrily:

"Your friend, Ramon, who comes and dines here every Sunday, is going to leave us, little one. There is a new second head-clerk."

She looked at her father, and with a precocious child's pity, she said:

"So somebody has been put over your head again!"

He stopped laughing, and did not reply, and then, in order, to create a diversion, he said, addressing his wife, who was cleaning the windows:

"How is mamma, up there?"

Madame Caravan left off rubbing, turned round, pulled her cap up, as it had fallen quite on to her back, and said, with trembling lips:

“Ah! yes; just speak to your mother about this, for she has created a pretty scene. Just think that a short time ago Madame Lebaudin, the hairdresser’s wife, came upstairs to borrow a packet of starch of me, and, as I was not at home, your mother called her *a beggar woman*, and turned her out; but I gave it to the old woman. She pretended not to hear, like she always does when one tells her unpleasant truths, but she is no more deaf than I am, as you know. It is all a sham, and the proof of it is, that she went up to her own room immediately, without saying a word.”

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Caravan did not utter a word, and at that moment the little servant came in to announce dinner. In order to let his mother know, he took a broom-handle, which always stood in a corner, and rapped loudly on the ceiling three times, and they went into the dining-room. Madame Caravan, junior, helped the soup, and waited for the old woman, but she did not come, and the soup was getting cold, so they began to eat slowly, and when their plates were empty, they waited again, and Madame Caravan, who was furious, attacked her husband:

“She does it on purpose, you know that as well as I do. But you always uphold her.”

He, in great perplexity between the two, sent Marie-Louise to fetch her grandmother, and he sat motionless, with his eyes down, while his wife tapped her glass angrily with her knife. In about a minute, the door flew open suddenly, and the child came in again, out of breath and very pale, and said very quickly:

“Grandmamma has fallen down on the ground.”

Caravan jumped up, threw his table-napkin down, and rushed upstairs, while his wife, who thought it was some trick of her mother-in-law’s, followed more slowly, shrugging her shoulders, as if to express her doubt. When they got upstairs, however, they found the old woman lying at full length in the middle of the room, and when they turned her over they saw that she was insensible and motionless, while her skin looked more wrinkled and yellow than usual, and her eyes were closed, her teeth clenched, and her thin body was stiff.

Caravan knelt down by her, and began to moan:

“My poor mother! my poor mother!” he said. But the other Madame Caravan said:

“Bah! She has only fainted again, that is all, and she has done it to prevent us from dining comfortably, you may be sure of that.”

They put her on the bed, undressed her completely, and Caravan, his wife, and the servant began to rub her, but, in spite of their efforts, she did not recover consciousness, so they sent Rosalie, the servant, to fetch *Doctor* Chenet. He lived a long way off, on the quay going towards Suresnes, and so it was considerable time before he arrived. He came at last, however, and, after having looked at the old woman, felt her pulse, auscultated her, he said:—“It is all over.”

Caravan threw himself on the body, sobbing violently; he kissed his mother’s rigid face, and wept so, that great tears fell on the dead woman’s face, like drops of water, and, naturally, Madame Caravan, Junior, showed a decorous amount of grief, and uttered feeble moans, as she stood behind her husband, while she rubbed her eyes vigorously.

But, suddenly, Caravan raised himself up, with his thin hair in disorder, and, looking very ugly in his grief, said:—

“But ... are you sure, doctor?... Are you quite sure?...”

The medical stooped over the body, and, handling it with professional dexterity, like a shopkeeper might do, when showing off his goods, he said:—“See, my dear friend, look at her eye.”

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He raised the eyelid, and the old woman's looks reappeared under his finger, and were altogether unaltered, unless, perhaps, the pupil was rather larger, and Caravan felt a severe shock at the sight. Then Monsieur Chenet took her thin arm, forced the fingers open, and said, angrily, as if he had been contradicted:

"Just look at her hand; I never make a mistake, you may be quite sure of that."

Caravan fell on the bed, and almost bellowed, while his wife, still whimpering, did what was necessary.

She brought the night-table, on which she spread a table napkin, and placed four wax candles on it, which she lighted; then she took a sprig of box, which was hanging over the chimney glass, and put it between the candles, into the plate, which she filled with clean water, as she had no holy water. But, after a moment's rapid reflection, she threw a pinch of salt into the water, no doubt, thinking she was performing some sort of act of consecration by doing that, and when she had finished, she remained standing motionless, and the medical man, who had been helping her, whispered to her:

"We must take Caravan away."

She nodded assent, and, going up to her husband, who was still on his knees, sobbing, she raised him up by one arm, while Chenet took him by the other.

They put him into a chair, and his wife kissed his forehead, and then began to lecture him. Chenet enforced her words, and preached firmness, courage, and resignation—-the very things which are always wanting in such overwhelming misfortunes—and then both of them took him by the arms again and led him out.

He was crying like a great child, with convulsive hiccoughs; his arms were hanging down, and his legs seemed useless, and he went downstairs without knowing what he was doing, and moving his legs mechanically. They put him into the chair which he always occupied at dinner, in front of his empty soup plate. And there he sat, without moving, with his eyes fixed on his glass, and so stupefied with grief, that he could not even think.

In a corner, Madame Caravan was talking with the doctor, and asking what the necessary formalities were, as she wanted to obtain practical information. At last, Monsieur Chenet, who appeared to be waiting for something, took up his hat and prepared to go, saying that he had not dined yet; whereupon, she exclaimed:—

"What! you have not dined? But stop here, doctor; don't go. You shall have whatever we can give you, for, of course, you will understand that we do not fare sumptuously." However, he made excuses and refused, but she persisted, and said:—

“You really must stop; at times like this, people like to have friends near them, and, besides that, perhaps you will be able to persuade my husband to take some nourishment; he must keep up his strength.”

The doctor bowed, and, putting down his hat, he said:—

“In that case, I will accept your invitation, Madame.”

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She gave Rosalie, who seemed to have lost her head, some orders, and then sat down, “to pretend to eat,” as she said, “to keep the *doctor* company.”

The soup was brought in again, and Monsieur Chenet took two helpings. Then there came a dish of tripe, which exhaled a smell of onions, and which Madame Caravan made up her mind to taste.

“It is excellent,” the doctor said, at which she smiled, and, turning to her husband, she said:—

“Do take a little, my poor Alfred, only just to put something into your stomach. Remember you have got to pass the night watching by her!”

He held out his plate, docilely, just as he would have gone to bed, if he had been told to, obeying her in everything, without resistance and without reflection, and, therefore, he ate; the doctor helped himself three times, while Madame Caravan, from time to time, fished out a large piece at the end of her fork, and swallowed it with a sort of studied inattention.

When a salad bowl full of macaroni was brought in, the doctor said:

“By Jove! That is what I am very fond of.” And this time, Madame Caravan helped everybody. She even filled the children’s saucers, which they had scraped clean, and who, being left to themselves, had been drinking wine without any water, and were now kicking each other under the table.

Chenet remembered that Rossini, the composer, had been very fond of that Italian dish, and suddenly he exclaimed:—

“Why! that rhymes, and one could begin some lines like this:

"The Maestro Rossini
Was fond of macaroni."

Nobody listened to him, however. Madame Caravan, who had suddenly grown thoughtful, was thinking of all the probable consequences of the event, while her husband made bread pellets, which he put on the table-cloth, and looked at with a fixed, idiotic stare. As he was devoured by thirst, he was continually raising his glass full of wine to his lips, and the consequences were that his senses, which had already been rather upset by the shock and grief, seemed to dance about vaguely in his head, as if they were going to vanish altogether.

Meanwhile, the doctor, who had been drinking away steadily, was getting visibly drunk, and Madame Caravan herself felt the reaction which follows all nervous shocks, and

was agitated and excited, and although she had been drinking nothing but water, she felt her head rather confused.

By-and-bye, Chenet began to relate stories of deaths, that appeared funny to him. In that suburb of Paris, that is full of people from the provinces, one meets with that indifference towards death were it even a father or mother, which all peasants show; that want of respect, that unconscious ferociousness which is so common in the country, and so rare in Paris, and he said:

“Why, I was sent for last week to the *Rue du Puteaux*, and when I went, I found the sick person (and there was the whole family calmly sitting near the bed) finishing a bottle of liquor of aniseed, which had been bought the night before to satisfy the dying man’s fancy.”

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But Madame Caravan was not listening; she was continually thinking of the inheritance, and Caravan was incapable of understanding anything.

Soon coffee was served, which had been made very strong, and as every cup was well qualified with cognac, it made all their faces red, and confused their ideas still more; to make matters still worse, Chenet suddenly seized the brandy bottle and poured out “a drop just to wash their mouths out with,” as he termed it, for each of them, and then, without speaking any more, overcome in spite of themselves, by that feeling of animal comfort which alcohol affords after dinner, they slowly sipped the sweet cognac, which formed a yellowish syrup at the bottom of their cups.

The children had gone to sleep, and Rosalie carried them off to bed, and then, Caravan, mechanically obeying that wish to forget oneself which possesses all unhappy persons, helped himself to brandy again several times, and his dull eyes grew bright. At last the doctor rose to go, and seizing his friend’s arm, he said:

“Come with me; a little fresh air will do you good. When one is in trouble, one must not stick to one spot.”

The other obeyed mechanically, put on his hat, took his stick, and went out, and both of them went arm-in-arm towards the Seine, in the starlight night.

The air was warm and sweet, for all the gardens in the neighborhood were full of flowers at that season of the year, and their scent, which is scarcely perceptible during the day, seemed to awaken at the approach of night, and mingled with the light breezes which blew upon them in the darkness.

The broad avenue, with its two rows of gaslamps, that extended as far as the *Arc de Triomphe*, was deserted and silent, but there was the distant roar of Paris, which seemed to have a reddish vapor hanging over it. It was a kind of continual rumbling, which was at times answered by the whistle of a train at full speed, in the distance, traveling to the ocean, through the provinces.

The fresh air on the faces of the two men rather overcame them at first, made the doctor lose his equilibrium a little, and increased Caravan’s giddiness, from which he had suffered since dinner. He walked as if he were in a dream; his thoughts were paralyzed, although he felt no grief, for he was in a state of mental torpor that prevented him from suffering, and he even felt a sense of relief which was increased by the mildness of the night.

When they reached the bridge they turned to the right, and they got the fresh breeze from the river. It rolled along, calm and melancholy, bordered by tall poplar trees, and the stars looked as if they were floating on the water and were moving with the current. A slight, white mist that floated over the opposite banks, filled their lungs with a

sensation of cold, and Caravan stopped suddenly, for he was struck by that smell from the water, which brought back old

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memories to his mind. For he, suddenly, in his mind, saw his mother again, in Picardy, as he had seen her years before, kneeling in front of their door, and washing the heaps of linen, by her side, in the stream that ran through their garden. He almost fancied that he could hear the sound of the wooden beetle with which she beat the linen, in the calm silence of the country, and her voice, as she called out to him:

“Alfred, bring me some soap.” And he smelt that odor of the trickling water, of the mist rising from the wet ground, the heap of wet linen, which he should never forget, and which came back to him on the very evening on which his mother died.

He stopped, with a feeling of despair, and felt heartbroken at that eternal separation. His life seemed cut in half, all his youth disappeared, swallowed up by that death. All the *former* life was over and done with, all the recollections of his youthful days would vanish; for the future, there would be nobody to talk to him of what had happened in days gone by, of the people he had known of old, of his own part of the country, and of his past life; that was a part of his existence which existed no longer, and the other might as well end now.

And then he saw *Mamma* as she was when younger, wearing well-worn dresses, which he remembered for such a long time that they seemed inseparable from her; he recollected her movements, the different tones of her voice, her habits, her manias, her fits of anger, the wrinkles on her face, the movements of her thin fingers, and all her well-known attitudes, which she would never have again, and clutching hold of the doctor, he began to moan and weep. His lank legs began to tremble, his whole, stout body was shaken by his sobs, all he could say was:

“My mother, my poor mother, my poor mother...!”

But his companion, who was still drunk, and who intended to finish the evening in certain places of bad repute that he frequented secretly, made him sit down on the grass by the riverside, and left him almost immediately, under the pretext that he had to see a patient.

Caravan went on crying for a long time, and then, when he had got to the end of his tears, when his grief had, so to say, run out of him, he again felt relief, repose, and sudden tranquillity.

The moon had risen, and bathed the horizon in its soft light.

The tall poplar trees had a silvery sheen on them, and the mist on the plain, looked like floating snow; the river, in which the stars were reflected, and which looked as if it were covered with mother-of-pearl, was rippled by the wind. The air was soft and sweet, and

Caravan inhaled it almost greedily, and thought that he could perceive a feeling of freshness, of calm and of superhuman consolation pervading him.

He really tried to resist that feeling of comfort and relief, and kept on saying to himself: —“My mother, my poor mother!” ... and tried to make himself cry, from a kind of a conscientious feeling, but he could not succeed in doing so any longer and those sad thoughts, which had made him sob so bitterly a short time before, had almost passed away. In a few moments, he rose to go home, and returned slowly, under the influence of that serene night, and with a heart soothed in spite of himself.

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When he reached the bridge he saw that the last tramcar was ready to start, and the lights through the windows of the *Cafe du Globe*, and he felt a longing to tell somebody of the catastrophe that had happened, to excite pity, to make himself interesting. He put on a woeful face, pushed open the door, and went up to the counter, where the landlord still was. He had counted on creating an effect, and had hoped that everybody would get up and come to him with outstretched hands, and say:—"Why, what is the matter with you?" But nobody noticed his disconsolate face, so he rested his two elbows on the counter, and, burying his face in his hands, he murmured: "Good heavens! Good heavens!"

The landlord looked at him and said: "Are you ill, Monsieur Caravan?"

"No, my friend," he replied, "but my mother has just died."

"Ah!" the other exclaimed, and as a customer at the other end of the establishment asked for a glass of Bavarian beer, he went to attend to him, left Caravan almost stupefied at his want of sympathy.

The three domino players were sitting at the same table which they had occupied before dinner, totally absorbed in their game, and Caravan went up to them, in search of pity, but as none of them appeared to notice him, he made up his mind to speak.

"A great misfortune has happened to me since I was here," he said.

All three slightly raised their heads at the same instant, but keeping their eyes fixed on the pieces which they held in their hands.

"What do you say?"

"My mother has just died;" whereupon one of them said:

"Oh! the devil," with that false air of sorrow which indifferent people assume. Another, who could not find anything to say, emitted a sort of sympathetic whistle, shaking his head at the same time, and the third turned to the game again, as if he were saying to himself: "Is that all!"

Caravan had expected some of those expressions that are said to "come from the heart," and when he saw how his news was received, he left the table, indignant at their calmness before their friend's sorrow, although at that moment he was so dazed with grief, that he hardly felt it, and went home. When he got in, his wife was waiting for him in her nightgown, and sitting in a low chair by the open window, still thinking of the inheritance.

"Undress yourself," she said; "we will talk when we are in bed."

He raised his head, and looking at the ceiling, he said:

“But ... there is nobody up there.”

“I beg your pardon, Rosalie is with her, and you can go and take her place at three o’clock in the morning, when you have had some sleep.”

He only partially undressed, however, so as to be ready for anything that might happen, and after tying a silk handkerchief round his head, he joined his wife, who had just got in between the sheets, and for some time they remained side by side, and neither of them spoke. She was thinking.

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Even in bed, her night-cap was adorned with a red bow, and was pushed rather over one ear, as was the way with all the caps that she wore, and, presently, she turned towards him and said:

“Do you know whether your mother made a will?”

He hesitated for a moment, and then replied:

“I ... I do not think so.... No, I am sure that she did not.”

His wife looked at him, and she said, in a low, furious voice:

“I call that infamous; here we have been wearing ourselves out for ten years in looking after her, and have boarded and lodged her! Your sister would not have done so much for her, nor I either, if I had known how I was to be rewarded! Yes, it is a disgrace to her memory! I daresay that you will tell me that she paid us, but one cannot pay one’s children in ready money for what they do; that obligation is recognized after death; at any rate, that is how honorable people act. So I have had all my worry and trouble for nothing! Oh, that is nice! that is very nice!”

Poor Caravan, who felt nearly distracted, kept on saying:

“My dear, my dear, please, please be quiet.”

She grew calmer by degrees, and, resuming her usual voice and manner, she continued:

“We must let your sister know, to-morrow.”

He started, and said:

“Of course, we must; I had forgotten all about it; I will send her a telegram the first thing in the morning.”

“No,” she replied, like a woman who had foreseen everything; “no, do not send it before ten or eleven o’clock, so that we may have time to turn round before she comes. It does not take more than two hours to get here from Charenton, and we can say that you lost your head from grief. If we let her know in the course of the day, that will be soon enough, and will give us time to look round.”

But Caravan put his hand to his forehead, and, in the same timid voice in which he always spoke of his chief, the very thought of whom made him tremble, he said:

“I must let them know at the office.”

“Why?” she replied. “On such occasions like this, it is always excusable to forget. Take my advice, and don’t let him know; your chief will not be able to say anything to you, and you will put him in a nice fix.”

“Oh! yes, that I shall, and he will be in a terrible rage, too, when he notices my absence. Yes, you are right; it is a capital idea, and when I tell him that my mother is dead, he will be obliged to hold his tongue.”

And he rubbed his hands in delight at the joke, when he thought of his chief’s face; while the body of the dead old woman lay upstairs, and the servant was asleep close to it.

But Madame Caravan grew thoughtful, as if she were pre-occupied by something, which she did not care to mention, but at last she said:

“Your mother had given you her clock, had she not; the girl playing at cup and ball?”

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He thought for a moment, and then replied:

“Yes, yes; she said to me (but it was a long time ago, when she first came here): ‘I shall leave the clock to you, if you look after me well.’”

Madame Caravan was reassured, and regained her serenity, and said:

“Well, then, you must go and fetch it out of her room, for if we get your sister here, she will prevent us from having it.”

He hesitated.

“Do you think so?...”

That made her angry.

“I certainly think so; as soon as it is in our possession, she will know nothing at all about where it came from; it belongs to us. It is just the same with the chest of drawers with the marble top, that is in her room; she gave it me one day when she was in a good temper. We will bring it down at the same time.”

Caravan, however, seemed incredulous, and said:

“But, my dear, it is a great responsibility!”

She turned on him furiously.

“Oh! Indeed! Will you never alter? You would let your children die of hunger, rather than make a move. Does not that chest of drawers belong to us, as she gave it to me? And if your sister is not satisfied, let her tell me so, me! I don’t care a straw for your sister. Come, get up, and we will bring down what your mother gave us, immediately.”

Trembling and vanquished, he got out of bed, and began to put on his trousers, but she stopped him:

“It is not worth while to dress yourself; your drawers are quite enough; I mean to go as I am.”

They both left the room in their night clothes, went upstairs quite noiselessly, opened the door and went into the room, where the four lighted tapers and the plate with the sprig of box alone seemed to be watching the old woman in her rigid repose; for Rosalie, who was lying back in the easy chair with her legs stretched out, her hands folded in her lap, and her head on one side, was also quite motionless, and was snoring with her mouth wide open.

Caravan took the clock, which was one of those grotesque objects that were produced so plentifully under the Empire. A girl in gilt bronze was holding a cup and ball, and the ball formed the pendulum.

“Give that to me,” his wife said, “and take the marble top off the chest of drawers.”

He put the marble on his shoulder with a considerable effort, and they left the room. Caravan had to stoop in the door-way, and trembled as he went downstairs, while his wife walked backwards, so as to light him, and held the candlestick in one hand, while she had the clock under her other arm.

When they were in their own room, she heaved a sigh.

“We have got over the worst part of the job,” she said; “so now let us go and fetch the other things.”

But the drawers were full of the old woman’s wearing apparel, which they must manage to hide somewhere, and Madame Caravan soon thought of a plan.

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“Go and get that wooden box in the passage; it is hardly worth anything, and we may just as well put it here.”

And when he had brought it upstairs, the change began. One by one, she took out all the collars, cuffs, chemises, caps, all the well-worn things that had belonged to the poor woman lying there behind them, and arranged them methodically in the wooden box, in such a manner as to deceive Madame Braux, the deceased woman’s other child, who would be coming the next day.

When they had finished, they first of all carried the drawers downstairs, and the remaining portion afterwards, each of them holding an end, and it was some time before they could make up their minds where it would stand best; but at last they settled upon their own room, opposite the bed, between the two windows, and as soon as it was in its place, Madame Caravan filled it with her own things. The clock was placed on the chimney-piece in the dining-room, and they looked to see what the effect was, and they were both delighted with it, and agreed that nothing could be better. Then they got into bed, she blew out the candle, and soon everybody in the house was asleep.

It was broad daylight when Caravan opened his eyes again. His mind was rather confused when he woke up, and he did not clearly remember what had happened, for a few minutes; when he did, he felt it painfully, and jumped out of bed, almost ready to cry again.

He very soon went to the room overhead, where Rosalie was still sleeping in the same position as the night before, for she did not wake up once during the whole time. He sent her to do her work, put fresh tapers in the place of those that had burnt out, and then he looked at his mother, revolving in his brain those apparently profound thoughts, those religious and philosophical commonplaces, which trouble people of mediocre minds, in the face of death.

But he went down stairs as soon as his wife called him. She had written out a list of what had to be done during the morning, which rather frightened him when he saw that he would have to do all this:

1. Give information of the death to the Mayor’s officer. 2. See the doctor who had attended her. 3. Order the coffin. 4. Give notice at the church. 5. Go to the undertaker. 6. Order the notices of her death at the printer’s. 7. Go to the lawyer. 8. Telegraph the news to all the family.

Besides all this there were a number of small commissions; so he took his hat and went out, and as the news had got abroad, Madame Caravan’s female friends and neighbors soon began to come in, and begged to be allowed to see the body. There had been a scene at the hairdresser’s, on the ground floor, about the matter, between husband and wife, while he was shaving a customer; for while she was knitting the woman had said:

“Well, there is one less, and as great a miser as one ever meets with. I certainly was not very fond of her; but, nevertheless, I must go and have a look at her.”

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The husband, while lathering his *patient's* chin, said: "That is another queer fancy! Nobody but a woman would think of such a thing. It is not enough for them to worry you during life, but they cannot even leave you at peace when you are dead." But his wife, without disconcerting herself the least, replied: "The feeling is stronger than I, and I must go. It has been on me since the morning. If I was not to see her, I should think about it all my life, but when I have had a good look at her, I shall be satisfied."

The knight of the razor shrugged his shoulders, and remarked in a low voice to the gentleman whose cheek he was scraping: "I just ask you, what sort of ideas do you think these confounded females have? I should not amuse myself by going to see a corpse!" But his wife had heard him, and replied very quietly: "But it is so, it is so." And then, putting her knitting on the counter, she went upstairs, to the first floor, where she met two other neighbors, who had just come, and who were discussing the event with Madame Caravan, who was giving them the details, and they all went together to the mortuary chamber. The four women went in softly, and, one after the other, sprinkled the bed clothes with the holy water, knelt down, made the sign of the cross while they mumbled a prayer, then they got up, and open-mouthed, regarded the corpse for a long time, while the daughter-in-law of the dead woman, with her handkerchief to her face, pretended to be sobbing piteously.

When she turned about to walk away, whom should she perceive standing close to the door but Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste, who were curiously taking stock of things. Then, forgetting to control her chagrin, she threw herself upon them with uplifted hands, crying out in a furious voice, "Will you get out of this, you filthy brats."

Ten minutes later, in going upstairs again with another contingent of neighbors, she prayed, wept profusely, performed all her duties, and found once more her two children, who had followed her up stairs. She again boxed their ears soundly, but the next time she paid no heed to them, and at each fresh arrival of visitors the two urchins always followed in the wake, crowded themselves up in a corner, and imitating slavishly everything they saw their mother do.

When the afternoon came round the crowds of curious people began to diminish, and soon there were no more visitors. Madame Caravan, returning to her own apartments, began to make the necessary preparations for the funeral ceremony, and the defunct was hence left by herself.

The window of the room was open. A torrid heat entered along with the clouds of dust; the flames of the four candles were flickering in the direction of the immobile corpse, and upon the cloth which covered the face, the closed eyes, the two hands stretched out, small flies alighted, came, went, and careered up and down incessantly, being the only companions of the old woman during the next hour.

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Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste, however, had now left the house, and were running up and down the street. They were soon surrounded by their playmates, by little girls, especially, who were older, and who were much more interested to inquire into all the mysteries of life, asking questions after the manner of persons of great importance.

“Then your grandmother is dead?” “Yes, she died yesterday evening.” “How, in what way did she meet her death?”

Then Marie began to explain, telling all about the candles and the cadaverous face. It was not long before great curiosity was aroused in the breasts of all the children, and they asked to be allowed to go upstairs to look at the departed.

It was not long before Marie-Louise had arranged a group for a first visit, consisting of five girls and two boys—the biggest and the most courageous. She made them take off their shoes so that they might not be discovered. The troupe filed into the house and mounted the stairs as stealthily as an army of mice.

Once in the chamber, the little girl, imitating her mother, regulated the ceremony. She solemnly walked in advance of her comrades, went down on her knees, made the sign of the cross, moistened her lips with the holy water, stood up again, sprinkled the bed, and while the children, all crowded together, were approaching—frightened and curious, and eager to look at the face and hands of the deceased—she began suddenly to simulate sobbing, and to bury her eyes in her little handkerchief. Then, becoming instantly consoled, on thinking of the other children who were downstairs waiting at the door, she withdrew in haste, returning in a minute with another group, then a third, for all the little ruffians of the country-side, even to the little beggars in rags, had congregated in order to participate in this new pleasure; and each time she repeated her mother’s grimaces with absolute perfection.

At length, however, she became tired. Some game or other attracted the children away from the house, and the old grandmother was left alone, forgotten suddenly by everybody.

A dismal gloom pervaded the chamber, and upon the dry and rigid features of the corpse, the dying flames of the candles cast occasional gleams of light.

Towards 8 o’clock, Caravan ascended to the chamber of death, closed the windows, and renewed the candles. On entering now he was quite composed, evidently accustomed already to regard the corpse as though it had been there for a month. He even went the length of declaring that, as yet, there was not any signs of decomposition, making this remark just at the moment when he and his wife were about to sit down at table. “Pshaw!” she responded, “she is now in wood; she will keep there for a year.”

The soup was eaten without a word being uttered by anyone. The children, who had been free all day, now worn out by fatigue, were sleeping soundly on their chairs, and nobody ventured on breaking the silence.

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Suddenly the flame of the lamp went down. *Mdme*. Caravan immediately turned up the wick, a prolonged gurgling noise ensued, and the light went out. It had been forgotten during the day to buy oil. To send for it now to the grocers' would keep back the dinner, and everybody began to look for candles, but none were to be found except the night lights which had been placed upon the tables upstairs, in the death chamber.

Mdme. Caravan, always prompt in her decisions, quickly dispatched Marie-Louise to fetch two, and her return was awaited in total darkness.

The footsteps of the girl who had ascended the stairs were distinctly heard. There followed now a silence for a few seconds, then the child descended precipitately. She threw open the door affrighted, and in a choked voice murmured: "Oh! papa, grandmamma is dressing herself!"

Caravan bounded to his feet with such precipitance that his chair rolled over against the chair. He stammered out: "You say?... What is that you say?"

But Marie-Louise, gasping with emotion, repeated: "Grand ... grand ... grandmamma is putting on her clothes, she is coming down stairs."

Caravan rushed boldly up the staircase, followed by his wife, dumbfounded; but he came to a standstill before the door of the second floor, overcome with terror, not daring to enter. What was he going to see? *Mdme*. Caravan, more courageous, turned the handle of the door and stepped forward into the room.

The room seemed to become darker, and in the middle of it, a tall emaciated figure moved about. The old woman stood upright, and in awakening from her lethargic sleep, before even full consciousness had returned to her, in turning upon her side, and raising herself on her elbow, she had extinguished three of the candles which burned near the mortuary bed. Then, recovering her strength, she got out of bed and began to seek for her things. The absence of her chest of drawers had at first given her some trouble, but, after a little, she had succeeded in finding her things at the bottom of the wooden trunk, and was now quietly dressing. She emptied the plateful of holy water, replaced the box which contained the latter behind the looking-glass and arranged the chairs in their places, and was ready to go downstairs when there appeared before her her son and daughter-in-law.

Caravan rushed forward, seized her by the hands, embraced her with tears in his eyes, while his wife, who was behind him, repeated in a hypocritical tone of voice: "Oh, what a blessing! Oh, what a blessing!"

But the old woman, without being at all moved, without even appearing to understand, as rigid as a statue, and with glazed eyes, simply asked: "Will the dinner soon be ready?"

He stammered out, not knowing what he said: “O, yes, mother, we have been waiting for you.”

And with an alacrity, unusual in him, he took her arm, while *Mdme*. Caravan, the younger, seized the candle and lighted them downstairs, walking backwards in front of them, step by step, just as she had done the previous night, in front of her husband, who was carrying the marble.

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On reaching the first floor, she ran up against people who were ascending. It was the Charenton family, *Mdme*. Braux, followed by her husband.

The wife, tall, fleshy, with a dropsical stomach which threw her trunk far out behind her, opened wide her astonished eyes, ready to take flight. The husband, a shoemaker socialist, a little hairy man, the perfect image of a monkey, murmured, quite unconcerned: "Well, what next? Is she resurrected?"

As soon as *Mdme*. Caravan recognized them, she made despairing signs to them, then, speaking aloud, she said: "Mercy! How do you mean!... Look there! What a happy surprise!"

But *Mdme*. Braux, dumbfounded, understood nothing; she responded in a low voice: "It was your dispatch which made us come; we believed it was all over."

Her husband, who was behind her, pinched her to make her keep silent. He added with a malignant laugh, which his thick beard concealed: "It was very kind of you to invite us here. We set out in post haste."—which remark showed clearly the hostility which had for a long time reigned between the households. Then, just as the old woman had arrived at the last steps, he pushed forward quickly and rubbed against her cheeks the hair which covered his face, bawling out in her ear, on account of her deafness: "How well you look, mother; sturdy as usual, hey!"

Mdme. Braux, in her stupor at seeing the old woman whom they all believed to be dead, dared not even embrace her; and her enormous belly blocked up the passage and hindered the others from advancing. The old woman, uneasy and suspicious, but without speaking, looked at everyone around her; and her little gray eyes, piercing and hard, fixed themselves now on the one and now on the other, and they were so terrible in their expression that the children became frightened.

Caravan, to explain matters, said: "She has been somewhat ill, but she is better now; quite well, indeed, are you not, mother?"

Then the good woman, stopping in her walk, responded in a husky voice, as though it came from a distance: "It was syncope. I heard you all the while."

An embarrassing silence followed. They entered the dining-room, and in a few minutes they all sat down to an improvised dinner.

Only M. Braux had retained his self-possession; his gorilla features grinned wickedly, while he let fall some words of double meaning which painfully disconcerted everyone.

But the clock in the hall kept on ticking every second; and Rosalie, lost in astonishment, came to seek out Caravan, who darted a fierce glance at her, as she threw down his serviette. His brother-in-law even asked him whether it was not one of his days to hold

a reception, to which he stammered out, in answer: “No, I have only been executing a few commissions; nothing more.”

Next, a packet was brought in, which he began to open sadly, and from which dropped out unexpectedly a letter with black borders. Then, reddening up to the very eyes, he picked up the letter hurriedly, and pushed it into his waistcoat pocket.

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His mother had not seen it! She was looking intently at her clock, which stood on the mantelpiece, and the embarrassment increased in midst of a glacial silence. Turning her face towards her daughter, the old woman, from whose eyes flashed fierce malice, said: "On Monday, you must take me away from here, so that I can see your little girl. I want so much to see her." Madame Braux, her features illuminated, exclaimed: "Yes, mother, that I will," while *Mdme*. Caravan, the younger, became pale, and seemed to be enduring the most excruciating agony. The two men, however, gradually drifted into conversation, and soon became embroiled in a political discussion. Braux maintained the most revolutionary and communistic doctrines, gesticulating and throwing about his arms, his eyes darting like a blood-hound's. "Property, sir," he said, "is robbery perpetrated on the working classes; the land is the common property of every man; hereditary rights are an infamy and a disgrace." But, hereupon, he suddenly stopped, having all the appearance of a man who has just said something foolish; then, resuming, after a pause, he said, in softer tones: "But I can see quite well that this is not the proper moment to discuss such things."

The door was opened, and Doctor Chenet appeared. For a moment he seemed bewildered, but regaining his usual smirking expression of countenance, he jauntily approached the old woman, and said: "Ah, hah! mamma, you are better to-day. Oh! I never had any doubt but you would come round again; in fact, I said to myself as I was mounting the staircase, 'I have an idea that I shall find the old one on her feet once more;'" and he tapped her gently on the back: "Ah! she is as solid as the Pont-Neuf, she will see us all out; you shall see if she does not."

He sat down, accepted the coffee that was offered him, and soon began to join in the conversation of the two men, backing up Braux, for he himself had been mixed up in the Commune.

Now, the old woman, feeling herself fatigued, wished to leave the room, at which Caravan rushed forward. She thereupon fixed him in the eyes and said to him: "You, you, must carry my clock and chest of drawers up stairs again without a moment's delay." "Yes, mamma," he replied, yawning; "yes, I will do so." The old woman then took the arm of her daughter and withdrew from the room. The two Caravans remained rooted to the floor, silent, plunged in the deepest despair, while Braux rubbed his hands and sipped his coffee, gleefully.

Suddenly *Mdme*. Caravan, consumed with rage, rushed at him, exclaiming: "You are a thief, a footpad, a cur. I would spit in your face, if ... I would ... I ... would...." She could find nothing further to say, suffocating as she was, with rage, while he still sipped his coffee, with a smile.

His wife returning just then, looked menacingly at her sister-in-law, and both—the one with her enormous fat stomach, the other, epileptic and spare, voice changed, hands trembling—flew at one another and seized each other by the throat.

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Chenet and Braux now interposed, and the latter taking his better half by the shoulders pushed her out of the door in front of him, shouting to his sister-in-law: "Go away, you slut: you are a disgrace to your relations;" and the two were heard in the street bellowing and shouting at the Caravans, until after they had disappeared from sight.

M. Chenet also took his departure, leaving the Caravans alone, face to face. The husband soon fell back on his chair, and with the cold sweat standing out in beads on his temples, murmured: "What shall I say to my chief to-morrow?"

THE ODALISQUE OF SENICHOU

In Senichou, which is a suburb of Prague, there lived about twenty years ago, two poor but honest people, who earned their bread by the sweat of their brow; he worked in a large printing establishment, and his wife employed her spare time as a laundress. Their pride, and their only pleasure, was their daughter Viteska, who was a vigorous, voluptuous-looking, handsome girl of eighteen, whom they brought up very well and carefully. She worked for a dress-maker, and was thus able to help her parents a little, and she made use of her leisure moments to improve her education, and especially her music. She was a general favorite in the neighborhood on account of her quiet modest demeanor, and she was looked upon as a model by the whole suburb.

When she went to work in the town, the tall girl with her magnificent head, which resembled that of an ancient, Bohemian Amazon, with its wealth of black hair, and her dark, sparkling yet soft eyes, attracted the looks of passers-by, in spite of her shabby dress, much more than the graceful, well-dressed ladies of the aristocracy. Frequently some young, wealthy lounger would follow her home; and even try to get into conversation with her, but she always managed to get rid of them and their importunities, and she did not require any protector, for she was quite capable of protecting herself from any insults.

One evening, however, she met a man on the suspension bridge, whose strange appearance made her give him a look which evinced some interest, but perhaps even more surprise. He was a tall, handsome man with bright eyes and a black beard; he was very sunburnt, and in his long coat, which was like a caftan, with a red fez on his head, he gave those who saw him the impression of an Oriental; he had noticed her look all the more as he himself had been so struck by her poor, and at the same time regal, appearance, that he remained standing and looking at her in such a way, that he seemed to be devouring her with his eyes, so that Viteska, who was usually so fearless, looked down. She hurried on and he followed her, and the quicker she walked, the more rapidly he followed her, and, at last, when they were in a narrow, dark street in the suburb, he suddenly said in an insinuating voice: "May I offer you my arm, my pretty

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girl?" "You can see that I am old enough to look after myself," Viteska replied hastily; "I am much obliged to you, and must beg you not to follow me any more; I am known in this neighborhood, and it might damage my reputation." "Oh! You are very much mistaken if you think you will get rid of me so easily," he replied. "I have just come from the East and am returning there soon, come with me, and as I fancy that you are as sensible as you are beautiful, you will certainly make your fortune there, and I will bet that before the end of a year, you will be covered with diamonds, and be waited on by eunuchs and female slaves."

"I am a respectable girl, sir," she replied proudly, and tried to go on in front, but the stranger was immediately at her side again. "You were born to rule," he whispered to her. "Believe me, and I understand the matter, that you will live to be a Sultaness, if you have any luck." The girl did not give him any answer, but walked on. "But, at any rate, listen to me," the tempter continued. "I will not listen to anything; because I am poor, you think it will be easy for you to seduce me," Viteska exclaimed: "but I am as virtuous as I am poor, and I should despise any position which I had to buy with shame." They had reached the little house where her parents lived, and she ran in quickly, and slammed the door behind her.

When she went into the town the next morning, the stranger was waiting at the corner of the street where she lived, and bowed to her very respectfully. "Allow me to speak a few words with you," he began. "I feel that I ought to beg your pardon for my behavior yesterday." "Please let me go on my way quietly," the girl replied. "What will the neighbors think of me?" "I did not know you," he went on, without paying any attention to her angry looks, "but your extraordinary beauty attracted me. Now that I know that you are as virtuous as you are charming, I wish very much to become better acquainted with you. Believe me, I have the most honorable intentions."

Unfortunately, the bold stranger had taken the girl's fancy, and she could not find it in her heart to refuse him. "If you are really in earnest," she stammered in charming confusion, "do not follow me about in the public streets, but come to my parents' house like a man of honor, and state your intentions there." "I will certainly do so, and immediately, if you like," the stranger replied, eagerly. "No, no," Viteska said; "but come this evening if you like."

The stranger bowed and left her, and really called on her parents in the evening. He introduced himself as Ireneus Krisapolis, a merchant from Smyrna, spoke of his brilliant circumstances, and finally declared that he loved Viteska passionately. "That is all very nice and right," the cautious father replied, "but what will it all lead to? Under no circumstances can I allow you to visit my daughter. Such a passion as yours often dies out as quickly as it arises, and a respectable girl is easily robbed of her virtue." "And suppose I make up my mind to marry your daughter?" the stranger asked, after a

moment's hesitation. "Then I shall refer you to my child, for I shall never force Viteska to marry against her will," her father said.

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The stranger seized the pretty girl's hand, and spoke in glowing terms of his love for her, of the luxury with which she would be surrounded in his house, of the wonders of the East, to which he hoped to take her, and at last Viteska consented to become his wife. Thereupon the stranger hurried on the arrangements for the wedding, in a manner that made the most favorable impression on them all, and during the time before their marriage he lay at her feet like her humble slave.

As soon as they were married, the newly-married couple set off on their journey to Smyrna and promised to write as soon as they got there, but a month, then two and three, passed without the parents, whose anxiety increased every day, receiving a line from them, until at last the father in terror applied to the police.

The first thing was to write to the Consul at Smyrna for information: his reply was to the effect that no merchant of the name of Ireneus Krisapolis was known in Smyrna, and that he had never been there. The police, at the entreaties of the frantic parents, continued their investigations, but for a long time without any result. At last, however, they obtained a little light on the subject, but it was not at all satisfactory. The police at Pestle said that a man, whose personal appearance exactly agreed with the description of Viteska's husband, had a short time before carried off two girls from the Hungarian capital, to Turkey, evidently intending to trade in that coveted, valuable commodity there, but that when he found that the authorities were on his track he had escaped from justice by a sudden flight.

* * * * *

Four years after Viteska's mysterious disappearance, two persons, a man and a woman, met in a narrow street in Damascus, in a scarcely less strange manner, than when the Greek merchant met Viteska on the suspension bridge at Prague. The man with the black beard, the red fez, and the long, green caftan, was no one else than Ireneus Krisapolis; matters appeared to be going well with him; he had his hands comfortably thrust into the red shawl which he had round his waist, and a negro was walking behind him with a large parasol, while another carried his *Chiloque* after him. A noble Turkish lady met him in a litter borne by four slaves; she was wrapped like a ghost in a white veil, only that a pair of large, dark, threatening eyes flashed at the merchant.

He smiled, for he thought that he had found favor in the eyes of an Eastern houri, and that flattered him; but he soon lost sight of her in the crowd, and forgot her almost immediately. The next morning however, a eunuch of the pasha's came to him, to his no small astonishment, and told him to come with him. He took him to the Sultan's most powerful deputy, who ruled as an absolute despot in Damascus. They went through dark, narrow passages, and curtains were pushed aside, which rustled behind them again. At last they reached a large rotunda,

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the center of which was occupied by a beautiful fountain, while scarlet divans ran all around it. Here the eunuch told the merchant to wait, and left him. He was puzzling his brains what the meaning of it all could be, when suddenly a tall, commanding woman came into the apartment. Again a pair of large, threatening eyes looked at him through the veil, while he knew from her green, gold-embroidered caftan, that if it was not the pasha's wife, it was at least one of his favorites, who was before him, and so he hurriedly knelt down, and crossing his hands on his breast, he put his head on to the ground before her. But a clear, diabolical laugh made him look up, and when the beautiful Odalisque threw back her veil, he uttered a cry of terror, for his wife, his deceived wife, whom he had sold, was standing before him.

"Do you know me?" she asked with quiet dignity. "Viteska!" "Yes, that was my name when I was your wife," she replied quickly, in a contemptuous voice; "but now that I am the pasha's wife, my name is Sarema. I do not suppose you ever expected to find me again, you wretch, when you sold me in Varna to an old Jewish profligate, who was only half alive. You see I have got into better hands, and I have made my fortune, as you said I should do. Well? What do you expect of me; what thanks, what reward?"

The wretched man was lying overwhelmed, at the feet of the woman whom he had so shamefully deceived, and could not find a word to say; he had felt that he was lost, and had not even got the courage to beg for mercy. "You deserve death, you miscreant," Sarema continued. "You are in my hands, and I can do whatever I please with you, for the pasha has left your punishment to me alone. I ought to have you impaled, and to feast my eyes on your death agonies. That would be the smallest compensation for all the years of degradation that I have been through, and which I owe to you." "Mercy, Viteska! Mercy!" the wretched man cried, trembling all over, and raising his hands to her in supplication.

The Odalisque's only reply was a laugh, in which rang all the cruelty of an insulted woman's deceived heart. It seemed to give her pleasure to see the man whom she had loved, and who had so shamefully trafficked in her beauty, in his mortal agony, as he cringed before her, whining for his life, as he clung to her knees, but at last she seemed to relent somewhat.

"I will give your life, you miserable wretch," she said, "but you shall not go unpunished." So saying, she clapped her hands, and four black eunuchs came in, and seized the favorite's unfortunate husband and in a moment bound his hands and feet.

"I have altered my mind, and he shall not be put to death," Sarema said, with a smile that made the traitor's blood run cold in his veins; "but give him a hundred blows with the bastinade, and I will stand by and count them." "For God's sake," the merchant

screamed, “I can never endure it.” “We will see about that,” the favorite said, coldly, “and if you die under it, it was allotted you by fate; I am not going to retract my orders.”

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She threw herself down on the cushions, and began to smoke a long pipe, which a female slave handed to her on her knees. At a sign from her the eunuchs tied the wretched man's feet to the pole, by which the soles of the culprit were raised, and began the terrible punishment. Already at the tenth blow the merchant began to roar like a wild animal, but his wife whom he had betrayed, remained unmoved, carelessly blowing the blue wreaths of smoke into the air, and resting on her lovely arm, she watched his features, which were distorted by pain, with merciless enjoyment.

During the last blows he only groaned gently, and then he fainted.

* * * * *

A year later the dealer was caught with his female merchandise by the police in an Austrian town, and handed over to justice, when he made a full confession, and by that means the parents of the *Odalisque of Senichou* heard of their daughter's position. As they knew that she was happy and surrounded by luxury, they made no attempt to get her out of the Pasha's hands, who, like a thorough Mussulman, had become the slave of his slave.

The unfortunate husband was sent over to the frontier when he was released from prison. His shameful traffic, however, flourishes still, in spite of all the precautions of the police and of the consuls, and every year he provides the harems of the East with those voluptuous *Boxclanas*, especially from Bohemia and Hungary, who, in the eyes of a Mussulman, vie for the prize of beauty, with the slender Circassian women.

A GOOD MATCH

Strauss' band was playing in the saloons of the Horticultural Society, which was so full that the young cadet Hussar-sergeant Max B., who had nothing better to do on an afternoon when he was off duty than to drink a glass of good beer and to listen to a new waltz tune, had already been looking about for a seat for some time, when the head waiter, who knew him, quickly took him to an unoccupied place, and without waiting for his orders, brought him a glass of beer. A very gentlemanly-looking man, and three elegantly dressed ladies were sitting at the table.

The cadet saluted them with military politeness, and sat down, but almost before he could put the glass to his lips, he noticed that the two elder ladies, who appeared to be married, turned up their noses very much at his taking a seat at their table, and even said a few words which he could not catch, but which no doubt referred unpleasantly to him. "I am afraid I am in the way here," the cadet said; and he got up to leave, when he felt a pull at his sabre-tasch beneath the table, and at the same time the gentleman felt bound to say with some embarrassment: "Oh! not at all; on the contrary, we are very pleased that you have chosen this table."

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Thereupon the cadet resumed his seat, not so much because he took the gentleman's invitation as sincere, but because the silent request to remain, which he had received under the table, and which was much more sincerely meant, had raised in him one of those charming illusions, which are so frequent in our youth, and which promised so much happiness, with electrical rapidity. He could not doubt for a moment, that the daring invitation came from the third, the youngest and prettiest of the ladies, into whose company a fortunate accident had thrown him.

From the moment that he had sat down by her, however, she did not deign to bestow even another look on him, much less a word, and to the young hussar, who was still rather inexperienced in such matters, this seemed rather strange; but he possessed enough natural tact not to expose himself to a rebuff by any hasty advances, but quietly to wait further developments of the adventure on the part of the heroine of it. This gave him the opportunity of looking at her more closely, and for this he employed the moments when their attention was diverted from him, and was taken up by conversation among themselves.

The girl, whom the others called Angelica, was a thorough Viennese beauty, not exactly regularly beautiful, for her features were not Roman or Greek, and not even strictly German, and yet they possessed every female charm, and were seductive, in the fullest sense of the word. Her strikingly small nose, which in a lady's-maid might have been called impudent, and her little mouth with its voluptuously full lips, which would have been called lustful in a street-walker, imparted an indescribable piquant charm to her small head, which was surmounted by an imposing tower of that soft brown hair which is so characteristic of Viennese women. Her bright eyes were full of good sense, and a merry smile lurked continually in the most charming little dimples near her mouth and on her chin.

In less than a quarter of an hour, our cadet was fettered, with no more will of his own than a slave has, to the triumphal chariot of this delightful little creature, and as he hoped and believed—for ever. And he was a man worth capturing. He was tall and slim, but muscular, and looked like an athlete, and at the time he had one of those handsome, open faces which women like so much. His honest, dark eyes showed strength of will, courage and strong passions, and that, women also like.

During an interval in the music, an elderly gentleman, with the ribbon of an order in his button-hole, came up to the table, and from the manner in which he greeted them, it was evident that he was an old friend. From their conversation, which was carried on in a very loud tone of voice, and with much animation, in the bad, Viennese fashion, the cadet gathered that the gentleman who was with the ladies, was a Councilor of Legation, and that the eldest lady was his wife, while the second lady was his married, and the youngest his unmarried, sister-in-law. When they at last rose to go, the pretty girl, evidently intentionally, put her velvet jacket, trimmed with valuable sable, very loosely over her shoulders; then she remained standing at the exit, and slowly put it on,

so that the cadet had an opportunity to get close to her. “Follow us,” she whispered to him, and then ran after the others.

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The cadet was only too glad to obey her directions, and followed them at a distance, without being observed, to the house where they lived. A week passed without his seeing the pretty Angelica again, or without her giving him any sign of life. The waiter in the Horticultural Society's grounds, whom he asked about them, could tell him nothing more than that they were people of position, and a few days later the cadet saw them all again at a concert, but he was satisfied with looking at his ideal from a distance. She, however, when she could do so without danger, gave him one of those coquettish looks which inexperienced young men imagine express the innermost feelings of a pure, virgin heart. On that occasion she left the grounds with her sisters, much earlier, and as she passed the handsome cadet, she let a small piece of rolled-up paper fall, which only contained the words: "Come at ten o'clock to-night, and ring the bell."

He was outside the house at the stroke of ten and rang, but his astonishment knew no bounds when, instead of Angelica or her confidential maid, the housekeeper opened the door. She saw his confusion, and quickly put an end to it by taking his hand, and pulling him into the house. "Come with me," she whispered; "I know all about it. The young lady will be here directly, so come along." Then she lead him through the kitchen into a room which was shut off from the rest of the house, and which she had apparently furnished for similar meetings, on her own account, and left him there by himself, and the cadet was rather surprised to see the elegant furniture, a wide, soft couch, and some rather obscene pictures in broad, gilt frames. In a few minutes, the beautiful girl came, in, and without any further ceremony, threw her arms round the young soldier's neck. In her *negligee*, she appeared to him much more beautiful than in her elegant outdoor dress, but the virginal fragrance which then pervaded her, had given way to that voluptuous atmosphere which surrounds a young newly-married woman.

Angelica, whose little feet were encased in blue velvet slippers lined with ermine, and who was wrapped in a richly embroidered, white dressing-gown, that was trimmed with lace, drew the handsome cadet down on to the couch with graceful energy, and almost before he exactly knew what he had come for, she was his, and the young soldier, who was half dazed at his unexpected victory and good fortune, did not leave her until after twelve o'clock. He returned every night at ten, rang the bell, and was admitted by the girl's slyly-smiling confidante, and a few moments later was clasping his little goddess, who used to wrap her delicate, white limbs sometimes in dark sable, and at others in princely ermine, in his arms. Every time they partook of a delicious supper, laughed and joked and loved each other like only young, good-looking people do love, and frequently they entertained one another until morning.

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Once the cadet attempted diffidently to pay the housekeeper for her services, and also for the supper, but she refused his money with a laugh, and said that everything was already settled; and the young soldier had reveled in this manner in boundless bliss for four months, when, by an unfortunate accident, he met his mistress in the street one day. She was alone, but in spite of this she contracted her delicate, finely-arched eyebrows angrily, when he was about to speak to her, and turned her head away. This hurt the honest young fellow's feelings, and when that evening she drew him to her bosom, that was rising and falling tempestuously under the black velvet that covered it, he remonstrated with her quietly, but emphatically.—She made a little grimace, and looking at him coldly and angrily, she at last said, shortly: "I forbid you to take any notice of me out of doors. I do not choose to recognize you; do you understand?"

The cadet was surprised and did not reply, but the harmony of his pleasures was destroyed by a harsh discord. For some time he bore his misery in silence and with resignation, but at last the situation became unendurable; his mistress's fiery kisses seemed to mock him, and the pleasure which she gave him to degrade him, so at last he summoned up courage, and in his open way, he came straight to the point.

"What do you think of our future, Angelica?" She wrinkled her brows a little. "Do not let us talk about it; at any rate not to-day." "Why not? We must talk about it sooner or later," he replied, "and I think it is high time for me to explain my intentions to you, if I do not wish to appear as a dishonorable scoundrel in your eyes." She looked at him in surprise. "I look upon you as one of the best and most honorable of men, Max," she said, soothingly, after a pause. "And do you trust me also?" "Of course I do." "Are you convinced that I love you honestly?" "Quite." "Then do not hesitate any longer to bestow your hand upon me," her lover said, in conclusion. "What are you thinking about?" she cried, quickly, in a tone of refusal. "What is to be the end of our connection? What is at any rate not permissible with a woman, is wrong and dishonorable with a girl. You yourself must feel lowered if you do not become my wife as soon as possible." "What a narrow-minded view," Angelica replied, angrily, "but as you wish it, I will give you my opinion on the subject, but ... by letter." "No, no; now, directly."

The pretty girl did not speak for some time, and looked down, but suddenly she looked at her lover, and a malicious, mocking smile lurked in the corners of her mouth. "Well, I love you, Max, I love you really and ardently," she said, carelessly; "but I can never be your wife. If you were an officer I might perhaps marry you; yes, I certainly would, but as it is, it is impossible." "Is that your last word?" the cadet said, in great excitement. She only nodded, and then put her full, white arms round his neck, with all the security of a mistress who is granting some favor to her slave; but on that occasion she was mistaken. He sprang up, seized his sword and hurried out of the room, and she let him go, for she felt certain that he would come back again, but he did not do so, and when she wrote to him, he did not answer her letters, and still did not come; so at last she gave him up.

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It was a bad, a very bad, experience for the honorable young fellow; the highborn, frivolous girl had trampled on all the ideals and illusions of his life with her small feet, for he then saw only too clearly, that she had not loved him, but that he had only served her pleasures and her lusts, while he, he had loved her so truly!

About a year after the catastrophe with charming Angelica, the handsome cadet happened to be in his captain's quarters, and accidentally saw a large photograph of a lady on his writing table, and on going up and looking at it, he recognized—Angelica.

"What a beautiful girl," he said, wishing to find out how the land lay. "That is the lady I am going to marry," the captain, whose vanity was flattered, said, "and she is as pure and as good as an angel, just as she is as beautiful as one, and into the bargain she comes of a very good and very rich family; in short, in the fullest sense of the word, she is 'a good match.'"

A FASHIONABLE WOMAN

It can easily be proved that Austria is far richer in talented men in every domain, than North Germany, but while men are systematically drilled there for the vocation which they choose, like the Prussian soldiers are, with us they lack the necessary training, especially technical training, and consequently very few of them get beyond mere diletantism. Leo Wolfram was one of those intellectual diletantes, and the more pleasure one took in his materials and characters, which were usually boldly taken from real life, and in a certain political, and what is still more, in a plastic plot, the more he was obliged to regret that he had never learnt to compose or to mold his characters, or to write; in one word, that he had never become a literary artist, but how greatly he had in himself the materials for a master of narration, his "Dissolving Views," and still more his *Goldkind*,[4] prove.

[Footnote 4: Golden Child.]

This Goldkind is a striking type of our modern society, and the novel of that name contains all the elements of a classic novel, although of course in a crude, unfinished state. What an exact reflection of our social circumstances Leo Wolfram gave in that story our present reminiscences will show, in which a lady of that race plays the principal part.

It may be ten years ago, that every day four very stylishly dressed persons went to dine in a corner of the small dining-room of one of the best hotels in Vienna, who, both there and elsewhere, gave occasion for a great amount of talk. They were an Austrian landowner, his charming wife, and two young diplomatists, one of whom came from the North, while the other was a pure son of the South. There was no doubt that the lady came in for the greatest share of the general interest in every respect.

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The practiced observer and discerner of human nature easily recognized in her one of those characters which Goethe has so aptly named “problematical,” for she was one of those individuals who are always dissatisfied and at variance with themselves and with the world, who are a riddle to themselves, and who can never be relied on, and with the interesting and captivating, though unfortunate contradictions in her nature, she made a strong impression on everybody, even by her mere outward appearance. She was one of those women who are called beautiful, without their being really so. Her face, as well as her figure, was wanting in aesthetic lines, but there was no doubt that, in spite of that, or perhaps on that very account, she was the most dangerous, infatuating woman that one could imagine.

She was tall and thin, and there was a certain hardness about her figure, which became a charm through the vivacity and grace of her movements; her features harmonized with her figure, for she had a high, clever, cold forehead, a strong mouth with sensual lips, and an angular, sharp chin, the effect of which was, however, diminished by her slightly turned-up, small nose, her beautifully arched eyebrows, and her large, animated, swimming blue eyes.

In her face, which was almost too full of expression for a woman, there was as much feeling, kindness and candor as there was calculation, coolness and deceit, and when she was angry and drew her upper lip up, so as to show her dazzlingly white teeth, it had even a devilish look of wickedness and cruelty, and at that time, when women still wore their own hair, the beauty of her long, chestnut plaits, which she fastened on the top of her head like a crown, was very striking. Besides this, she was remarkable for her elegant, tasteful dresses, and a bearing which united to the dignity of a lady of rank that undefinable something which makes actresses and women who belong to the higher classes of the *demi-monde* so interesting to us.

In Paris she would have been taken for a kept woman, but in Vienna the best drawing-rooms were open to her, and she was not looked upon as more respectable or as less respectable than any other aristocratic beauties.

Her husband decidedly belonged to that class of men whom that witty writer, Balzac, so delightfully calls *les hommes predestines* in his *Physiologie du Mariage*. Without doubt, he was a very good-looking man, but he bore that stamp of insignificance which so often conceals coarseness and vulgarity, and was one of those men who, in the long run, become unendurable to a woman of refined tastes. He had a good private income, but his wife understood the art of enjoying life, and so a deficit in the yearly accounts of the young couple became the rule, without causing the lively lady to check her noble passion in the least on that account; she kept horses and carriages, rode with the greatest boldness, had her box at the opera, and gave beautiful little suppers, which at that time was the highest aim of a Viennese woman of her class.

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One of the two young diplomats who accompanied her, a young Count, belonging to a well-known family in North Germany, and who was a perfect gentleman in the highest sense of the word, was looked upon as her adorer, while the other, who was his most intimate friend, yet, in spite of his ancient name and his position as attache to a foreign legation, gave people that distinct impression that he was an adventurer, which makes the police keep such a careful eye on some persons, and he had the reputation of being an unscrupulous and dangerous duellist. Short, thin, with a yellow complexion, with strongly-marked but engaging features, an aquiline nose and bright, dark eyes, he was the typical picture of a man who seduces women and kills men.

The handsome woman appeared to be in love with the Count, and to take an interest in his friend; at least, that was the construction that the others in the dining-room put upon the situation, as far as it could be made out from the behavior and looks of the people concerned, and especially from their looks, for it was strange how devotedly and ardently the beautiful woman's blue eyes rested on the Count, and with what wild, diabolical sympathy she gazed at the Italian from time to time, and it was hard to guess whether there was most love or hatred in that glance. None of the four, however, who were then dining and chatting so gaily together, had any presentiment at the time that they were amusing themselves over a mine, which might explode at any moment, and bury them all.

It was the husband of the beautiful woman who provided the tinder. One day he told her that she must make up her mind to the most rigid retrenchment, give up her box at the opera, and sell her carriage and horses, if she did not wish to risk her whole position in society. Her creditors had lost all patience, and were threatening to distrain on her property, and even to put her in prison. She made no reply to this revelation, but during dinner she said to the Count, in a whisper, that she must speak to him later, and would, therefore, come to see him at his house. When it was dark, she came thickly veiled, and after she had responded to his demonstrations of affection for some time, with more patience than amiableness, she began. Their conversation is extracted from his diary.

"You are so unconcerned and happy, while misery and disgrace are threatening me!" "Please explain what you mean!" "I have incurred some debts." "Again?" he said reproachfully, "why do you not come to me at once, for you must do it in the end, and then at least you would avoid any exposure?" "Please do not take me to task," she replied; "you know it only makes me angry. I want some money; can you give me some?" "How much do you want?" She hesitated, for she had not the courage to name the real amount, but at last she said, in a low voice: "Five thousand florins."[5] It was evidently only a small portion of what she really required, so he replied: "I am sure you want more than that!" "No." "Really not?" "Do not make me angry."

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[Footnote 5: About L500, nominally.]

He shrugged his shoulders, went to his strong box and gave her the money, whereupon she nodded, and giving him her hand, she said: "You are always kind, and as long as I have you, I am not afraid; but if I were to lose you, I should be the most unhappy woman in the world." "You always have the same fears; but I shall never leave you; it would be impossible for me to separate from you," the Count exclaimed. "And if you die?" she interrupted him hastily. "If I die?" the Count said, with a peculiar smile. "I have provided for you in that eventuality also." "Do you mean to say" ... she stammered, flushed, and her large, lovely eyes rested on her lover with an indescribable expression in them. He, however, opened a drawer in his writing-table, and took out a document, which he gave her. It was his will. She opened it with almost indecent haste, and when she saw the amount—thirty thousand florins—she grew pale to her very lips.

It was a moment in which the germs of a crime were sown in her breast, but one of those crimes which cannot be touched by the Criminal Code. A few days after she had paid her visit to the Count, she herself received one from the Italian. In the course of conversation he took a jewel case out of his breast pocket and asked her opinion of the ornaments, as she was well-known for her taste in such matters, telling her at the same time, that it was intended as a present for an actress, with whom he was on intimate terms.—"It is a magnificent set!" she said, as she looked at it. "You have made an excellent selection." Then she suddenly became absorbed in thought, while her nostrils began to quiver, and that touch of cold cruelty played on her lips.

"Do you think that the lady for whom this ornament is intended will be pleased with it?" the Italian asked. "Certainly," she replied; "I myself would give a great deal to have it." "Then may I venture to offer it to you?" the Italian said.

She blushed, but did not refuse it, but the same evening she rushed into her lover's room in a state of the greatest excitement. "I am beside myself," she stammered; "I have been most deeply insulted." "By whom?" the Count asked, excitedly. "By your friend, who has dared to send me some jewelry to-day. I suppose he looks upon me as a lost woman; perhaps I am already looked upon as belonging to the *demi-monde*, and this I owe to you, to you alone, and to my mad love for you, to which I have sacrificed my honor and everything. Everything!" She threw herself down and sobbed, and would not be pacified until the Count gave her his word of honor that he would set aside every consideration for his friend, and obtain satisfaction for her at any price. He met the Italian the same evening at a card party and questioned him.

"I did not, in the first place, send the lady the jewelry, but I gave it to her myself, not, however, until she had asked me to do so." "That is a shameful lie!" the Count shouted, furiously. Unfortunately, there were others present, and his friend took the matter seriously, so the next morning he sent his seconds to the Count.

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Some of their real friends tried to settle the matter in another way, but his bad angel, his mistress, who required thirty thousand florins, drove the Count to his death. He was found in the Prater, with his friend's bullet in his chest. A letter in his pocket spoke of suicide, but the police did not doubt for a moment that a duel had taken place. Suspicion soon fell on the Italian, but when they went to arrest him, he had already made his escape.

The husband of the beautiful, problematical woman, called on the broken-hearted father of the man who had been killed in the duel, and who had hastened to Vienna on receipt of a telegraphic message, a few hours after his arrival, and demanded the money. "My wife was your son's most intimate friend," he stammered, in embarrassment, in order to justify his action as well as he could. "Oh! I know that," the old Count replied, "and female friends of that kind want to be paid immediately, and in full. Here are the thirty thousand florins."

And our *Goldkind*? She paid her debts, and then withdrew from the scene for a while. She had been compromised, certainly, but then, she had risen in value in the eyes of those numerous men who can only adore and sacrifice themselves for a woman when her foot is on the threshold of vice and crime.

I saw her last during the Franco-German war, in the beautiful *Mirabell-garden* at Salzburg. She did not seem to feel any qualms of conscience, for she had become considerably stouter, which made her more attractive, more beautiful, and consequently, more dangerous, than she was before.

THE CARNIVAL OF LOVE

The Princess Leonie was one of those beautiful, brilliant enigmas, who irresistibly allure everyone like a Sphinx, for she was young, charming, and singularly lovely, and understood how to heighten her charms not a little by carefully-chosen dresses. She was a great lady of the right stamp, and was very intellectual into the bargain, which is not the case with all aristocratic ladies; she also took great interest in art and literature, and it was even said that she patronized one of our poets in a manner which was worthy of the Medicis, and that she strewed the beautiful roses of continual female sympathy on to his thorny path. All this was evident to everybody, and had nothing strange about it, but the world would have liked to know the history of that woman, and to look into the depths of her soul, and because people could not do this in Princess Leonie's case, they thought it very strange.

No one could read that face, which was always beautiful, always cheerful, and always the same; no one could fathom those large, dark, unfathomable eyes, which hid their secrets under the unvarying brilliancy of majestic repose, like a mountain lake, whose waters look black on account of their depth. For everybody was agreed that the

beautiful princess had her secrets, interesting and precious secrets, like all other ladies of our fashionable world.

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Most people looked upon her as a flirt who had no heart, and even no blood, and they asserted that she was only virtuous because the power of loving was denied her, but that she took all the more pleasure in seeing that she was loved, and that she set her trammels and enticed her victims, until they surrendered at discretion at her feet, so that she might leave them to their fate, and hurry off in pursuit of some fresh game.

Others declared that the beautiful woman had met with her romances in life, and was still having them, but, as a thorough Messalina, she knew how to conceal her adventures as cleverly as that French queen who had every one of her lovers thrown into the cold waters of the Seine, as soon as he quitted her soft, warm arms, and she was described thus to Count Otto F., a handsome cavalry officer, who had made the acquaintance of the beautiful, dangerous woman at that fashionable watering place, Karlsbad, and had fallen deeply in love with her.

Even before he had been introduced to her, the Princess had already exchanged fiery, encouraging glances with him, and when a brother officer took him to call on her, she welcomed him with a smile which appeared to promise him happiness, but after he had paid his court to her for a month, he did not seem to have made any progress, and as she possessed in a high degree the skill of being able to avoid even the shortest private interviews, it appeared as if matters would go no further than that delightful promise.

Night after night, the enamored young officer walked along the garden railings of her villa as close to her windows as possible, without being noticed by any one, and at last fortune seemed to favor him. The moon, which was nearly at the full, was shining brightly, and in its silvery light he saw a tall, female figure, with large plaits round her head, coming along the grave path; he stood still, as he thought he recognized the Princess, but as she came nearer he saw a pretty girl, whom he did not know, and who came up to the railings and said to him with a smile: “What can I do for you, Count?” mentioning his name.

“You seem to know me, Fraeulein.” “Oh! I am only the Princess’s lady’s-maid.” ... “But you could do me a great favor.” “How?” she asked quickly: “You might give the Princess a letter.” ... “I should not venture to do that,” the girl replied with a peculiar, half-mocking, half-pitying smile, and with a deep curtsey, she disappeared behind the raspberry bushes which formed a hedge along the railings.

The next morning, as the Count, with several other ladies and gentlemen, was accompanying the Princess home from the pump-room, the fair coquette let her pocket-handkerchief fall just outside her house. The young officer took this for a hint, so he picked it up, concealed the letter that he had written, which he always kept about him so as to be prepared for any event, in the folds of the soft cambric, and gave it back to the Princess, who quickly put it into her pocket. That also seemed to him to be a good augury, and, in fact, in the course of a few hours he received a note in disguised

handwriting, by the post, in which his bold wooing was graciously entertained, and an appointment was made for the same night in the pavilion of the Princess's villa.

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The happiness of the enamored young officer knew no bounds; he kissed the letter a hundred times, thanked the Princess when he met her in the afternoon where the band was playing by his animated looks, which she either did not or could not understand, and at night was standing an hour before the appointed time behind the wall at the bottom of the garden.

When the church clock struck eleven he climbed over it and jumped on to the ground on the other side, and looked about him carefully; then he went up to the small, white-washed summer-house, where the Princess had promised to meet him, on tiptoe. He found the door ajar, went in, and at the same moment he felt two soft arms thrown round him. “Is it you, Princess?” he asked, in a whisper, for the pavilion was in total darkness, as the venetian blinds were drawn. “Yes, Count, it is I.” ... “How cruel.” ... “I love you, but I am obliged to conceal my passion under the mask of coldness because of my social position.”

As she said this, the enamored woman, who was trembling on his breast with excitement, drew him on to a couch that occupied one side of the pavilion, and began to kiss him ardently. The lovers spent two blissful hours in delightful conversation and intoxicating pleasures; then she bade him farewell, and told him to remain where he was until she had gone back to the house. He obeyed her, but could not resist looking at her through the venetian blinds, and he saw her tall, slim figure as she went along the gravel path with an undulating walk. She wore a white boumous, which he recognized as having seen in the pump-room; her soft, black hair fell down over her shoulders, and before she disappeared into the villa she stood for a moment and looked back, but he could not see her face, as she wore a thick veil.

When Count F. met the Princess the next morning in company with other ladies, when the band was playing, she showed an amount of unconstraint which confused him, and while she was joking in the most unembarrassed manner, he turned crimson and stammered out such a lot of nonsense that the ladies noticed it, and made him the target for their wit. None of them was bolder or more confident in their attacks on him than the Princess, so that at last he looked upon the woman who concealed so much passion in her breast, and who yet could command herself so thoroughly, as a kind of miracle, and at last said to himself: “The world is right; woman is a riddle!”

The Princess remained there for some weeks longer, and always maintained the same polite and friendly, but cool and sometimes ironical, demeanor towards him, but he easily endured being looked upon as her unfortunate adorer by the world, for at least every other day a small, scented note, stamped with her arms and signed *Leonie*, summoned him to the pavilion, and there he enjoyed the full, delightful possession of the beautiful woman. It, however, struck him as strange that she would never let him see her face. Her head was always covered with a thick black veil, through which he could see her eyes, which sparkled with love, glistening; he passed his fingers through her hair, he saw her well-known dresses, and once he succeeded in getting possession

of one of her pocket-handkerchiefs, on which the name *Leonie* and the princely coronet were magnificently embroidered.

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When she returned to Vienna for the winter, a note from her invited him to follow her there, and as he had indefinite leave of absence from his regiment, he could obey the commands of his divinity. As soon as he arrived there he received another note, which forbade him to go to her house, but promised him a speedy meeting in his rooms, and so the young officer had the furniture elegantly renovated, and looked forward to a visit from the beautiful woman with all a lover's impatience.

At last she came, wrapped in a magnificent cloak of green velvet, trimmed with ermine, but still thickly veiled, and before she came in she made it a condition that the room in which he received her should be quite dark, and after he had put out all the lights she threw off her fur, and her coldness gave way to the most impetuous tenderness.

"What is the reason that you will never allow me to see your dear, beautiful face?" the officer asked. "It is a whim of mine, and I suppose I have the right to indulge in whims," she said, hastily. "But I so long once more to see your splendid figure and your lovely face in full daylight," the Count continued. "Very well then, you shall see me at the Opera this evening."

She left him at six o'clock, after stopping barely an hour with him, and as soon as her carriage had driven off he dressed and went to the opera. During the overture, he saw the Princess enter her box and looking dazzlingly beautiful; she was wearing the same green velvet cloak, trimmed with ermine, that he had had in his hands a short time before, but almost immediately she let it fall from her shoulders, and showed a bust which was worthy of the Goddess of Love. She spoke with her husband with much animation, and smiled with her usual cold smile, though she did not give her adorer even a passing look, but, in spite of this, he felt the happiest of mortals.

In Vienna, however, the Count was not as fortunate as he had been at Karlsbad, where he had first met her, for his beautiful mistress only came to see him once a week; often she only stopped a short time with him, and once nearly six weeks passed without her favoring him at all, and she did not even make any excuse for remaining away. Just then, however, Leonie's husband accidentally made the young officer's acquaintance at the Jockey Club, took a fancy to him, and asked him to go and see him at his house.

When he called and found the Princess alone his heart felt as if it would burst with pleasure, and seizing her hand, he pressed it ardently to his lips. "What are you doing, Count?" she said, drawing back. "You are behaving very strangely." "We are alone," the young officer whispered, "so why this mask of innocence? Your cruelty is driving me mad, for it is six weeks since you came to see me last." "I certainly think you are out of your mind," the Princess replied, with every sign of the highest indignation, and hastily left the drawing-room. Nothing else remained for the Count but to do the same thing, but his mind was in a perfect whirl, and he was quite incapable of explaining to himself the Princess's enigmatical behavior. He dined at an hotel with some friends, and when he got home he found a note in which the Princess begged him to pardon her, and

promised to justify her conduct, for which purpose she would see him at eight o’clock that evening.

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Scarcely, however, had he read her note, when two of his brother-officers came to see him, and asked him, with well-simulated anxiety, whether he were ill. When he said that he was perfectly well, one of them continued, laughing: "Then please explain the occurrence that is in everybody's mouth to-day, in which you play such a comical part."—"I, a comical part?" the Count shouted.—"Well, is it not very comical when you call on a lady like Princess Leonie, whom you do not know, to upbraid her for her cruelty, and most unceremoniously call her *thou*[6]?"

[Footnote 6: In Germany, *thou du*, is only used between near relations, lovers, very intimate friends, to children, servants, &c.—TRANSLATOR.]

That was too much; Count F. might pardon the Princess for pretending not to know him in society, but that she should make him a common laughing-stock, nearly drove him mad. "If I call the Princess *thou*," he exclaimed, "it is because I have the right to do so, as I will prove."—His comrades shrugged their shoulders, but he asked them to come again punctually at seven o'clock, and then he made his preparations.

At eight o'clock his divinity made her appearance, still thickly veiled, but on this occasion wearing a valuable sable cloak. As usual, Count F. took her into the dark-room and locked the outer door; then he opened that which led into his bedroom, and his two friends came in, each with a candle in his hand.—The lady in the sable cloak cried out in terror when Count F. pulled off her veil, but then it was his turn to be surprised, for it was not the Princess Leonie who stood before him, but her pretty lady's-maid, who, now she was discovered, confessed that love had driven her to assume her mistress's part, in which she had succeeded perfectly, on account of the similarity of their figure, eyes and hair. She had found the Count's letter in the Princess's pocket-handkerchief when they were at Karlsbad and had answered it. She had made him happy, and had heightened the illusion which her figure gave rise to by borrowing the Princess's dresses.

Of course the Count was made great fun of, and turned his back on Vienna hastily that same evening, but the pretty lady's-maid also disappeared soon after the catastrophe, and only by those means escaped from her mistress's well-merited anger; for it turned out that that gallant little individual had already played the part of her mistress more than once, and had made all those hopeless adorers of the Princess, who had found favor in her own eyes, happy in her stead.

Thus the enigma was solved which Princess Leonie seemed to have proposed to the world.

A DEER PARK IN THE PROVINCES

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It is not very long ago that an Hungarian Prince, who was in an Austrian cavalry regiment, was quartered in a wealthy Austrian garrison town. The ladies of the local aristocracy naturally did everything they could to allure the new comer, who was young, good-looking, animated and amusing, into their nets, and at last one of the ripe beauties, who was now resting there on her amorous laurels, after innumerable victories on the hot floors of Viennese society, succeeded in taking him in her toils, but only for a short time, for she had very nearly reached that limit in age where, on the man's side, love ceases and esteem begins. But she had more sense than most women, and she recognized the fact in good time, and as she did not wish to give up the principal character which she played in society there so easily, she reflected as to what means she could employ to bind him to her in another manner. It is well known that the notorious Marchioness de Pompadour, who was one of the mistresses of Louis XV. of France, when her own charms did not suffice to fetter that changeable monarch, conceived the idea of securing the chief power in the State and in society for herself, by having a pavilion in the deer park, which belonged to her, and where Louis XV. was in the habit of hunting, fitted up with every accommodation of a harem, where she brought beautiful women and girls of all ranks of life to the arms of her royal lover.

Inspired by that historical example, the baroness began to arrange evening parties, balls, and private theatricals in the winter, and in the summer excursions into the country, and thus she gave the Prince, who at that time was still, so to say, at her feet, the opportunity of plucking fresh flowers. But even this clever expedient did not avail in the long run, for beautiful women were scarce in that provincial town, and the few which the local aristocracy could produce were not able to offer the Prince any fresh attractions, when he had made their closer acquaintance. At last, therefore, he turned his back on the highly-born Messalinas, and began to bestow marked attention on the pretty women and girls of the middle classes, either in the streets or when he was in his box at the theater.

There was one girl in particular, the daughter of a well-to-do merchant, who was supposed to be the most beautiful girl in the capital, on to whom his opera glass was constantly leveled, and whom he even followed occasionally without being noticed. But Baroness Pompadour soon got wind of this unprincely taste, and determined to do everything in her power to keep her lover and the whole nobility, which was threatened, from such an unheard-of disgrace, as an intrigue of a Prince with a girl of the middle classes, would have been in her eyes. "It is really sad," the outraged baroness once said to me, "that in these days princes and monarchs choose their mistresses only from the stage, or even from the scum of the people. But it is the fault of our ladies themselves. They mistake their vocation! Ah! Where are those delightful times when the daughters of the first families looked upon it as an honor to become their princes' mistresses?"

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Consequently, the horror of the blue-blooded, aristocratic lady was intense when the Prince, in his usual, amiable, careless manner, suggested to her to people her deer park with girls of the lower orders.

“It is a ridiculous prejudice,” the Prince said on that occasion, “which obliges us to shut ourselves off from the other ranks, and to confine ourselves altogether to our own circle, for monotony and boredom are the inevitable consequences of it. How many honorable men of sense and education, and especially how many charming women and girls there are, who do not belong to the aristocracy, who would infuse fresh life and a new charm into our dull, listless society! I very much wish that a lady like you would make a beginning, and would give up this exclusiveness, which cannot be maintained in these days, and would enrich our circle with the charming daughters of middle class families.”

A wish of the Prince’s was as good as a command; so the baroness made a wry face, but she accommodated herself to the circumstances, and promised to invite some of the prettiest girls of the *plebs* to a ball in a few days. She really issued a number of invitations, and even condescended to drive to the house of each of them in person. “But I must ask one thing of you,” she said to each of the pretty girls, “and that is to come dressed as simply as possible; washing muslins will be best. The Prince dislikes all finery and ostentation and he would be very vexed with me if I were the cause of any extravagance on your part.”

The great day arrived; it was quite an event for the little town, and all classes of society were in a state of the greatest excitement. The pretty, plebeian girls, with her whom the Prince had first noticed at their head, appeared in all their innocence, in plain, washing dresses, according to the Prince’s orders, with their hair plainly dressed, and without any ornaments, except their own fresh, buxom charms. When they were all captives in the den of the proud, aristocratic lioness, the poor little mice were very much terrified when suddenly the aristocratic ladies came into the ball-room, rustling in whole oceans of silks and lace, with their haughty heads changed into so many hanging gardens of Semiramis, loaded with all the treasures of India, and radiant as the sun.

At first the poor girls looked down in shame and confusion, and Baroness Pompadour’s eyes glistened with all the joy of triumph, but her ill-natured pleasure did not last long, for the intrigue, on which the Prince’s ignoble passions were to make shipwreck, recoiled on the highly-born lady patroness of the deer park.

It was not the aristocratic ladies in their magnificent toilettes that threw the girls from the middle classes into the shade, but, on the contrary, those pretty girls in their washing dresses, and with the plain but splendid ornament of their abundant hair looked far more charming than they would have done in silk dresses with long trains, and with flowers in their hair, and the novelty and unwontedness of their appearance there allured not only the Prince, but all the other gentlemen and officers, so that the proud grand-daughters

of the lions, griffins, and eagles, were quite neglected by the gentlemen, who danced almost exclusively with the pretty girls of the middle classes.

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The faded lips of the baronesses and countesses uttered many a "*For Shame*!" but all in vain, neither was it any good for the Baroness to make up her mind that she would never again put a social medley before the Prince in her drawing-room, for he had seen through her intrigue, and gave her up altogether. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

She, however, consoled herself as best she could.

THE WHITE LADY

Fortuna, the goddess of chance and good luck, has always been *Cupid's* best ally and Arnold T., who was a lieutenant in a hussar regiment, was evidently a special favorite of both those roguish deities.

This good-looking, well-bred young officer had been an enthusiastic admirer of the two Countesses W., mother and daughter, during a tolerably long leave of absence, which he spent with his relations in Vienna. He had admired them from the *Prater*, and worshiped them at the opera, but he had never had an opportunity of making their acquaintance, and when he was back at his dull quarters in Galicia, he liked to think about those two aristocratic beauties. Last summer his regiment was transferred to Bohemia, to a wildly romantic district, that had been made illustrious by a talented writer, which abounded in magnificent woods, lofty mountain-forests and castles, and which was a favorite summer resort of the neighboring aristocracy.

Who can describe his joyful surprise, when he and his men were quartered in an old, weather-beaten castle in the middle of a wood, and he learnt from the house-steward who received him that the owner of the castle was the husband, and, consequently, also the father of his Viennese ideals. An hour after he had taken possession of his old-fashioned, but beautifully furnished, room in a side-wing of the castle, he put on his full-dress uniform, and throwing his dolman over his shoulders, he went to pay his respects to the Count and the ladies.

He was received with the greatest cordiality. The Count was delighted to have a companion when he went out shooting, and the ladies were no less pleased at having some one to accompany them on their walks in the forests, or on their rides, so that he felt only half on the earth, and half in the seventh heaven of Mohammedan bliss. Before supper he had time to inspect the house more closely, and even to take a sketch of the large, gloomy building from a favorable point. The ancient seat of the Counts of W. was really very gloomy; in fact it created a sinister, uncomfortable feeling. The walls, which were crumbling away here and there, and which were covered with dark ivy; the round towers, which harbored jackdaws, owls, and hawks; the AEolian harp, which complained and sighed and wept in the wind; the stones in the castle yard, which were overgrown with grass; the cloisters, in which every footstep re-echoed; the great ancestral portraits which hung on the walls, coated as it were with dark, mysterious veils

by the centuries which had passed over them—all this recalled to him the legends and fairy tales of his youth, and he involuntarily thought of the *Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, and of *Blue Beard*, of the cruel mistress of the Kynast,[7] and that aristocratic tigress of the Carpathians, who obtained the unfading charms of eternal youth by bathing in human blood.

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[Footnote 7: A Castle, now a well-preserved ruin, in the Giant Mountains in N. Germany. The legend is that its mistress, Kunigerude, vowed to marry nobody except the Knight who should ride round the parapet of the Castle, and many perished in the attempt. At last one of them succeeded in performing the feat, but he merely sternly rebuked her, and took his leave. He was accompanied by his wife, disguised as his page, according to some versions of the legend.—TRANSLATOR.]

He came in to supper where he found himself for the first time in company with all the members of the family, just in the frame of mind that was suitable for ghosts, and was not a little surprised when his host told him, half smiling and half seriously, that the "White Lady" was disturbing the castle again, and that she had latterly been seen very often. "Yes, indeed," Countess Ida exclaimed; "You must take care, Baron, for she haunts the very wing where your room is." The hussar was just in the frame of mind to take the matter seriously, but, on the other hand, when he saw the dark, ardent eyes of the Countess, and then the merry blue eyes of her daughter fixed on him, any real fear of ghosts was quite out of the question with him. For Baron T. feared nothing in this world, but he possessed a very lively imagination, which could conjure up threatening forms from another world so plainly that sometimes he felt very uncomfortable at his own fancies. But on the present occasion that malicious apparition had no power over him; the ladies took care of that, for both of them were beautiful and amiable.

The Countess was a mature Venus of thirty-six, of middle height, and with the voluptuous figure of a true Viennese, with bright eyes, thick dark hair, and beautiful white teeth, while her daughter Ida, who was seventeen, had light hair and the pert little nose of the china figures of shepherdesses in the dress of the period of Louis XIV., and was short, slim, and full of French grace. Besides them and the Count, a son of twelve and his tutor were present at supper. It struck the hussar as strange that the tutor, who was a strongly-built young man, with a winning face and those refined manners which the greatest plebeian quickly acquires when brought into close and constant contact with the aristocracy, was treated with great consideration by all the family except the Countess, who treated him very haughtily. She assumed a particularly imperious manner towards her son's tutor, and she either found fault with, or made fun of, everything that he did, while he put up with it all with smiling humility.

Before supper was over their conversation again turned on to the ghost, and Baron T. asked whether they did not possess a picture of the *White Lady*. "Of course we have one," they all replied at once; whereupon Baron T. begged to be allowed to see it. "I will show it you to-morrow," the Count said. "No, Papa, now, immediately," the younger lady said mockingly; "just before the ghostly hour, such a thing creates a much greater impression."

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All who were present, not excepting the boy and his tutor, took a candle and then they walked as if they had formed a torchlight procession, to the wing of the house where the hussar's room was. There was a life-size picture of the *White Lady* hanging in a Gothic passage near his room, among other ancestral portraits, and it by no means made a terrible impression on anyone who looked at it, but rather the contrary. The ghost, dressed in stiff, gold brocade and purple velvet, and with a hawk on her wrist, looked like one of those seductive Amazons of the fifteenth century, who exercised the art of laying men and game at their feet with equal skill.

"Don't you think that the *White Lady* is very like mamma?" Countess Ida said, interrupting the Baron's silent contemplation of the picture. "There is no doubt of it," the hussar replied, while the Countess smiled and the tutor turned red, and they were still standing before the picture, when a strong gust of wind suddenly extinguished all the lights, and they all uttered a simultaneous cry. The *White Lady*, the little Count whispered, but she did not come, and as it was luckily a moonlight night, they soon recovered from their momentary shock. The family retired to their apartments, while the hussar and the tutor went to their own rooms, which were situated in the wing of the castle which was haunted by the *White Lady*; the officer's being scarcely thirty yards from the portrait, while the tutor's were rather further down the corridor.

The hussar went to bed, and was soon fast asleep, and though he had rather uneasy dreams nothing further happened. But while they were at breakfast the next morning, the Count's body-servant told them, with every appearance of real terror, that as he was crossing the court-yard at midnight, he had suddenly heard a noise like bats in the open cloisters, and when he looked he distinctly saw the *White Lady* gliding slowly through them; but they merely laughed at the poltroon, and though our hussar laughed also, he fully made up his mind, without saying a word about it, to keep a look-out for the ghost that night.

Again they had supper alone, without any company, had some music and pleasant talk and separated at half-past eleven. The hussar, however, only went to his room for form's sake; he loaded his pistols, and when all was quiet in the castle, he crept down into the court-yard and took up his position behind a pillar which was quite hidden in the shade, while the moon, which was nearly at the full, flooded the cloisters with its clear, pale light.

There were no lights to be seen in the castle except from two windows, which were those of the Countess's apartments, and soon they were also extinguished. The clock struck twelve, and the hussar could scarcely breathe from excitement; the next moment, however, he heard the noise which the Count's body-servant had compared to that of bats, and almost at the same instant a white figure glided slowly through the open cloisters and passed so close to him, that it almost made his blood curdle, and then it disappeared in the wing of the castle which he and the tutor occupied.

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The officer who was usually so brave, stood as though he was paralyzed for a few moments, but then he took heart, and feeling determined to make the nearer acquaintance of the spectral beauty, he crept softly up the broad staircase and took up his position in a deep recess in the cloisters, where nobody could see him.

He waited for a long time; he heard every quarter strike, and at last, just before the close of the *witching hour*, he heard the same noise like the rustling of bats, and then she came, he felt the flutter of her white dress, and she stood before him—it was indeed the Countess.

He presented his pistol at her as he challenged her, but she raised her hand menacingly. "Who are you?" he exclaimed. "If you are really a ghost, prove it, for I am going to fire." "For heaven's sake!" the White Lady whispered, and at the same instant two white arms were thrown round him, and he felt a full, warm bosom heaving against his own.

After that night the ghost appeared more frequently still. Not only did the *White Lady* make her appearance every night in the cloisters, only to disappear in the proximity of the hussar's rooms as long as the family remained at the castle, but she even followed them to Vienna.

Baron T., who went to that capital on leave of absence during the following winter, and who was the Count's guest at the express wish of his wife, was frequently told by the footman that although hitherto she had seemed to be confined to the old castle in Bohemia, she had shown herself now here, now there, in the mansion in Vienna, in a white dress and making a noise like the wings of a bat, and bearing a striking resemblance to the beautiful Countess.

CAUGHT

A young and charming lady, who was a member of the Viennese aristocracy, went last summer, like young and charming ladies usually do, to a fashionable Austrian watering place, Carlsbad, which is much frequented by foreigners, without her husband.

As is usually the case in their rank of life, she had married from family considerations and for money; and the short spell of *Love after Marriage* was not sufficient to take deep root, and after she had satisfied family traditions and her husband's wishes by giving birth to a son and heir, they both went their way; the young, handsome and fascinating man to his clubs, the race-course, and behind the scenes at the theaters, and his charming, coquettish wife to her box at the opera, to the ice in winter, and to some fashionable watering place in the summer.

On the present occasion she brought a young, very highly-connected Pole with her from one of the latter resorts, who enjoyed all the rights and the liberty of an avowed favorite, and who had to perform all the duties of a slave.

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As is usual in such cases, the lady rented a small house in one of the suburbs of Vienna, had it beautifully furnished and received her lover there. She was always dressed very attractively, sometimes as *La Belle Helene* in Offenbach's Opera, only rather more after the ancient Greek fashion; another time as an Odalisque in the Sultan's harem, and another time as a lighthearted Suabian girl, and so forth. In winter, however, she grew tired of such meetings, and she wanted to have matters more comfortable, so she took it into her head to receive her lover in her own house. But how was it to be done? That, however, gave her no particular difficulty, as is the case with every woman, when once she has made up her mind to a thing, and after thinking it over for a day or two she went to the next *rendez-vous*, with a fully prepared plan of war.

The Pole was one of those types of handsome men which are rare; he was almost womanly in his delicate features, of the middle height, slim and well-made, and he resembled a youthful Bacchus who might very easily be made to pass for a Venus by the help of false locks; the more so as there was not even the slightest down on his lips. The lady, therefore, who was very fertile in resources, suggested to the handsome Pole that he might just as well transform himself into a handsome Polish lady, so that he might, under the cover of the ever feminine, be able to visit her undisturbed, and as it was winter, the thick, heavy, capacious dress assisted the metamorphosis.

The lady, accordingly, bought a number of very beautiful costumes for her lover, and in the course of a few days she told her husband that a charming young Polish lady, whose acquaintance she had made in the summer at Carlsbad, was going to spend the winter in Vienna, and would very frequently come and see her. Her husband listened to her with the greatest indifference, for it was one of his fundamental rules never to make love to any of his wife's female friends, and he went to his club as usual at night, and the next day had forgotten all about the Polish lady.

And now, half an hour after the husband had left the house, a cab drove up and a tall, slim, heavily veiled lady got out and went up the thickly carpeted stairs, only to be metamorphosed into the most ardent lover in the young woman's *boudoir*. The young Pole grew accustomed to his female attire so quickly that he even ventured to appear in the streets in it, and when he began to make conquests, and aristocratic gentlemen and successful speculators on the Stock Exchange looked at him significantly, and even followed him, he took a real pleasure in the part he was playing, and began to understand the pleasure a coquette feels in tormenting men.

The young Pole became more and more daring, until at last one evening he went to a private box at the opera, wrapped in an ermine cloak, on to which his dark, false curls fell in heavy waves.

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A handsome young man in a box opposite to him ogled him incessantly from the first moment, and the young Pole responded in a manner which made the other bolder every minute. At the end of the third act, the box opener brought the fictitious Venus a small bouquet with a card concealed in it, on which was written in pencil: "You are the most lovely woman in the world, and I implore you on my knees to grant me an interview." The young Pole read the name of the man who had been captivated so quickly, and, with a peculiar smile, wrote on a card on which nothing but the name "Valeska" was printed: "After the theater," and sent Cupid's messenger back with it.

When the spurious Venus was about to enter her carriage after the performance, thickly veiled and wrapped in her ermine cloak, the handsome young man was standing by it with his hat off, and he opened the door for her. She was kind enough to allow him to get in with her and during their drive she talked to him in the most charming manner, but she was cruel enough to dismiss him without pity before they reached her house, and this she did every time. For she went to the theater each night now, and every evening she received an ardent note, and every evening she allowed the amorous swain to accompany her as far as her house, and men were beginning to envy him on account of his brilliant conquest, when a catastrophe happened which was very surprising for all concerned.

The husband of the lady in whose eyes the Pole had found favor, surprised the loving couple one day under circumstances which made any justification impossible. But while he, trembling with rage and jealousy, was drawing a small Circassian dagger which hung against the wall from its sheath, and as his wife threw herself, half-fainting, on to a couch, the young Pole had hastily put the false curls on to his head, and had slipped into the silk dress and the sable cloak which he had been wearing when he came into his mistress's boudoir. "What does this mean," the husband stammered, "Valeska?"—-"Yes, sir," the young Pole replied; "Valeska, who has come here to show your wife a few love letters, which." ... "No, no," the deceived, but nevertheless guilty, husband said in imploring accents; "no, that is quite unnecessary." And at the same time he put the dagger back into its sheath. "Very well then, there is a truce between us," the Pole observed coolly, "but do not forget what weapons I possess, and which I mean to retain against all contingencies."

Then the gentlemen bowed politely to each other, and the unexpected meeting came to an end.

From that time forward, the terms on which the young married couple lived together assumed the character of that everlasting peace, which President Grant once promised to the whole world in his message to all nations. The young woman did not find it necessary to make her lover put on petticoats, and the husband constantly accompanied the real Valeska a good deal further than he did the false one on that memorable occasion.

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CHRISTMAS EVE

“The Christmas-eve supper![8] Oh! no, I shall never go in for that again!” Stout Henri Templier said that in a furious voice, as if some one had proposed some crime to him, while the others laughed and said:

“What are you flying into a rage about?”

[Footnote 8: A great institution in France, and especially in Paris, at which black puddings are an indispensable dish.—TRANSLATOR.]

“Because a Christmas-eve supper played me the dirtiest trick in the world, and ever since I have felt an insurmountable horror for that night of imbecile gayety.”

“Tell us what it is?”

“You want to know what it was? Very well then, just listen.

“You remember how cold it was two years ago at Christmas; cold enough to kill poor people in the streets. The Seine was covered with ice; the pavements froze one’s feet through the soles of one’s boots, and the whole world seemed to be at the point of going to pot.

“I had a big piece of work on, and so I refused every invitation to supper, as I preferred to spend the night at my writing table. I dined alone and then began to work. But about ten o’clock I grew restless at the thought of the gay and busy life all over Paris, at the noise in the streets which reached me in spite of everything, at my neighbors’ preparations for supper, which I heard through the walls. I hardly knew any longer what I was doing; I wrote nonsense, and at last I came to the conclusion that I had better give up all hope of producing any good work that night.

“I walked up and down my room; I sat down and got up again. I was certainly under the mysterious influence of the enjoyment outside, and I resigned myself to it. So I rang for my servant and said to her:

“’Angela, go and get a good supper for two; some oysters, a cold partridge, some crayfish, hams and some cakes. Put out two bottles of champagne, lay the cloth and go to bed.’

“She obeyed in some surprise, and when all was ready, I put on my great coat and went out. A great question was to be solved: ’Whom was I going to bring in to supper?’ My female friends had all been invited elsewhere, and if I had wished to have one, I ought to have seen about it beforehand, so I thought that I would do a good action at the same time, and I said to myself:

“’Paris is full of poor and pretty girls who will have nothing on their table to-night, and who are on the look out for some generous fellow. I will act the part of Providence to one of them this evening; and I will find one if I have to go into every pleasure resort, and have to question them and hunt for one till I find one to my choice.’ And I started off on my search.

“I certainly found many poor girls, who were on the look-out for some adventure, but they were ugly enough to give any man a fit of indigestion, or thin enough to freeze as they stood if they had stopped, and you all know that I have a weakness for stout women. The more flesh they have, the better I like them, and a female colossus would drive me out of my senses with pleasure.

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“Suddenly, opposite the Theatre des Varietes, I saw a face to my liking. A good head, and then two protuberances, that on the chest very beautiful, and that on the stomach simply surprising; it was the stomach of a fat goose. I trembled with pleasure, and said:

“‘By Jove! What a fine girl!’

“It only remained for me to see her face. A woman’s face is the dessert, while the rest is ... the joint.

“I hastened on, and overtook her, and turned round suddenly under a gas lamp. She was charming, quite young, dark, with large, black eyes, and I immediately made my proposition, which she accepted without any hesitation, and a quarter of an hour later, we were sitting at supper in my lodgings. ‘Oh! how comfortable it is here,’ she said as she came in, and she looked about her with evident satisfaction at having found a supper and a bed, on that bitter night. She was superb; so beautiful that she astonished me, and so stout that she fairly captivated me.

“She took off her cloak and hat, sat down and began to eat; but she seemed in low spirits, and sometimes her pale face twitched as if she were suffering from some hidden sorrow.

“‘Have you anything troubling you?’ I asked her.

“‘Bah! Don’t let us think of troubles!’

“And she began to drink. She emptied her champagne glass at a draught, filled it again, and emptied it again, without stopping, and soon a little color came into her cheeks, and she began to laugh.

“I adored her already, kissed her continually, and discovered that she was neither stupid, nor common, nor coarse as ordinary street-walkers are. I asked her for some details about her life, but she replied:

“‘My little fellow, that is no business of yours!’ Alas! an hour later....

“At last it was time to go to bed, and while I was clearing the table, which had been laid in front of the fire, she undressed herself quickly, and got in. My neighbors were making a terrible din, singing and laughing like lunatics, and so I said to myself:

“’I was quite right to go out and bring in this girl; I should never have been able to do any work.’

“At that moment, however, a deep groan made me look round, and I said:

“‘What is the matter with you, my dear?’

“She did not reply, but continued to utter painful sighs, as if she were suffering horribly, and I continued:

“‘Do you feel ill?’ And suddenly she uttered a cry, a heartrending cry, and I rushed up to the bed, with a candle in my hand.

“Her face was distorted with pain, and she was wringing her hands, panting and uttering long, deep groans, which sounded like a rattle in the throat, and which are so painful to hear, and I asked her in consternation:

“‘What is the matter with you? Do tell me what is the matter.’

“‘Oh! my stomach! my stomach!’ she said. I pulled up the bed-clothes, and I saw ... My friends, she was in labor.

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“Then I lost my head, and I ran and knocked at the wall with my fists, shouting: ‘Help! help!’

“My door was opened almost immediately, and a crowd of people came in, men in evening dress, women in low necks, harlequins, Turks, Musketeers, and this inroad startled me so, that I could not explain myself, and they, who had thought that some accident had happened, or that a crime had been committed, could not understand what was the matter. At last, however, I managed to say:

“‘This ... this ... woman ... is being confined.’

“Then they looked at her, and gave their opinion, and a Friar, especially, declared that he knew all about it, and wished to assist nature, but as they were all as drunk as pigs, I was afraid that they would kill her, and I rushed downstairs without my hat, to fetch an old doctor, who lived in the next street. When I came back with him, the whole house was up; the gas on the stairs had been relighted, the lodgers from every floor were in my room, while four boatmen were finishing my champagne and lobsters.

“As soon as they saw me they raised a loud shout, and a milkmaid presented me with a horrible little wrinkled specimen of humanity, that was mewing like a cat, and said to me:

“‘It is a girl.’

“The doctor examined the woman, declared that she was in a dangerous state, as the event had occurred immediately after supper, and he took his leave, saying he would immediately send a sick nurse and a wet nurse, and an hour later, the two women came, bringing all that was requisite with them.

“I spent the night in my armchair, too distracted to be able to think of the consequences, and almost as soon as it was light, the doctor came again, who found his patient very ill, and said to me:

“‘Your wife, Monsieur....’

“‘She is not my wife,’ I interrupted him.

“‘Very well then, your mistress; it does not matter to me.’

“He told me what must be done for her, what her diet must be, and then wrote a prescription.

“What was I to do? Could I send the poor creature to the hospital? I should have been looked upon as a brute in the house and in all the neighborhood, and so I kept her in my rooms, and she had my bed for six weeks.

“I sent the child to some peasants at Poissy to be taken care of, and she still costs me fifty francs[9] a month, for as I had paid at first, I shall be obliged to go on paying as long as I live, and later on, she will believe that I am her father. But to crown my misfortunes, when the girl had recovered ... I found that she was in love with me, madly in love with me, the baggage!”

[Footnote 9: L2]

“Well?”

“Well, she had grown as thin as a homeless cat, and I turned the skeleton out of doors, but she watches for me in the streets, hides herself, so that she may see me pass, stops me in the evening when I go out, in order to kiss my hand, and, in fact, worries me enough to drive me mad; and that is why I never keep Christmas eve now.”

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WORDS OF LOVE

Sunday.—

You do not write to me, I never see you, you never come, so I must suppose that you have ceased to love me. But why? What have I done? Pray tell me, my own dear love. I love you so much, so dearly! I should like always to have you near me, to kiss you all day while I called you every tender name that I could think of. I adore you, I adore you, I adore you, my beautiful cock.—Your affectionate hen,

SOPHIE.

* * * * *

Monday.—

My dear friend,

You will absolutely understand nothing of what I am going to say to you, but that does not matter, and if my letter happens to be read by another woman, it may be profitable to her.

Had you been deaf and dumb, I should no doubt have loved you for a very long time, and the cause of what has happened is, that you can talk; that is all.

In love, you see, dreams are always made to sing, but in order that they might do so, they must not be interrupted, and when one talks between two kisses, one always interrupts that frenzied dream which our souls indulge in, unless they utter sublime words; and sublime words do not come out of the little mouths of pretty girls.

You do not understand me at all, do you? So much the better, and I will go on. You are certainly one of the most charming and adorable women whom I have ever seen.

Are there any eyes on earth that contain more dreams than yours, more unknown promises, greater depths of love? I do not think so. And when that mouth of yours, with its two round lips, smiles, and shows the glistening white teeth, one is tempted to say that there issues from this ravishing mouth ineffable music, something inexpressibly delicate, a sweetness which extorts sighs.

It is then that you quietly call out to me, my great and renowned “lady-killer,” and it then seems to me as though I had suddenly found an entrance into your thoughts, which I can see is ministering to your soul—that little soul of a pretty, little creature, yes, pretty, but—and that is what troubles me, don’t you see, troubles me more than tongue can tell. I would much prefer never to see you at all.

You go on pretending not to understand anything, do you not? I calculate on that.

Do you remember the first time you came to see me at my residence? How gaily you stepped inside, an odor of violets, which clung to your skirts, heralding your entrance; how we regarded each other, for ever so long, without uttering a word, after which we embraced like two fools.... Then ... then from that time to this, we have never exchanged a word.

But when we separated, did not our trembling hands and our eyes say many things, things ... which cannot be expressed in any language. At least, I thought so; and when you went away, you murmured:

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“We shall meet again soon!”

That was all you said, and you will never guess what delightful dreams you left me, all that I, as it were, caught a glimpse of, all that I fancied I could guess in your thoughts.

You see, my poor child, for men who are not stupid, who are rather refined and somewhat superior, love is such a complicated instrument, that the merest trifle puts it out of order. You women never perceive the ridiculous side of certain things when you love, and you fail to see the grotesqueness of some expressions.

Why does a word which sounds quite right in the mouth of a small, dark woman, seem quite wrong and funny in the mouth of a fat, light-haired woman? Why are the wheedling ways of the one, altogether out of place in the other?

Why is it that certain caresses which are delightful from the one, should be wearisome from the other? Why? Because in everything, and especially in love, perfect harmony, absolute agreement in motion, voice, words, and in demonstrations of tenderness, are necessary, with the person who moves, speaks and manifests affection; it is necessary in age, in height, in the color of the hair, and in the style of beauty.

If a woman of thirty-five, who has arrived at the age of violent, tempestuous passion, were to preserve the slightest traces of the caressing archness of her love affairs at twenty, were not to understand that she ought to express herself differently, look at her lover differently, and kiss him differently were not to see that she ought to be Dido and not a Juliette, she would infallibly disgust nine lovers out of ten, even if they could not account to themselves for their estrangement. Do you understand me? No. I hoped so.

From the time that you turned on your tap of tenderness, it was all over for me, my dear friend. Sometimes we would embrace for five minutes, in one interminable kiss, one of those kisses which make lovers close their eyes, as if part of it would escape through their looks, as if to preserve it entire in that clouded soul which it is ravaging. And then, when our lips separated, you would say to me:

“That was nice, you fat old dog.”

At such moments, I could have beaten you; for you gave me successively all the names of animals and vegetables which you doubtless found in some *cookery book*, or *Gardener’s Manual*. But that is nothing.

The caresses of love are brutal, bestial, and if one comes to think of it, grotesque! ... Oh! My poor child, what joking elf, what perverse sprite could have prompted the concluding words of your letter to me? I have made a collection of them, but out of love for you, I will not show them to you.

And you really sometimes said things which were quite inopportune, and you managed now and then to let out an exalted: *I love you!* on such singular occasions, that I was obliged to restrain a strong desire to laugh. There are times when the words: *I love you!* are so out of place, that they become indecorous; let me tell you that.

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But you do not understand me, and many other women will also not understand me, and think me stupid, though that matters very little to me. Hungry men eat like gluttons, but people of refinement are disgusted at it, and they often feel an invincible dislike for a dish, on account of a mere trifle. It is the same with love, as it is with cookery.

What I cannot comprehend, for example, is, that certain women who fully understand the irresistible attraction of fine, embroidered stockings, the exquisite charm of shades, the witchery of valuable lace concealed in the depths of their underclothing, the exciting jest of hidden luxury, and all the subtle delicacies of female elegance, never understand the invincible disgust with which words that are out of place, or foolishly tender, inspire us.

At times coarse and brutal expressions work wonders, as they excite the senses, and make the heart beat, and they are allowable at the hours of combat. Is not that sentence of Cambronne's sublime? [10]

[Footnote 10: At Waterloo, General Cambronne is reported to have said, when called on to surrender:—*The Guard dies, but does not surrender.* But according to Victor Hugo, in *Les Miserables*, he used the expression *Merde*! which cannot be put into English fit for ears polite.—TRANSLATOR.]

Nothing shocks us that comes at the right time; but then, we must also know when to hold our tongue, and to avoid phrases *a la Paul de Kock*, at certain moments.

And I embrace you passionately, on the condition that you say nothing,

RENE.

A DIVORCE CASE

M. Chassel advocate, rises to speak: Mr. President and gentlemen of the jury. The cause that I am charged to defend before you, requires medicine rather than justice; and is much more a case of pathology than a case of ordinary law. At first blush the facts seem very simple.

A young man, very rich, with a noble and cultivated mind, and a generous heart, becomes enamored of a young lady, who is the perfection of beauty, more than beautiful, in fact; she is adorable, besides being as gracious, as she is charming, as good and true as she is tender and pretty, and he marries her. For some time, he comports himself towards her not only as a devoted husband, but as a man full of solicitude and tenderness. Then he neglects her, misuses her, seems to entertain for her an insurmountable aversion, an irresistible disgust. One day he even strikes her, not only without any cause, but also without the faintest pretext. I am not going, gentlemen, to draw a picture of silly allurements, which no one would comprehend. I

shall not paint to you the wretched life of those two beings, and the horrible grief of this young woman. It will be sufficient to convince you, if I read some fragments from a journal written up every day by that poor young man, by that poor fool! For it is in the presence of a fool, gentlemen, that we now find ourselves, and the case is all the more curious, all the more interesting, seeing that, in many points, it recalls the insanity of the unfortunate prince who recently died, of the witless king who reigned platonically over Bavaria. I shall hence designate this case—poetic folly.

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You will readily call to mind all that has been told of that most singular prince. He caused to be erected amid the most magnificent scenery his kingdom afforded, veritable fairy castles. The reality even of the beauty of the things themselves, as well as of the places, did not satisfy him. He invented, he created, in these improbable manors, factitious horizons, obtained by means of theatrical artifices, changes of view, painted forests, fabled empires, in which the leaves of the trees became precious stones. He had the Alps, and glaciers, steppes, deserts of sand made hot by a blazing sun; and at nights, under the rays of the real moon, lakes which sparkled from below by means of fantastic electric lights. Swans floated on the lakes which glistened with skiffs, while an orchestra, composed of the finest executants in the world, inebriated with poetry the soul of the royal fool. That man was chaste, that man was a virgin. He lived only to dream, his dream, his dream divine. One evening he took out with him in his boat, a lady, young and beautiful, a great artiste, and he begged her to sing. Intoxicated herself by the magnificent scenery, by the languid softness of the air, by the perfume of flowers, and by the ecstacy of that prince, both young and handsome, she sang, she sang as women sing who have been touched by love; then, overcome, trembling, she falls on the bosom of the king in order to seek out his lips. But he throws her into the lake, and seizing his oars, rows back to the shore, without concerning himself, whether anybody has saved her or not.

Gentlemen of the jury, we find ourselves in presence of a case similar in every way to that. I shall say no more now, except to read some passages from the journal which we unexpectedly came upon in the drawer of an old secretary.

* * * * *

How sad and weary is everything; always the same, always hateful. How I dream of a land more beautiful, more noble, more varied. What a poor conception they have of their God, if their God existed, or if he had not created other things, elsewhere. Always woods, little woods, waves which resemble waves, plains which resemble plains, everything is sameness and monotony. And Man? Man? What a horrible animal! wicked, haughty and repugnant!

* * * * *

It is essential to love, to love perdition, without seeing that which one loves. For, to see is to comprehend, and to comprehend is to embrace. It is necessary to love, to become intoxicated by it, just as one gets drunk with wine, even to the extent that one knows no longer what one is drinking. And to drink, to drink, to drink, without drawing breath, day and night!

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I have found her, I believe. She has about her something ideal which does not belong to this world, and which furnishes wings to my dream. Ah! my dream! How it reveals to me beings different from what they really are! She is a blonde, a delicate blonde, with hair whose delicate shade is inexpressible. Her eyes are blue! Only blue eyes can penetrate my soul. All women, the woman who lives in my heart, reveal themselves to me in the eye, only in the eyes. Oh! what a mystery, what a mystery is the eye! The whole universe lives in it, inasmuch as it sees, inasmuch as it reflects. It contains the universe, both things and beings, forests and oceans, men and beasts, the settings of the sun, the stars, the arts—all, all, it sees; it collects and absorbs all; and there is still more in it; the eye of itself has a soul; it has in it the man who thinks, the man who loves, the man who laughs, the man who suffers! Oh! regard the blue eyes of women, those eyes that are as deep as the sea, as changeful as the sky, so sweet, so soft, soft as the breezes, sweet as music, luscious as kisses; and transparent, so clear that one sees behind them, discerns the soul, the blue soul which colors them, which animates them, which electrifies them. Yes, the soul has the color of the looks. The blue soul alone contains in itself that which dreams; it bears its azure to the floods and into space. The eye! Think of it, the eye! It imbibes the visible life, in order to nourish thought. It drinks in the world, color, movement, books, pictures, all that is beautiful, all that is ugly, and weaves ideas out of them. And when it regards us, it gives us the sensation of a happiness that is not of this earth. It informs us of that of which we have always been ignorant; it makes us comprehend that the realities of our dreams are but noisome ordures.

* * * * *

I love her too for her walk. “Even when the bird walks one feels that it has wings,” as the poet has said. When she passes one feels that she is of another race from ordinary women, of a race more delicate, and more divine. I shall marry her to-morrow. But I am afraid, I am afraid of so many things!

* * * * *

Two beasts, two dogs, two wolves, two foxes, cut their way through the plantation and encounter one another. One of each two is male, the other female. They couple. They couple in consequence of an animal instinct, which forces them to continue the race, their race, the one from which they have sprung, the hairy coat, the form, movements and habitudes. The whole of the animal creation do the same without knowing why.

We human beings, also.

It is for this I have married; I have obeyed that insane passion which throws us in the direction of the female.

* * * * *

She is my wife. In accordance with my ideal desires, she comes very nearly to realize my unrealizable dream. But in separating from her, even for a second, after I have held her in my arms, she becomes no more than the being whom nature has made use of, to disappoint all my hopes.

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Has she disappointed them? No. And why have I grown weary of her, become loath even to touch her; she cannot graze even the palm of my hand, or the tip of my lips, but my heart throbs with unutterable disgust, not perhaps disgust of her, but a disgust more potent, more widespread, more loathsome; the disgust, in a word, of carnal love so vile in itself that it has become for all refined beings, a shameful thing, which is necessary to conceal, which one never speaks of save in a whisper, nor without blushing.

* * * * *

I can no longer bear the idea of my wife coming near me, calling me by name, with a smile; I cannot look at her, nor touch even her arm, I cannot do it any more. At one time I thought to be kissed by her, would be to transport me to St. Paul's seventh heaven. One day, she was suffering from one of those transient fevers, and I smelled in her breath, a subtle, slight almost imperceptible puff of human putridity; I was completely overthrown.

Oh! the flesh, with its seductive and eager smell, a putrefaction which walks, which thinks, which speaks, which looks, which laughs, in which nourishment ferments and rots, which, nevertheless, is rose-colored, pretty, tempting, deceitful as the soul itself.

* * * * *

Why flowers alone, which smell so sweet, those large flowers, glittering or pale, whose tones and shades make my heart tremble and trouble my eyes. They are so beautiful, their structure is so finished, so varied and sensual, semi-opened like human organs, more tempting than mouths, and streaked with turned up lips, teeth, flesh, seed of life powders, which, in each, gives forth a distinct perfume.

They reproduce themselves, they alone, in the world, without polluting their inviolable race, shedding around them the divine influence of their love, the odoriferous incense of their caresses, the essence of their incomparable body, of their body adorned with every grace, with every elegances of every shape and form; who have likewise the coquetry of every hue of color, and the inebriating seduction of every variety of perfume.

* * * * *

FRAGMENTS WHICH WERE SELECTED SIX MONTHS LATER.

I love flowers, not as flowers, but as material and delicious beings; I pass my days and my nights in beds of flowers, where they have been concealed from the public view like the women of a harem.

Who knows, except myself, the sweetness, the infatuation, the quivering, carnal, ideal, superhuman ecstacy of these tendernesses; and those kisses upon the bare flesh of a

rose, upon the blushing flesh, upon the white skin, so miraculously different, delicate, rare, subtle, unctuous, of these adorable flowers!

I have flower-beds that no one has seen except myself, and which I tend myself.

I enter there as one would glide into a place of secret pleasure. In the lofty glass gallery, I pass first through a collection of enclosed carollas, half open or in full bloom, which incline towards the ground, or towards the roof. This is the first kiss they have given me.

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The flowers just mentioned, these flowers which adorn the vestibule of my mysterious passions, are my servants and not my favorites.

They salute me by the change of their color and by their first inhalations. They are darlings, coquettes, arranged in eight rows to the right, eight rows, the left, and so laid out that they look like two gardens springing up from under my feet.

My heart palpitates, my eyes flash at the sight of them; my blood rushes through my veins, my soul is elated, and my hands tremble from desire as soon as I touch them. I pass on. There are three closed doors at the bottom of that gallery. I can make my choice of them. I have three harems.

But I enter most often the habitation of the orchids, my little wheedlers, by preference. Their chamber is low, suffocating. The humid and hot air make the skin moist, takes away the breath and causes the fingers to quiver. They come, these strange girls, from a country marshy, burning and unhealthy. They draw you towards them as do the sirens, are as deadly as poison, admirably fantastic, enervating, dreadful. The butterflies here would also seem to have enormous wings, tiny feet, and eyes! Yes! they have also eyes! They look at me, they see me, prodigious, incomparable beings, fairies, daughters of the sacred earth, of the impalpable air, and of hot sun rays, that mother bountiful of the universe. Yes, they have wings, they have eyes, and nuances that no painter could imitate, every charm, every grace, every form that one could dream of. These wombs are transverse, odoriferous and transparent, ever open for love and more tempting than all the flesh of women. The unimaginable designs of their little bodies inebriates the soul, and transports it to a paradise of images and of voluptuous ideals. They tremble upon their stems as though they would fly. When they do fly do they come to me? No, it is my heart that hovers o'er them, like a mystic male, tortured by love.

No wing of any animal can keep pace with them. We are alone, they and I, in the lighted prison which I have constructed for them. I regard them, I contemplate them, I admire them, I adore them, the one after the other.

How healthy, strong and rosy, a rosiness that moistens the lips of desire! How I love them! The border is frizzled, paler than their throat, where the carolla hides itself away; a mysterious mouth, seductive sugar under the tongue, exhibiting and unveiling the delicate, admirable and sacred organs of these divine little creatures which smell so exquisitely and do not speak.

I sometimes have a passion for some of them that lasts as long as their existence, which only embraces a few days and nights. I then have them taken away from the common gallery and enclosed in a pretty glass cabin, in which there murmurs a jet of water over against a tropical gazon, which has been brought from one of the Pacific Islands. And I remain close to it, ardent, feverish and tormented, knowing that its death

is near, and watch it fading away, while that in thought, I possess it, aspire to its love, drink it in, and then pluck its short life with an inexpressible caress.

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* * * * *

When he had finished the reading of these fragments, the advocate continued:

“Decency, gentlemen of the jury, hinders me from communicating to you the extraordinary avowals of this shameless, idealistic fool. The fragments that I have just submitted to you will be sufficient, in my opinion, to enable you to appreciate this instance of mental malady, less rare in our epoch of hysterical insanity and of corrupt decadence than most of us believe.

“I think, then, that my client is more entitled than any women whatever to claim a divorce, in the exceptional circumstances in which the disordered senses of her husband has placed her.”

WHO KNOWS?

I

My God! My God! I am going to write down at last what has happened to me. But how can I? How dare I? The thing is so bizarre, so inexplicable, so incomprehensible, so silly!

If I were not perfectly sure of what I have seen, sure that there was not in my reasoning any defect, no error in my declarations, no lacune in the inflexible sequence of my observations, I should believe myself to be the dupe of a simple hallucination, the sport of a singular vision. After all, who knows?

Yesterday I was in a private asylum, but I went there voluntarily, out of prudence and fear. Only one single human being knows my history, and that is the doctor of the said asylum. I am going to write to him. I really do not know why? To disembarrass myself? For I feel as though I were being weighed down by an intolerable nightmare.

Let me explain.

I have always been a recluse, a dreamer, a kind of isolated philosopher, easy-going, content with but little, harboring ill-feeling against no man, and without even having a grudge against heaven. I have constantly lived alone, consequently, a kind of torture takes hold of me when I find myself in the presence of others. How is this to be explained? I for one cannot. I am not averse from going out into the world, from conversation, from dining with friends, but when they are near me for any length of time, even the most intimate friends, they bore me, fatigue me, enervate me, and I experience an overwhelming torturing desire, to see them get up to depart, or to take themselves away, and to leave me by myself.

That desire is more than a craving; it is an irresistible necessity. And if the presence of people, with whom I find myself, were to be continued; if I were compelled, not only to listen, but also to follow, for any length of time, their conversation, a serious accident would assuredly take place. What kind of accident? Ah! who knows? Perhaps a slight paralytic stroke? Yes, probably!

I like so much to be alone that I cannot even endure the vicinage of other beings sleeping under the same roof. I cannot live in Paris, because when there I suffer the most acute agony. I lead a moral life, and am therefore tortured in my body and in my nerves by that immense crowd which swarms, which lives around even when it sleeps. Ah! the sleeping of others is more painful still than their conversation. And I can never find repose when I know, when I feel, that on the other side of a wall, several existences are interrupted by these regular eclipses of reason.

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Why am I thus? Who knows? The cause of it is perhaps very simple. I get tired very soon with everything that does not emanate from me. And there are many people in similar case.

We are, on earth, two distinct races. Those who have need of others, whom others distract, engage, soothe, whom solitude harasses, pains, stupefies, like the forward movement of a terrible glacier, or the traversing of the desert; and those, on the contrary, whom others weary, tire, bore, silently torture, while isolation calms them, bathes them in the repose of independency, and plunges them into the humors of their own thoughts. In fine, there is here a normal, physical phenomenon. Some are constituted to live a life without themselves, others, to live a life within themselves. As for me, my exterior associations are abruptly and painfully short-lived, and, as they reach their limits, I experience in my whole body and in my whole intelligence, an intolerable uneasiness.

As a result of this, I became attached, or rather, I had become much attached to inanimate objects, which have for me the importance of beings, and my house has become, had become, a world in which I lived an active and solitary life, surrounded by all manner of things, furniture, familiar knick-knacks, as sympathetic in my eyes as the visages of human beings. I had filled my mansion with them, little by little, I had adorned it with them, and I felt an inward content and satisfaction, was more happy than if I had been in the arms of a desirable female, whose wonted caresses had become a soothing and delightful necessity.

I had had this house constructed in the center of a beautiful garden, which hid it from the public highways, and which was near the entrance to a city where I could find, on occasion, the resources of society, for which, at moments, I had a longing. All my domestics slept in a separate building which was situated at some considerable distance from my house, at the far end of the kitchen garden, which was surrounded by a high wall. The obscure envelopment of the nights, in the silence of my invisible and concealed habitation, buried under the leaves of the great trees, were so reposeful and so delicious, that I hesitated every evening, for several hours, before I could retire to my couch, in order to enjoy the solitude a little longer.

One day *Signad* had been played at one of the city theaters. It was the first time that I had listened to that beautiful, musical, and fairy-like drama, and I had derived from it the liveliest pleasures.

I returned home on foot, with a light step, my head full of sonorous phrases, and my mind haunted by delightful visions. It was night, the dead of night, and so dark that I could hardly distinguish the broad highway, and whence I stumbled into the ditch more than once. From the custom's-house, at the barriers to my house, was about a mile, perhaps a little more, or a leisurely walk of about twenty

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minutes. It was one o'clock in the morning, one o'clock or maybe half-past one; the sky had by this time cleared somewhat and the crescent appeared, the gloomy crescent of the last quarter of the moon. The crescent of the first quarter is, that which rises about five or six o'clock in the evening; is clear, gay and fretted with silver; but the one which rises after midnight is reddish, sad and desolating; it is the true Sabbath crescent. Every prowler by night has made the same observation. The first, though as slender as a thread, throws a faint joyous light which rejoices the heart and lines the ground with distinct shadows; the last, sheds hardly a dying glimmer, and is so wan that it occasions hardly any shadows.

In the distance, I perceived the somber mass of my garden, and I know not why I was seized with a feeling of uneasiness at the idea of going inside. I slowed my pace, and walked very softly, the thick cluster of trees having the appearance of a tomb in which my house was buried.

I opened my outer gate, and I entered the long avenue of sycamores, which ran in the direction of the house, arranged vault-wise like a high tunnel, traversing opaque masses, and winding round the turf lawns, on which baskets of flowers, in the pale darkness, could be indistinctly discerned.

In approaching the house, I was seized by a strange feeling, I could hear nothing, I stood still. In the trees there was not even a breath of air. "What is the matter with me then?" I said to myself. For ten years I had entered and re-entered in the same way, without ever experiencing the least inquietude. I never had any fear at nights. The sight of a man, a marauder, or a thief, would have thrown me into a fit of anger, and I would have rushed at him without any hesitation. Moreover, I was armed, I had my revolver. But I did not touch it, for I was anxious to resist that feeling of dread with which I was permeated.

What was it? Was it a presentiment? That mysterious presentiment which takes hold of the senses of men who have witnessed something which, to them, is inexplicable? Perhaps? Who knows?

In proportion as I advanced, I felt my skin quiver more and more, and when I was close to the wall, near the outhouses of my vast residence, I felt that it would be necessary for me to wait a few minutes before opening the door and going inside. I sat down, then, on a bench, under the windows of my drawing room. I rested there, a little fearful, with my head leaning against the wall, my eyes wide open under the shade of the foliage. For the first few minutes, I did not observe anything unusual around me; I had a humming noise in my ears, but that happened often to me. Sometimes it seemed to me that I heard trains passing, that I heard clocks striking, that I heard a multitude on the march.

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Very soon, those humming noises became more distinct, more concentrated, more determinable, I was deceiving myself. It was not the ordinary tingling of my arteries which transmitted to my ears these rumbling sounds, but it was a very distinct, though very confused, noise which came, without any doubt whatever, from the interior of my house. I distinguished through the walls this continued noise, I should rather say agitation than noise, an indistinct moving about of a pile of things, as if people were tossing about, displacing, and carrying away surreptitiously all my furniture.

I doubted, however, for some considerable time yet, the evidence of my ears. But having placed my ear against one of the outhouses, the better to discover what this strange disturbance was that was inside my house, I became convinced, certain, that something was taking place in my residence, which was altogether abnormal and incomprehensible. I had no fear, but I was—how shall I express it—paralyzed by astonishment. I did not draw my revolver, knowing very well that there was no need of my doing so. I listened.

I listened a long time, but could come to no resolution, my mind being quite clear, though in myself I was naturally anxious. I got up and waited, listening always to the noise, which gradually increased, and at intervals grew very loud, and which seemed to become an impatient, angry disturbance, a mysterious commotion.

Then, suddenly, ashamed of my timidity, I seized my bunch of keys, I selected the one I wanted, I guided it into the lock, turned it twice, and, pushing the door with all my might, sent it banging against the partition.

The collision sounded like the report of a gun, and there responded to that explosive noise, from roof to basement of my residence, a formidable tumult. It was so sudden, so terrible, so deafening, that I recoiled a few steps, and though I knew it to be wholly useless, I pulled my revolver out of its case.

I continued to listen for some time longer. I could distinguish now an extraordinary pattering upon the steps of my grand staircase, on the waxed floors, on the carpets, not of boots, nor of naked feet, but of iron, and wooden crutches, which resounded like cymbals. Then I suddenly discerned, on the threshold of my door, an arm chair, my large reading easy chair, which set off waddling. It went away through my garden. Others followed it, those of my drawing-room, then my sofas, dragging themselves along like crocodiles on their short paws; then all my chairs, bounding like goats, and the little footstools, hopping like rabbits.

Oh! what a sensation! I slunk back into a clump of bushes where I remained crouched up, watching, meanwhile, my furniture defile past, for everything walked away, the one behind the other, briskly or slowly, according to its weight or size. My piano, my grand piano, bounded past with the gallop of a horse and a murmur of music in its sides; the smaller articles slid along the gravel like snails, my brushes, crystal, cups and saucers,

which glistened in the moonlight. I saw my writing desk appear, a rare curiosity of the last century, which contained all the letters I had ever received, all the history of my heart, an old history from which I have suffered so much! Besides, there was inside of it a great many cherished photographs.

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Suddenly—I no longer had any fear—I threw myself on it, seized it as one would seize a thief, as one would seize a wife about to run away; but it pursued its irresistible course, and despite my efforts and despite my anger, I could not even retard its pace. As I was resisting in desperation that insuperable force, I was thrown to the ground in my struggle with it. It then rolled me over, trailed me along the gravel, and the rest of my furniture which followed it, began to march over me, tramping on my legs and injuring them. When I loosed my hold, other articles passed over my body, just as a charge of cavalry does over the body of a dismounted soldier.

Seized at last with terror, I succeeded in dragging myself out of the main avenue, and in concealing myself again among the shrubbery, so as to watch the disappearance of the most cherished objects, the smallest, the least striking, the least unknown which had once belonged to me.

I then heard, in the distance, noises which came from my apartments, which sounded now as if the house were empty, a loud noise of shutting of doors. They were being slammed from top to bottom of my dwelling, even the door which I had just opened myself unconsciously, and which had closed of itself, when the last thing had taken its departure. I took flight also, running towards the city, and I only regained my self-composure on reaching the boulevards, where I met belated people. I rang the bell of a hotel where I was known. I had knocked the dust off my clothes with my hands, and I told the porter how that I had lost my bunch of keys, which included also that of the kitchen garden, where my servants slept in a house standing by itself, on the other side of the wall of the enclosure, which protected my fruits and vegetables from the raids of marauders.

I covered myself up to the eyes in the bed which was assigned to me; but I could not sleep, and I waited for the dawn in listening to the throbbing of my heart. I had given orders that my servants were to be summoned to the hotel at daybreak, and my *valet de chambre* knocked at my door at seven o'clock in the morning.

His countenance bore a woeful look.

"A great misfortune has happened during the night, monsieur," said he.

"What is it?"

"Somebody has stolen the whole of monsieur's furniture, all, everything, even to the smallest articles."

This news pleased me. Why? Who knows? I was complete master of myself, bent on dissimulating, on telling no one of anything I had seen; determined on concealing and in burying in my heart of hearts, a terrible secret. I responded:

“They must then be the same people who have stolen my keys. The police must be informed immediately. I am going to get up, and I will rejoin you in a few moments.”

The investigation into the circumstances under which the robbery might have been committed lasted for five months. Nothing was found, not even the smallest of my knick-knacks, nor the least trace of the thieves. Good gracious! If I had only told them what I knew.... If I had said ... I had been locked up—I, not the thieves—and that I was the only person who had seen everything from the first.

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Yes I but I knew how to keep silence. I shall never refurnish my house. That were indeed useless. The same thing would happen again. I had no desire even to re-enter the house, and I did not re-enter it; I never visited it again. I went to Paris, to the hotel, and I consulted doctors in regard to the condition of my nerves, which had disquieted me a good deal ever since that fatal night.

They advised me to travel, and I followed their council.

II

I began by making an excursion into Italy. The sunshine did me much good. During six months I wandered about from Genoa to Venice, from Venice to Florence, from Florence to Rome, from Rome to Naples. Then I traveled over Sicily, a country celebrated for its scenery and its monuments, relics left by the Greeks and the Normans. I passed over into Africa, I traversed at my ease that immense desert, yellow and tranquil, in which the camels, the gazelles, and the Arab vagabonds, roam about, where, in the rare and transparent atmosphere, there hovers no vague hauntings, where there is never any night, but always day.

I returned to France by Marseilles, and in spite of all the Provencal gaiety, the diminished clearness of the sky made me sad. I experienced, in returning to the continent, the peculiar sensation, of an illness which I believed had been cured, and a dull pain which predicted that the seeds of the disease had not been eradicated.

I then returned to Paris. At the end of a month, I was very dejected. It was in the autumn, and I wished to make, before the approach of winter, an excursion through Normandy, a country with which I was unacquainted.

I began my journey, in the best of spirits, at Rouen, and for eight days I wandered about passive, ravished and enthusiastic, in that ancient city, in that astonishing museum of extraordinary Gothic monuments.

But, one afternoon, about four o'clock, as I was sauntering slowly through a seemingly unattractive street, by which there ran a stream as black as the ink called "Eau de Robec," my attention, fixed for the moment on the quaint, antique appearance of some of the houses, was suddenly turned away by the view of a series of second-hand furniture shops, which succeeded one another, door after door.

Ah! they had carefully chosen their locality, these sordid traffickers in antiquaries, in that quaint little street, overlooking that sinister stream of water, under those tile and slate-pointed roofs in which still grinned the vanes of byegone days.

At the end of these grim storehouses you saw piled up sculptured chests, Rouen, Sevre, and Moustier's pottery, painted statues, others of oak, Christs, Virgins, Saints,

church ornaments, chasubles, capes, even sacred vases, and an old gilded wooden tabernacle, where a god had hidden himself away. Oh! What singular caverns are in those lofty houses, crowded with objects of every description, where the existence of things seems to be ended, things which have survived their original possessors, their century, their times, their fashions, in order to be bought as curiosities by new generations.

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My affection for bibelots was awakened in that city of antiquaries. I went from shop to shop crossing, in two strides, the four plank rotten bridges thrown over the nauseous current of the Eau de Robec.

Heaven protect me! What a shock! One of my most beautiful wardrobes was suddenly descried by me, at the end of a vault, which was crowded with articles of every description and which seemed to be the entrance to some catacombs of a cemetery of ancient furniture. I approached my wardrobe, trembling in every limb, trembling to such an extent that I dare not touch it. I put forth my hand, I hesitated. It was indeed my wardrobe, nevertheless; a unique wardrobe of the time of Louis XIII., recognizable by anyone who had only seen it once. Casting my eyes suddenly a little farther, towards the more somber depths of the gallery, I perceived three of my tapestry covered chairs; and farther on still, my two Henry II. tables, such rare treasures that people came all the way from Paris to see them.

Think! only think in what a state of mind I now was! I advanced, haltingly, quivering with emotion, but I advanced, for I am brave, I advanced like a knight of the dark ages.

I found, at every step, something that belonged to me; my brushes, my books, my tables, my silks, my arms, everything, except the bureau full of my letters, and that I could not discover.

I walked on, descending to the dark galleries, in order to ascend next to the floors above. I was alone, I called out, nobody answered, I was alone; there was no one in that house—a house as vast and tortuous as a labyrinth.

Night came on, and I was compelled to sit down in the darkness on one of my own chairs, for I had no desire to go away. From time to time I shouted, “Hullo, hullo, somebody.”

I had sat there, certainly, for more than an hour, when I heard steps, steps soft and slow, I knew not where, I was unable to locate them, but bracing myself up, I called out anew, whereupon I perceived a glimmer of light in the next chamber.

“Who is there?” said a voice.

“A buyer,” I responded.

“It is too late to enter thus into a shop.”

“I have been waiting for you for more than an hour,” I answered.

“You can come back to-morrow.”

“To-morrow I must quit Rouen.”

I dared not advance, and he did not come to me. I saw always the glimmer of his light, which was shining on a tapestry on which were two angels flying over the dead on a field of battle. It belonged to me also. I said:

“Well, come here.”

“I am at your service,” he answered.

I got up and went towards him.

Standing in the center of a large room was a little man, very short and very fat, phenomenally fat, a hideous phenomenon.

He had a singular beard, straggling hair, white and yellow, and not a hair on his head. Not a hair!

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As he held his candle aloft at arm's length in order to see me, his cranium appeared to me to resemble a little moon, in that vast chamber, encumbered with old furniture. His features were wrinkled and blown, and his eyes could not be seen.

I bought three chairs which belonged to myself, and paid at once a large sum for them, giving him merely the number of my room at the hotel. They were to be delivered the next day before nine o'clock.

I then started off. He conducted me, with much politeness, as far as the door.

I immediately repaired to the commissaire's office at the central police depot, and I told the commissaire of the robbery which had been perpetrated and of the discovery I had just made. He required time to communicate by telegraph with the authorities who had originally charge of the case, for information, and he begged me to wait in his office until an answer came back. An hour later, an answer came back, which was in accord with my statements.

"I am going to arrest and interrogate this man at once," he said to me, "for he may have conceived some sort of suspicion, and smuggled away out of sight what belongs to you. Will you go and dine and return in two hours: I shall then have the man here, and I shall subject him to a fresh interrogation in your presence."

"Most gladly, monsieur. I thank you with my whole heart."

I went to dine at my hotel and I ate better than I could have believed. I was quite happy now; "that man was in the hands of the police," I thought.

Two hours later I returned to the office of the police functionary, who was waiting for me.

"Well, monsieur," said he, on perceiving me, "we have not been able to find your man. My agents cannot put their hands on him."

Ah! I felt myself sinking.

"But ... you have at least found his house?" I asked.

"Yes, certainly; and what is more, it is now being watched and guarded until his return. As for him, he has disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Yes, disappeared. He ordinarily passes his evenings at the house of a female neighbor, who is also a furniture broker, a queer sort of sorceress, the widow Bidoin. She has not seen him this evening and cannot give any information in regard to him. We must wait until to-morrow."

I went away. Ah! how sinister the streets of Rouen seemed to me, now troubled and haunted!

I slept so badly that I had a fit of nightmare every time I went off to sleep.

As I did not wish to appear too restless or eager, I waited till 10 o'clock the next day before reporting myself to the police.

The merchant had not reappeared. His shop remained closed.

The commissary said to me:

"I have taken all the necessary steps. The court has been made acquainted with the affair. We shall go together to that shop and have it opened, and you shall point out to me all that belongs to you."

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We drove there in a cab. Police agents were stationed round the building; there was a locksmith, too, and the door of the shop was soon opened.

On entering, I could not discover my wardrobes, my chairs, my tables; I saw nothing, nothing of that which had furnished my house, no, nothing, although on the previous evening, I could not take a step without encountering something that belonged to me.

The chief commissary, much astonished, regarded me at first with suspicion.

“My God, monsieur,” said I to him, “the disappearance of these articles of furniture coincides strangely with that of the merchant.”

He laughed.

“That is true. You did wrong in buying and paying for the articles which were your own property, yesterday. It was that that gave him the cue.”

“What seems to me incomprehensible,” I replied, “is, that all the places that were occupied by my furniture are now filled by other furniture.”

“Oh!” responded the commissary, “he has had all night, and has no doubt been assisted by accomplices. This house must communicate with its neighbors. But have no fear, monsieur; I will have the affair promptly and thoroughly investigated. The brigand shall not escape us for long, seeing that we are in charge of the den.”

* * * * *

Ah! My heart, my heart, my poor heart, how it beat!

I remained a fortnight at Rouen. The man did not return. Heavens! good heavens! That man, what was it that could have frightened and surprised him!

But, on the sixteenth day, early in the morning, I received from my gardener, now the keeper of my empty and pillaged house, the following strange letter:

* * * * *

Monsieur:

I have the honor to inform monsieur, that there happened something, the evening before last, which nobody can understand, and the police no more than the rest of us. The whole of the furniture has been returned, not one piece is missing—everything is in its place, up to the very smallest article. The house is now the same in every respect as it was before the robbery took place. It is enough to make one lose one’s head. The thing took place during the night Friday—Saturday. The roads are dug up as though the

whole barrier had been dragged from its place up to the door. The same thing was observed the day after the disappearance of the furniture.

We are anxiously expecting monsieur, whose very humble and obedient servant, I am,

Raudin, Phillipe.

* * * * *

Ah! no, no, ah! never, never, ah! no. I shall never return there!

I took the letter to the commissary of police.

“It is a very dexterous restitution,” said he. “Let us bury the hatchet. We shall, however, nip the man one of these days.”

But he has never been nipped. No. They have not nipped him, and I am afraid of him now, as though he were a ferocious animal that had been let loose behind me.

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Inexplicable! It is inexplicable, this monster of a moon-struck skull! We shall never get to comprehend it. I shall not return to my former residence. What does it matter to me? I am afraid of encountering that man again, and I shall not run the risk.

I shall not risk it! I shall not risk it! I shall not risk it!

And if he returns, if he takes possession of his shop, who is to prove that my furniture was on his premises? There is only my testimony against him; and I feel that that is not above suspicion.

Ah! no! This kind of existence was no longer possible. I was not able to guard the secret of what I had seen. I could not continue to live like the rest of the world, with the fear upon me that those scenes might be re-enacted.

I have come to consult the doctor who directs this lunatic asylum, and I have told him everything.

After he had interrogated me for a long time, he said to me:

“Will you consent, monsieur, to remain here for some time?”

“Most willingly, monsieur.”

“You have some means?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Will you have isolated apartments?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Would you care to receive any friends?”

“No, monsieur, no, nobody. The man from Rouen might take it into his head to pursue me here to be revenged on me.”

And I have been alone, alone, all, all alone, for three months. I am growing tranquil by degrees. I have no longer any fears. If the antiquary should become mad ... and if he should be brought into this asylum! Even prisons themselves are not places of security.

SIMON’S PAPA

Noon had just struck. The school-door opened and the youngsters tumbled out rolling over each other in their haste to get out quickly. But instead of promptly dispersing and

going home to dinner as was their daily wont, they stopped a few paces off, broke up into knots and set to whispering.

The fact was that that morning Simon, the son of La Blanchotte, had, for the first time, attended school.

They had all of them in their families heard talk of La Blanchotte; and, although in public she was welcome enough, the mothers among themselves treated her with compassion of a somewhat disdainful kind, which the children had caught without in the least knowing why.

As for Simon himself, they did not know him, for he never went abroad, and did not go galloping about with them through the streets of the village or along the banks of the river. Therefore, they loved him but little; and it was with a certain delight, mingled with considerable astonishment, that they met and that they recited to each other this phrase, set afoot by a lad of fourteen or fifteen who appeared to know all, all about it, so sagaciously did he wink. “You know ... Simon ... well, he has no papa.”

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La Blanchotte's son appeared in his turn upon the threshold of the school.

He was seven or eight years old. He was rather pale, very neat, with a timid and almost awkward manner.

He was on the point of making his way back to his mother's house when the groups of his school-fellows perpetually whispering and watching him with the mischievous and heartless eyes of children bent upon playing a nasty trick, gradually surrounded him and ended by enclosing him altogether. There he stood fixed amidst them, surprised and embarrassed, not understanding what they were going to do with him. But the lad who had brought the news, puffed up with the success he had met with already, demanded:

"How do you name yourself, you?"

He answered: "Simon."

"Simon what?" retorted the other.

The child, altogether bewildered, repeated: "Simon."

The lad shouted at him: "One is named Simon something ... that is not a name ... Simon indeed."

And he, on the brink of tears, replied for the third time:

"I am named Simon."

The urchins fell a-laughing. The lad triumphantly lifted up his voice: "You can see plainly that he has no papa."

A deep silence ensued. The children were dumbfounded by this extraordinary, impossible monstrous thing—a boy who had not a papa; they looked upon him as a phenomenon, an unnatural being, and they felt that contempt, until then inexplicable, of their mothers for La Blanchotte grow upon them. As for Simon, he had propped himself against a tree to avoid falling and he remained as though struck to the earth by an irreparable disaster. He sought to explain, but he could think of no answer for them, to deny this horrible charge that he had no papa. At last he shouted at them quite recklessly: "Yes, I have one."

"Where is he?" demanded the boy.

Simon was silent, he did not know. The children roared, tremendously excited; and these sons of toil, most nearly related to animals, experienced that cruel craving which animates the fowls of a farm-yard to destroy one among themselves as soon as it is

wounded. Simon suddenly espied a little neighbor, the son of a widow, whom he had always seen, as he himself was to be seen, quite alone with his mother.

“And no more have you,” he said, “no more have you a papa.”

“Yes,” replied the other, “I have one.”

“Where is he?” rejoined Simon.

“He is dead,” declared the brat with superb dignity, “he is in the cemetery, is my papa.”

A murmur of approval rose amidst the scapegraces, as if this fact of possessing a papa dead in a cemetery had caused their comrade to grow big enough to crush the other one who had no papa at all. And these rogues, whose fathers were for the most part evil-doers, drunkards, thieves and ill-treaters of their wives, hustled each other as they pressed closer and closer, as though they, the legitimate ones, would stifle in their pressure one who was beyond the law.

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He who chanced to be next Simon suddenly put his tongue out at him with a waggish air and shouted at him:

“No papa! No papa!”

Simon seized him by the hair with both hands and set to work to demolish his legs with kicks, while he bit his cheek ferociously. A tremendous struggle ensued between the two combatants, and Simon found himself beaten, torn, bruised, rolled on the ground in the middle of the ring of applauding vagabonds. As he arose mechanically brushing his little blouse all covered with dust with his hand, some one shouted at him:

“Go and tell your Papa.”

He then felt a great sinking in his heart. They were stronger than he was, they had beaten him and he had no answer to give them, for he knew well that it was true that he had no Papa. Full of pride he attempted for some moments to struggle against the tears which were suffocating him. He had a choking fit, and then without cries he commenced to weep with great sobs which shook him incessantly. Then a ferocious joy broke out among his enemies, and, naturally, just as with savages in their fearful festivals, they took each other by the hand and set about dancing in a circle about him as they repeated as a refrain:

“No Papa! No Papa!”

But Simon quite suddenly ceased sobbing. Frenzy overtook him. There were stones under his feet, he picked them up and with all his strength hurled them at his tormentors. Two or three were struck and rushed off yelling, and so formidable did he appear that the rest became panic stricken. Cowards, as a crowd always is in the presence of an exasperated man, they broke up and fled. Left alone, the little thing without a father set off running towards the fields, for a recollection had been awakened which brought his soul to a great determination. He made up his mind to drown himself in the river.

He remembered, in fact, that eight days before a poor devil who begged for his livelihood, had thrown himself into the water because he had no more money. Simon had been there when they had fished him out again; and the sight of the fellow, who usually seemed to him so miserable, and ugly, had then struck him—his pale cheeks, his long drenched beard and his open eyes being full of calm. The bystanders had said:

“He is dead.”

And someone had said:

“He is quite happy now.”

And Simon wished to drown himself also because he had no father, just like the wretched being who had no money.

He reached the neighborhood of the water and watched it flowing. Some fishes were sporting briskly in the clear stream and occasionally made a little bound and caught the flies flying on the surface. He stopped crying in order to watch them, for their housewifery interested him vastly. But, at intervals, as in the changes of a tempest, altering suddenly from tremendous gusts of wind, which snap off the trees and then lose themselves in the horizon, this thought would return to him with intense pain:

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“I am about to drown myself because I have no Papa.”

It was very warm and fine weather. The pleasant sunshine warmed the grass. The water shone like a mirror. And Simon enjoyed some minutes the happiness of that languor which follows weeping, in which he felt very desirous of falling asleep there upon the grass in the warmth.

A little green frog leapt from under his feet. He endeavored to catch it. It escaped him. He followed it and lost it three times following. At last he caught it by one of its hind legs and began to laugh as he saw the efforts the creature made to escape. It gathered itself up on its large legs and then with a violent spring suddenly stretched them out as stiff as two bars; while, its eye wide open in its round, golden circle, it beat the air with its front limbs which worked as though they were hands. It reminded him of a toy made with straight slips of wood nailed zigzag one on the other, which by a similar movement regulated the exercise of the little soldiers stuck thereon. Then he thought of his home and next of his mother, and overcome by a great sorrow he again began to weep. His limbs trembled; and he placed himself on his knees and said his prayers as before going to bed. But he was unable to finish them, for such hurried and violent sobs overtook him that he was completely overwhelmed. He thought no more, he no longer saw anything around him and was wholly taken up in crying.

Suddenly a heavy hand was placed upon his shoulder, and a rough voice asked him:

“What is it that causes you so much grief, my fine fellow?”

Simon turned round. A tall workman with a black beard and hair all curled, was staring at him good naturedly. He answered with his eyes and throat full of tears:

“They have beaten me ... because ... I ... have no ... Papa ... no Papa.”

“What!” said the man smiling, “why everybody has one.”

The child answered painfully amidst his spasms of grief:

“But I ... I ... I have none.”

Then the workman became serious. He had recognized La Blanchotte’s son, and although but recently come to the neighborhood he had a vague idea of her history.

“Well,” said he, “console yourself my boy, and come with me home to your mother. They will give you ... a Papa.”

And so they started on the way, the big one holding the little one by the hand, and the man smiled afresh, for he was not sorry to see this Blanchotte, who was, it was said,

one of the prettiest girls of the country-side, and, perhaps, he said to himself, at the bottom of his heart, that a lass who had erred might very well err again.

They arrived in front of a little and very neat white house.

“There it is,” exclaimed the child, and he cried “Mamma.”

A woman appeared and the workman instantly left off smiling, for he at once perceived that there was no more fooling to be done with the tall pale girl who stood austerely at her door as though to defend from one man the threshold of that house where she had already been betrayed by another. Intimidated, his cap in his hand, he stammered out:

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“See, madam, I have brought back your little boy who had lost himself near the river.”

But Simon flung his arms about his mother’s neck and told her, as he again began to cry:

“No, mamma, I wished to drown myself, because the others had beaten me ... had beaten me ... because I have no Papa.”

A burning redness covered the young woman’s cheeks, and, hurt to the quick, she embraced her child passionately, while the tears coursed down her face. The man, much moved, stood there, not knowing how to get away. But Simon suddenly ran to him and said:

“Will you be my Papa?”

A deep silence ensued. La Blanchotte, dumb and tortured with shame, leaned herself against the wall, both her hands upon her heart. The child seeing that no answer was made him, replied:

“If you do not wish it, I shall return to drown myself.”

The workman took the matter as a jest and answered laughing:

“Why, yes, I wish it certainly.”

“What is your name, then?” went on the child, “so that I may tell the others when they wish to know your name?”

“Phillip,” answered the man.

Simon was silent a moment so that he might get the name well into his head; then he stretched out his arms quite consoled as he said:

“Well, then, Phillip, you are my Papa.”

The workman, lifting him from the ground kissed him hastily on both cheeks, and then made off very quickly with great strides.

When the child returned to school next day he was received with a spiteful laugh, and at the end of school when the lads were on the point of recommencing, Simon threw these words at their heads as he would have done a stone: “He is named Phillip, my Papa.”

Yells of delight burst out from all sides.

“Phillip who? ... Phillip what? What on earth is Phillip? Where did you pick up your Phillip?”

Simon answered nothing; and immovable in faith he defied them with his eye, ready to be martyred rather than fly before them. The school-master came to his rescue and he returned home to his mother.

During three months, the tall workman, Phillip, frequently passed by the Blanchotte’s house, and sometimes he made bold to speak to her when he saw her sewing near the window. She answered him civilly, always sedately, never joking with him, nor permitting him to enter her house. Notwithstanding which, being, like all men, a bit of a coxcomb, he imagined that she was often rosier than usual when she chatted with him.

But a fallen reputation is so difficult to recover and always remains so fragile that, in spite of the shy reserve, La Blanchotte maintained they already gossiped in the neighborhood.

As for Simon, he loved his new Papa much, and walked with him nearly every evening when the day’s work was done. He went regularly to school and mixed with great dignity with his school-fellows without ever answering them back.

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One day, however, the lad who had first attacked him said to him:

“You have lied. You have not a Papa named Phillip.”

“Why do you say that?” demanded Simon, much disturbed.

The youth rubbed his hands. He replied:

“Because if you had one he would be your mamma’s husband.”

Simon was confused by the truth of this reasoning, nevertheless he retorted:

“He is my Papa all the same.”

“That can very well be,” exclaimed the urchin with a sneer, “but that is not being your Papa altogether.”

La Blanchotte’s little one bowed his head and went off dreaming in the direction of the forge belonging to old Loizon, where Phillip worked.

This forge was as though entombed in trees. It was very dark there, the red glare of a formidable furnace alone lit up with great flashes five blacksmiths, who hammered upon their anvils with a terrible din. They were standing enveloped in flame, like demons, their eyes fixed on the red-hot iron they were pounding; and their dull ideas rose and fell with their hammers.

Simon entered without being noticed and went quietly to pluck his friend by the sleeve. He turned himself round. All at once the work came to a standstill and all the men looked on very attentive. Then, in the midst of this unaccustomed silence, rose the little slender pipe of Simon:

“Phillip, explain to me what the lad at La Michande has just told me, that you are not altogether my Papa.”

“And why that?” asked the smith.

The child replied with all its innocence:

“Because you are not my mamma’s husband.”

No one laughed. Philip remained standing, leaning his forehead upon the back of his great hands, which supported the handle of his hammer standing upright upon the anvil. He mused. His four companions watched him, and, quite a tiny mite among these giants, Simon anxiously waited. Suddenly, one of the smiths, answering to the sentiment of all, said to Phillip:

“La Blanchotte is all the same a good and honest girl, and stalwart and steady in spite of her misfortune, and one who would make a worthy wife for a honest man.”

“That is true,” remarked the three others.

The smith continued:

“Is it this girl’s fault if she has fallen? She had been promised marriage and I know more than one who is much respected to-day, and who sinned every bit as much.”

“That is true,” responded the three men in chorus.

He resumed:

“How hard she has toiled, poor thing, to educate her lad all alone, and how much she has wept since she no longer goes out, save to go to church, God only knows.”

“This also is true,” said the others.

Then no more was heard than the bellows which fanned the fire of the furnace. Phillip hastily bent himself down to Simon:

“Go and tell your mamma that I shall come to speak to her.”

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Then he pushed the child out by the shoulders. He returned to his work and with a single blow the five hammers again fell upon their anvils. Thus they wrought the iron until nightfall, strong, powerful, happy, like hammers satisfied. But just as the great bell of a cathedral resounds upon feast days above the jingling of the other bells, so Phillip's hammer, dominating the noise of the others, clanged second after second with a deafening uproar. And he, his eye on fire, plied his trade vigorously, erect amid the sparks.

The sky was full of stars as he knocked at La Blanchotte's door. He had his Sunday blouse on, a fresh shirt, and his beard was trimmed. The young woman showed herself upon the threshold and said in a grieved tone:

"It is ill to come thus when night has fallen, Mr. Phillip."

He wished to answer, but stammered and stood confused before her.

She resumed:

"And still you understand quite well that it will not do that I should be talked about any more."

Then he said all at once:

"What does that matter to me, if you will be my wife!"

No voice replied to him, but he believed that he heard in the shadow of the room the sound of a body which sank down. He entered very quickly; and Simon, who had gone to his bed, distinguished the sound of a kiss and some words that his mother said very softly. Then he suddenly found himself lifted up by the hands of his friend, who, holding him at the length of his herculean arms, exclaimed to him:

"You will tell them, your school-fellows, that your papa is Phillip Remy, the blacksmith, and that he will pull the ears of all who do you any harm."

On the morrow, when the school was full and lessons were about to begin, little Simon stood up quite pale with trembling lips:

"My papa," said he in a clear voice, "is Phillip Remy, the blacksmith, and he has promised to box the ears of all who do me any harm."

This time no one laughed any longer, for he was very well known, was Phillip Remy, the blacksmith, and was a papa of whom anyone in the world would have been proud.

PAUL'S MISTRESS

The Restaurant Grillon, a small commonwealth of boatmen, was slowly emptying. In front of the door all was a tumult of cries and calls, while the jolly dogs in white flannels gesticulated with oars on their shoulders.

The ladies in bright spring toilets stepped aboard the skiffs with care, and seating themselves astern, arranged their dresses, while the landlord of the establishment, a mighty individual with a red beard, of renowned strength, offered his hand to the pretty dears, with great self-possession, keeping the frail craft steady.

The rowers, bare-armed, with bulging chests, took their places in their turn, posing for their gallery, as they did so, a gallery consisting of middle class people dressed in their Sunday clothes, of workmen and soldiers leaning upon their elbows on the parapet of the bridge, all taking a great interest in the sight.

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The boats one by one cast off from the landing stage. The oarsmen bent themselves forward and then threw themselves backwards with an even swing, and under the impetus of the long curved oars, the swift skiffs glided along the river, got far away, grew smaller and finally disappeared under the other bridge, that of the railway, as they descended the stream towards La Grenouillere. One couple only remained behind. The young man, still almost beardless, slender, and of pale countenance, held his mistress, a thin little brunette, with the gait of a grasshopper, by the waist; and occasionally they gazed into each others eyes. The landlord shouted:

“Come, Mr. Paul, make haste,” and they drew near.

Of all the guests of the house, Mr. Paul was the most liked and most respected. He paid well and punctually, while the others hung back for a long time, if indeed they did not vanish insolvent. Besides which he acted as a sort of walking advertisement for the establishment, inasmuch as his father was a senator. And when a stranger would inquire: “Who on earth is that little chap who thinks so much of himself because of his girl?” some habitue would reply, half-aloud, with a mysterious and important air: “Don’t you know? That is Paul Baron, a senator’s son.”

And invariably the other could not restrain himself from exclaiming:

“Poor devil! He is not half mashed.”

Mother Grillon, a worthy and good business woman, described the young man and his companion as “her two turtle-doves,” and appeared quite moved by this passion, profitable for her house.

The couple advanced at a slow pace; the skiff, Madeleine, was ready, when at the moment of embarking therein they kissed each other, which caused the public collected on the bridge to laugh, and Mr. Paul taking the oars, they left also for La Grenonillere.

When they arrived it was just upon three o’clock and the large floating cafe overflowed with people.

The immense raft, sheltered by a tarpaulin roof, is attached to the charming island of Croissy by two narrow foot bridges, one of which leads into the center of this aquatic establishment, while the other unites its end with a tiny islet planted with a tree and surnamed “The Flower Pot,” and thence leads to land near the bath office.

Mr. Paul made fast his boat alongside the establishment, climbed over the railing of the cafe and then grasping his mistress’s hand assisted her out of the boat and they both seated themselves at the end of a table opposite each other.

On the opposite side of the river along the market road, a long string of vehicles was drawn up. Fiacres alternated with the fine carriages of the swells; the first, clumsy, with

enormous bodies crushing the springs, drawn by a broken down hack with hanging head and broken knees; the second, slightly built on light wheels, with horses slender and straight, their heads well up, their bits snowy with foam, while the coachman, solemn in his livery, his head erect in his high collar, waited bolt upright, his whip resting on his knee.

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The bank was covered with people who came off in families, or in gangs, or two by two, or alone. They plucked blades of grass, went down to the water, remounted the path, and all having attained the same spot, stood still awaiting the ferryman. The clumsy punt plied incessantly from bank to bank, discharging its passengers on to the island. The arm of the river (named the Dead Arm) upon which this refreshment wharf lay, appeared asleep, so feeble was the current. Fleets of yawls, of skiffs, of canoes, of podoscaphs (a light boat propelled by wheels set in motion by a treadle), of gigs, of craft of all forms and of all kinds, crept about upon the motionless stream, crossing each other, intermingling, running foul of one another, stopping abruptly under a jerk of the arms to shoot off afresh under a sudden strain of the muscles gliding swiftly along like great yellow or red fishes.

Others arrived incessantly; some from Chaton up the stream; others from Bougival down it; laughter crossed the water from one boat to another, calls, admonitions or imprecations. The boatmen exposed the bronzed and knotted flesh of their biceps to the heat of the day; and similar to strange flowers, which floated, the silk parasols, red, green, blue, or yellow, of the ladies seated near the helm, bloomed in the sterns of the boats.

A July sun flamed high in the heavens; the atmosphere seemed full of burning merriment: not a breath of air stirred the leaves of the willows or poplars.

Down there the inevitable Mont-Valerien erected its fortified ramparts, tier above tier, in the intense light; while on the right the divine slopes of Louveniennes following the bend of the river disposed themselves in a semi-circle, displaying in their order across the rich and shady lawns, of large gardens, the white walls of country seats.

Upon the outskirts of La Grenonillere a crowd of promenaders moved about beneath the giant trees which make this corner of the island the most delightful park in the world.

Women and girls with breasts developed beyond all measurement, with exaggerated bustles, their complexions plastered with rouge, their eyes daubed with charcoal, their lips blood-red, laced up, rigged out in outrageous dresses—trailed the crying bad taste of their toilets over the fresh green sward; while beside them young men postured in their fashion-plate accouterments with light gloves, varnished boots, canes, the size of a thread, and single eye-glasses punctuating the insipidity of their smiles.

The island is narrow opposite La Grenonillere, and on its other side, where also a ferry-boat plies, bringing people unceasingly across from Croissy, the rapid branch of the river, full of whirlpools and eddies and foam, rushes along with the strength of a torrent.

A detachment of pontoon-soldiers, in the uniform of artillerymen, is encamped upon this bank, and the soldiers seated in a row on a long beam watched the water flowing.

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In the floating establishment there was a boisterous and uproarious crowd. The wooden tables upon which the spilt refreshments made little sticky streams, were covered with half empty glasses and surrounded by half tipsy individuals. All this crowd shouted, sang and brawled. The men, their hats at the backs of their heads, their faces red, with the brilliant eyes of drunkards, moved about vociferously in need of a row natural to brutes. The women, seeking their prey for the night, caused themselves to be treated, in the meantime; and in the free space between the tables, the ordinary local public predominated a whole regiment of boatmen, *Rowkickersup*, with their companions in short flannel petticoats.

One of them carried on at the piano and appeared to play with his feet as well as his hands; four couples bounded through a quadrille, and some young men watched them, polished and correct, who would have looked proper, if in spite of all, vice itself had appeared.

For there, one tastes in full all the pomp and vanity of the world, all its well bred debauchery, all the seamy side of Parisian society; a mixture of counter-jumpers, of strolling players, of the lowest journalists, of gentlemen in tutelage, of rotten stock-jobbers, of ill-famed debauchees, of used-up old, fast men; a doubtful crowd of suspicious characters, half-known, half gone under, half-recognized, half-cut, pickpockets, rogues, procurers of women, sharpers with dignified manners, and a bragging air, which seems to say: “I shall rend the first who treats me as a scoundrel.”

This place reeks of folly, stinks of the scum and the gallantry of the shops. Male and female there give themselves airs. There dwells an odor of love, and there one fights for a yes, or for a no, in order to sustain a worm-eaten reputation, which a stroke of the sword or a pistol bullet would destroy further.

Some of the neighboring inhabitants looked in out of curiosity every Sunday; some young men, very young, appeared there every year to learn how to live, some promenaders lounging about showed themselves there; some greenhorns wandered thither. It is with good reason named La Grenonillere. At the side of the covered wharf where they drank, and quite close to the Flower Pot, people bathed. Those among the women who possessed the requisite roundness of form came there to display their wares naked and to make clients. The rest, scornful, although well filled out with wadding, shored up with springs, corrected here and altered there, watched their sisters dabbling with disdain.

The swimmers crowded on to a little platform to dive thence head foremost. They are either straight like vine poles, or round like pumpkins, gnarled like olive branches, they are bowed over in front, or thrown backwards by the size of their stomachs and are invariably ugly, they leap into the water which splashes almost over the drinkers in the cafe.

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Notwithstanding the great trees which overhang the floating-house, and notwithstanding the vicinity of the water a suffocating heat fills the place. The fumes of the spilt liquors mix with the effluvium of the bodies and with that of the strong perfumes with which the skin of the traders in love is saturated and which evaporate in this furnace. But beneath all these diverse scents a slight aroma of vice-powder lingered, which now disappeared and then reappeared, which one was perpetually encountering as though some concealed hand had shaken an invisible powder-puff in the air. The show was upon the river whither the perpetual coming and going of the boats attracts the eyes. The boatwomen sprawled upon their seats opposite their strong-wristed males, and contemplated with contempt the dinner hunters prowling about the island.

Sometimes when a train of boats, just started, passed at full speed, the friends who stayed ashore gave shouts, and all the people suddenly seized with madness set to work yelling.

At the bend of the river towards Chaton fresh boats showed themselves unceasingly. They came nearer and grew larger, and if only faces were recognized, the vociferations broke out anew.

A canoe covered with an awning and manned by four women came slowly down the current. She who rowed was little, thin, faded, in a cabin boy's costume, her hair drawn up under an oil-skin cap. Opposite her, a lusty blonde, dressed as a man, with a white flannel jacket, lay upon her back at the bottom of the boat, her legs in the air, on the seat at each side of the rower, and she smoked a cigarette, while at each stroke of the oars, her chest and stomach quivered, shaken by the shock. Quite at the back, under the awning, two handsome girls, tall and slender, one dark and the other fair, held each other by the waist as they unceasingly watched their companions.

A cry arose from La Grenonillere, "There is Lesbos," and there became all at once a furious clamor; a terrifying scramble took place; the glasses were knocked down; people clambered on to the tables; all in a frenzy of noise bawled: "Lesbos! Lesbos! Lesbos!" The shout rolled along, became indistinct, was no longer more than a kind of tremendous howl, and then suddenly it seemed to start anew, to rise into space, to cover the plain, to fill the foliage of the great trees, to extend itself to the distant slopes, to go even to the sun.

The rower, in the face of this ovation, had quietly stopped. The handsome blonde extended upon the bottom of the boat, turned her head with a careless air, as she raised herself upon her elbows; and the two girls at the back commenced laughing as they saluted the crowd.

Then the hullaballoo was doubled, making the floating establishment tremble. The men took off their hats, the women waved their handkerchiefs, and all voices, shrill or deep, together cried:

“Lesbos.”

One would have said that these people, this collection of the corrupt, saluted a chief like the squadrons which fire guns when an admiral passes along the line.

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The numerous fleet of boats also acclaimed the women's boat, which awoke from its sleepy motion to land rather farther off.

Mr. Paul, contrary to the others, had drawn a key from his pocket and whistled with all his might. His nervous mistress grew paler, caught him by the arm to cause him to be quiet, and upon this occasion she looked at him with fury in her eyes. But he appeared exasperated, as though borne away by jealousy of some man by deep anger, instinctive and ungovernable. He stammered, his lips quivering with indignation:

"It is shameful! They ought to be drowned like dogs with a stone about the neck."

But Madeleine instantly flew into a rage; her small and shrill voice became hissing, and she spoke volubly, as though pleading her own cause:

"And what has it to do with you—you indeed? Are they not at liberty to do what they wish since they owe nobody anything. A truce with your airs and mind your own business...."

But he cut her speech short:

"It is the police whom it concerns, and I will have them marched off to St. Lazare; so I will."

She gave a start:

"You?"

"Yes, I! And in the meantime I forbid you to speak to them, you understand, I forbid you to do so."

Then she shrugged her shoulders and grew calm in a moment:

"My friend, I shall do as I please; if you are not satisfied, be off, and instantly. I am not your wife, am I? Very well then, hold your tongue."

He made no reply and they stood face to face, their mouths tightly closed and their breathing rapid.

At the other end of the great cafe of wood the four women made their entry. The two in men's costumes marched in front: the one thin like an oldish tomboy, with yellow lines on her temples; the other filled out her white flannel garments with her fat, swelling out her big trousers with her buttocks; she swayed about like a fat goose with enormous legs and yielding knees. Their two friends followed them, and the crowd of boatmen thronged about to shake their hands.

They had all four hired a small cottage close to the water's edge, and they lived there as two households would have lived.

Their vice was public, recognized, patent. People talked of it as a natural thing, which almost excited their sympathy, and whispered in very low tones strange stories of dramas begotten of furious feminine jealousies, of the stealthy visit of well-known women and of actresses to the little house close to the water's edge.

A neighbor, horrified by these scandalous rumors, apprised the police, and the inspector, accompanied by a man, had come to make inquiry. The mission was a delicate one; it was impossible, in short, to reproach these women, who did not abandon themselves to prostitution with anything. The inspector, very much puzzled, indeed, ignorant of the nature of the offenses suspected, had asked questions at random, and made a lofty report conclusive of their innocence.

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They laughed about it all the way to St. Germain. They walked about La Grenonillere establishment with stately steps like queens; and seemed to glory in their fame, rejoicing in the gaze that was fixed on them, so superior to this crowd, to this mob, to these plebeians.

Madeleine and her lover watched them approach and in the girl's eyes a fire lightened.

When the two first had reached the end of the table, Madeleine cried:

"Pauline!"

The large woman turned herself and stopped, continuing all the time to hold the arm of her feminine cabin boy:

"Good gracious, Madeleine.... Do come and talk to me, my dear."

Paul squeezed his fingers upon his mistress's wrist; but she said to him, with such an air:

"You know, my fine fellow, you can be off;" he said nothing and remained alone.

Then they chatted in low voices, standing all three of them. Many pleasant jests passed their lips, they spoke quickly; and Pauline looked now and then at Paul, by stealth, with a shrewd and malicious smile.

At last, putting up with it no longer, he suddenly raised himself and in a single bound was at their side, trembling in every limb. He seized Madeleine by the shoulders:

"Come. I wish it," said he. "I have forbidden you to speak to these scoundrels."

Whereupon Pauline raised her voice and set to work blackguarding him with her Billingsgate vocabulary. All the bystanders laughed; they drew near him; they raised themselves on tiptoe in order the better to see him. He remained dumbfounded under this downpour of filthy abuse. It appeared to him that these words, which came from that mouth and fell upon him, defiled him like dirt, and, in presence of the row which was beginning, he fell back, retraced his steps, and rested his elbows on the railing towards the river, turning his back upon the three victorious women.

There he stayed watching the water, and sometimes with rapid gesture as though he plucked it out, he removed with his sinewy fingers the tear which had formed in his eye.

The fact was that he was hopelessly in love, without knowing why, notwithstanding his refined instincts, in spite of his reason, in spite, indeed, of his will. He had fallen into this love as one falls into a sloughy hole. Of a tender and delicate disposition, he had dreamed of liaisons, exquisite, ideal and impassioned, and there that little bit of a

woman, stupid like all girls, with an exasperating stupidity, not even pretty, thin and a spitfire, had taken him prisoner, possessing him from head to foot, body and soul. He underwent this feminine bewitchery, mysterious and all powerful, this unknown power, this prodigious domination, arising no one knows whence, from the demon of the flesh, which casts the most sensible man at the feet of some girl or other without there being anything in her to explain her fatal and sovereign power.

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And there at his back he felt that some infamous thing was brewing. Shouts of laughter cut him to the heart. What should he do? He knew well, but he could not do it.

He steadily watched an angler upon the bank opposite him, and his motionless line.

Suddenly, the worthy man jerked a little silver fish, which wriggled at the end of his line, out of the river. Then he endeavored to extract his hook, hoisted and turned it, but in vain. At last, losing patience, he commenced to pull it out, and all the bleeding gullet of the beast, with a portion of its intestines, came out. Paul shuddered, rent himself to his heart-strings. It seemed to him that the hook was his love and that if he should pluck it out, all that he had in his breast would come out in the same way at the end of a curved iron fixed in the depths of his being, of which Madeleine held the line.

A hand was placed upon his shoulder; he started and turned; his mistress was at his side. They did not speak to each other; and she rested, like him, with her elbows upon the railing, her eyes fixed upon the river.

He sought for what he ought to say to her and could find nothing. He did not even arrive at disentangling his own emotions; all that he was sensible of was joy at feeling her there close to him, come back again, and a shameful cowardice, a craving to pardon everything, to permit everything, provided she never left him.

At last, at the end of some minutes, he asked her in a very gentle voice:

“Do you wish that we should leave? It will be nicer in the boat.”

She answered: “Yes, my puss.”

And he assisted her into the skiff, pressing her hands, all softened, with some tears still in his eyes. Then she looked at him with a smile and they kissed each other anew.

They re-ascended the river very slowly, skirting the bank planted with willows, covered with grass, bathed and still in the afternoon warmth. When they had returned to the Restaurant Grillon, it was barely six o’clock. Then leaving their boat they set off on foot on the island towards Bezons, across the fields and along the high poplars which bordered the river. The long grass ready to be mowed was full of flowers. The sun, which was sinking, showed himself from beneath a sheet of red light, and in the tempered heat of the closing day the floating exhalations from the grass, mingled with the damp scents from the river, filled the air with a soft languor, with a happy light, as though with a vapor of well-being.

A soft weakness overtakes the heart, and a species of communion with this splendid calm of evening, with this vague and mysterious chilliness of outspread life, with the keen and melancholy poetry which seems to arise from flowers and things, develops itself revealed at this sweet and pensive time to the senses.

He felt all that; but she did not understand anything of it, for her part. They walked side by side; and, suddenly tired of being silent, she sang. She sang with her shrill and false voice, something which pervaded the streets, an air catching the memory, which rudely destroyed the profound and serene harmony of the evening.

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Then he looked at her and he felt an unsurpassable abyss between them. She beat the grass with her parasol, her head slightly inclined, contemplating her feet and singing, spinning out the notes, attempting trills, and venturing on shakes. Her smooth little brow, of which he was so fond, was at that time absolutely empty! empty! There was nothing therein but this music of a bird-organ; and the ideas which formed there by chance were like this music. She did not understand anything of him; they were now separated as if they did not live together. Did then his kisses never go any further than her lips?

Then she raised her eyes to him and laughed again. He was moved to the quick and, extending his arms in a paroxysm of love, he embraced her passionately.

As he was rumpling her dress she ended by disengaging herself, murmuring by way of compensation as she did so:

“Go; I love you well, my puss.”

But he seized her by the waist and seized by madness, carried her rapidly away. He kissed her on the cheek, on the temple, on the neck, all the while dancing with joy. They threw themselves down panting at the edge of a thicket, lit up by the rays of the setting sun, and before they had recovered breath they became friends again without her understanding his transport.

They returned, holding each other by the hand, when suddenly, across the trees, they perceived on the river, the canoe manned by the four women. The large Pauline also saw them, for she drew herself up and blew kisses to Madeleine. And then she cried:

“Until to-night!”

Madeleine replied:

“Until to-night!”

Paul believed he suddenly felt his heart enveloped in ice.

They re-entered the house for dinner.

They installed themselves in one of the arbors, close to the water, and set about eating in silence. When night arrived, they brought a candle inclosed in a glass globe, which lit them up with a feeble and glimmering light; and they heard every moment the bursting out of the shouts of the boatmen in the great saloon on the first floor.

Towards dessert, Paul, taking Madeleine’s hand, tenderly said to her:

“I feel very tired, my darling; unless you have any objection, we will go to bed early.”

She, however, understood the ruse, and shot an enigmatical glance at him, that glance of treachery which so readily appears at the bottom of a woman's eyes. Then having reflected she answered:

"You can go to bed if you wish, but I have promised to go to the ball at La Grenonillere."

He smiled in a piteous manner, one of those smiles with which one veils the most horrible suffering, but he replied in a coaxing but agonized tone:

"If you were very kind, we should remain here, both of us."

She indicated no with her head, without opening her mouth.

He insisted:

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“I beg of you, my Bichette.”

Then she roughly broke out:

“You know what I said to you. If you are not satisfied the door is open. No one wishes to keep you. As for myself, I have promised; I shall go.”

He placed his two elbows upon the table, covered his face with his hands and remained there pondering sorrowfully.

The boat people came down again, bawling as usual. They set off in their vessels for the ball at La Grenonillere.

Madeleine said to Paul:

“If you are not coming, say so, and I will ask one of these gentlemen to take me.”

Paul rose:

“Let us go!” murmured he.

And they left.

The night was black, full of stars, overpowered by a burning air, by oppressive breaths of wind, burdened with heat and emanations, with living germs, which, mixed with the breeze, destroyed its freshness. It imparted to the face a heated caress, made one breathe more quickly, gasp a little, so thick and heavy did it seem. The boats started on their way bearing venetian lanterns at the prow. It was not possible to distinguish the craft, but only these little colored lights, swift and dancing up and down like glow-worms in a fit; and voices sounded from all sides in the shade. The young people’s skiff glided gently along. Now and then, when a fast boat passed near them, they could, for a moment, see the white back of the rower, lit up by his lantern.

When they turned the elbow of the river, La Grenonillere appeared to them in the distance. The establishment, en fete, was decorated with sconces, with colored garlands draped with clusters of lights. On the Seine some great barges moved about slowly, representing domes, pyramids and elaborate erections in fires of all colors. Illuminated festoons hung right down to the water, and sometimes a red or blue lantern, at the end of an immense invisible fishing-rod, seemed like a great swinging star.

All this illumination spread a light around the cafe, lit up the great trees on the bank, from top to bottom, the trunks of which stood out in pale gray and the leaves in a milky green upon the deep black of the fields and the heavens. The orchestra, composed of five suburban artists, flung far its public-house ball-music, poor and jerky, which caused Madeleine to sing anew.

She desired to enter at once. Paul desired first to take a turn on the island, but he was obliged to give way. The attendance was more select. The boatmen, always alone, remained with some thinly scattered citizens, and some young men flanked by girls. The director and organizer of this can-can majestic, in a jaded black suit, walked about in every direction, his head laid waste by his old trade of purveyor of public amusements, at a cheap rate.

The large Pauline and her companions were not there; and Paul breathed again.

They danced; couples opposite each other, capered in the most distracted manner, throwing their legs in the air, until they were upon a level with the noses of their partners.

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The women, whose thighs were disjointed, skipped amid such a flying upwards of their petticoats that the lower portions of their frames were displayed. They kicked their feet up above their heads with astounding facility, balanced their bodies, wagged their backs and shook their sides, shedding around them a powerful scent of sweating womanhood.

The men were squatted like toads, some making obscene signs; some turned and twisted themselves, grimacing and hideous; some turned like a wheel on their hands, or, perhaps, trying to make themselves funny, sketched the manners of the day with exaggerated gracefulness.

A fat servant-maid and two waiters served refreshments.

This cafe-boat being only covered with a roof and having no wall whatever, to shut it in, the hare-brained dance was displayed in the face of the peaceful night and of the firmament powdered with stars.

Suddenly, Mount Valerien, yonder opposite, appears illumined, as if a conflagration had been set ablaze behind it. The radiance spreads itself and deepens upon the sky, describing a large luminous circle of wan and white light. Then something or other red appeared, grew greater, shining with a burning red, like that of hot metal upon the anvil. That gradually developed into a round body which seemed to arise from the earth; and the moon, freeing herself from the horizon, rose slowly into space. In proportion as she ascended, the purple tint faded and became yellow, a shining bright yellow, and the satellite appeared to grow smaller in proportion as her distance increased.

Paul watched her for sometime, lost in contemplation, forgetting his mistress, and when he returned to himself the latter had vanished.

He sought for her, but could not find her. He threw his anxious eye over table after table, going to and fro unceasingly, inquiring after her from this one and that one. No one had seen her. He was thus tormented with disquietude, when one of the waiters said to him:

“You are looking for Madame Madeleine, are you not? She has left but a few moments ago, in company with Madame Pauline.” And at the same instant, Paul perceived the cabin-boy and the two pretty girls standing at the other end of the cafe, all three holding each others’ waists and lying in wait for him, whispering to one another. He understood, and, like a madman, dashed off into the island.

He first ran towards Chatou, but having reached the plain, retraced his steps. Then he began to search the dense coppices, occasionally roamed about distractedly, halting to listen.

The toads all round about him poured out their metallic and short notes.

Towards Bougival, some unknown bird warbled some song which reached him from the distance.

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Over the large lawns the moon shed a soft light, resembling powdered wool; it penetrated the foliage and shone upon the silvered bark of the poplars, and riddled with its brilliant rays the waving tops of the great trees. The entrancing poetry of this summer night had, in spite of himself, entered into Paul, athwart his infatuated anguish, and stirred his heart with a ferocious irony, increasing even to madness, his craving for an ideal tenderness, for passionate outpourings of the bosom of an adored and faithful woman. He was compelled to stop, choked by hurried and rending sobs.

The crisis over, he started anew.

Suddenly, he received what resembled the stab of a poignard. There, behind that bush, some people were kissing. He ran thither; and found an amorous couple whose faces were entwined, united in an endless kiss.

He dared not call, knowing well that she would not respond, and he had also a frightful dread of discovering them all at once.

The flourishes of the quadrilles, with the ear-splitting solos of the cornet, the false shriek of the flute, the shrill squeaking of the violin, irritated his feelings, and exasperated his sufferings. Wild and limping music was floating under the trees, now feeble, now stronger, wafted hither and thither by the breeze.

Suddenly, he said to himself, that possibly she had returned. Yes, she had returned! Why not? He had stupidly lost his head, without cause, carried away by his fears, by the inordinate suspicions which had for some time overwhelmed him.

Seized by one of these singular calms which will sometimes occur in cases of the greatest despair, he returned towards the ball-room.

With a single glance of the eye, he took in the whole room. He made the round of the tables, and abruptly again found himself face to face with the three women. He must have had a doleful and queer expression of countenance, for all three together burst into merriment.

He made off, returned into the island, threw himself across the coppice panting. He listened again, listened a long time, for his ears were singing. At last, however, he believed he heard a little farther off a little, sharp laugh, which he recognized at once; and he advanced very quietly, on his knees, removing the branches from his path, his heart beating so rapidly, that he could no longer breathe.

Two voices murmured some words, the meaning of which he did not understand, and then they were silent.

Next, he was possessed by a frightful longing to fly, to save himself, for ever, from this furious passion which threatened his existence. He was about to return to Chatou and

take the train, resolved never to come back again, never again to see her. But her likeness suddenly rushed in upon him, and he mentally pictured that moment in the morning when she would wake in their warm bed, and would press herself coaxingly against him, throwing her arms around his neck, her hair disheveled, and a little entangled on the forehead, her eyes still shut and her lips apart ready to receive the first kiss. The sudden recollection of this morning caress filled him with frantic recollection and the maddest desire.

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The couple began to speak again; and he approached, doubled in two. Then a faint cry rose from under the branches quite close to him. He advanced again, always as though in spite of himself, invisibly attracted, without being conscious of anything ... and he saw them.

And he stood there astounded and distracted, as though he had there suddenly discovered a corpse, dead and mutilated. Then, in an involuntary flash of thought, he remembered the little fish whose entrails he had felt being torn out.... But Madeleine murmured to her companion, in the same tone in which she had often called him by name, and he was seized by such a fit of anguish that he fled with all his might.

He struck against two trees, fell over a root, set off again and suddenly found himself near the river, opposite its rapid branch, which was lit up by the moon. The torrent-like current made great eddies where the light played upon it. The high bank dominated the river like a cliff, leaving a wide obscure zone at its foot where the eddies made themselves heard in the darkness.

On the other bank, the country seats of Croissy ranged themselves and could be plainly seen.

Paul saw all this as though in a dream, he thought of nothing, understood nothing, and all things, even his very existence, appeared vague, far-off, forgotten, done with.

The river was there. Did he know what he was doing? Did he wish to die? He was mad. He turned himself, however, towards the island, towards her, and in the still air of the night, in which the faint and persistent burden of the public house band was borne up and down, he uttered, in a voice frantic with despair, bitter beyond measure, and superhuman, a frightful cry:

“Madeleine.”

His heartrending call shot across the great silence of the sky, and sped all around the horizon.

Then, with a tremendous leap, with the bound of a wild animal, he jumped into the river. The water rushed on, closed over him, and from the place where he had disappeared a series of great circles started, enlarging their brilliant undulations, until they finally reached the other bank. The two women had heard the noise of the plunge. Madeleine drew herself up and exclaimed:

“It is Paul,” a suspicion having arisen in her soul, “he has drowned himself;” and she rushed towards the bank, where Pauline rejoined her.

A clumsy punt, propelled by two men, turned and returned on the spot. One of the men rowed, the other plunged into the water a great pole and appeared to be looking for something. Pauline cried:

“What are you doing? What is the matter?”

An unknown voice answered:

“It is a man who has just drowned himself.”

The two ghastly women, squeezing each other tightly, followed the maneuvers of the boat. The music of La Grenonillere continued to sound in the distance, and appeared with its cadences to accompany the movements of the somber fisherman; and the river which now concealed a corpse, whirled round and round, illuminated. The search was prolonged. The horrible suspense made Madeleine shiver all over. At last, after at least half an hour, one of the men announced:

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“I have got it.”

And he pulled up his long pole very gently, very gently. Then something large appeared upon the surface. The other mariner left his oars, and they both uniting their strength and hauling upon the inert weight, caused it to tumble over into their boat.

Then they made for the land, seeking a place well lighted and low. At the moment when they landed, the women also arrived. The moment she saw him, Madeleine fell back with horror. In the moonlight he already appeared green, with his mouth, his eyes, his nose, his clothes full of slime. His fingers closed and stiff, were hideous. A kind of black and liquid plaster covered his whole body. The face appeared swollen, and from his hair, glued up by the ooze, there ran a stream of dirty water.

“Do you know him?” asked one.

The other, the Croissy ferryman, hesitated:

“Yes, it certainly seems to me that I have seen that head; but you know when like that one cannot recognize anyone easily.” And then, suddenly:

“Why, it’s Mr. Paul.”

“Who is Mr. Paul?” inquired his comrade.

The first answered:

“Why, Mr. Paul Baron, the son of the senator, the little chap who was so amorous.”

The other added, philosophically:

“Well, his fun is ended now; it is a pity, all the same, when one is so rich!”

Madeleine sobbed and fell to the ground. Pauline approached the body and asked:

“Is he indeed quite dead?”

“Quite?”

The men shrugged their shoulders.

“Oh! after that length of time for certain.”

Then one of them asked:

“Was it at the Grillon that he lodged?”

“Yes,” answered the other; “we had better take him back there, there will be something to be made of it.”

They embarked again in their boat and set out, moving off slowly on account of the rapid current; and yet, a long time after they were out of sight, from the place where the women remained, the regular splash of the oars in the water could be heard.

Then Pauline took the poor weeping Madeleine in her arms, petted her, embraced her for a long while, consoled her.

“What would you have; it is not your fault, is it? It is impossible to prevent men committing folly. He wished it, so much the worse for him, after all!”

And then lifting her up:

“Come, my dear, come and sleep at the house; it is impossible for you to go back to the Grillon to-night.”

And she embraced her again.

“Come, we will cure you,” said she.

Madeleine arose, and weeping all the while, but with fainter sobs, her head upon Pauline’s shoulder, as though it had found a refuge in a closer and more certain affection, more familiar and more confiding, set off with very slow steps.

THE RABBIT

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Old Lecacheur appeared at the door of his house at his usual hour, between five and a quarter past five in the morning, to look after his men who were going to work.

With a red face, only half awake, his right eye open and the left nearly closed, he was buttoning his braces over his fat stomach with some difficulty while he was all the time looking into every corner of the farm-yard with a searching glance. The sun was darting his oblique rays through the beech-trees by the side of the ditch and the apple trees outside, and was making the cocks crow on the dung-hill, and the pigeons coo on the roof. The smell of the cow stalls came through the open door, and mingled in the fresh morning air, with the pungent odor of the stable where the horses were neighing, with their heads turned towards the light.

As soon as his trousers were properly fastened, Lecacheur came out, and went first of all towards the hen-house to count the morning's eggs, for he had been afraid of thefts for some time; but the servant girl ran up to him with lifted arms and cried:

"Master! Master! they have stolen a rabbit during the night."

"A rabbit?"

"Yes, Master, the big gray rabbit, from the hutch on the left;" whereupon the farmer quite opened his left eye, and said, simply:

"I must see that."

And off he went to inspect it. The hutch had been broken open and the rabbit was gone. Then he became thoughtful, closed his right eye again, and scratched his nose, and after a little consideration, he said to the frightened girl, who was standing stupidly before her master:

"Go and fetch the gendarmes; say I expect them as soon as possible."

Lecacheur was mayor of the village, Pairgry-le Gras, and ruled it like a master, on account of his money and position, and as soon as the servant had disappeared in the direction of the village, which was only about five hundred yards off, he went into the house to have his morning coffee and to discuss the matter with his wife, whom he found on her knees in front of the fire, trying to get it to burn up quickly, and as soon as he got to the door, he said:

"Somebody has stolen the gray rabbit."

She turned round so quickly that she found herself sitting on the floor, and looking at her husband with distressed eyes, she said:

"What is it, Cacheux! Somebody has stolen a rabbit?"

“The big gray one.”

She sighed.

“How sad! Who can have done it?”

She was a little, thin, active, neat woman, who knew all about farming, and Lecacheur had his own ideas about the matter.

“It must be that fellow Polyte.”

His wife got up suddenly and said in a furious voice:

“He did it! he did it! You need not look for anyone else. He did it! You have said it, Cacheux!”

All her peasant’s fury, all her avarice, all her rage of a saving woman against the man of whom she had always been suspicious, and against the girl whom she had always suspected, showed themselves in the contraction of her mouth, and the wrinkles in her cheeks and forehead of her thin exasperated face.

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“And what have you done?” she asked.

“I have sent for the gendarmes.”

This Polyte was a laborer, who had been employed on the farm for a few days, and who had been dismissed by Lecacheur for an insolent answer. He was an old soldier, and was supposed to have retained his habits of marauding and debauchery, from his campaigns in Africa. He did anything for a livelihood, but whether he were a mason, a navvy, a reaper, whether he broke stones or lopped trees, he was always lazy, and so he remained nowhere, and he had, at times, to change his neighborhood to obtain work.

From the first day that he came to the farm, Lecacheur’s wife had detested him, and now she was sure that he had committed the robbery.

In about half an hour the two gendarmes arrived. Brigadier Senateur was very tall and thin, and Gendarme Lenient, short and fat. Lecacheur made them sit down and told them the affair, and then they went and saw the scene of the theft, in order to verify the fact that the hutch had been broken open, and to collect all the proofs they could. When they got back to the kitchen, the mistress brought in some wine, filled their glasses and asked with a distrustful look.

“Shall you catch him?”

The brigadier, who had his sword between his legs, appeared thoughtful. Certainly, he was sure of taking him, if he was pointed out to him, but if not, he could not answer for being able to discover him, himself, and after reflecting for a long time, he put this simple question:

“Do you know the thief?”

And Lecacheur replied, with a look of Normandy slyness in his eyes:

“As for knowing him, I do not, as I did not see him commit the robbery. If I had seen him, I should have made him eat it raw, skin and flesh, without a drop of cider to wash it down. But as for saying who it is, I cannot, although I believe it is that good-for-nothing Polyte.”

Then he related at length his troubles with Polyte, his leaving his service, his bad reputation, things which had been told him, accumulating insignificant and minute proofs, and then, the brigadier, who had been listening very attentively while he emptied his glass and filled it again, with an indifferent air, turned to his gendarme and said:

“We must go and look in the cottage of Severin’s wife.” At which the gendarme smiled and nodded three times.

Then Madame Lecacheur came to them, and very quietly, with all a peasant's cunning, questioned the brigadier in her turn. That shepherd Severin, a simpleton, a sort of a brute who had been brought up and grown up among his bleating flocks, and who knew scarcely anything besides them in the world, had nevertheless preserved the peasant's instinct for saving, at the bottom of his heart. For years and years he must have hidden in hollow trees and crevices in the rocks, all that he earned, either as shepherd, or by curing animal's sprains (for the bone-setter's secret had been handed down to him by the old shepherd whose place he took), by touch or word, and one day he bought a small property consisting of a cottage and a field, for three thousand francs.

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A few months later, it became known that he was going to marry a servant, notorious for her bad morals, the innkeeper's servant. The young fellows said that the girl, knowing that he was pretty well off, had been to his cottage every night, and had taken him, overcome him, led him on to matrimony, little by little, night by night.

And then, having been to the mayor's office and to church, she now lived in the house which her man had bought, while he continued to tend his flocks, day and night, on the plains.

And the brigadier added:

"Polyte has been sleeping with her for three weeks, for the thief has no place of his own to go to!"

The gendarme make a little joke:

"He takes the shepherd's blankets."

Madame Lecacheur, who was seized by a fresh access of rage, of rage increased by a married woman's anger against debauchery, exclaimed:

"It is she, I am sure. Go there. Ah! the blackguard thieves!"

But the brigadier was quite unmoved.

"A minute," he said. "Let us wait until twelve o'clock, as he goes and dines there every day. I shall catch them with it under their noses."

The gendarme smiled, pleased at his chief's idea, and Lecacheur also smiled now, for the affair of the shepherd struck him as very funny: deceived husbands are always amusing.

* * * * *

Twelve o'clock had just struck when the brigadier, followed by his man, knocked gently three times at the door of a little lonely house, situated at the corner of a wood, five hundred yards from the village.

They had been standing close against the wall, so as not to be seen from within, and they waited. As nobody answered, the brigadier knocked again in a minute or two. It was so quiet, that the house seemed uninhabited; but Lenient, the gendarme, who had very quick ears, said that he heard somebody moving about inside, and then Senateur got angry. He would not allow anyone to resist the authority of the law for a moment, and, knocking at the door with the hilt of his sword, he cried out:

“Open the door, in the name of the law.”

As this order had no effect, he roared out:

“If you do not obey, I shall smash the lock. I am the brigadier of the gendarmerie, by G—! Here Lenient.”

He had not finished speaking when the door opened and Senateur saw before him a fat girl, with a very red color, blowzy, with pendant breasts, a big stomach and broad hips, a sort of sanguine and bestial female, the wife of the shepherd Severin, and he went into the cottage.

“I have come to pay you a visit, as I want to make a little search,” he said, and he looked about him. On the table there was a plate, a jug of cider and a glass half full, which proved that a meal had been going on. Two knives were lying side by side, and the shrewd gendarme winked at his superior officer.

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“It smells good,” the latter said.

“One might swear that it was stewed rabbit,” Lenient added, much amused.

“Will you have a glass of brandy?” the peasant woman asked.

“No, thank you; I only want the skin of the rabbit that you are eating.”

She pretended not to understand, but she was trembling.

“What rabbit?”

The brigadier had taken a seat, and was calmly wiping his forehead.

“Come, come, you are not going to try and make us believe that you live on couch grass. What were you eating there all by yourself for your dinner?”

“I? Nothing whatever, I swear to you. A mite of butter on my bread.”

“You are a novice, my good woman, *a mite of butter on your bread*.... You are mistaken; you ought to have said: a mite of butter on the rabbit. By G—d, your butter smells good! It is special butter, extra good butter, butter fit for a wedding; certainly, not household butter!”

The gendarme was shaking with laughter, and repeated:

“Not household butter, certainly.”

As brigadier Senateur was a joker, all the gendarmes had grown facetious, and the officer continued:

“Where is your butter?”

“My butter?”

“Yes, your butter.”

“In the jar.”

“Then where is the butter jar?”

“Here it is.”

She brought out an old cup, at the bottom of which there was a layer of rancid, salt butter, and the brigadier smelt it, and said, with a shake of his head:

“It is not the same. I want the butter that smells of the rabbit. Come, Lenient, open your eyes; look under the sideboard, my good fellow, and I will look under the bed.”

Having shut the door, he went up to the bed and tried to move it; but it was fixed to the wall, and had not been moved for more than half a century, apparently. Then the brigadier stooped, and made his uniform crack. A button had flown off.

“Lenient,” he said.

“Yes, brigadier?”

“Come here my lad and look under the bed; I am too tall. I will look after the sideboard.”

He got up and waited while his man executed his orders.

Lenient, who was short and stout, took off his kepi, laid himself on his stomach, and putting his face on the floor looked at the black cavity under the bed, and then, suddenly, he exclaimed:

“All right, here we are!”

“What have you got? The rabbit?”

“No, the thief.”

“The thief! Pull him out, pull him out!”

The gendarme had put his arms under the bed and laid hold of something, and he was pulling with all his might, and at last a foot, shod in a thick boot, appeared, which he was holding in his right hand. The brigadier took it, crying:

“Pull! pull!”

And Lenient, who was on his knees by that time, was pulling at the other leg. But it was a hard job, for the prisoner kicked out hard, and arched up his back across the bed.

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“Courage! courage! pull! pull!” Senateur cried, and they pulled him with all their strength so that the wooden bar gave way, and he came out as far as his head; but at last they got that out also, and they saw the terrified and furious face of Polyte, whose arms remained stretched out under the bed.

“Pull away!” the brigadier kept on exclaiming. Then they heard a strange noise, and as the arms followed the shoulders, and the hands the arms, and, in the hands the handle of a saucepan, and at the end of the handle the saucepan itself, which contained stewed rabbit.

“Good Lord! good Lord!” the brigadier shouted in his delight, while Lenient took charge of the man; and the rabbit’s skin, an overwhelming proof, was discovered under the mattress, and then the gendarmes returned in triumph to the village with their prisoner and their booty.

* * * * *

A week later, as the affair had made much stir, Lecacheur, on going into the *Mairie* to consult the school-master, was told that the shepherd Severin had been waiting for him for more than an hour, and he found him sitting on a chair in a corner, with his stick between his legs. When he saw the mayor, he got up, took off his cap, and said:

“Good morning, Maitre Cacheux;” and then he remained standing, timid and embarrassed.

“What do you want?” the former said.

“This is it, Monsieur. Is it true that somebody stole one of your rabbits last week?”

“Yes, it is quite true, Severin.”

“Who stole the rabbit?”

“Polyte Ancas, the laborer.”

“Right! right! And is it also true that it was found under my bed ...”

“What do you mean, the rabbit?”

“The rabbit and then Polyte.”

“Yes, my poor Severin, quite true, but who told you?”

“Pretty well everybody. I understand! And I suppose you know all about marriages, as you marry[11] people?”

[Footnote 11: In France, Civil Marriage is compulsory, though frequently followed by the religious rite.—TRANSLATOR.]

“What about marriage?”

“With regard to one’s rights.”

“What rights?”

“The husband’s rights and then the wife’s rights.”

“Of course I do.”

“Oh! Then just tell me, M’sieu Cacheux, has my wife the right to go to bed with Polyte?”

“What do you mean by going to bed with Polyte?”

“Yes, has she any right before the law, and seeing that she is my wife, to go to bed with Polyte?”

“Why of course not, of course not.”

“If I catch him there again, shall I have the right to thrash him and her also?”

“Why ... why ... why, yes.”

“Very well, then; I will tell you why I want to know. One night last week, as I had my suspicions, I came in suddenly, and they were not behaving properly. I chucked Polyte out, to go and sleep somewhere else; but that was all, as I did not know what my rights were. This time I did not see them; I only heard of it from others. That is over, and we will not say any more about it; but if I catch them again ... by G—d if I catch them again, I will make them lose all taste for such nonsense, Maitre Cacheux, as sure as my name is Severin ...”

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THE TWENTY-FIVE FRANCS OF THE MOTHER-SUPERIOR

He certainly looked very droll, did Daddy Pavilly, with his great, spider legs and his little body, his long arms and his pointed head, surrounded by a flame of red hair on the top of the crown.

He was a clown, a peasant clown by nature, born to play tricks, to act parts, simple parts, as he was a peasant's son and was himself a peasant, who could scarcely read. Yes! God had certainly created him to amuse others, the poor country devils who have neither theaters nor fetes, and he amused them conscientiously. In the cafe people treated him to drink in order to keep him there, and he drank intrepidly, laughing and joking, hoaxing everybody without vexing anyone, while the people were laughing heartily around him.

He was so droll that the very girls could not resist him, ugly as he was, because he made them laugh so. He would drag them about joking all the while, and he tickled and squeezed them, saying such funny things that they held their sides while they pushed him away.

Towards the end of June he engaged himself for the harvest to farmer Le Harivan, near Rouville. For three whole weeks he amused the harvesters, male and female, by his jokes, both by day and night. During the day, when he was in the fields, he wore an old straw hat which hid his red shock head, and one saw him gathering up the yellow grain and tying it into bundles with his long, thin arms; and then suddenly stopping to make a funny movement which made the laborers, who always kept their eyes on him, laugh all over the field. At night he crept, like some crawling animal, in among the straw in the barn where the women slept, causing screams and exciting a disturbance. They drove him off with their wooden clogs, and he escaped on all fours, like a fantastic monkey, amidst volleys of laughter from the whole place.

On the last day, as the wagon full of reapers, decked with ribbons and playing bag-pipes, shouting and singing with pleasure and drink, went along the white, high road, slowly drawn by six dapple-gray horses, driven by a lad in a blouse, with a rosette in his cap, Pavilly, in the midst of the sprawling women, danced like a drunken satyr, and kept the little dirty-faced boys and astonished peasants, standing staring at him open-mouthed on the way to the farm.

Suddenly, as they got to the gate of Le Harivan's farm yard, he gave a leap as he was lifting up his arms, but unfortunately, as he came down, he knocked against the side of the long wagon, fell over it onto the wheel, and rebounded into the road. His companions jumped out, but he did not move; one eye was closed, while the other was open, and he was pale with fear, while his long limbs were stretched out in the dust, and

when they touched his right leg he began to scream, and when they tried to make him stand up, he immediately fell down.

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“I think one of his legs is broken,” one of the men said.

And so it really was. Harivan, therefore, had him laid on a table and sent off a man on horseback to Rouville to fetch the doctor, who came an hour later.

The farmer was very generous and said that he would pay for the man’s treatment in the hospital, so that the doctor carried Pavilly off in his carriage to the hospital, and had him put into a white-washed ward, where his fracture was reduced.

As soon as he knew that it would not kill him, and that he would be taken care of, cuddled, cured, and fed without having anything to do except to lie on his back between the sheets, Pavilly’s joy was unbounded, and he began to laugh silently and continuously, so as to show his decayed teeth.

Whenever one of the Sisters of Mercy came near his bed he made grimaces of satisfaction, winking, twisting his mouth awry and moving his nose, which was very long and mobile. His neighbors in the ward, ill as they were, could not help laughing, and the Mother-Superior often came to his bedside, to be amused for a quarter of an hour, and he invented all kinds of jokes and stories for her, and as he had all the makings of a strolling actor in him, he would be devout in order to please her, and spoke of religion with the serious air of a man who knows that there are times when jokes are out of place.

One day, he took it into his head to sing to her. She was delighted and came to see him more frequently, and then she brought him a hymn-book, so as to utilize his voice. Then he might be seen sitting up in bed, for he was beginning to be able to move, singing the praises of the Almighty and of Mary, in a falsetto voice, while the kind, stout sister stood by him and beat time with her finger. When he could walk, the Superior offered to keep him for some time longer to sing in chapel, to serve at Mass and to fulfill the duties of sacristan, and he accepted. For a whole month he might be seen in his surplice, limping and singing the psalms and the responses, with such movements of his head, that the number of the faithful increased, and that people deserted the parish Church to attend Vespers at the hospital.

But as everything must come to an end in this world, they were obliged to discharge him, when he was quite cured, and the Superior gave him twenty-five francs in return for his services.

As soon as Pavilly found himself in the street with all that money in his pocket, he asked himself what he was going to do. Should he return to the village? Certainly not before having a drink, for he had not had one for a long time, and so he went into a cafe. He did not go into the town more than two or three times a year, and so he had a confused and intoxicating recollection of an orgie, on one of those visits in particular, and so he

asked for a glass of the best brandy, which he swallowed at a gulp to grease the passage, and then he had another to see how it tasted.

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As soon as the strong and fiery brandy had touched his palate and tongue, awakening more vividly than ever the sensation of alcohol which he was so fond of, and so longed for, which caresses, and stings, and burns the mouth, he knew that he should drink a whole bottle of it, and so he asked immediately what it cost, so as to spare himself having it in detail. They charged him three francs, which he paid, and then he began quietly to get drunk.

However, he was methodical in it, as he wished to keep sober enough for other pleasures, and so, as soon as he felt that he was on the point of seeing the fireplace bow to him, he got up and went out with unsteady steps, with his bottle under his arm, in search of a house where girls of easy virtue lived.

He found one, with some difficulty, after having asked a carter, who did not know of one; a postman, who directed him wrong; a baker, who began to swear and called him an old pig; and lastly, a soldier, who was obliging enough to take him to it, advised him to choose *La Reine*.

Although it was barely twelve o'clock, Pavilly went into that palace of delights, where he was received by a servant, who wanted to turn him out again. But he made her laugh by making a grimace, showed her three francs, the usual price of the special provisions of the place, and followed her with difficulty up a dark staircase, which led to the first floor.

When he had been shown into a room, he asked for *la Reine*, and had another drink out of the bottle, while he waited. But very shortly, the door opened and a girl came in. She was tall, fat, red-faced, enormous. She looked at the drunken fellow, who had fallen into a seat, with the eye of a judge of such matters, and said:

"Are you not ashamed of yourself, at this time of day?"

"Ashamed of what, Princess?" he stammered.

"Why, of disturbing a lady, before she has even had time to eat her dinner."

He wanted to have a joke, so he said:

"There is no such thing as time, for the brave."

"And there ought to be no time for getting drunk, either, old guzzler."

At this he got angry:

"I am not a guzzler, and I am not drunk."

"Not drunk?"

“No, I am not.”

“Not drunk? Why, you could not even stand straight;” and she looked at him angrily, thinking that all this time her companions were having their dinner.

“I ... I could dance a polka,” he replied, getting up, and to prove his stability he got onto the chair, made a pirouette and jumped onto the bed, where his thick, muddy shoes made two great marks.

“Oh! you dirty brute!” the girl cried, and rushing at him, she struck him a blow with her fist in the stomach, such a blow that Pavilly lost his balance, fell and struck the foot of the bed, and making a complete somersault tumbled onto the night-table, dragging the jug and basin with him, and then rolled onto the ground, roaring.

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The noise was so loud, and his cries so piercing, that everybody in the house rushed in, the master, mistress, servant, and the staff.

The master picked him up, but as soon as he had put him on his legs, the peasant lost his balance again, and then began to call out that his leg was broken, the other leg, the sound one.

It was true, so they sent for a doctor, and it happened to be the same one who had attended him at Le Harivan's.

"What! Is it you again?" he said.

"Yes, M'sieu."

"What is the matter with you?"

"Somebody has broken my other leg for me, M'sieu."

"Who did it, old fellow?"

"Why, a female."

Everybody was listening. The girls in their dressing gowns, with their mouths still greasy from their interrupted dinner, the mistress of the house furious, the master nervous.

"This will be a bad job," the doctor said. "You know that the municipal authorities look upon you with very unfavorable eyes, so we must try and hush the matter up."

"How can it be managed?" the master of the place asked.

"Why the best way would be to send him back to the hospital, from which he has just come out, and to pay for him there."

"I would rather do that," the master of the house replied, "than have any fuss made about the matter."

So half an hour later, Pavilly returned drunk and groaning to the ward which he had left an hour before. The Superior lifted up her hands in sorrow, for she liked him, and with a smile, for she was glad to have him back.

"Well, my good fellow, what is the matter with you now?"

"The other leg is broken, Madame."

"So you have been getting onto another load of straw, you old joker?"

And Pavilly, in great confusion, but still sly, said, with hesitation:

“No... no.... Not this time, no ... not this time. No ... no.... It was not my fault, not my fault ...A mattress caused this.”

She could get no other explanation out of him, and never knew that his relapse was due to her twenty-five francs.

THE VENUS OF BRANIZA

Some years ago there lived in Braniza, a celebrated Talmadist, who was renowned no less on account of his beautiful wife, than of his wisdom, his learning, and his fear of God. The Venus of Braniza deserved that name thoroughly, for she deserved it for herself, on account of her singular beauty, and even more as the wife of a man who was deeply versed in the Talmud; for the wives of the Jewish philosophers are, as a rule, ugly, or even possess some bodily defect.

The Talmud explains this, in the following manner. It is well known that marriages are made in heaven, and at the birth of a boy a divine voice calls out the name of his future wife, and *vice versa*. But just as a good father tries to get rid of his good wares out of doors, and only uses the damaged stuff at home for his children, so God bestows those women whom other men would not care to have, on the Talmudists.

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Well, God made an exception in the case of our Talmudist, and had bestowed a Venus on him, perhaps only in order to confirm the rule by means of this exception, and to make it appear less hard. His wife was a woman who would have done honor to any king's throne, or to the pedestal in any sculpture gallery. Tall, and with a wonderful, voluptuous figure, she carried a strikingly beautiful head, surmounted by thick, black plaits, on her proud shoulders, while two large, dark eyes languished and glowed beneath her long lashes, and her beautiful hands looked as if they were carved out of ivory.

This beautiful woman, who seemed to have been designed by nature to rule, to see slaves at her feet, to provide occupation for the painter's brush, the sculptor's chisel and the poet's pen, lived the life of a rare and beautiful flower, which is shut up in a hot house, for she sat the whole day long wrapped up in her costly fur jacket and looked down dreamily into the street.

She had no children; her husband, the philosopher, studied, and prayed, and studied again from early morning until late at night; his mistress was *the Veiled Beauty*, as the Talmudists call the Kabbalah. She paid no attention to her house, for she was rich and everything went of its own accord, just like a clock, which has only to be wound up once a week; nobody came to see her, and she never went out of the house; she sat and dreamed and brooded and—yawned.

* * * * *

One day when a terrible storm of thunder and lightning had spent all its fury over the town, and all windows had been opened in order to let the Messiah in, the Jewish Venus was sitting as usual in her comfortable easy chair, shivering in spite of her fur jacket, and was thinking, when suddenly she fixed her glowing eyes on the man who was sitting before the Talmud, swaying his body backwards and forwards, and said suddenly:

"Just tell me, when will Messias, the Son of David, come?"

"He will come," the philosopher replied, "when all the Jews have become either altogether virtuous or altogether vicious, says the Talmud."

"Do you believe that all the Jews will ever become virtuous," the Venus continued.

"How am I to believe that!"

"So Messias will come, when all the Jews have become vicious?"

The philosopher shrugged his shoulders and lost himself again in the labyrinth of the Talmud, out of which, so it is said, only one man returned unscathed, and the beautiful

woman at the window again looked dreamily out onto the heavy rain, while her white fingers played unconsciously with the dark fur of her splendid jacket.

* * * * *

One day the Jewish philosopher had gone to a neighboring town, where an important question of ritual was to be decided. Thanks to his learning, the question was settled sooner than he had expected, and instead of returning the next morning, as he had intended, he came back the same evening with a friend, who was no less learned than himself. He got out of the carriage at his friend's house, and went home on foot, and was not a little surprised when he saw his windows brilliantly illuminated, and found an officer's servant comfortably smoking his pipe in front of his house.

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“What are you doing here?” he asked in a friendly manner, but with some curiosity, nevertheless.

“I am looking out, in case the husband of the beautiful Jewess should come home unexpectedly.”

“Indeed? Well, mind and keep a good look out.”

Saying this, the philosopher pretended to go away, but went into the house through the garden entrance at the back. When he got into the first room, he found a table laid for two, which had evidently only been left a short time previously. His wife was sitting as usual at her bed room window wrapped in her fur jacket, but her cheeks were suspiciously red, and her dark eyes had not got their usual languishing look, but now rested on her husband with a gaze which expressed at the same time satisfaction and mockery. At that moment he kicked against an object on the floor, which emitted a strange sound, which he picked up and examined in the light. It was a pair of spurs.

“Who has been here with you?” the Talmudist said.

The Jewish Venus shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, but did not reply.

“Shall I tell you? The Captain of Hussars has been with you.”

“And why should he not have been here with me?” she said, smoothing the fur on her jacket with her white hand.

“Woman! are you out of your mind?”

“I am in full possession of my senses,” she replied, and a knowing smile hovered round her red voluptuous lips. “But must I not also do my part, in order that Messias may come and redeem us poor Jews?”

LA MORILLONNE

They called her *La Morillonne*[12] because of her black hair and of her complexion, which resembled autumnal leaves, and because of her mouth with thick purple lips, which were like blackberries, when she curled them.

[Footnote 12: Black Grapes.]

That she should be born as dark as this in a district where everybody was fair, and engendered by a father and mother with tow-colored hair and a complexion like butter was one of the mysteries of atavism. One of her female ancestors must have had an

intimacy with one of those traveling tinkers who, have gone about the country from time immemorial, with faces the color of bistre and indigo, crowned by a wisp of light hair.

From that ancestor she derived, not only her dark complexion, but also her dark soul, her deceitful eyes, whose depths were at times illuminated by flashes of every vice, her eyes of an obstinate and malicious animal.

Handsome? Certainly not, nor even pretty. Ugly, with an absolute ugliness! Such a false look! Her nose was flat, and had been smashed by a blow, while her unwholesome looking mouth was always slobbering with greediness, or uttering something vile. Her hair was thick and untidy, and a regular nest for vermin, to which may be added a thin, feverish body, with a limping walk. In short, she was a perfect monster, and yet all the young men of the neighborhood had made love to her, and whoever had been so honored, longed for her society again.

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From the time that she was twelve, she had been the mistress of every fellow in the village. She had corrupted boys of her own age in every conceivable manner and place.

Young men at the risk of imprisonment, and even steady, old, notable and venerable men, such as the farmer at Eclausiaux, Monsieur Martin, the ex-mayor and other highly respectable men, had been taken by the manners of that creature, and the reason why the rural policeman was not severe upon them, in spite of his love for summoning people before the magistrates, was, so people said, that he would have been obliged to take out a summons against himself.

The consequence was that she had grown up without being interfered with, and was the mistress of every fellow in the village, as the school-master said; who had himself been one of *the fellows*. But the most curious part of the business was that no one was jealous. They handed her on from one to the other, and when someone expressed his astonishment at this to her one day, she said to this unintelligent stranger:

“Is everybody not satisfied?”

And then, how could any one of them, even if he had been jealous, have monopolized her? They had no hold on her. She was not selfish, and though she accepted all gifts, whether in kind or in money, she never asked for anything and she even appeared to prefer paying herself after her own fashion, by stealing. All she seemed to care about as her reward was pilfering, and a crown put into her hand, gave her less pleasure than a halfpenny which she had stolen. Neither was it any use to dream of ruling her as the sole male, or as the proud master of the hen roost, for which of them, no matter how broad shouldered he was, would have been capable of it? Some had tried to vanquish her, but in vain.

How then, could any of them claim to be her master? It would have been the same as wishing to have the sole right of baking their bread in the common oven, in which the whole village baked.

But there was one man who formed the exception, and that was Bru, the shepherd.

He lived in the fields in his movable hut, on cakes made of unleavened dough, which he kneaded on a stone and baked in the hot ashes, now here, now there, is a hole dug out in the ground, and heated with dead wood. Potatoes, milk, hard cheese, blackberries, and a small cask of old gin that he had distilled himself, were his daily pittance; but he knew nothing about love, although he was accused of all sorts of horrible things, and therefore nobody dared abuse him to his face; in the first place, because Bru was a spare and sinewy man, who handled his shepherd’s crook like a drum-major does his staff; next, because of his three sheep dogs, who had teeth like wolves, and who knew nobody except their master; and lastly, for fear of the evil eye. For Bru, it appeared,

knew spells which would blight the corn, give the sheep foot rot, the cattle the *rinder pest*, make cows die in calving, and set fire to the ricks and stacks.

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But as Bru was the only one who did not loll out his tongue after La Morillonne, naturally one day she began to think of him, and she declared that she, at any rate, was not afraid of his evil eye, and so she went after him.

“What do you want?” he said, and she replied boldly:

“What do I want? I want you.”

“Very well,” he said, “but then you must belong to me alone.”

“All right,” was her answer, “if you think you can please me.”

He smiled and took her into his arms, and she was away from the village for a whole week. She had, in fact, become entirely Bru’s exclusive property.

The village grew excited. They were not jealous of each other, but they were of him. What! Could she not resist him. Of course he had charms and spells against every imaginable thing. And they grew furious. Next they grew bold, and watched from behind a tree. She was still as lively as ever, but he, poor fellow, seemed to have become suddenly ill, and required the most tender nursing at her hands. The villagers, however, felt no compassion for the poor shepherd, and so, one of them, more courageous than the rest, advanced towards the hut with his gun in his hand:

“Tie up your dogs,” he cried out from a distance; “fasten them up, Bru, or I shall shoot them.”

“You need not be frightened of the dogs,” *La Morillonne* replied; “I will be answerable for it that they will not hurt you;” and she smiled as the young man with the gun went towards her.

“What do you want?” the shepherd said.

“I can tell you,” she replied. “He wants me and I am very willing. There!”

Bru began to cry, and she continued:

“You are a good for nothing.”

And she went off with the lad, while Bru seized his crook, seeing which the young fellow raised his gun.

“Seize him! seize him!” the shepherd shouted, urging on his dogs, while the other had already got his finger on the trigger to fire at them. But *La Morillonne* pushed down the muzzle and called out:

“Here, dogs! here! Prr, prr, my beauties!”

And the three dogs rushed up to her, licked her hands and frisked about as they followed her, while she called to the shepherd from the distance:

“You see, Bru, they are not at all jealous!”

And then, with a short and evil laugh, she added:

“They are my property now.”

WAITER, A “BOCK"[13]

[Footnote 13: A French imitation of German Lager Beer.]

Why did I enter, on this particular evening, a certain beer shop? I cannot explain it. It was bitterly cold. A fine rain, a watery dust floated about, which enshrouded the gas jets in a transparent fog, made the pavements that passed under the shadow of the shop fronts glitter, and which at once exhibited the soft slush and the soiled feet of the passers-by.

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I was going nowhere in particular; was simply having a short walk after dinner. I had passed the Credit Lyonnais, the Rue Vivienne, besides several other streets. Thereupon, I suddenly descried a large public house, which was more than half full. I walked inside, with no object in view. I was not the least thirsty.

By a searching sweep of the eye I sought out a place where I would not be too much crowded, and so I went and sat down by the side of a man who seemed to me to be old, and who smoked a halfpenny clay pipe, which had become as black as coal. From six to eight beer saucers were piled up on the table in front of him, indicating the number of "bocks" he had already absorbed. With the same sweep of the eye I had recognized a "regular toper," one of those frequenters of beer-houses, who come in the morning as soon as the place is open, and only go way in the evening when it is about to close. He was dirty, bald to about the middle of the cranium, while his long, powder and salt, gray hair, fell over the neck of his frock coat. His clothes, much too large for him, appeared to have been made for him at a time when he carried a great stomach. One could guess that the pantaloons were not suspended from braces, and that this man could not take ten paces without his having to stop to pull them up and to readjust them. Did he wear a vest? The mere thought of his boots and that which they enveloped filled me with horror. The frayed cuffs were as perfectly black at the edges as were his nails.

As soon as I had sat down near him, this queer creature said to me in a tranquil tone of voice:

"How goes it with you?"

I turned sharply round to him and closely scanned his features, whereupon he continued:

"I see you do not recognize me."

"No, I do not."

"Des Barrets."

I was stupefied. It was Count Jean des Barrets, my old college chum.

I seized him by the hand, and was so dumbfounded that I could find nothing to say. I, at length, managed to stammer out:

"And you, how goes it with yourself?"

He responded placidly:

"With me? Just as I like."

He became silent. I wanted to be friendly, and I selected this phrase:

“What are you doing now?”

“You see what I am doing,” he answered, quite resignedly.

I felt my face getting red. I insisted:

“But every day?”

“Every day is alike to me,” was his response accompanied with a thick puff of tobacco smoke.

He then tapped on the top of the marble table with a sou, to attract the attention of the waiter, and called out:

“Waiter, two ‘bocks.’”

A voice in the distance repeated:

“Two bocks, instead of four.”

Another voice, more distant still, shouted out:

“Here they are, sir, here they are.”

Immediately there appeared a man with a white apron, carrying two “bocks,” which he sat down foaming on the table, the spouts facing over the edge, on to the sandy floor.

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Des Barrets emptied his glass at a single draught and replaced it on the table. He next asked:

“What is there new?”

“I know of nothing new, worth mentioning, really,” I stammered:

“But nothing has grown old, for me; I am a commercial man.”

In an equable tone of voice, he said;

“Indeed ... does that amuse you?”

“No, but what do you mean to assert? Surely you must do something!”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I only mean, how do you pass your time!”

“What’s the use of occupying myself with anything. For my part, I do nothing at all, as you see, never anything. When one has not got a sou one can understand why one has to go to work. What is the good of working? Do you work for yourself, or for others? If you work for yourself you do it for your own amusement, which is all right; if you work for others, you reap nothing but ingratitude.”

Then sticking his pipe into his whiskers, he called out anew:

“Waiter, a ‘bock.’ It makes me thirsty to keep calling so. I am not accustomed to that sort of thing. Yes, yes, I do nothing; I let things slide, and I am growing old. In dying I have nothing to regret. If so, I should remember nothing, outside this public house. I have no wife, no children, no cares, no sorrows, nothing. That is the very best thing that could happen to one.”

He then emptied the glass which had meanwhile been fetched to him, passed his tongue over his lips, and resumed his pipe.

I looked at him stupefied. I asked him:

“But you have not always been like that?”

“Pardon me, sir; ever since I left college.”

“That is not a proper life to lead, my dear sir; it is simple horrible. Come, you must indeed have done something, you must have loved something, you must have friends.”

“No; I get up at noon, I come here, I have my breakfast, I drink my ‘bock,’ I remain until the evening, I have my dinner, I drink ‘bock.’ Then about one in the morning, I return to my couch, because the place closes up. And it is this latter that embitters me more than anything. For the last ten years, I have passed six years on this bench, in my corner; and the other four in my bed, never changing. I talk sometimes with the habitues.”

“But on arriving in Paris what did you do at first?”

“I paid my devoirs to the Cafe de Medicis.”

“What next?”

“Next? I crossed the water and came here.”

“Why did you even take that trouble?”

“What do you mean? One cannot remain all one’s life in the Latin Quarter.
The students make too much noise. But I do not move about any longer.
Waiter, a ‘bock.’”

I now began to think that he was making fun of me, and I continued:

“Come now, be frank. You have been the victim of some great sorrow; despair in love, no doubt! It is easy to see that you are a man whom misfortune has hit hard. What age are you?”

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“I am thirty years of age, but I look to be forty-five at least.”

I regarded him straight in the face. His shrunken figure, so badly cared for, gave one the impression that he was an old man. On the summit of his cranium, a few long hairs shot straight up from the skin of doubtful cleanness. He had enormous eyelashes, a large moustache, and a thick beard. Suddenly, I had a kind of vision. I know not why; the vision of a basin filled with noisome water, the water which should have been applied to that poll. I said to him:

“Verily, you look to be more than that age. Of a certainty you must have experienced some great disappointment.”

He replied:

“I tell you that I have not. I am old because I never take air. There is nothing that vitiates the life of a man more than the atmosphere of a cafe.”

I could not believe him.

“You must surely have been married as well? One could not get as bald-headed as you are without having been much in love.”

He shook his head, sending down his back little white things which fell from the end of his locks:

“No, I have always been virtuous.”

And raising his eyes towards the luster, which beat down on our heads, he said:

“If I am bald-headed, it is the fault of the gas. It is the enemy of hair. Waiter, a ‘bock.’ You must be thirsty also?”

“No, thank you. But you certainly interest me. Since when did you have your first discouragement? Your life is not normal, it is not natural. There is something under it all.”

“Yes, and it dates from my infancy. I received a heavy blow when I was very young, and that turned my life into darkness, which will last to the end.”

“How did it come about?”

“You wish to know about it? Well, then, listen. You recall, of course, the castle in which I was brought up, seeing that you used to visit it for five or six months during the vacations? You remember that large, gray building, in the middle of a great park, and

the long avenues of oaks, which opened towards the four cardinal points! You remember my father and mother, both of whom were ceremonious, solemn and severe.

“I worshiped my mother; I was suspicious of my father; but I respected both, accustomed always as I was to see everyone bow before them. They were in the country, Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse; while our neighbors, the Tannemares’, the Ravelets’, the Brennevilles’, showed the utmost consideration for my parents.

“I was then thirteen years old. I was happy, satisfied with everything, as one is at that age, full of joy and vivacity.

“Now towards the end of September, a few days before my entering college, while I was enjoying myself in the mazes of the park, climbing the trees and swinging on the branches, I descried in crossing an avenue, my father and mother, who were walking along.

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“I recall the thing as though it were yesterday. It was a very stormy day. The whole line of trees bent under the pressure of the wind, groaned, and seemed to utter cries—cries, though dull, yet deep, that the whole forest rang under the tempest.

“Evening came on. It was dark in the thickets. The agitation of the wind and the branches excited me, made me bound about like an idiot, and howl in imitation of the wolves.

“As soon as I perceived my parents, I crept furtively towards them, under the branches, in order to surprise them, as though I had been a veritable rodent. But becoming seized with fear, I stopped a few paces from them. My father, a prey to the most ferocious passion, cried:

“’Your mother is a fool; moreover, it is not your mother that is the question, it is you. I tell you that I want money, and I will make you sign this.’

“My mother responded in a firm voice:

“’I will not sign it. It is Jean’s fortune, I shall guard it for him and I will not allow you to devour it with strange women, as you have your own heritage.’

“Then my father, full of rage, wheeled round and seized his wife by the throat, and began to slash her full in the face with the disengaged hand.

“My mother’s hat fell off, her hair became all disheveled and spread over her back; she essayed to parry the blows, but she could not escape from them. And my father, like a madman, banged and banged. My mother rolled over on the ground, covering her face in both her hands. Then he turned her over on her back in order to batter her still more, pulling away her hands which were covering her face.

“As for me, my friend, it seemed as though the world had come to an end, that the eternal laws had changed. I experienced the overwhelming dread that one has in presence of things supernatural, in presence of irreparable disasters. My boyish head whirled round, floated. I began to cry with all my might, without knowing why, a prey to terror, to grief, to a dreadful bewilderment. My father heard me, turned round, and, on seeing me, made as though he would rush towards me. I believed that he wanted to kill me, and I fled like a haunted animal, running straight in front of me in the woods.

“I ran perhaps for an hour, perhaps for two, I know not. Darkness had set in, I tumbled over some thick herb, exhausted, and I lay there lost, devoured by terror, eaten up by a sorrow capable of breaking for ever the heart of a poor infant. I became cold, I became hungry. At length day broke. I dared neither get up, walk, return home, nor save myself, fearing to encounter my father whom I did not wish to see again.

“I should probably have died of misery and of hunger at the foot of a tree, if the guard had not discovered me and led me away by force.

“I found my parents wearing their ordinary aspect. My mother alone spoke to me:

“’How you have frightened me, you naughty boy; I have been the whole night sleepless.’

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“I did not answer, but began to weep. My father did not utter a single word.

“Eight days later I entered college.

“Well, my friend, it was all over with me. I had witnessed the other side of things, the bad side; I have not been able to perceive the good side since that day. What things have passed in my mind, what strange phenomena has warped my ideas? I do not know. But I no longer have a taste for anything, a wish for anything, a love for anybody, a desire for anything whatever, nor ambition, nor hope. And I perceive always my poor mother on the ground, lying in the avenue, while my father is maltreating her. My mother died a few years after; my father lives still. I have not seen him since. Waiter, a ‘bock.’”

A waiter brought him his “bock,” which he swallowed at a gulp. But, in taking up his pipe again, trembling as he was he broke it. Then he made a violent gesture:

“Zounds! This is indeed a grief, a real grief. I have had it for a month, and it was coloring so beautifully!”

He darted through the vast saloon, which was now full of smoke and of people drinking, uttering his cry:

“Waiter, a ’bock’—and a new pipe.”

REGRET

Monsieur Savel, who was called in Mantes, “Father Savel,” had just risen from bed. He wept. It was a dull autumn day; the leaves were falling. They fell slowly in the rain, resembling another rain, but heavier and slower. M. Savel was not in good spirit. He walked from the fireplace to the window, and from the window to the fireplace. Life has its somber days. It will no longer have any but somber days for him now, for he has reached the age of sixty-two. He is alone, an old bachelor, with nobody about him. How sad it is to die alone, all alone, without the disinterested affection of anyone!

He pondered over his life, so barren, so void. He recalled the days gone by, the days of his infancy, the house, the house of his parents; his college days, his follies, the time of his probation in Paris, the illness of his father, his death. He then returned to live with his mother. They lived together, the young man and the old woman, very quietly, and desired nothing more. At last the mother died. How sad a thing is life! He has lived always alone, and now, in his turn, he, too, will soon be dead. He will disappear, and that will be the finish. There will be no more of Savel upon the earth. What a frightful thing! Other people will live, they will live, they will laugh. Yes, people will go on amusing themselves, and he will no longer exist! Is it not strange that people can laugh, amuse themselves, be joyful under that eternal certainty of death! If this death were

only probable, one could then have hope; but no, it is inevitable, as inevitable as that night follows the day.

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If, however, his life had been complete! If he had done something; if he had had adventures, grand pleasures, successes, satisfaction of some kind or another. But now, nothing. He had done nothing, never anything but rise from bed, eat, at the same hours, and go to bed again. And he has gone on like that, to the age of sixty-two years. He had not even taken unto himself a wife, as other men do. Why? Yes, why was it that he was not married? He might have been, for he possessed considerable means. Was it an opportunity which had failed him? Perhaps! But one can create opportunities. He was indifferent; that was all. Indifference had been his greatest drawback, his defect, his vice. Have some men missed their lives through indifference! To certain natures, it is so difficult for them to get out of bed, to move about, to take long walks, to speak, to study any question.

He had not even been in love. No woman had reposed on his bosom, in a complete abandon of love. He knew nothing of this delicious anguish of expectation, of the divine quivering of the pressed hand, of the ecstacy of triumphant passion.

What superhuman happiness must inundate your heart, when lips encounter lips for the first time, when the grasp of four arms makes one being of you, a being unutterably happy, two beings infatuated with one another.

M. Savel was sitting down, his feet on the fender, in his dressing gown. Assuredly his life had been spoiled, completely spoiled. He had, however, loved. He had loved secretly, dolorously and indifferently, just as was characteristic of him in everything. Yes, he had loved his old friend, Madame Saudres, the wife of his old companion, Saudres. Ah! if he had known her as a young girl! But he had encountered her too late; she was already married. Unquestionably he would have asked her hand; that he would! How he had loved her, nevertheless, without respite, since the first day he had set eyes on her!

He recalled, without emotion, all the times he had seen her, his grief on leaving her, the many nights that he could not sleep, because of his thinking of her.

In the mornings he always got up somewhat less amorous than in the evening.

Why?

Seeing that she was formerly pretty, and “crumy,” blonde, curl, joyous. Saudres was not the man she would have selected. She was now fifty-two years of age. She seemed happy. Ah! if she had only loved him in days gone by; yes, if she had only loved him! And why should she not have loved him, he, Savel, seeing that he loved her so much, yes, she, Madame Saudres!

If only she could have divined something—Had she not divined anything, had she not seen anything, never comprehended anything? But! Then what would she have thought? If he had spoken what would she have answered?

And Savel asked himself a thousand other things. He reviewed his whole life, seeking to grasp again a multitude of details.

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He recalled all the long evenings spent at the house of Saudres, when the latter's wife was young and so charming.

He recalled many things that she had said to him, the sweet intonations of her voice, the little significant smiles that meant so much.

He recalled the walks that the three of them had had, along the banks of the Seine, their lunches on the grass on the Sundays, for Saudres was employed at the sub-prefecture. And all at once the distant recollection came to him, of an afternoon spent with her in a little plantation on the banks of the river.

They had set out in the morning, carrying their provisions in baskets. It was a bright spring morning, one of those days which inebriate one. Everything smelt fresh, everything seemed happy. The voices of the birds sounded more joyous, and the flapping of their wings more rapid. They had lunch on the grass, under the willow trees, quite close to the water, which glittered in the sun's rays. The air was balmy, charged with the odors of fresh vegetation; they had drunk the most delicious wines. How pleasant everything was on that day!

After lunch, Saudres went to sleep on the broad of his back, "The best nap he had in his life," said he, when he woke up.

Madame Saudres had taken the arm of Savel, and they had started to walk along the river's bank.

She leaned tenderly on his arm. She laughed and said to him: "I am intoxicated, my friend, I am quite intoxicated." He looked at her, his heart going patty-patty. He felt himself grow pale, fearful that he had not looked too boldly at her, and that the trembling of his hand had not revealed his passion.

She had decked her head with wild flowers and water-lilies, and she had asked him: "Do you not like to see me appear thus?"

As he did not answer—for he could find nothing to say, he should rather have gone down on his knees—she burst out laughing, a sort of discontented laughter, which she threw straight in his face, saying: "Great goose, what ails you? You might at least speak!"

He felt like crying, and could not even yet find a word to say.

All these things came back to him now, as vividly as on the day when they took place. Why had she said this to him, "Great goose. What ails you! You might at least speak!"

And he recalled how tenderly she had leaned on his arm. And in passing under a shady tree he had felt her ear leaning against his cheek, and he had tilted his head abruptly, for fear that she had not meant to bring their flesh into contact.

When he had said to her: “Is it not time to return?” she darted at him a singular look. “Certainly,” she said, “certainly,” regarding him at the same time in a curious manner. He had not thought of anything then; and now the whole thing appeared to him quite plain.

“Just as you like, my friend. If you are tired let us go back.”

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And he had answered: "It is not that I am fatigued; but Saudres has perhaps woke up now."

And she had said: "If you are afraid of my husband's being awake, that is another thing. Let us return."

In returning she remained silent and leaned no longer on his arm. Why?

At that time it had never occurred to him to ask himself "why." Now he seemed to apprehend something that he had not then understood.

What was it?

M. Savel felt himself blush, and he got up at a bound, feeling thirty years younger, believing that he now understood Madame Saudres then to say, "I love you."

Was it possible! That suspicion which had just entered his soul, tortured him. Was it possible that he could not have seen, not have dreamed!

Oh! if that could be true, if he had rubbed against such good fortune without laying hold of it!

He said to himself: "I wish to know. I cannot remain in this state of doubt. I wish to know!" He put on his clothes quickly, dressed in hot haste. He thought: "I am sixty-two years of age, she is fifty-eight; I may ask her that now without giving offense."

He started out.

The Saudres's house was situated on the other side of the street, almost directly opposite his own. He went up to it, knocked, and a little servant came to open the door.

"You there at this hour, ill, Savel! Has some accident happened to you?"

M. Savel responded:

"No, my girl; but go and tell your mistress that I want to speak to her at once."

"The fact is, Madame is preparing her stock of pear-jams for the winter, and she is standing in front of the fire. She is not dressed, as you may well understand."

"Yes, but go and tell her that I wish to see her on an important matter."

The little servant went away, and Savel began to walk, with long, nervous strides, up and down the drawing-room. He did not feel himself the least embarrassed, however.

Oh! he was merely going to ask her something, as he would have asked her about some cooking receipt, and that was: "Do you know that I am sixty-two years of age!"

The door opened; and Madame appeared. She was now a gross woman, fat and round, with full cheeks, and a sonorous laugh. She walked with her arms away from her body, and her sleeves tucked up to the shoulders, her bare arms all smeared with sugar juice. She asked, anxiously:

"What is the matter with you, my friend; you are not ill, are you?"

"No, my dear friend; but I wish to ask you one thing, which to me is of the first importance, something which is torturing my heart, and I want you to promise that you will answer me candidly."

She laughed, "I am always candid. Say on."

"Well, then. I have loved you from the first day I ever saw you. Can you have any doubt of this?"

She responded, laughing, with something of her former tone of voice.

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“Great goose! what ails you? I knew it well from the very first day!”

Savel began to tremble. He stammered out: “You knew it? Then—”

He stopped.

She asked:

“Then?... What?”

He answered:

“Then ... what would you think?... what ... what.... What would you have answered?”

She broke forth into a peal of laughter, which made the sugar juice run off the tips of her fingers on to the carpet.

“I? But you did not ask me anything. It was not for me to make a declaration.”

He then advanced a step towards her.

“Tell me ... tell me.... You remember the day when Saudres went to sleep on the grass after lunch ... when we had walked together as far as the bend of the river, below ...”

He waited, expectantly. She had ceased to laugh, and looked at him, straight in the eyes.

“Yes, certainly, I remember it.”

He answered, shivering all over.

“Well ... that day ... if I had been ... if I had been ... enterprising ... what would you have done?”

She began to laugh as only a happy woman can laugh, who has nothing to regret, and responded, frankly, in a voice tinged with irony:

“I would have yielded, my friend.”

She then turned on her heels and went back to her jam-making.

Savel rushed into the street, cast down, as though he had encountered some great disaster. He walked with giant strides, through the rain, straight on, until he reached the river, without thinking where he was going. When he reached the bank he turned to the right and followed it. He walked a long time, as if urged on by some instinct. His clothes were running with water, his hat was bashed in, as soft as a piece of rag, and

dripping like a thatched roof. He walked on, straight in front of him. At last, he came to the place where they had lunched so long, long ago, the recollection of which had tortured his heart. He sat down under the leafless trees, and he wept.

THE PORT

PART I

Having sailed from Havre on the 3rd of May, 1882, for a voyage in the China seas, the square-rigged three-master, *Notre Dame des Vents*, made her way back into the port of Marseilles, on the 8th of August, 1886, after an absence of four years. When she had discharged her first cargo in the Chinese port for which she was bound, she had immediately found a new freight for Buenos Ayres, and from that place had conveyed goods to Brazil.

Other passages, then damage repairs, calms ranging over several months, gales which knocked her out of her course—all the accidents, adventures, and misadventures of the sea, in short—had kept far from her country, this Norman three-master, which had come back to Marseilles with her hold full of tin boxes containing American preserves.

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At her departure, she had on board, besides the captain and the mate, fourteen sailors, eight Normans and six Britons. On her return, there were left only five Britons and four Normans; the other Briton had died while on the way; the four Normans having disappeared under various circumstances, had been replaced by two Americans, a negro, and a Norwegian carried off, one evening, from a tavern in Singapore.

The big vessel, with reefed sails and yards crossed over her masts, drawn by a tug from Marseilles, rocking over a sweep of rolling waves which subsided gently on becoming calm, passed in front of the Chateau d'If, then under all the gray rocks of the roadstead, which the setting sun covered with a golden vapor; and she entered the ancient port, in which are packed together, side by side, ships from every part of the world, pell mell, large and small, of every shape and every variety of rigging, soaking like a "bouillabaise" of boats in this basin too limited in extent, full of putrid water, where shells touch each other, rub against each other, and seem to be pickled in the juice of the vessels.

Notre Dame des Vents took up her station between an Italian brig and an English schooner, which made way to let this comrade slip in between them; then, when all the formalities of the custom-house and of the port had been complied with, the captain authorized the two-thirds of his crew to spend the night on shore.

It was already dark. Marseilles was lighted up. In the heat of this summer's evening a flavor of cooking with garlic floated over the noisy city, filled with the clamor of voices, of rolling vehicles, of the crackling of whips, and of southern mirth.

As soon as they felt themselves on shore, the ten men, whom the sea had been tossing about for some months past, proceeded along quite slowly with the hesitating steps of persons who are out of their element, unaccustomed to cities, two by two, procession.

They swayed from one side to another as they walked, looked about them, smelling out the lanes opening out on the harbor, rendered feverish by the amorous appetite which had been growing to maturity in their bodies during their last sixty-six days at sea. The Normans strode on in front, led by Celestin Duclos, a tall young fellow, sturdy and waggish, who served as a captain for the others every time they set forth on land. He divined the places worth visiting, found out by-ways after a fashion of his own, and did not take much part in the squabbles so frequent among sailors in seaport towns. But, once he was caught in one, he was afraid of nobody.

After some hesitation as to which of the obscure streets which lead down to the waterside, and from which arise heavy smells, a sort of exhalation from closets, they ought to enter, Celestin gave the preference to a kind of winding passage, where gleamed over the doors projecting lanterns bearing enormous numbers on their rough colored glass. Under the narrow arches at the entrance to the houses, women wearing aprons like servants, seated on straw chairs, rose up on seeing them coming near,

taking three steps towards the gutter which separated the street into two halves, and which cut off the path from this file of men, who sauntered along at their leisure, humming and sneering, already getting excited by the vicinity of those dens of prostitutes.

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Sometimes, at the end of a hall, appeared, behind a second open door, which presented itself unexpectedly, covered over with dark leather, a big wench, undressed, whose heavy thighs and fat calves abruptly outlined themselves under her coarse white cotton wrapper. Her short petticoat had the appearance of a puffed out girdle; and the soft flesh of her breast, her shoulders, and her arms, made a rosy stain on a black velvet corsage with edgings of gold lace. She kept calling out from her distant corner, "Will you come here, my pretty boys?" and sometimes she would go out herself to catch hold of one of them, and to drag him towards her door with all her strength, fastening on to him like a spider drawing forward an insect bigger than itself. The man, excited by the struggle, would offer a mild resistance, and the rest would stop to look on, undecided between the longing to go in at once and that of lengthening this appetizing promenade. Then when the woman, after desperate efforts, had brought the sailor to the threshold of her abode, in which the entire band would be swallowed up after him, Celestin Duclos, who was a judge of houses of this sort, suddenly exclaimed: "Don't go in there, Marchand! That's not the place."

The man, thereupon, obeying this direction, freed himself with a brutal shake; and the comrades formed themselves into a band once more, pursued by the filthy insults of the exasperated wench, while other women, all along the alley, in front of them, came out past their doors, attracted by the noise, and in hoarse voices threw out to them invitations coupled with promises. They went on, then, more and more stimulated, from the combined effects of the coaxings and the seductions held out as baits to them by the choir of portresses of love all over the upper part of the street, and the ignoble maledictions hurled at them by the choir at the lower end—the despised choir of disappointed wenches. From time to time, they met another band—soldiers marching along with spurs jingling at their heels—sailors again—isolated citizens—clerks in business houses. On all sides might be seen fresh streets, narrow, and studded all over with those equivocal lanterns. They pursued their way still through this labyrinth of squalid habitation, over those greasy pavements through which putrid water was oozing, between those walls filled with women's flesh.

At last, Duclos made up his mind, and, drawing up before a house of rather attractive exterior, made all his companions follow him in there.

PART II

Then followed a scene of thorough going revelry. For four hours the six sailors gorged themselves with love and wine. Six months' pay was thus wasted.

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In the principal room in the tavern they were installed as masters, gazing with malignant glances at the ordinary customers, who were seated at the little tables in the corners, where one of the girls, who was left free to come and go, dressed like a big baby or a singer at a cafe-concert, went about serving them, and then seated herself near them. Each man, on coming in, had selected his partner, whom he kept all the evening, for the vulgar taste is not changeable. They had drawn three tables close up to them; and, after the first bumper, the procession divided into two parts, increased by as many women as there were seamen, had formed itself anew on the staircase. On the wooden steps, the four feet of each couple kept tramping for some time, while this long file of lovers got swallowed up behind the narrow doors leading into the different rooms.

Then they came down again to have a drink, and, after they had returned to the rooms descended the stairs once more.

Now, almost intoxicated, they began to howl. Each of them, with bloodshot eyes, and his chosen female companion on his knee, sang or bawled, struck the table with his fist, shouted while swilling wine down his throat, set free the human brute. In the midst of them, Celestin Duclos, pressing close to him, a big damsel with red cheeks, who sat astride over his legs, gazed at her ardently. Less tipsy than the others, not that he had taken less drink, he was as yet occupied with other thoughts, and, more tender than his comrades, he tried to get up a chat. His thoughts wandered a little, escaped him, and then came back, and disappeared again, without allowing him to recollect exactly what he meant to say.

“What time—what time—how long are you here?”

“Six months,” the girl answered.

He seemed to be satisfied with her, as if this were a proof of good conduct, and he went on questioning her:

“Do you like this life?”

She hesitated, then in a tone of resignation.

“One gets used to it. It is not more worrying than any other kind of life. To be a servant-girl or else a scrub is always a nasty occupation.”

He looked as if he also approved of the truthful remark.

“You are not from this place?” said he.

She answered merely by shaking her head.

“Do you come from a distance?”

She nodded, still without opening her lips.

“Where is it you come from?”

She appeared to be thinking, to be searching her memory, then said falteringly:

“From Perpignan.”

He was once more perfectly satisfied, and said:

“Ah! yes.”

In her turn she asked:

“And you, are you a sailor?”

“Yes, my beauty.”

“Do you come from a distance?”

“Ah! yes. I have seen countries, ports, and everything.”

“You have been round the world, perhaps?”

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“I believe you, twice rather than once.”

Again she seemed to hesitate, to search in her brain for something that she had forgotten, then, in a tone somewhat different, more serious:

“Have you met many ships in your voyages?”

“I believe you, my beauty.”

“You did not happen to see the *Notre Dame des Vents*?”

He chuckled:

“No later than last week.”

She turned pale, all the blood leaving her cheeks, and asked:

“Is that true, perfectly true?”

“’Tis true as I tell you.”

“Honor bright! you are not telling me a lie?”

He raised his hand.

“Before God, I’m not!” said he.

“Then do you know whether Celestin Duclos is still on her?”

He was astonished, uneasy, and wished, before answering, to learn something further.

“Do you know him?”

She became distrustful in turn.

“Oh! ’tis not myself—’tis a woman who is acquainted with him.”

“A woman from this place?”

“No, from a place not far off.”

“In the street?”

“What sort of a woman?”

“Why, then, a woman—a woman like myself.”

“What has she to say to him, this woman?”

“I believe she is a country-woman of his.”

They stared into one another’s hand, watching one another, feeling, divining that something of a grave nature was going to arise between them.

He resumed:

“I could see her there, this woman.”

“What would you say to her?”

“I would say to her—I would say to her—that I had seen Celestin Duclos.”

“He is quite well—isn’t he?”

“As well as you or me—he is a strapping young fellow.”

She became silent again, trying to collect her ideas; then slowly:

“Where has the *Notre Dame des Vents* gone to?”

“Why, just to Marseilles.”

She could not repress a start.

“Is that really true?”

“’Tis really true.”

“Do you know Duclos?”

“Yes, I do know him.”

She still hesitated; then in a very gentle tone:

“Good! That’s good!”

“What do you want with him?”

“Listen!—you will tell him—nothing!”

He stared at her, more and more perplexed. At last, he put this question to her:

“Do you know him, too, yourself?”

“No,” said she.

“Then what do you want with him?”

Suddenly, she made up her mind what to do, left her seat, rushed over to the bar where the landlady of the tavern presided, seized a lemon, which she tore open, and shed its juice into a glass, then she filled this glass with pure water, and carrying it across to him:

“Drink this!”

“Why?”

“To make it pass for wine. I will talk to you afterwards.”

He drank it without further protest, wiped his lips with the back of his hand, then observed:

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“That’s all right. I am listening to you.”

“You will promise not to tell him you have seen me, or from whom you learned what I am going to tell you. You must swear not to do so.”

He raised his hand.

“All right. I swear I will not.”

“Before God?”

“Before God.”

“Well, you will tell him that his father died, that his mother died, that his brother died, the whole three in one month, of typhoid fever, in January, 1883—three years and a half ago.”

In his turn, he felt all his blood set in motion through his entire body, and for a few seconds he was so much overpowered that he could make no reply; then he began to doubt what she had told him, and asked:

“Are you sure?”

“I am sure.”

“Who told it to you?”

She laid her hands on his shoulders, and looking at him out of the depths of her eyes:

“You swear not to blab?”

“I swear that I will not.”

“I am his sister!”

He uttered that name in spite of himself:

“Francoise?”

She contemplated him once more with a fixed stare, then, excited by a wild feeling of terror, a sense of profound horror, she faltered in a very low tone, almost speaking into his mouth:

“Oh! oh! it is you, Celestin.”

They no longer stirred, their eyes riveted in one another.

Around them, his comrades were still yelling. The sounds made by glasses, by fists, by heels keeping time to the choruses, and the shrill cries of the women, mingled with the roar of their songs.

He felt her leaning on him, clasping him, ashamed and frightened, his sister. Then, in a whisper, lest anyone might hear him, so hushed that she could scarcely catch his words:

“What a misfortune! I have made a nice piece of work of it!”

The next moment, her eyes filled with tears, and she faltered:

“Is that my fault?”

But, all of a sudden, he said:

“So then, they are dead?”

“They are dead.”

“The father, the mother, and the brother?”

“The three in one month, and I told you. I was left by myself with nothing but my clothes, for I was in debt to the apothecary and the doctor and for the funeral of the three, and had to pay what I owed with the furniture.”

“After that I went as a servant to the house of Mait’e Cacheux—you know him well—the cripple. I was just fifteen at the time, for you went away when I was not quite fourteen. I tripped with him. One is so senseless when one is young. Then I went as a nursery-maid to the notary who debauched me also, and brought me to Havre, where he took a room for me. After a little while, he gave up coming to see me. For three days I lived without eating a morsel of food; and then, not being able to get employment, I went to a house, like many others. I, too, have seen different places—ah! and dirty places! Rouen, Evreux, Lille, Bordeaux, Perpignan, Nice, and then Marseilles, where I am now!”

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The tears started from her eyes, flowed over her nose, wet her cheeks, and trickled into her mouth.

She went on:

“I thought you were dead, too?—my poor Celestin.”

He said:

“I would not have recognized you myself—you were such a little thing then, and here you are so big!—but how is it that you did not recognize me?”

She answered with a despairing movement of her hands:

“I see so many men that they all seem to me alike.”

He kept his eyes still fixed on her intently, oppressed by an emotion that dazed him, and filled him with such pain as to make him long to cry like a little child that has been whipped. He still held her in his arms, while she sat astride on his knees, with his open hands against the girl’s back; and now by sheer dint of looking continually at her, he at length recognized her, the little sister left behind in the country with all those whom she had seen die, while he had been tossing on the seas. Then, suddenly taking between his big seaman’s paws this head found once more, he began to kiss her, as one kisses kindred flesh. And after that, sobs, a man’s deep sobs, heaving like great billows, rose up in his throat, resembling the hiccoughs of drunkenness.

He stammered:

“And this is you—this is you, Francoise—my little Francoise!”—

Then, all at once, he sprang up, began swearing in an awful voice, and struck the table such a blow with his fists that the glasses were knocked down and smashed. After that, he advanced three steps, staggered, stretched out his arms, and fell on his face. And he rolled on the ground, crying out, beating the floor with his hands and feet, and uttering such groans that they seemed like a death-rattle.

All those comrades of his stared at him, and laughed.

“He’s not a bit drunk,” said one.

“He ought to be put to bed,” said another. “If he goes out, we’ll all be run in together.”

Then, as he had money in his pockets, the landlady offered to let him have a bed, and his comrades, themselves so much intoxicated that they could not stand upright, hoisted him up the narrow stairs to the apartment of the woman who had just been in his

company, and who remained sitting on a chair, at the foot of that bed of crime, weeping quite as freely as he had wept, until the morning dawned.

THE HERMIT

We had gone to see, with some friends, the old hermit installed on an antique mound covered with tall trees, in the midst of the vast plain which extends from Cannes to La Napoule.

On our return we spoke of those strange lay solitaries, numerous in former times, but now a vanished race. We sought to find out the moral causes, and endeavored to determine the nature of the griefs which in bygone days had driven men into solitudes.

All of a sudden one of our companions said:

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“I have known two solitaries—a man and a woman. The woman must be living still. She dwelt, five years ago, on the ruins of a mountain top absolutely deserted on the coast of Corsica, fifteen or twenty kilometers away from every house. She lived there with a maid-servant. I went to see her. She had certainly been a distinguished woman of the world. She received me with politeness and even in a gracious manner, but I know nothing about her, and I could find out nothing about her.

“As for the man, I am going to relate to you his ill-omened adventure:

* * * * *

Look round! You see over there that peaked woody mountain which stands by itself behind La Napoule in front of the summits of the Esterel; it is called in the district Snake Mountain. There is where my solitary lived within the walls of a little antique temple about a dozen years ago.

Having heard about him, I resolved to make his acquaintance, and I set out for Cannes on horseback one March morning. Leaving my steed at the inn at La Napoule, I commenced climbing on foot that singular cave, about one hundred and fifty perhaps, or two hundred meters in height, and covered with aromatic plants, especially cysti, whose odor is so sharp and penetrating that it irritates you and causes you discomfort. The soil is stony, and you can see gliding over the pebbles long adders which disappear in the grass. Hence this well-deserved appellation of Snake Mountain. On certain days, the reptiles seem to spring into existence under your feet when you climb the declivity exposed to the rays of the sun. They are so numerous that you no longer venture to go on, and experience a strange sense of uneasiness, not fear, for those creatures are harmless, but a sort of mysterious terror. I had several times the peculiar sensation of climbing a sacred mountain of antiquity, a fantastic hill perfumed and mysterious, covered with cysti and inhabited by serpents and crowned with a temple.

This temple still exists. They told me, at any rate, that it was a temple; for I did not seek to know more about it so as not to destroy the illusion.

So then, one March morning, I climbed up there under the pretext of admiring the country. On reaching the top, I perceived, in fact, walls and a man sitting on a stone. He was scarcely more than forty years of age, though his hair was quite white; but his beard was still almost black. He was fondling a cat which had cuddled itself upon his knees, and did not seem to mind me. I took a walk around the ruins, one portion of which covered over and shut in by means of branches, straw, grass and stones, was inhabited by him, and I made my way towards the place which he occupied.

The view here is splendid. On the right is the Esterel with its peaked summit strangely carved, then the boundless sea stretching as far as the distant coast of Italy with its numerous capes, facing Cannes, the Lerins Islands green and flat, which look as if they

were floating, and the last of which shows in the direction of the open sea an old castellated fortress with battlemented towers built in the very waves.

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Then, commanding a view of green mountain-side where you could see, at an equal distance, like innumerable eggs laid on the edge of the shore the long chaplet of villas and white villages built among the trees rose the Alps, whose summits are still shrouded in a hood of snow.

I murmured:

“Good heavens, this is beautiful!”

The man raised his head, and said:

“Yes, but when you see it every day, it is monstrous.”

Then he spoke, he chatted, and tired himself with talking—my solitary, I detained him.

I did not tarry long that day, and only endeavored to ascertain the color of misanthropy. He created on me especially the impression of being bored with other people, weary of everything, hopelessly disillusioned and disgusted with himself as well as the rest.

I left him after a half-hour’s conversation. But I came back, eight hours later, and once again in the following week, then every week, so that before two months we were friends.

Now, one evening at the close of May, I decided that the moment had arrived, and I brought provisions in order to dine with him on Snake Mountain.

It was one of those evenings of the South so odorous in that country where flowers are cultivated just as wheat is in the North, in that country where every essence that perfumes the flesh and the dress of women is manufactured, one of those evenings when the breath of the innumerable orange-trees with which the gardens and all the recesses of the dales are planted, excite and cause languor so that old men have dreams of love.

My solitary received me with manifest pleasure. He willingly consented to share in my dinner.

I made him drink a little wine, to which he had ceased to be accustomed. He brightened up and began to talk about his past life. He had always resided in Paris, and had, it seemed to me, lived a gay bachelor’s life.

I asked him abruptly:

“What put into your head this funny notion of going to live on the top of a mountain?”

He answered immediately:

“Her! it was because I got the most painful shock that a man can experience. But why hide from you this misfortune of mine? It will make you pity me, perhaps! And then—I have never told anyone—never—and I would like to know, for once, what another thinks of it, and how he judges it.”

“Born in Paris, brought up in Paris, I grew to manhood and spent my life in that city. My parents had left me an income of some thousands of francs a year, and I procured as a shelter, a modest and tranquil place which enabled me to pass as wealthy for a bachelor.

“I had, since my youth, led a bachelor’s life. You know what that is. Free and without family, resolved not to take a legitimate wife, I passed at one time three months with one, at another time six months with another, then a year without a companion, taking as my prey the mass of women who are either to be had for the asking or bought.

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“This every day, or, if you like the phrase better, commonplace, existence agreed with me, satisfied my natural tastes for changes and silliness. I lived on the boulevard, in theaters and cafes, always out of doors, always without a regular home, though I was comfortably housed. I was one of those thousands of beings who let themselves float like corks, through life, for whom the walls of Paris are the walls of the world, and who have no care about anything, having no passion for anything. I was what is called a good fellow, without accomplishments and without defects. That is all. And I judge myself correctly.

“Then, from twenty to forty years, my existence flowed along slowly or rapidly without any remarkable event. How quickly they pass, the monstrous years of Paris, when none of those memories worth fixing the date of find way into the soul, these long and yet hurried years, trivial and gay, when you eat, drink and laugh without knowing why, your lips stretched out towards all they can taste and all they can kiss, without having a longing for anything. You are young, and you grow old without doing any of the things that others do, without any attachment, any root, any bond, almost without friends, without family, without wife, without children.

“So, gently and quickly, I reached my fortieth year; and in order to celebrate this anniversary, I invited myself to take a good dinner all alone in one of the principal cafes.

“After dinner, I was in doubt as to what I would do. I felt disposed to go to a theater; and then the idea came into my head to make a pilgrimage to the Latin quarters, where I had in former days lived as a law-student. So I made my way across Paris, and without premeditation went in to one of those public-houses where you are served by girls.

“The one who attended at my table was quite young, pretty, and merry-looking. I asked her to take a drink, and she at once consented. She sat down opposite me, and gazed at me with a practiced eye, without knowing with what kind of a male she had to do. She was a fair-haired woman, or rather a fair-haired girl, a fresh, quite fresh young creature, whom you guessed to be rosy and plump under her swelling bodice. I talked to her in that flattering and idiotic style which we always adopt with girls of this sort; and as she was truly charming, the idea suddenly occurred to me to take her with me—-always with a view to celebrating my fortieth year. It was neither a long nor difficult task. She was free, she told me, for the past fortnight, and she forthwith accepted my invitation to come and sup with me in the Halles when her work would be finished.

“As I was afraid lest she might give me the slip—you never can tell what may happen, or who may come into those drink-shops, or what wind may blow into a woman’s head—I remained there all the evening waiting for her.

“I, too, had been free for the past month or two, and watching this pretty debutante of love going from table to table, I asked myself the question whether it would not be worth

my while to make a bargain with her to live with me for some time. I am here relating to you one of those ordinary adventures which occur every day in the lives of men in Paris.

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“Excuse me for such gross details. Those who have not loved in a poetic fashion take and choose women, as you choose a chop in a butcher’s shop without caring about anything save the quality of their flesh.

“Accordingly, I took her to her own house—for I had a regard for my own sheets. It was a little working-girl’s lodgings in the fifth story, clean and poor, and I spent two delightful hours there. This little girl had a certain grace and a rare attractiveness.

“When I was about to leave the room, I advanced towards the mantelpiece in order to place there the stipulated present, after having agreed on a day for a second meeting with the girl, who remained in bed, I got a vague glimpse of a clock without a globe, two flower-vases and two photographs, one of them very old, one of those proofs on glass called daguerreo-types. I carelessly bent forward towards this portrait, and I remained speechless at the sight, too amazed to comprehend.... It was my own, the first portrait of myself, which I had got taken in the days when I was a student in the Latin Quarter.

“I abruptly snatched it up to examine it more closely. I did not deceive myself—and I felt a desire to burst out laughing, so unexpected and queer did the thing appear to me.

“I asked:

“‘Who is this gentleman?’

“She replied:

“’Tis my father, whom I did not know. Mamma left it to me, telling me to keep it, as it might be useful to me, perhaps, one day—’

“She hesitated, began to laugh, and went on:

“’I don’t know in what way, upon my word. I don’t think he’ll care to acknowledge me.’

“My heart went beating wildly, like the mad gallop of a runaway horse. I replaced the portrait, laying it down flat on the mantelpiece. On top of it I placed, without even knowing what I was doing, two notes for a hundred francs, which I had in my pocket, and I rushed away, exclaiming:

“‘We’ll meet again soon—by-bye, darling—by-bye.’

“I heard her answering:

“‘Till Tuesday.’

“I was on the dark staircase, which I descended, groping my way down.

“When I got into the open air, I saw that it was raining, and I started at a great pace down some street or other.

“I walked straight on, stupefied, distracted, trying to jog my memory! Was this possible? Yes. I remembered all of a sudden a girl who had written to me, about a month after our rupture, that she was going to have a child by me. I had torn or burned the letter, and had forgotten all about the matter. I should have looked at the woman’s photograph over the girl’s mantelpiece. But would I have recognized it? It was the photograph of an old woman, it seemed to me.

“I reached the quay. I saw a bench, and sat down on it. It went on raining. People passed from time to time under umbrellas. Life appeared to me odious and revolting, full of miseries, of shames, of infamies deliberate or unconscious. My daughter!... I had just perhaps possessed my own daughter! And Paris, this vast Paris, somber, mournful, dirty, sad, black, with all those houses shut up, was full of such things, adulteries, incests, violated children, I recalled to mind what I had been told about bridges haunted by the infamous votaries of vice.

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“I had acted, without wishing it, without being aware of it, in a worse fashion than these ignoble beings. I had entered my own daughter’s bed!

“I was on the point of throwing myself into the water. I was mad! I wandered about till dawn, then I came back to my own house to think.

“I thereupon did what appeared to me the wisest thing. I desired a notary to send for this little girl, and to ask her under what conditions her mother had given her the portrait of him whom she supposed to be her father, stating that he was intrusted with this duty by a friend.

“The notary executed my commands. It was on her death-bed that this woman had designated the father of her daughter, and in the presence of a priest, whose name was given to me.

“Then, still in the name of this unknown friend, I got half of my fortune sent to this child, about one hundred and forty thousand francs, of which she could only get the income. Then I resigned my employment—and here I am.

“While wandering along this shore, I found this mountain, and I stopped there—up to what time I am unable to say!

“What do you think of me, and of what I have done?”

I replied as I extended my hand towards him:

“You have done what you ought to do. Many others would have attached less importance to this odious fatality.”

He went on:

“I know that, but I was nearly going mad on account of it. It seems I had a sensitive soul without ever suspecting it. And now I am afraid of Paris, as believers are bound to be afraid of Hell. I have received a blow on the head—that is all—a blow resembling the fall of a tile when one is passing through the street. I am getting better for some time past.”

I quitted my solitary. I was much disturbed by his narrative.

I saw him again twice, then I went away, for I never remain in the South after the month of May.

When I came back in the following year the man was no longer on Snake Mountain; and I have never since heard anything about him.

This is the history of my hermit.

THE ORDERLY

The cemetery, filled with officers, looked like a field covered with flowers. The kepis and the red trousers, the stripes and the gold buttons, the shoulder-knots of the staff, the braid of the chasseurs and the hussars, passed through the midst of the tombs, whose crosses, white or black, opened their mournful arms—their arms of iron, marble, or wood—over the vanished race of the dead.

Colonel Limousin's wife had just been buried. She had been drowned, two days before, while taking a bath. It was over. The clergy had left; but the colonel, supported by two brother-officers, remained standing in front of the pit, at the bottom of which he saw still the oaken coffin, wherein lay, already decomposed, the body of his young wife.

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He was almost an old man, tall and thin, with white moustache; and, three years ago, he had married the daughter of a comrade, left an orphan on the death of her father, Colonel Sortis.

The captain and the lieutenant, on whom their commanding officer was leaning, attempted to lead him away. He resisted, his eyes full of tears, which he heroically held back, and murmuring, “No, no, a little while longer!” he persisted in remaining there, his legs bending under him, at the side of that pit, which seemed to him bottomless, an abyss into which had fallen his heart and his life, all that he held dear on earth.

Suddenly, General Ormont came up, seized the colonel by the arm, and dragging him from the spot almost by force said: “Come, come, my old comrade! you must not remain here.”

The colonel thereupon obeyed, and went back to his quarters. As he opened the door of his study, he saw a letter on the table. When he took it in his hands, he was near falling with surprise and emotion; he recognized his wife’s handwriting. And the letter bore the post-mark and the date of the same day. He tore open the envelope and read:

* * * * *

“Father,

“Permit me to call you still father, as in days gone by. When you receive this letter, I shall be dead and under the clay. Therefore, perhaps, you may forgive me.

“I do not want to excite your pity or to extenuate my sin. I only want to tell the entire and complete truth, with all the sincerity of a woman who, in an hour’s time, is going to kill herself.

“When you married me through generosity, I gave myself to you through gratitude, and I loved you with all my girlish heart. I loved you as I loved my own father—almost as much; and one day, while I sat on your knee, and you were kissing me, I called you ‘Father’ in spite of myself. It was a cry of the heart, instinctive, spontaneous. Indeed, you were to me a father, nothing but a father. You laughed, and you said to me, ‘Address me always in that way, my child; it gives me pleasure.’

“We came to the city; and—forgive me, father—I fell in love. Ah! I resisted long, well, nearly two years—and then I yielded, I sinned, I became a fallen woman.

“And as to him? You will never guess who he is. I am easy enough about that matter, since there were a dozen officers always around me and with me, whom you called my twelve constellations.

“Father, do not seek to know him, and do not hate him. He only did what any man, no matter whom, would have done in his place, and then I am sure that he loved me, too, with all his heart.

“But listen! One day we had an appointment in the isle of Becasses—you know the little isle, close to the mill. I had to get there by swimming, and he had to wait for me in a thicket, and then to remain there till nightfall, so that nobody should see him going away. I had just met him when the branches opened, and we saw Philippe, your orderly, who had surprised us. I felt that we were lost, and I uttered a great cry. Thereupon he said to me—he, my lover—’Go, swim back quietly, my darling, and leave me here with this man.’

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“I went away so excited that I was near drowning myself, and I came back to you expecting that something dreadful was about to happen.

“An hour later, Philippe said to me in a low tone, in the lobby outside the drawing-room where I met him: ’I am at madame’s orders, if she has any letters to give me.’ Then I knew that he had sold himself, and that my lover had bought him.

“I gave him some letters, in fact—all my letters—he took them away, and brought me back the answers.

“This lasted about two months. We had confidence in him, as you had confidence in him yourself.

“Now, father, here is what happened. One day, in the same isle which I had to reach by swimming, but this time alone, I found your orderly. This man had been waiting for me; and he informed me that he was going to reveal everything about us to you, and deliver to you the letters which he had kept, stolen, if I did not yield to his desires.

“Oh! father, father, I was filled with fear—a cowardly fear, an unworthy fear, a fear above all of you who had been so good to me, and whom I had deceived—fear on his account too—you would have killed him—for myself also perhaps! I cannot tell; I was mad, desperate; I thought of once more buying this wretch who loved me, too—how shameful!

“We are so weak, we women, we lose our heads more easily than you do. And then, when a woman once falls, she always falls lower and lower. Did I know what I was doing? I understood only that one of you two and I were going to die—and I gave myself to this brute.

“You see, father, that I do not seek to excuse myself.

“Then, then—then what I should have foreseen happened—he had the better of me again and again, when he wished, by terrifying me. He, too, has been my lover, like the other, every day. Is not this abominable? And what punishment, father?

“So then it is all over with me. I must die. While I lived, I could not confess such a crime to you. Dead, I dare everything. I could not do otherwise than die—nothing could have washed me clean—I was too polluted. I could no longer love or be loved. It seemed to me that I stained everyone by merely allowing my hand to be touched.

“Presently I am going to take my bath, and I will never come back.

“This letter for you will go to my lover. It will reach him when I am dead, and without anyone knowing anything about it, he will forward it to you, accomplishing my last wishes. And you shall read it on your return from the cemetery.

“Adieu, father! I have no more to tell you. Do whatever you wish, and forgive me.”

* * * * *

The colonel wiped his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. His coolness; the coolness of days when he had stood on the field of battle, suddenly came back to him. He rang.

A man-servant made his appearance. “Send in Philippe to me,” said he. Then, he opened the drawer of his table.

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The man entered almost immediately—a big soldier with red moustache, a malignant look, and a cunning eye.

The colonel looked him straight in the face.

“You are going to tell me the name of my wife’s lover.”

“But, my colonel—”

The officer snatched his revolver out of the half-open drawer.

“Come! quick! You know I do not jest!”

“Well—my colonel—it is Captain Saint-Albert.”

Scarcely had he pronounced this name when a flame flashed between his eyes, and he fell on his face, his forehead pierced by a ball.

DUCHOUX

While descending the wide staircase of the club heated like a conservatory by the stove the Baron de Mordiane had left his fur-coat open; therefore, when the huge street-door closed behind him he felt a shiver of intense cold run through him, one of those sudden and painful shivers which make us feel sad, as if we were stricken with grief. Moreover, he had lost some money, and his stomach for some time past had troubled him, no longer permitting him to eat as he liked.

He went back to his own residence; and, all of a sudden, the thought of his great, empty apartment, of his footman asleep in the ante-chamber, of the dressing-room in which the water kept tepid for the evening toilet simmered pleasantly under the chafing-dish heated by gas, and the bed, spacious, antique, and solemn-looking, like a mortuary couch, caused another chill, more mournful still than that of the icy atmosphere, to penetrate to the bottom of his heart, the inmost core of his flesh.

For some years past he had felt weighing down on him that load of solitude which sometimes crushes old bachelors. Formerly, he had been strong, lively, and gay, giving all his days to sport and all his nights to festive gatherings. Now, he had grown dull, and no longer took pleasure in anything. Exercise fatigued him; suppers and even dinners made him ill; women annoyed him as much as they had formerly amused him.

The monotony of evenings all like each other, of the same friends met again in the same place, at the club, of the same game with a good hand and a run of luck, of the same talk on the same topics, of the same witty remarks by the same lips, of the same jokes on the same themes, of the same scandals about the same women, disgusted him so

much as to make him feel at times a veritable inclination to commit suicide. He could no longer lead this life regular and inane, so commonplace, so frivolous and so dull at the same time, and he felt a longing for something tranquil, restful, comfortable, without knowing what.

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He certainly did not think of getting married, for he did not feel in himself sufficient fortitude to submit to the melancholy, the conjugal servitude, to that hateful existence of two beings, who, always together, knew one another so well that one could not utter a word which the other would not anticipate, could not make a single movement which would not be foreseen, could not have any thought or desire or opinion which would not be divined. He considered that a woman could only be agreeable to see again when you know her but slightly, when there is something mysterious and unexplored attached to her, when she remains disquieting, hidden behind a veil. Therefore, what he would require was a family without family-life, wherein he might spend only a portion of his existence; and, again, he was haunted by the recollection of his son.

For the past year he had been constantly thinking of this, feeling an irritating desire springing up within him to see him, to renew acquaintance with him. He had become the father of this child, while still a young man, in the midst of dramatic and touching incidents. The boy dispatched to the South, had been brought up near Marseilles without ever hearing his father's name.

The latter had at first paid from month to month for the nurture, then for the education and the expense of holidays for the lad, and finally had provided an allowance for him on making a sensible match. A discreet notary had acted as an intermediary without ever disclosing anything.

The Baron de Mordiane accordingly knew merely that a child of his was living somewhere in the neighborhood of Marseilles, that he was looked upon as intelligent and well-educated, that he had married the daughter of an architect and contractor, to whose business he had succeeded. He was also believed to be worth a lot of money.

Why should he not go and see this unknown son without telling his name, in order to form a judgment about him at first and to assure himself that he would be able, in case of necessity, to find an agreeable refuge in this family?

He had acted handsomely towards the young man, had settled a good fortune on him, which had been thankfully accepted. He was, therefore, certain that he would not find himself clashing against any inordinate sense of self-importance; and this thought, this desire, which every day returned to him afresh, of setting out for the South, tantalized him like a kind of itching sensation. A strange self-regarding feeling of affection also attracted him, bringing before his mental vision this pleasant, warm abode by the seaside, where he would meet his young and pretty daughter-in-law, his grandchildren, with outstretched arms, and his son, who would recall to his memory the charming and short-lived adventure of bygone years. He regretted only having given so much money, and that this money had prospered in the young man's hands, thus preventing him from any longer presenting himself in the character of a benefactor.

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He hurried along, with all these thoughts running through his brain, and the collar of his fur-coat wrapped round his head. Suddenly he made up his mind. A cab was passing; he hailed it, drove home, and, when his valet, just roused from a nap, had opened the door.

“Louis,” said he, “we start to-morrow evening for Marseilles. We’ll remain there perhaps a fortnight. You will make all the necessary preparations.”

The train rushed on past the Rhone with its sandbanks, then through yellow plains, bright villages, and a wide expanse of country, shut in by bare mountains, which rose on the distant horizon.

The Baron de Mordiane, waking up after a night spent in a sleeping compartment of the train, looked at himself, in a melancholy fashion, in the little mirror of his dressing-case. The glaring sun of the South showed him some wrinkles which he had not observed before—a condition of decrepitude unnoticed in the imperfect light of Parisian rooms. He thought, as he examined the corners of his eyes, and saw the rumpled lids, the temples, the skinny forehead:

“Damn it, I’ve not merely got the gloss taken off—I’ve become quite an old fogy.”

And his desire for rest suddenly increased, with a vague yearning, born in him for the first time, to take his grandchildren on his knees.

About one o’clock in the afternoon, he arrived in a landau which he had hired at Marseilles, in front of one of those houses of Southern France so white, at the end of their avenues of plane-trees that they dazzle us and make our eyes droop. He smiled as he pursued his way along the walk before the house, and reflected:

“Deuce take it! this is a nice place.”

Suddenly, a young rogue of five or six made his appearance, starting out of a shrubbery, and remained standing at the side of the path, staring at the gentleman with eyes wide open.

Mordiane came over to him:

“Good morrow, my boy.”

The brat made no reply.

The baron, then, stooping down, took him up in his arms to kiss him, but, the next moment, suffocated by the smell of garlic with which the child seemed impregnated all over, he put him back again on the ground, muttering:

“Oh! it is the gardener’s son.”

And he proceeded towards the house.

The linen was hanging out to dry on a cord before the door—shirts and chemises, napkins, dish-cloths, aprons, and sheets, while a row of socks, hanging from strings one above the other, filled up an entire window, like sausages exposed for sale in front of a pork-butcher’s shop.

The baron announced his arrival. A servant-girl appeared, a true servant of the South, dirty and untidy, with her hair hanging in wisps and falling over her face, while her petticoat under the accumulation of stains which had soiled it had retained only a certain uncouth remnant of its old color, a hue suitable for a country fair or a mountebank’s tights.

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He asked:

“Is M. Duchoux at home?”

He had many years ago, in the mocking spirit of a skeptical man of pleasure, given this name to the foundling, in order that it might not be forgotten that he had been picked up under a cabbage.

The servant-girl asked:

“Do you want M. Duchoux?”

“Yes.”

“Well, he is in the big room drawing up his plans.”

“Tell him that M. Merlin wishes to speak to him.”

She replied, in amazement:

“Hey! go inside then, if you want to see him.”

And she bawled out:

“Monsieur Duchoux—a call.”

The baron entered, and in a spacious apartment, rendered dark by the windows being half-closed, he indistinctly traced out persons and things, which appeared to him very slovenly looking.

Standing in front of a table laden with articles of every sort, a little bald man was tracing lines on a large sheet of paper.

He interrupted his work, and advanced two steps. His waistcoat left open, his unbuttoned breeches, and his turned-up shirt-sleeves, indicated that he felt hot, and his muddy shoes showed that it had rained hard some days before.

He asked with a very pronounced southern accent:

“Whom have I the honor of—?”

“Monsieur Merlin—I came to consult you about a purchase of building-ground.”

“Ha! ha! very well!”

And Duchoux, turning towards his wife, who was knitting in the shade:

“Clear off a chair, Josephine.”

Mordiane then saw a young woman, who appeared already old, as women look old at twenty-five in the provinces, for want of attention to their persons, regular washing, and all the little cares bestowed on feminine toilet which make them fresh, and preserve, till the age of fifty, the charm and beauty of the sex. With a neckerchief over her shoulders, her hair clumsily braided—though it was lovely hair, thick and black, you could see that it was badly brushed—she stretched out towards a chair hands like those of a servant, and removed an infant’s robe, a knife, a fag-end of packe-bread, an empty flower-pot, and a greasy plate left on the seat, which she then moved over towards the visitor.

He sat down, and presently noticed that Duchoux’s work-table had on it, in addition to the books and papers, two salads recently gathered, a wash-hand basin, a hair-brush, a napkin, a revolver, and a number of cups which had not been cleaned.

The architect perceived this look, and said with a smile:

“Excuse us! there is a little disorder in the room—it is owing to the children.”

And he drew across his chair, in order to chat with his client.

“So then you are looking out for a piece of ground in the neighborhood of Marseilles?”

His breath, though not close to the baron, carried towards the latter that odor of garlic which the people of the South exhale as flowers do their perfume.

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Mordiane asked:

“Is it your son that I met under the plane-trees?”

“Yes. Yes, the second.”

“You have two of them?”

“Three, monsieur; one a year.”

And Duchoux looked full of pride.

The baron was thinking:

“If they all have the same perfume, their nursery must be a real conservatory.”

He continued:

“Yes, I would like a nice piece of ground near the sea, on a little solitary strip of beach —”

Thereupon Duchoux proceeded to explain. He had ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred, or more, pieces of ground of the kind required, at different prices and suited to different tastes. He talked just as a fountain flows, smiling, self-satisfied, wagging his bald round head.

And Mordiane was reminded of a little woman, fair-haired, slight, with a somewhat melancholy look, and a tender fashion of murmuring, “My darling,” of which the mere remembrance made the blood stir in his veins. She had loved him passionately, madly, for three months; then, becoming pregnant in the absence of her husband, who was a governor of a colony, she had run away and concealed herself, distracted with despair and terror, till the birth of the child, which Mordiane carried off one summer’s evening, and which they had not laid eyes on afterwards.

She died of consumption three years later, over there, in the colony of which her husband was governor, and to which she had gone across to join him. And here, in front of him, was their son, who was saying, in the metallic tones with which he rang out his closing words:

“This piece of ground, monsieur, is a rare chance—”

And Mordiane recalled the other voice, light as the touch of a gentle breeze, as it used to murmur:

“My darling, we shall never part—”

And he remembered that soft, deep, devoted glance in those eyes of blue, as he watched the round eye, also blue, but vacant, of this ridiculous little man, who, for all that, bore a resemblance to his mother.

Yes, he looked more and more like her every moment—like her in accent, in movement, in his entire deportment—he was like her in the way an ape is like a man; but still he was hers; he displayed a thousand external characteristics peculiar to her, though in an unspeakably distorted, irritating, and revolting form.

The baron was galled, haunted as he was all of a sudden by this resemblance, horrible, each instant growing stronger, exasperating, maddening, torturing him like a nightmare, like a weight of remorse.

He stammered out:

“When can we look at this piece of ground together?”

“Why, to-morrow, if you like.”

“Yes, to-morrow. At what hour?”

“One o’clock.”

“All right.”

The child he had met in the avenue appeared before the open door, exclaiming:

“Dada!”

There was no answer.

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Mordiane had risen up with a longing to escape, to run off, which made his legs tremble. This “dada” had hit him like a bullet. It was to *him* that it was addressed, it was intended for him, this “dada,” smelling of garlic—this “dada” of the South.

Oh! how sweet had been the perfume exhaled by her, his sweetheart of bygone days!

Duchoux saw him to the door.

“This house is your own?” said the baron.

“Yes, monsieur; I bought it recently. And I am proud of it. I am a child of accident, monsieur, and I don’t want to hide it; I am proud of it. I owe nothing to anyone; I am the son of my own efforts; I owe everything to myself.”

The little boy, who remained on the threshold, kept still exclaiming, though at some distance away from them:

“Dada!”

Mordiane, shaking with a shivering fit, seized with panic, fled as one flies away from a great danger.

“He is going to guess who I am, to recognize me,” he thought. “He is going to take me in his arms, and to call out to me, ‘Dada,’ while giving me a kiss perfumed with garlic.”

“To-morrow, monsieur.”

“To-morrow, at one o’clock.”

The landau rolled over the white road.

“Coachman! to the railway-station!”

And he heard two voices, one far away and sweet, the faint, sad voice of the dead, saying: “My darling,” and the other sonorous, sing-song, frightful, bawling out, “Dada,” just as people bawl out, “Stop him!” when a thief is flying through the street.

Next evening, as he entered the club, the Count d’Etreillis said to him:

“We have not seen you for the last three days. Have you been ill?”

“Yes, a little unwell. I get headaches from time to time.”

OLD AMABLE

PART I

The humid, gray sky seemed to weigh down on the vast brown plain. The odor of Autumn, the sad odor of bare, moist lands, of fallen leaves, of dead grass, made the stagnant evening air more thick and heavy. The peasants were still at work, scattered through the fields, waiting for the stroke of the Angelus to call them back to the farm-houses, whose thatched roofs were visible here and there through the branches of the leafless trees which protected the apple-gardens against the wind.

At the side of the road, on a heap of clothes, a very small male child seated with its legs apart, was playing with a potato, which he now and then let fall on his dress, while five women bent down with their rumps in the air, were picking sprigs of colza in the adjoining plain. With a slow continuous movement, all along the great cushions of earth which the plow had just turned up, they drove in sharp wooden stakes, and then cast at once into the hole so formed the plant, already a little withered, which sank on the side; then they covered over the root, and went on with their work.

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A man who was passing, with a whip in his hand, and wearing wooden shoes, stopped near the child, took it up, and kissed it. Then one of the women rose up, and came across to him. She was a big, red-haired girl, with large hips, waist, and shoulders, a tall Norman woman, with yellow hair in which there was a blood-red tint.

She said, in a resolute voice:

“Here you are, Cesaire—well?”

The man, a thin young fellow with a melancholy air, murmured:

“Well, nothing at all—always the same.”

“He won’t have it?”

“He won’t have it.”

“What are you going to do?”

“What do you say I ought to do?”

“Go see the cure.”

“I will.”

“Go at once!”

“I will.”

And they stared at each other. He held the child in his arms all the time. He kissed it once more, and then put it down again on the woman’s clothes.

In the distance, between two farm-houses, could be seen a plow drawn by a horse, and driven along by a man. They moved on very gently, the horse, the plow, and the laborer, under the dim evening sky.

The woman went on:

“What, then, did your father say?”

“He said he would not have it.”

“Why wouldn’t he have it?”

The young man pointed towards the child whom he had just put back on the ground, then with a glance he drew her attention to the man drawing the plow yonder there.

And he said emphatically:

“Because ’tis his—this child of yours.”

The girl shrugged her shoulders, and in an angry tone said:

“Faith everyone knows it well—that it is Victor’s. And what about it after all? I made a slip. Am I the only woman that did? My mother also made a slip before me, and then yours did the same before she married your dad! Who is it that hasn’t made a slip in the country. I made a slip with Victor, because he took advantage of me while I was asleep in the barn, it’s true, and afterwards it happened between us when I wasn’t asleep. I certainly would have married him if he weren’t a servant-man. Am I a worse woman for that?”

The man said simply:

“As for me, I like you just as you are, with or without the child. ’Tis only my father that opposes me. All the same, I’ll see about settling the business.”

She answered:

“Go to the cure at once.”

“I’m going to him.”

And he set forth with his heavy peasant’s tread; while the girl, with her hands on her hips, turned round to pick her colza.

In fact, the man who thus went off, Cesaire Houlbreque, the son of deaf old Amable Houlbreque, wanted to marry in spite of his father, Celeste Levesque, who had a child by Victor Lecoq, a mere laborer on his parent’s farm, turned out of doors for this act.

Moreover, the hierarchy of caste does not exist in the fields, and if the laborer is thrifty, he becomes, by taking a farm in his turn, the equal of his former master.

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So Cesaire Houlbreque went off with his whip under his arm, brooding over his own thoughts, and lifting up one after the other his heavy wooden shoes daubed with clay. Certainly he desired to marry Celeste Levesque. He wanted her with her child, because it was the woman he required. He could not say why: but he knew it, he was sure of it. He had only to look at her to be convinced of it, to feel himself quite jolly, quite stirred up, as it were turned into a pure animal through contentment. He even found a pleasure in kissing the little boy, Victor's little boy, because he had come out of her.

And he gazed, without hate, at the distant profile of the man who was driving his plow along on the horizon's edge.

But old Amable did not want this marriage. He opposed it with the obstinacy of a deaf man, with a violent obstinacy.

Cesaire in vain shouted in his ear, in that ear which still heard a few sounds:

"I'll take good care of you, daddy. I tell you she's a good girl and strong, too, and also thrifty."

The old man repeated:

"As long as I live, I won't see her your wife."

And nothing could get the better of him, nothing could bend his severity. One hope only was left to Cesaire. Old Amable was afraid of the cure through apprehension of the death which he felt drawing nigh. He had not much fear of the good God nor of the Devil nor of Hell nor of Purgatory, of which he had no conception, but he dreaded the priest, who represented to him burial, as one might fear the doctors through horror of diseases. For the last eight days Celeste, who knew this weakness of the old man, had been urging Cesaire to go and find the cure; but Cesaire always hesitated, because he had not much liking for the black robe, which represented to him hands always stretched out for collections for blessed bread.

However, he made up his mind, and he proceeded towards the presbytery, thinking in what manner he would speak about his case.

The Abbe Raffin, a lively little priest, thin and never shaved, was awaiting his dinner-hour while warming his feet at his kitchen-fire.

As soon as he saw the peasant entering, he asked, merely turning round his head:

"Well, Cesaire, what do you want?"

"I'd like to have a talk with you, M. le Cure."

The man remained standing, intimidated, holding his cap in one hand and his whip in the other.

“Well, talk.”

Cesaire looked at the housekeeper, an old woman who dragged her feet while putting on the cover for her master’s dinner at the corner of the table in front of the window.

He stammered:

“’Tis—’tis a sort of confession.”

Thereupon, the Abbe Raffin carefully surveyed his peasant. He saw his confused countenance, his air of constraint, his wandering eyes, and he gave orders to the housekeeper in these words:

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“Marie, go away for five minutes to your room, while I talk to Cesaire.”

The servant cast on the man an angry glance, and went away grumbling.

The clergyman went on:

“Come, now, spin out your yarn.”

The young fellow still hesitated, looked down at his wooden shoes, moved about his cap, then, all of a sudden, he made up his mind:

“Here it is: I want to marry Celeste Levesque.”

“Well, my boy, what’s there to prevent you?”

“The father won’t have it.”

“Your father?”

“Yes, my father.”

“What does your father say?”

“He says she has a child.”

“She’s not the first to whom that happened, since our Mother Eve.”

“A child by Victor Lecoq, Anthione Loisel’s servant-man.”

“Ha! ha! So he won’t have it?”

“He won’t have it.”

“What! not at all?”

“No, no more than an ass that won’t budge an inch, saving your presence.”

“What do you say to him yourself in order to make him decide?”

“I say to him that she’s a good girl, and strong too, and thrifty also.”

“And this does not make him settle it. So you want me to speak to him?”

“Exactly. You speak to him.”

“And what am I to tell your father?”

“Why, what you tell people in your sermons to make them give you sous.”

In the peasant’s mind every effort of religion consisted in loosening the purses, in emptying the pockets of men in order to fill the heavenly coffer. It was a kind of huge commercial establishment, of which the cures were the clerks, sly, crafty clerks, sharp as anyone must be who does business for the good God at the expense of the country people.

He knew full well that the priests rendered services, great services to the poorest, to the sick and dying, that they assisted, consoled, counseled, sustained, but all this by means of money, in exchange for white pieces, for beautiful glittering coins, with which they paid for sacraments and masses, advice and protection, pardon of sins and indulgences, purgatory and paradise accompanying the yearly income, and the generosity of the sinner.

The Abbe Raffin, who knew his man, and who never lost his temper, burst out laughing.

“Well, yes, I’ll tell your father my little story; but you, my lad, you’ll go there—to the sermon.”

Houlbreque extended his hand in order to give a solemn assurance:

“On the word of a poor man, if you do this for me, I promise that I will.”

“Come, that’s all right. When do you wish me to go and find your father?”

“Why the sooner the better—to-night if you can.”

“In half-an-hour, then, after supper.”

“In half-an-hour.”

“That’s understood. So long, my lad.”

“Good-bye till we meet again, Monsieur le Cure; many thanks.”

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“Not at all, my lad.”

And Cesaire Houlbreque returned home, his heart relieved of a great weight.

He held on lease a little farm, quite small, for they were not rich, his father and he. Alone with a female servant, a little girl of fifteen, who made the soup, looked after the fowls, milked the cows and churned the butter, they lived hardly, though Cesaire was a good cultivator. But they did not possess either sufficient lands or sufficient cattle to gain more than the indispensable.

The old man no longer worked. Sad, like all deaf people, crippled with pains, bent double, twisted, he went through the fields leaning on his stick, watching the animals and the men with a hard, distrustful eye. Sometimes, he sat down on the side of a ditch, and remained there without moving for hours, vaguely pondering over the things that had engrossed his whole life, the price of eggs and corn, the sun and the rain which spoil the crops or make them grow. And, worn out by rheumatism, his old limbs still drank in the humidity of the soul, as they had drunk in for the past sixty years, the moisture of the walls of his low thatched house covered over with humid straw.

He came back at the close of the day, took his place at the end of the table, in the kitchen, and when the earthen pot containing the soup had been placed before him, he caught it between his crooked fingers, which seemed to have kept the round form of the jar, and, winter and summer, he warmed his hands, before commencing to eat, so as to lose nothing, not even a particle of the heat that came from the fire, which costs a great deal, neither one drop of soup into which fat and salt have to be put, nor one morsel of bread, which comes from the wheat.

Then, he climbed up a ladder into a loft where he had his straw-bed, while his son slept below-stairs at the end of a kind of niche near the chimney-piece and the servant shut herself up in a kind of cave, a black hole which was formerly used to store the potatoes.

Cesaire and his father scarcely ever talked to each other. From time to time only, when there was a question of selling a crop or buying a calf, the young man took the advice of his father, and making a speaking-trumpet of his two hands, he bawled out his views into his ear, and old Amable either approved of them or opposed them in a slow, hollow voice that came from the depths of his stomach.

So, one evening, Cesaire, approaching him as if about to discuss the purchase of a horse or a heifer, communicated to him at the top of his voice his intention to marry Celeste Levesque.

Then, the father got angry. Why? On the score of morality? No, certainly. The virtue of a girl is scarcely of importance in the country. But his avarice, his deep, fierce instinct for sparing, revolted at the idea that his son should bring up a child which he had not

begotten himself. He had thought suddenly, in one second, on the soup the little fellow would swallow before being useful in the farm. He had calculated all the pounds of bread, all the pints of cider, that this brat would consume up to his fourteenth year; and a mad anger broke loose from him against Cesaire who had not bestowed a thought on all this.

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He replied, with an usual strength of voice:

“Have you lost your senses?”

Thereupon, Cesaire began to enumerate his reasons, to speak about Celeste’s good points, to prove that she would be worth a thousand times what the child would cost. But the old man doubted these advantages, while he could have no doubts as to the child’s existence; and he replied with emphatic repetition, without giving any further explanation:

“I will not have it! I will not have it! As long as I live, this won’t be done!”

And at this point they had remained for the last three months, without one or the other giving in, resuming at least once a week the same discussion, with the same arguments, the same words, the same gestures, and the same fruitlessness.

It was then that Celeste had advised Cesaire to go and ask for the cure’s assistance.

On arriving home the peasant found his father already seated at table, for he was kept late by his visit to the presbytery.

They dined in silence face to face, ate a little bread and butter after the soup and drank a glass of cider. Then they remained motionless in their chairs, with scarcely a glimmer of light, the little servant-girl having carried off the candle in order to wash the spoons, wipe the glasses, and cut beforehand the crusts of bread for next morning’s breakfast.

There was a knock at the door, which was immediately opened; and the priest appeared. The old man raised towards him an anxious eye full of suspicion, and, foreseeing danger, he was getting ready to climb up his ladder when the Abbe Raffin laid his hand on his shoulder, and shouted close to his temple:

“I want to have a talk with you, Father Amable.”

Cesaire had disappeared, taking advantage of the door being open. He did not want to listen, so much was he afraid, and he did not want his hopes to crumble with each obstinate refusal of his father. He preferred to learn the truth at once, good or bad, later on; and he went out into the night. It was a moonless night, a starless night, one of those foggy nights when the air seems thick with humidity. A vague odor of apples floated through the farm-yard, for it was the season when the earliest apples were gathered, the “soon ripe” ones, as they are called in the language of the peasantry. As Cesaire passed along by the cattle-sheds, the warm smell of living beasts sleeping on manure was exhaled through the narrow windows; and he heard near the stables the stamping of horses who remained standing, and the sound of their jaws tearing and bruising the hay on the racks.

He went straight ahead, thinking about Celeste. In this simple nature, whose ideas were scarcely more than images generated directly by objects, thoughts of love only formulated themselves by calling up before the mind the picture of a big red-haired girl, standing in a hollow road, and laughing with her hands on her hips.

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It was thus he saw her on the day when he first took a fancy for her. He had, however, known her from infancy but never had he been so struck by her as on that morning. They had stopped to talk for a few minutes, and then he went away; and as he walked along he kept repeating:

“Faith, she’s a fine girl, all the same. ’Tis a pity she made a slip with Victor.”

Till evening, he kept thinking of her, and also on the following morning.

When he saw her again, he felt something tickling the end of his throat, as if a cock’s feather had been driven through his mouth into his chest, and since then, every time he found himself near her, he was astonished at this nervous tickling which always commenced again.

In three months, he made up his mind to marry her, so much did she please him. He could not have said whence came this power over him, but he explained it by these words:

“I am possessed by her,” as if he felt the desire of this girl within him with as much dominating force as one of the powers of Hell. He scarcely bothered himself about her transgression. So much the worse, after all; it did her no harm, and he bore no grudge against Victor Lecoq.

But if the cure was not going to succeed, what was he to do? He did not dare to think of it, so much did this anxious question torment him.

He reached the presbytery and seated himself near the little gateway to await for the priest’s return.

He was there perhaps half-an-hour when he heard steps on the road, and he soon distinguished although the night was very dark, the still darker shadow of the sautane.

He rose up, his legs giving way under him, not even venturing to speak, not daring to ask a question.

The clergyman perceived him, and said gayly:

“Well, my lad, ’tis all right.”

Cesaire stammered:

“All right, ’tisn’t possible.”

“Yes, my lad, but not without trouble. What an old ass your father is!”

The peasant repeated:

“’Tisn’t possible!”

“Why, yes. Come and look me up to-morrow at midday in order to settle about the publication of the banns.”

The young man seized the cure’s hand. He pressed it, shook it, bruised it, while he stammered:

“True—true—true, Monsieur le Cure, on the word of an honest man, you’ll see me to-morrow—at your sermon.”

PART II

The wedding took place in the middle of December. It was simple, the bridal pair not being rich. Cesaire, attired in new clothes, was ready since eight o’clock in the morning to go and fetch his betrothed and bring her to the Mayor’s office; but, it was too early, he seated himself before the kitchen-table, and waited for the members of the family and the friends who were to accompany him.

For the last eight days, it had been snowing, and the brown earth, the earth already fertilized by the autumn savings had become livid, sleeping under a great sheet of ice.

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It was cold in the thatched houses adorned with white caps; and the round apples in the trees of the enclosures seemed to be flowering, powdered as they had been in the pleasant month of their blossoming.

This day, the big northern clouds, the gray clouds laden with glittering rain had disappeared, and the blue sky showed itself above the white earth on which the rising sun cast silvery reflections.

Cesaire looked straight before him through the window, thinking of nothing happy.

The door opened, two women entered, peasant women in their Sunday clothes, the aunt and the cousin of the bridegroom, then three men, his cousins, then a woman who was a neighbor. They sat down on chairs, and they remained motionless and silent, the women on one side of the kitchen, the men on the other suddenly seized with timidity, with that embarrassed sadness which takes possession of people assembled for a ceremony. One of the cousins soon asked:

“It is not the hour—is it?”

Cesaire replied:

“I am much afraid it is.”

“Come on! Let us start,” said another.

Those rose up. Then Cesaire, whom a feeling of uneasiness had taken possession of, climbed up the ladder of the loft to see whether his father was ready. The old man, always as a rule an early riser, had not yet made his appearance. His son found him on his bed of straw, wrapped up in his blanket, with his eyes open, and a malicious look in them.

He bawled out into his ear: “Come, daddy, get up. ’Tis the time for the wedding.”

The deaf man murmured in a doleful tone:

“I can’t, I have a sort of cold over me that freezes my back. I can’t stir.”

The young man, dumbfounded, stared at him, guessing that this was a dodge.

“Come, daddy, we must force you to go.”

“Look here! I’ll help you.”

And he stooped towards the old man, pulled off his blanket, caught him by the arm and lifted him up. But the old Amable began to whine:

“Ooh! Ooh! Ooh! What suffering! Ooh! I can’t. My back is stiffened up. ’Tis the wind that must have rushed in through this cursed roof.”

“Well, you’ll have no dinner, as I’m having a spread at Polyte’s inn. This will teach you what comes of acting mulishly.”

And he hurried down the ladder, then set out for his destination, accompanied by his relatives and guests.

The men had turned up their trousers so as not to soil the ends of them in the snow. The women held up their petticoats and showed their lean ankles, their gray woolen stockings, and their bony shanks resembling broomsticks. And they all moved forward balancing themselves on their legs, one behind the other without uttering a word in a very gingerly fashion through caution lest they might miss their way owing to flat, uniform uninterrupted sweep of snow that obliterated the track.

As they approached some of the farm houses, they saw one or two persons waiting to join them, and the procession went on without stopping, and wound its way forward, following the invisible outlines of the road, so that it resembled a living chaplet with black beads undulating through the white country side.

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In front of the bride's door, a large group was stamping up and down the open space awaiting the bridegroom. When he appeared they gave him a loud greeting; and presently, Celeste came forth from her room, clad in a blue dress, her shoulders covered with a small red shawl, and her head adorned with orange-flowers.

But everyone asked Cesaire:

"Where's your father?" he replied with embarrassment.

"He couldn't move on account of the pains."

And the farmers tossed their heads with an incredulous and waggish air.

They directed their steps towards the Mayor's office. Behind the pair about to be wedded, a peasant woman carried Victor's child, as if it were going to be baptized; and the male peasants, in pairs, now went on, with arms linked, through the snow with the movements of a sloop at sea.

After having been united by the Mayor in the little municipal house, the pair were made one by the cure, in his turn, in the modest house of the good God. He blessed their couplement by promising them fruitfulness, then he preached to them on the matrimonial virtues, the simple and healthful virtues of the country, work, concord, and fidelity, while the child, seized with cold, began bawling behind the backs of the newly-married pair.

As soon as the couple reappeared on the threshold of the church, shots were discharged in the moat of the cemetery. Only the barrels of the guns could be seen whence came forth rapid jets of smoke; then a head could be seen gazing at the procession. It was Victor Lecoq celebrating the marriage of his old sweetheart, wishing her happiness and sending her his good wishes with explosions of powder. He had employed some friends of his, five or six laboring men, for these salvoes of musketry. It could be seen that he carried the thing off well.

The repast was given in Polyte Cacheprune's inn. Twenty covers were laid in the great hall where people dined on market-days, and the big leg of mutton turning before the spit, the fowl browned under their own gravy, the chitterling roasting over the warm bright fire, filled the house with a thick odor of coal sprinkled with fat—the powerful and heavy odor of rustic fare.

They sat down to table at midday, and speedily the soup flowed into the plates. The faces already had brightened up; mouths opened to utter loud jokes, and eyes were laughing with knowing winks. They were going to amuse themselves and no mistake.

The door opened, and old Amable presented himself. He seemed in bad humor and his face wore a scowl, and he dragged himself forward on his sticks, whining at every step

to indicate his suffering. The sight of him caused great annoyance; but suddenly, his neighbor, Daddy Malivoire, a big joker, who knew all the little tricks and ways of people, began to yell, just as Cesaire used to do, by making a speaking-trumpet of his hands.

“Hallo, my cute old boy, you have a good nose on you to be able to smell Polyte’s cookery from your own house!”

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An immense laugh burst forth from the throats of those present. Malivoire, excited by his success, went on:

“There is nothing for the rheumatics like a chitterling poultice! It keeps your belly warm, along with a glass of three-six!”

The men uttered shouts, banged the table with their fists, laughed, bending on one side and raising up their bodies again as if they were each working a pump. The women clucked like hens, while the servants wriggled, standing against the walls. Old Amable was the only one that did not laugh, and, without making any reply, waited till they made room for him.

They found a place for him in the middle of the table facing his daughter-in-law, and, as soon as he was seated, he began to eat. It was his son who was paying, after all it was right he should take his share. With each ladlefull of soup that fell into his stomach, with each mouthful of bread or meat crushed under his gums, with each glass of cider or wine that flowed through his gullet, he thought he was regaining something of his own property, getting back a little of his money which all those gluttons were devouring, saving in fact, a portion of his own means. And he ate in silence with the obstinacy of a miser who hides his coppers, with the gloomy tenacity which he exhibited in former days in his persistent toils.

But all of a sudden he noticed at the end of the table Celeste’s child on a woman’s lap, and his eye remained fixed on the little boy. He went on eating, with his glance riveted on the youngster, into whose mouth the woman who minded him every now and then put a little stuffing which he nibbled at. And the old man suffered more from every mouthful taken in by this little grub than by all that the others swallowed.

The meal lasted till evening. Then everyone went back home.

Cesaire raised up old Amable.

“Come, daddy, we must go home,” said he.

And put the old man’s two sticks in his hands

Cesaire took her child in her arms, and they went on slowly through the pale night whitened by the snow. The deaf old man, three-fourths tipsy, and even more malicious under the influence of drink, persisted in not going on. Several times he even sat down with the object of making his daughter-in-law catch cold, and he kept whining, without uttering a word, giving vent to a sort of continuous groaning as if he were in pain.

When they reached home, he at once climbed up to his loft, while Cesaire made a bed for the child near the deep niche where he was going to lie down with his wife. But as the newly wedded pair could not sleep immediately, they heard the old man for a long

time moving about on his bed of straw, and he even talked loudly several times, whether it was that he was dreaming or that he let his thoughts escape through his mouth, in spite of himself, without being able to keep them back, under the obsession of a fixed idea.

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When he came down his ladder, next morning, he saw his daughter-in-law looking after the house-keeping.

She cried out to him:

“Come, daddy, hurry on! Here’s some good soup.”

And she placed at the end of the table the round black gray pot filled with smoking liquid. He sat down without giving any answer, seized the hot jar, warmed his hands with it in his customary fashion; and, as it was very cold, even pressed it against his breast, to try to make a little of the living heat of the boiling water enter into him, into his old body stiffened by so many winters.

Then he took his sticks and went out into the fields, covered with ice, till it was time for dinner, for he had seen Celeste’s youngster still asleep in a big soap-box.

He did not take his place in the household. He lived in the thatched house, as in bygone days, but he seemed not to belong to it any longer, to be no longer interested in anything, to look upon those people, his son, the wife, and the child as strangers whom he did not know, to whom he never spoke.

The winter glided by. It was long and severe.

Then the early spring made the seeds sprout forth again, and the peasants once more, like laborious ants, passed their days in the fields, toiling from morning till night, under the wind and under the rain, along the furrows of brown earth which brought forth the bread of men.

The year promised well for the newly-married pair. The crops grew thick and heavy. There were no slow frosts, and the apples bursting into bloom let fall into the grass their rosy white snow, which promised a hail of fruit for the autumn.

Cesaire toiled hard, rose early and left off work late, in order to save the expense of a laboring man.

His wife said to him sometimes:

“You’ll make yourself ill in the long run.”

He replied:

“Certainly not. I’m a good judge.”

Nevertheless, one evening he came home so fatigued that he had to go to bed without supper. He rose up next morning at the usual hour, but he could not eat, in spite of his

fast on the previous night, and he had to come back to the house in the middle of the afternoon in order to go to bed again. In the course of the night, he began to cough; he turned round on his straw couch, feverish, with his forehead burning, his tongue dry, and his throat parched by a burning thirst.

However, at daybreak, he went towards his grounds, but, next morning, the doctor had to be sent for, and pronounced him very ill from an inflammation of the chest.

And he no longer quitted the obscure niche which he made use of to sleep in. He could be heard coughing, panting, and tossing about in the interior of this hole. In order to see him, to give his medicine, and to apply cupping-glasses, it was necessary to bring a candle towards the entrance. Then one could see his narrow head with his long matted beard underneath a thick lacework of spiders' webs, which hung and floated when stirred by the air. And the hands of the sick man seemed dead under the dingy sheets.

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Celeste watched him with restless activity, made him take physic, applied blister plasters to him, and was constantly waving up and down the house, while the old Amable remained at the side of his loft, watching at a distance the gloomy cave where his son was dying. He did not come near him, through hatred of the wife, sulking like an ill-tempered dog.

Six more days passed, then, one morning, as Celeste, who was now asleep on the ground on two loose bundles of straw, was going to see whether her man was better, she no longer heard his rapid breathing from the interior of his low bed. Terror stricken, she asked:

“Well, Cesaire, what sort of a night had you?”

He did not answer. She put out her hand to touch him, and the flesh on his face felt cold as ice. She uttered a great cry, the long cry of a woman overpowered with fright. He was dead.

At this cry, the deaf old man appeared, at the top of his ladder, and when he saw Celeste rushing to call for help, he quickly descended, felt in his turn the flesh of his son, and suddenly realizing what had happened, went to shut the door from the inside, to prevent the wife from reentering, and to resume possession of his dwelling, since his son was no longer living.

Then he sat down on a chair by the dead man’s side.

Some of the neighbors arrived, called out, and knocked. He did not hear them. One of them broke the glass of the window, and jumped into the room. Others followed. The door was opened again, and Celeste reappeared, all in tears, with swollen face, and bloodshot eyes. Then, old Amable, vanquished, without uttering a word, climbed back to his loft.

The funeral took place next morning, then, after the ceremony, the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law found themselves alone in the farm-house with the child.

It was the usual dinner hour. She lighted the fire, divided the soup, and placed the plated on the table, while the old man sat on the chair waiting without appearing to look at her. When the meal was ready, she bawled out in his ear:

“Come, daddy, you must eat.” He rose up, took his seat at the end of the table, emptied his pot, masticated his bread and butter, drank his two glasses of cider, and then took himself off.

It was one of those warm days, one of those enjoyable days when life ferments, palpitates, blooms all over the surface of the soil.

Old Amable pursued a little path across the fields. He watched the young wheat and the young oats, thinking that his son was now under the clay, his poor boy. He went on at his customary pace, dragging his legs after him in a limping fashion. And, as he was all alone in the plain, all alone under the blue sky, in the midst of the growing crops, all alone with the larks, which he saw hovering above his head, without hearing their light song, he began to weep while he proceeded on his way.

Then he sat down close to a pool, and remained there till evening, gazing at the little birds that came there to drink; then, as the night was falling, he returned to the house, supped without saying a word, and climbed up to his loft.

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And his life went on as in the past. Nothing was changed, except that his son, Cesaire, slept in the cemetery.

What could he, an old man, do? He could work no longer; he was now good for nothing except to swallow the soup prepared by his daughter-in-law. And he did swallow it in silence, morning and evening, watching with an eye of rage, the little boy also taking soup, right opposite him, at the other side of the table. Then he went out, prowled about the fields in the fashion of a vagabond, went hiding behind the barns, where he slept for an hour or two, as if he were afraid of being seen, and then he came back at the approach of night.

But Celeste's mind began to be occupied by graver anxieties. The grounds needed a man to look after them and work them. Somebody should be there always to go through the fields, not a mere hired laborer, but a big cultivator, a master, who would know the business and have the care of the farm. A lone woman could not manage the farming, watch the price of corn, and direct the sale and purchase of cattle. Then ideas came into her head, simple practical ideas, which she had turned over in her head at night. She could not marry again before the end of the year, and it was necessary at once to take care of pressing interests, immediate interests.

Only one man could extricate her from embarrassment, Victor Lecoq, the father of her child. He was strong and well acquainted with farming business; with a little money in his pocket, he would make an excellent cultivator. She was aware of his skill, having known him while he was working on his parents' farm.

So, one morning, seeing him passing along the road with a cart of dung, she went out to meet him. When he perceived her, he drew up his horses and she said to him, as if she had met him the night before:

"Good morrow, Victor—are you quite well, the same as ever?"

He replied:

"I'm quite well, the same as ever—and how are you?"

"Oh, I'd be all right, only that I'm alone in the house, which bothers me on account of the grounds."

Then they remained chatting for a long time, leaning against the wheel of the heavy cart. The man every now and then lifted up his cap to scratch his forehead, and began thinking, while she, with flushed cheeks, went on talking warmly, told him about her views, her plans, her projects for the future. In the end, he said, in a low tone:

"Yes, it can be done."

She opened her hand like a countryman clinching a bargain, and asked:

“Is it agreed?”

He pressed her outstretched hand.

“’Tis agreed.”

“’Tis fixed, then, for Sunday next?”

“’Tis fixed for Sunday next.”

“Well, good morning, Victor.”

“Good morning, Madame Houlbreque.”

PART III

This Sunday was the day of the village festival, the annual festival in honor of the patron saint, which in Normandy is called the assembly.

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For the last eight days quaint looking vehicles, in which lay the wandering families of fancy fair owners, lottery managers, keepers of shooting galleries, and other forms of amusement or exhibitors of curiosities, which the peasants call “monster-makers,” could be seen coming along the roads drawn slowly by gray or chestnut horses.

The dirty caravans with their floating curtains accompanied by a melancholy-looking dog, who trotted, with his head down, between the wheels, drew up one after the other, in the green fronting the Mayor’s office. Then a tent was erected in front of each traveling abode, and inside this tent could be seen through the holes in the canvas glittering things, which excited the envy or the curiosity of the village brats.

As soon as the morning of the fete arrived, all the booths were opened, displaying their splendors of glass or porcelain; and the peasants on their way to mass, regarded already with looks of satisfaction, these modest shops, which, nevertheless, they saw again each succeeding year.

From the early part of the afternoon, there was a crowd on the green. From every neighboring village, the farmers arrived, shaken along with their wives and children in the two-wheeled open cars, which made a rattling sound as they oscillated like cradles. They unyoked at their friends’ houses, and the farm-yards were filled with strange looking traps, gray, high, lean, crooked, like long clawed creatures from the depths of the sea. And each family, with the youngsters in front, and the grown up ones behind, came to the assembly with tranquil steps, smiling countenances, and open hands, big hands, red and bony, accustomed to work and apparently tired of their temporary rest.

A tumbler played on a trumpet. The barrel-organ accompanying the wooden horses sent through the air its shrill jerky notes. The lottery-wheel made a whirring sound like that of cloth being torn, and every moment the crack of the rifle could be heard. And the slowly moving throng passed on quietly in front of the booths after the fashion of paste in a fluid condition, with the motions of a flock of sheep and the awkwardness of heavy animals rushing along at haphazard.

The girls, holding one another’s arms, in groups of six or eight, kept bawling out songs; the young men followed them making jokes, with their caps over their ears, and their blouses stiffened with starch, swollen out like blue balloons.

The whole country-side was there—masters, laboring men, and women-servants.

Old Amable himself, wearing his old-fashioned green frock-coat, had wished to see the assembly, for he never failed to attend on such an occasion.

He looked at the lotteries, stopped in front of the shooting galleries to criticise the shots, and interested himself specially in a very simple game, which consisted in throwing a big wooden ball into the open mouth of a mannikin carved and painted on a board.

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Suddenly, he felt a tap on his shoulder. It was Daddy Malivoire, who exclaimed:

“Ha, daddy! Come and have a glass of spirits.”

And they sat down before the table of a rustic inn placed in the open air.

They drank one glass of spirits, then two, then three; and old Amable once more wandered through the assembly. His thoughts became slightly confused, he smiled without knowing why, he smiled in front of the lotteries, in front of the wooden horses, and especially in front of the killing game. He remained there a long time, filled with delight when he saw a holidaymaker knocking down the gendarme or the cure, two authorities which he instinctively distrusted. Then he went back to the inn, and drank a glass of cider to cool himself. It was late, night came on. A neighbor came to warn him:

“You’ll get back home late for the stew, daddy.”

Then he set out on his way to the farm house. A soft shadow, the warm shadow of a spring night, was slowly descending on the earth.

When he reached the front door, he thought he saw through the window which was lighted up, two persons in the house. He stopped, much surprised, then he went in, and he saw Victor Lecoq seated at the table, with a plate filled with potatoes before him, taking his supper in the very same place where his son had sat.

And, all of a sudden, he turned round, as if he wanted to go away. The night was very dark now. Celeste started up, and shouted at him:

“Come quick, daddy! Here’s some good stew to finish off the assembly with.”

Thereupon he complied through inertia, and sat down watching in turn the man, the woman and the child. Then, he began to eat quietly as on ordinary days.

Victor Lecoq seemed quite at home, talked from time to time to Celeste, took up the child in his lap, and kissed him. And Celeste again served him with food, poured out drink for him, and appeared content while speaking to him. Old Amable followed them with a fixed look without hearing what they were saying.

When he had finished supper (and he had scarcely eaten anything, so much did he feel his heart wrung) he rose up, and in place of ascending to his loft as he did every night he opened the yard door, and went out into the open air.

When he had gone, Celeste, a little uneasy, asked:

“What is he going to do?”

Victor replied in an indifferent tone:

“Don’t bother yourself. He’ll come back when he’s tired.”

Then, she saw after the house, washed the plates and wiped the table, while the man quietly took off his clothes. Then he slipped into the dark and hollow bed in which she had slept with Cesaire.

The yard door reopened, old Amable again presented himself. As soon as he had come in, he looked round on every side with the air of an old dog on the scent. He was in search of Victor Lecoq. As he did not see him, he took the candle off the table, and approached the dark niche in which his son had died. In the interior of it he perceived the man lying under the bed clothes and already asleep. Then the deaf man noiselessly turned round, put back the candle, and went out into the yard.

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Celeste had finished her work. She put her son into his bed, arranged everything, and waited her father-in-law's return before lying down herself beside Victor.

She remained sitting on a chair, without moving her hands, and with her eyes fixed on vacancy.

As he did not come back she murmured in a tone of impatience and annoyance:

"This good-for-nothing old man will burn four sous' worth of candle on us."

Victor answered her from under the bed clothes.

"'Tis over an hour since he went out. We'd want to see whether he fell asleep on the bench before the door."

She declared:

"I'm going there."

She rose up, took the light, and went out, making a shade of her hand in order to see through the darkness.

She saw nothing in front of the door, nothing on the bench, nothing on the dung pit, where the old man used sometimes to sit in hot weather.

But, just as she was on the point of going in again, she chanced to raise her eyes towards the big apple tree, which sheltered the entrance to the farm house, and suddenly she saw two feet belonging to a man who was hanging at the height of her face.

She uttered terrible cries:

"Victor! Victor! Victor!"

He ran out in his shirt. She could not utter another word, and turning round her head, so as not to see, she pointed towards the tree with her outstretched arm.

Not understanding what she meant, he took the candle in order to find out, and in the midst of the foliage lit up from below, he saw old Amable hanged high up by the neck with a stable-halter.

A ladder was fixed at the trunk of the apple tree.

Victor rushed to look for a bill-hook, climbed up the tree, and cut the halter. But the old man was already cold, and he put out his tongue horribly with a frightful grimace.

MAGNETISM

It was at the close of a dinner-party of men, at the hour of endless cigars and incessant sips of brandy, amidst the smoke and the torpid warmth of digestion and the slight confusion of heads generated by such a quantity of eatables and by the absorption of so many different liquors.

Those present were talking about magnetism, about Donato's tricks, and about Doctor Charcot's experiences. All of a sudden, those men, so skeptical, so happy-go-lucky, so indifferent to religion of every sort, began telling stories about strange occurrences, incredible things which nevertheless had really happened, they contended, falling back into superstitions, beliefs, clinging to these last remnants of the marvelous, becoming devotees of this mystery of magnetism, defending it in the name of science. There was only one person who smiled, a vigorous young fellow, a great pursuer of girls in the town, and a hunter also of frisky matrons, in whose mind there was so much incredulity about everything that he would not even enter upon a discussion of such matters.

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He repeated with a sneer:

“Humbug! humbug! humbug! We need not discuss Donato, who is merely a very smart juggler. As for M. Charcot, who is said to be a remarkable man of science, he produces on me the effect of those story-tellers of the school of Edgar Poe, who end by going mad through constantly reflecting on queer cases of insanity. He has set forth some nervous phenomena, which are unexplained and inexplicable; he makes his way into that unknown region which men explore every day, and not being able to comprehend what he sees, he remembers perhaps too well the explanations of certain mysteries given by speaking on these subjects, that would be quite a different thing from your repetition of what he says.”

The words of the unbeliever were listened to with a kind of pity, as if he had blasphemed in the midst of an assembly of monks.

One of these gentlemen exclaimed:

“And yet miracles were performed in former days.”

But the other replied: “I deny it. Why cannot they be performed any longer?”

Thereupon, each man referred to some fact, or some fantastic presentiment, or some instance of souls communicating with each other across space, or some case of secret influences produced by one being or another. And they asserted, they maintained that these things had actually occurred, while the skeptic went on repeating energetically:

“Humbug! humbug! humbug!”

At last he rose up, threw away his cigar, and with his hands in his pockets, said: “Well, I, too, am going to relate to you two stories, and then I will explain them to you. Here they are:

“In the little village of Etretat, the men, who are all seafaring folk, go every year to Newfoundland to fish for cod. Now, one night the little son of one of these fishermen woke up with a start, crying out that his father was dead. The child was quieted, and again he woke up exclaiming that his father was drowned. A month later the news came that his father had, in fact, been swept off the deck of his smack by a billow. The widow then remembered how her son had wakened up and spoken of his father’s death. Everyone said it was a miracle, and the affair caused a great sensation. The dates were compared, and it was found that the accident and the dream had very nearly coincided, whence they drew the conclusion that they had happened on the same night and at the same hour. And there is the mystery of magnetism.”

The story-teller stopped suddenly.

Thereupon, one of those who had heard him, much affected by the narrative, asked:

“And can you explain this?”

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“Perfectly monsieur. I have discovered the secret. The circumstance surprised me and even embarrassed me very much; but, I, you see, do not believe on principle. Just as others begin by believing, I begin by doubting; and when I don’t at all understand, I continue to deny that there can be any telegraphic communication between souls, certain that my own sagacity will be enough to explain it. Well, I have gone on inquiring into the matter, and I have ended, by dint of questioning all the wives of the absent seamen, in convincing myself that not a week passed without one of themselves or their children dreaming and declaring when they woke up that the father was drowned. The horrible and continual fear of this accident makes them always talk about it. Now, if one of these frequent predictions coincides, by a very simple chance, with the death of the person referred to, people at once declare it to be a miracle; for they suddenly lose sight of all the other predictions of misfortune that have remained unconfirmed. I have myself known fifty cases where the persons who made the prediction forgot all about it in a week afterwards. But, if in fact the man was dead, then the recollection of the thing is immediately revived, and people will be ready to believe in the intervention of God, according to some, and magnetism, according to others.”

One of the smokers remarked:

“What you say is right enough; but what about your second story?”

“Oh! my second story is a very delicate matter to relate. It is to myself it happened, and so I don’t place any great value on my own view of the matter. One is never a good judge in a case where he is one of the parties concerned. At any rate, here it is:

“Among my acquaintances in society there was a young woman on whom I had never bestowed a thought, whom I had never even looked at attentively, never taken any notice of, as the saying is.

“I classed her among the women of no importance, though she was not quite bad-looking; in fact, she appeared to me to possess eyes, a nose, a mouth, some sort of hair—just a colorless type of countenance. She was one of those beings on whom one only thinks by accident, without taking any particular interest in the individual, and who never excites desire.

“Well, one night, as I was writing some letters by my own fireside before going to bed, I was conscious, in the midst of that train of sensual images that sometimes float before one’s brain in moments of idle reverie, while I held the pen in my hand, of a kind of light breath passing into my soul, a little shudder of the heart, and immediately, without reason, without any logical connection of thought, I saw distinctly, saw as If I touched her, saw from head to foot, uncovered, this young woman for whom I had never cared save in the most superficial manner when her name happened to recur to my mind. And all of a sudden I discovered in her a heap of qualities which I had never before observed, a sweet charm, a fascination that made me languish; she awakened in me

that sort of amorous uneasiness which sends me in pursuit of a woman. But I did not remain thinking of her long. I went to bed and was soon asleep. And I dreamed.

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“You have all had these strange dreams which render you masters of the impossible, which open to you doors that cannot be passed through, unexpected joys, impenetrable arms?

“Which of us in these agitated, exciting, palpitating slumbers, has not held, clasped, embraced, possessed with an extraordinary acuteness of sensation, the woman with whom our minds were occupied? And have you ever noticed what superhuman delight these good fortunes of dreams bestow upon us? Into what mad intoxication they cast you! with what passionate spasms they shake you! and with what infinite, caressing, penetrating tenderness they fill your heart for her whom you hold fainting and hot in that adorable and bestial illusion which seems so like reality!

“All this I felt with unforgettable violence. This woman was mine, so much mine that the pleasant warmth of her skin remained between my fingers, the odor of her skin remained in my brain, the taste of her kisses remained on my lips, the sound of her voice lingered in my ears, the touch of her clasp still clung to my side, and the burning charm of her tenderness still gratified my senses long after my exquisite but disappointing awakening.

“And three times the same night I had a renewal of my dream.

“When the day dawned she beset me, possessed me, haunted my brain and my flesh to such an extent that I no longer remained one second without thinking of her.

“At last, not knowing what to do, I dressed myself and went to see her. As I went up the stairs to her apartment, I was so much overcome by emotion that I trembled, and my heart panted; I was seized with vehement desire from head to foot.

“I entered the apartment. She rose up the moment she heard my name pronounced; and suddenly our eyes met in a fixed look of astonishment.

“I sat down.

“I uttered in a faltering tone some commonplaces which she seemed not to hear. I did not know what to say or to do. Then, abruptly, I flung myself upon her; seizing her with both arms; and my entire dream was accomplished so quickly, so easily, so madly, that I suddenly began to doubt whether I was really awake. She was, after this, my mistress for two years.”

“What conclusion do you draw from it?” said a voice.

The story-teller seemed to hesitate.

“The conclusion I draw from it—well, by Jove, the conclusion is that it was just a coincidence! And, in the next place, who can tell? Perhaps it was some glance of hers

which I had not noticed and which came back that night to me—one of those mysterious and unconscious evocations of memory which often bring before us things ignored by our own consciousness, unperceived by our minds!”

“Let that be just as you wish it,” said one of his table companions, when the story was finished, “but if you don’t believe in magnetism after that, you are an ungrateful fellow, my dear boy!”