The Hairpin and Other Stories

Guy de Maupassant

Table of Contents

The Hairpin and Other Stories

Guy de Maupassant

The Hairpin

I WILL NOT RECORD THE NAME EITHER OF THE COUNTRY OR OF the man concerned. It was far, very far from this part of the world, on a fertile and scorching sea−coast. All morning we had been following a coast clothed with crops and a blue sea clothed in sunlight. Flowers thrust up their heads quite close to the waves, rippling waves, so gentle, drowsing. It was hot−−a relaxing heat, redolent of the rich soil, damp and fruitful: one almost heard the rising of the sap.

I had been told that, in the evening, I could obtain hospitality in the house of a Frenchman, who lived at the end of a headland, in an orange grove. Who was he? I did not yet know. He had arrived one morning, ten years ago; he had bought a piece of ground, planted vines, sown seed; he had worked, this man, passionately, furiously. l hen, month by month, year by year, increasing his demesne, continually fertilising the lusty and virgin soil, he had in this way amassed a fortune by his unsparing labour.

Yet he went on working, all the time, people said. Up at dawn, going over his fields until night, always on the watch, he seemed to be goaded by a fixed idea, tortured by an insatiable lust for money, which nothing lulls to sleep, and nothing can appease.

Now he seemed to be very rich.

The sun was just setting when I reached his dwelling. This was, indeed, built at the end of an out−thrust cliff, in the midst of orange−trees. It was a large plain−looking house, built four−square, and overlooking the sea.

As I approached, a man with a big beard appeared in the door way. Greeting him, I asked him to give me shelter for the night. He held out his hand to me, smiling.

"Come in, sir, and make yourself at home."

He led the way to a room, put a servant at my disposal, with the perfect assurance and easy good manners of a man of the world; then he left me, saying:

"We will dine as soon as you are quite ready to come down."

We did indeed dine alone, on a terrace facing the sea. At the beginning of the meal, I spoke to him of this country, so rich, so far from the world, so little known. He smiled, answering indifferently.

"Yes, it is a beautiful country. But no country is attractive that lies so far from the country of one's heart."

"You regret France?"

"I regret Paris."

"Why not go back to it?"

"Oh, I shall go back to it."

Then, quite naturally, we began to talk of French society, of the boulevards, and people, and things of Paris. He questioned me after the manner of a man who knew all about it, mentioning names, all the names familiar on the Vaudeville promenade.

"Who goes to Tortoni's now?"

"All the same people, except those who have died."

I looked at him closely, haunted by a vague memory. Assuredly I had seen this face somewhere. But where? but when? He seemed weary though active, melancholy though determined. His big fair beard fell to his chest, and now and then he took hold of it below the chin and, holding it in his closed hand, let the whole length of it run through his fingers. A little bald, he had heavy eyebrows and a thick moustache that merged into the hair covering his cheeks. Behind us the sun sank in the sea, flinging over the coast a fiery haze. The orange−trees in full blossom filled the air with their sweet, heady scent. He had eyes for nothing but me, and with his intent gaze he seemed to peer through my eyes, to see in the depths of my thoughts the far−off, familiar, and well−loved vision of the wide, shady pavement that runs from the Madeleine to the Rue Drouot.

"Do you know Boutrelle?"

"Yes, well."

"Is he much changed?"

"Yes, he has gone quite white."

"And La Ridamie?"

"Always the same."

"And the women? Tell me about the woman. Let me see, Do you know Suzanne Verner?"

"Yes, very stout. Done for."

"Ah! And Sophie Astier?"

"Dead."

"Poor girl! And is . . . do you know. . . ."

But he was abruptly silent. Then in a changed voice, his face grown suddenly pale, he went on:

"No, it would be better for me not to speak of it any more, it tortures me."

Then, as if to change the trend of his thoughts, he rose.

"Shall we go in?"

"I am quite ready."

And he preceded me into the house.

The rooms on the ground floor were enormous, bare, gloomy, apparently deserted. Napkins and glasses were scattered about the tables, left there by the swan−skinned servants who prowled about this vast dwelling all the time. Two guns were hanging from two nails on the wall, and in the corners I saw spades, fishing−lines, dried palm leaves, objects of all kinds, deposited there by people who happened to come into the house, and remaining there within easy reach until someone happened to go out or until they were wanted for a job of work.

My host smiled.

"It is the dwelling, or rather the hovel; of an exile," said he, "but my room is rather more decent. Let's go there."

My first thought, when I entered the room, was that I was penetrating into a second−hand dealer's, so full of things was it, all the incongruous, strange, and varied things that one feels must be mementoes. On the walls two excellent pictures by well−known artists, hangings, weapons, swords and pistols, and then, right in the middle of the most prominent panel, a square of white satin in a gold frame.

Surprised, I went closer to look at it and I saw a hairpin stuck in the centre of the gleaming material.

My host laid his hand on my shoulder.

"There," he said, with a smile, "is the only thing I ever look at in this place, and the only one I have seen for ten years. Monsieur Prudhomme declared: 'This sabre is the finest day of my life!' As for me, I can say: 'This pin is the whole of my life!'"

I sought for the conventional phrase; I ended by saying:

"Some woman has made you suffer?"

He went on harshly:

"I suffer yet, and frightfully. . . . But come on to my balcony. A name came to my lips just now, that I dared not utter, because if you had answered 'dead,' as you did for Sophie Astier, I should have blown out my brains, this very day."

We had gone out on to a wide balcony looking towards two deep valleys, one on the right and the other on the left, shut in by high sombre mountains. It was that twilight hour when the vanished sun lights the earth only by its reflection in the sky.

He continued:

"Is Jeanne de Limours still alive?"

His eye was fixed on mine, full of shuddering terror.

I smiled.

"Very much alive . . . and prettier than ever."

"You know her?"

"Yes."

He hesitated:

"Intimately?"

"No."

He took my hand:

"Talk to me about her."

"But there is nothing I can say: she is one of the women, or rather one of the most charming and expensive

gay ladies in Paris. She leads a pleasant and sumptuous life, and that's all one can say."

He murmured: "I love her," as if he had said: "I am dying." Then abruptly:

"Ah, for three years, what a distracting and glorious life we lived! Five or six times I all but killed her; she tried to pierce my eyes with that pin at which you have been looking. There, look at this little white speck on my left eye. We loved each other! How can I explain such a passion? You would not understand it.

"There must be a gentle love, born of the swift mutual union of two hearts and two souls; but assuredly there exists a savage love, cruelly tormenting, born of the imperious force which binds together two discordant beings who adore while they hate.

"That girl ruined me in three years. I had four millions which she devoured quite placidly, in her indifferent fashion, crunching them up with a sweet smile that seemed to die from her eyes on to her lips.

"You know her? There is something irresistible about her. What is it? I don't know. Is it those grey eyes whose glance thrusts like a gimlet and remains in you like the barb of an arrow? It is rather that sweet smile, indifferent and infinitely charming, that dwells on her face like a mask. Little by little her slow grace invades one, rises from her like a perfume, from her tall, slender body, which sways a little as she moves, for she seems to glide rather than walk, from her lovely, drawling voice that seems the music of her smile, from the very motion of her body, too, a motion that is always restrained, always just right, taking the eye with rapture, so exquisitely proportioned it is. For three years I was conscious of no one but her. How I suffered! For she deceived me with every one. Why? For no reason, for the mere sake of deceiving. And when I discovered it, when I abused her as a light−o'−love and a loose woman, she admitted it calmly. 'We're not married, are we?' she said.

"Since I have been here, I have thought of her so much that I have ended by understanding her: that woman is Manon Lescaut come again. Manon could not love without betraying for Manon, love, pleasure, and money were all one."

He was silent. Then, some minutes later:

"When I had squandered my last sou for her, she said to me quite simply: 'You realise, my dear, that I cannot live on air and sunshine. I love you madly, I love you more than anyone in the world, but one must live. Poverty and I would never make good bedfellows.'

"And if I did but tell you what an agonising life I had lead with her! When I looked at her, I wanted to kill her as sharply as I wanted to embrace her. When I looked at her . . . I felt a mad impulse to open my arms, to take her to me and strangle her. There lurked in her, behind her eyes, something treacherous and for ever unattainable that made me execrate her; and it is perhaps because of that that I loved her so. In her, the Feminine, the detestable and distracting Feminine, was more puissant than in any other woman. She was charged with it, surcharged as with an intoxicating and venomous fluid. She was Woman, more essentially than any one woman has ever been.

"And look you, when I went out with her, she fixed her glance on every man, in such a way that she seemed to be giving each one of them her undivided interest. That maddened me and yet held me to her the closer. This woman, in the mere act of walking down the street, was owned by every man in it, in spite of me, in spite of herself, by virtue of her very nature, although she bore herself with a quiet and modest air. Do you understand?

"And what torture! At the theatre, in the restaurant, it seemed to me that men possessed her under my very eyes. And as soon as I left her company, other men did indeed possess her.

"It is ten years since I have seen her, and I love her more then ever."

Night had spread its wings upon the earth. The powerful scent of orange−trees hung in the air.

I said to him:

"You will see her again?"

He answered:

"By God, yes. I have here, in land and money, from seven to eight hundred thousand francs. When the million is complete, I shall sell all and depart. I shall have enough for one year with her−−one entire marvellous year. And then goodbye, my life will be over."

I asked:

"But afterwards?"

"Afterwards, I don't know. It will be the end. Perhaps I shall ask her to keep me on as her body−servant."

The Necklace

SHE WAS ONE OF THOSE PRETTY AND CHARMING GIRLS BORN, as though fate had blundered over her, into a family of artisans. She had no marriage portion, no expectations, no means of getting known, understood, loved, and wedded by a man of wealth and distinction; and she let herself be married off to a little clerk in the Ministry of Education. Her tastes were simple because she had never been able to afford any other, but she was as unhappy as though she had married beneath her; for women have no caste or class, their beauty, grace, and charm serving them for birth or family. their natural delicacy, their instinctive elegance, their nimbleness of wit, are their only mark of rank, and put the slum girl on a level with the highest lady in the land.

She suffered endlessly, feeling herself born for every delicacy and luxury. She suffered from the poorness of her house, from its mean walls, worn chairs, and ugly curtains. All these things, of which other women of her class would not even have been aware, tormented and insulted her. The sight of the little Breton girl who came to do the work in her little house aroused heart−broken regrets and hopeless dreams in her mind. She imagined silent antechambers, heavy with Oriental tapestries, lit by torches in lofty bronze sockets, with two tall footmen in knee−breeches sleeping in large arm−chairs, overcome by the heavy warmth of the stove. She imagined vast saloons hung with antique silks, exquisite pieces of furniture supporting priceless ornaments, and small, charming, perfumed rooms, created just for little parties of intimate friends, men who were famous and sought after, whose homage roused every other woman's envious longings.

When she sat down for dinner at the round table covered with a three−days−old cloth, opposite her husband, who took the cover off the soup−tureen, exclaiming delightedly: "Aha! Scotch broth! What could be better?" she imagined delicate meals, gleaming silver, tapestries peopling the walls with folk of a past age and strange birds in faery forests; she imagined delicate food served in marvellous dishes, murmured gallantries, listened to with an inscrutable smile as one trifled with the rosy flesh of trout or wings of asparagus chicken.

She had no clothes, no jewels, nothing. And these were the only things she loved; she felt that she was made for them. She had longed so eagerly to charm, to be desired, to be wildly attractive and sought after.

She had a rich friend, an old school friend whom she refused to visit, because she suffered so keenly when she returned home. She would weep whole days, with grief, regret, despair, and misery.

***

One evening her husband came home with an exultant air, holding a large envelope in his hand.

" Here's something for you," he said.

Swiftly she tore the paper and drew out a printed card on which were these words:

"The Minister of Education and Madame Ramponneau request the pleasure of the company of Monsieur and Madame Loisel at the Ministry on the evening of Monday, January the 18th."

Instead of being delighted, as her−husband hoped, she flung the invitation petulantly across the table, murmuring:

"What do you want me to do with this?"

"Why, darling, I thought you'd be pleased. You never go out, and this is a great occasion. I had tremendous trouble to get it. Every one wants one; it's very select, and very few go to the clerks. You'll see all the really big people there."

She looked at him out of furious eyes, and said impatiently: "And what do you suppose I am to wear at such an affair?"

He had not thought about it; he stammered:

"Why, the dress you go to the theatre in. It looks very nice, to me...."

He stopped, stupefied and utterly at a loss when he saw that his wife was beginning to cry. Two large tears ran slowly down from the corners of her eyes towards the corners of her mouth.

"What's the matter with you? What's the matter with you?" he faltered.

But with a violent effort she overcame her grief and replied in a calm voice, wiping her wet cheeks:

"Nothing. Only I haven't a dress and so I can't go to this party. Give your invitation to some friend of yours

whose wife will be turned out better than I shall."

He was heart−broken.

"Look here, Mathilde," he persisted. :What would be the cost of a suitable dress, which you could use on other occasions as well, something very simple?"

She thought for several seconds, reckoning up prices and also wondering for how large a sum she could ask without bringing upon herself an immediate refusal and an exclamation of horror from the careful−minded clerk.

At last she replied with some hesitation:

"I don't know exactly, but I think I could do it on four hundred francs."

He grew slightly pale, for this was exactly the amount he had been saving for a gun, intending to get a little shooting next summer on the plain of Nanterre with some friends who went lark−shooting there on Sundays.

Nevertheless he said: "Very well. I'll give you four hundred francs. But try and get a really nice dress with the money."

The day of the party drew near, and Madame Loisel seemed sad, uneasy and anxious. Her dress was ready, however. One evening her husband said to her:

"What's the matter with you? You've been very odd for the last three days."

"I'm utterly miserable at not having any jewels, not a single stone, to wear," she replied. "I shall look absolutely no one. I would almost rather not go to the party."

"Wear flowers," he said. "They're very smart at this time of the year. For ten francs you could get two or three gorgeous roses."

She was not convinced.

"No . . . there's nothing so humiliating as looking poor in the middle of a lot of rich women."

"How stupid you are!" exclaimed her husband. "Go and see Madame Forestier and ask her to lend you some jewels. You know her quite well enough for that."

She uttered a cry of delight.

"That's true. I never thought of it."

Next day she went to see her friend and told her her trouble.

Madame Forestier went to her dressing−table, took up a large box, brought it to Madame Loisel, opened it, and said:

"Choose, my dear."

First she saw some bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian cross in gold and gems, of exquisite workmanship. She tried the effect of the jewels before the mirror, hesitating, unable to make up her mind to leave them, to give them up. She kept on asking:

"Haven't you anything else?"

"Yes. Look for yourself. I don't know what you would like best."

Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin case, a superb diamond necklace; her heart began to beat covetousIy. Her hands trembled as she lifted it. She fastened it round her neck, upon her high dress, and remained in ecstasy at sight of herself.

Then, with hesitation, she asked in anguish:

"Could you lend me this, just this alone?"

"Yes, of course."

She flung herself on her friend's breast, embraced her frenziedly, and went away with her treasure. The day of the party arrived. Madame Loisel was a success. She was the prettiest woman present, elegant, graceful, smiling, and quite above herself with happiness. All the men stared at her, inquired her name, and asked to be introduced to her. All the Under−Secretaries of State were eager to waltz with her. The Minister noticed her.

She danced madly, ecstatically, drunk with pleasure, with no thought for anything, in the triumph of her beauty, in the pride of her success, in a cloud of happiness made up of this universal homage and admiration, of the desires she had aroused, of the completeness of a victory so dear to her feminine heart.

She left about four o'clock in the morning. Since midnight her husband had been dozing in a deserted little room, in company with three other men whose wives were having a good time. He threw over her shoulders the garments he had brought for them to go home in, modest everyday clothes, whose poverty clashed with the beauty of the ball−dress. She was conscious of this and was anxious to hurry away, so that she should not be noticed by

the other women putting on their costly furs.

Loisel restrained her.

"Wait a little. You'll catch cold in the open. I'm going to fetch a cab."

But she did not listen to him and rapidly descended−the staircase. When they were out in the street they could not find a cab; they began to look for one, shouting at the drivers whom they saw passing in the distance.

They walked down towards the Seine, desperate and shivering. At last they found on the quay one of those old nightprowling carriages which are only to be seen in Paris after dark, as though they were ashamed of their shabbiness in the daylight.

It brought them to their door in the Rue des Martyrs, and sadly they walked up to their own apartment. It was the end, for her. As for him, he was thinking that he must be at the office at ten.

She took off the garments in which she had wrapped her shoulders, so as to see herself in all her glory before the mirror. But suddenly she uttered a cry. The necklace was no longer round her neck!

"What's the matter with you?" asked her husband, already half undressed.

She turned towards him in the utmost distress.

"I . . . I . . . I've no longer got Madame Forestier's necklace. . . ."

He started with astonishment.

"What! . . . Impossible!"

They searched in the folds of her dress, in the folds of the coat, in the pockets, everywhere. They could not find it.

"Are you sure that you still had it on when you came away from the ball?" he asked.

"Yes, I touched it in the hall at the Ministry."

"But if you had lost it in the street, we should have heard it fall."

"Yes. Probably we should. Did you take the number of the cab?"

"No. You didn't notice it, did you?"

"No."

They stared at one another, dumbfounded. At last Loisel put on his clothes again.

"I'll go over all the ground we walked," he said, "and see if I can't find it."

And he went out. She remained in her evening clothes, lacking strength to get into bed, huddled on a chair, without volition or power of thought.

Her husband returned about seven. He had found nothing.

He went to the police station, to the newspapers, to offer a reward, to the cab companies, everywhere that a ray of hope impelled him.

She waited all day long, in the same state of bewilderment at this fearful catastrophe.

Loisel came home at night, his face lined and pale; he had discovered nothing.

"You must write to your friend," he said, "and tell her that you've broken the clasp of her necklace and are getting it mended. That will give us time to look about us."

She wrote at his dictation.

***

By the end of a week they had lost all hope.

Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:

"We must see about replacing the diamonds."

Next day they took the box which had held the necklace and went to the jewellers whose name was inside. He consulted his books.

"It was not I who sold this necklace, Madame; I must have merely supplied the clasp."

Then they went from jeweller to jeweller, searching for another necklace like the first, consulting their memories, both ill with remorse and anguish of mind.

In a shop at the Palais−Royal they found a string of diamonds which seemed to them exactly like the one they were looking for. It was worth forty thousand francs. They were allowed to have it for thirty−six thousand.

They begged the jeweller not tO sell it for three days. And they arranged matters on the understanding that it would be taken back for thirty−four thousand francs, if the first one were found before the end of February.

Loisel possessed eighteen thousand francs left to him by his father. He intended to borrow the rest.

He did borrow it, getting a thousand from one man, five hundred from another, five louis here, three louis there. He gave notes of hand, entered into ruinous agreements, did business with usurers and the whole tribe of money−lenders. He mortgaged the whole remaining years of his existence, risked his signature without even knowing it he could honour it, and, appalled at the agonising face of the future, at the black misery about to fall upon him, at the prospect of every possible physical privation and moral torture, he went to get the new necklace and put down upon the jeweller's counter thirty−six thousand francs.

When Madame Loisel took back the necklace to Madame Forestier, the latter said to her in a chilly voice:

"You ought to have brought it back sooner; I might have needed it."

She did not, as her friend had feared, open the case. If she had noticed the substitution, what would she have thought? What would she have said? Would she not have taken her for a thief?

***

Madame Loisel came to know the ghastly life of abject poverty. From the very first she played her part heroically. This fearful debt must be paid off. She would pay it. The servant was dismissed. They changed their flat; they took a garret under the roof.

She came to know the heavy work of the house, the hateful duties of the kitchen. She washed the plates, wearing out her pink nails on the coarse pottery and the bottoms of pans. She washed the dirty linen, the shirts and dish−cloths, and hung them out to dry on a string; every morning she took the dustbin down into the street and carried up the water, stopping on each landing to get her breath. And, clad like a poor woman, she went to the fruiterer, to the grocer, to the butcher, a basket on her arm, haggling, insulted, fighting for every wretched halfpenny of her money.

Every month notes had to be paid off, others renewed, time gained.

Her husband worked in the evenings at putting straight a merchant's accounts, and often at night he did copying at twopence−halfpenny a page.

And this life lasted ten years.

At the end of ten years everything was paid off, everything, the usurer's charges and the accumulation of superimposed interest.

Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become like all the other strong, hard, coarse women of poor households. Her hair was badly done, her skirts were awry, her hands were red. She spoke in a shrill voice, and the water slopped all over the floor when she scrubbed it. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she sat down by the window and thought of that evening long ago, of the ball at which she had been so beautiful and so much admired.

What would have happened if she had never lost those jewels. Who knows? Who knows? How strange life is, how fickle! How little is needed to ruin or to save!

One Sunday, as she had gone for a walk along the Champs−Elysees to freshen herself after the labours of the week, she caught sight suddenly of a woman who was taking a child out for a walk. It was Madame Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still attractive.

Madame Loisel was conscious of some emotion. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she would tell her all. Why not?

She went up to her.

"Good morning, Jeanne."

The other did not recognise her, and was surprised at being thus familiarly addressed by a poor woman.

"But . . . Madame . . ." she stammered. "I don't know . . . you must be making a mistake."

"No . . . I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry.

"Oh! . . . my poor Mathilde, how you have changed! . . ."

"Yes, I've had some hard times since I saw you last; and many sorrows . . . and all on your account."

"On my account! . . . How was that?"

"You remember the diamond necklace you lent me for the ball at the Ministry?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"How could you? Why, you brought it back."

"I brought you another one just like it. And for the last ten years we have been paying for it. You realise it wasn't easy for us; we had no money. . . . Well, it's paid for at last, and I'm glad indeed."

Madame Forestier had halted.

"You say you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?"

"Yes. You hadn't noticed it? They were very much alike."

And she smiled in proud and innocent happiness.

Madame Forestier, deeply moved, took her two hands.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! But mine was imitation. It was worth at the very most five hundred francs! . . . "

The Piece of String

ALONG ALL THE ROADS around Goderville the peasants and their wives were coming toward the burgh because it was market day. The men were proceeding with slow steps, the whole body bent forward at each movement of their long twisted legs; deformed by their hard work, by the weight on the plow which, at the same time, raised the left shoulder and swerved the figure, by the reaping of the wheat which made the knees spread to make a firm "purchase," by all the slow and painful labors of the country. Their blouses, blue, "stiff−starched," shining as if varnished, ornamented with a little design in white at the neck and wrists, puffed about their bony bodies, seemed like balloons ready to carry them off. From each of them two feet protruded.

Some led a cow or a calf by a cord, and their wives, walking behind the animal, whipped its haunches with a leafy branch to hasten its progress. They carried large baskets on their arms from which, in some cases, chickens and, in others, ducks thrust out their heads. And they walked with a quicker, livelier step than their husbands. Their spare straight figures were wrapped in a scanty little shawl pinned over their flat bosoms, and their heads were enveloped in a white cloth glued to the hair and surmounted by a cap.

Then a wagon passed at the jerky trot of a nag, shaking strangely, two men seated side by side and a woman in the bottom of the vehicle, the latter holding onto the sides to lessen the hard jolts.

In the public square of Goderville there was a crowd, a throng of human beings and animals mixed together. The horns of the cattle, the tall hats, with long nap, of the rich peasant and the headgear of the peasant women rose above the surface of the assembly. And the clamorous, shrill, screaming voices made a continuous and savage din which sometimes was dominated by the robust lungs of some countryman's laugh or the long lowing of a cow tied to the wall of a house.

All that smacked of the stable, the dairy and the dirt heap, hay and sweat, giving forth that unpleasant odor, human and animal, peculiar to the people of the field.

Maître Hauchecome of Breaute had just arrived at Goderville, and he was directing his steps toward the public square when he perceived upon the ground a little piece of string. Maître Hauchecome, economical like a true Norman, thought that everything useful ought to be picked up, and he bent painfully, for he suffered from rheumatism. He took the bit of thin cord from the ground and began to roll it carefully when he noticed Maître Malandain, the harness maker, on the threshold of his door, looking at him. They had heretofore had business together on the subject of a halter, and they were on bad terms, both being good haters. Maître Hauchecome was seized with a sort of shame to be seen thus by his enemy, picking a bit of a head. two arms and string out of the dirt. He concealed his "find" quickly under his blouse, then in his trousers' pocket; then he pretended to be still looking on the ground for something which he did not find, and he went toward the market, his head forward, bent double by his pains.

He was soon lost in the noisy and slowly moving crowd which was busy with interminable bargainings. The peasants milked, went and came, perplexed, always in fear of being cheated, not daring to decide, watching the vender's eye, ever trying to find the trick in the man and the flaw in the beast.

The women, having placed their great baskets at their feet, had taken out the poultry which lay upon the ground, tied together by the feet, with terrified eyes and scarlet crests.

They heard offers, stated their prices with a dry air and impassive face, or perhaps, suddenly deciding on some proposed reduction, shouted to the customer who was slowly going away: "All right, Maître Authirne, I'll give it to you for that."

Then lime by lime the square was deserted, and the Angelus ringing at noon, those who had stayed too long scattered to their shops.

At Jourdain's the great room was full of people eating, as the big court was full of vehicles of all kinds, carts, gigs, wagons, dumpcarts, yellow with dirt, mended and patched, raising their shafts to the sky like two arms or perhaps with their shafts in the ground and their backs in the air.

Just opposite the diners seated at the table the immense fireplace, filled with bright flames, cast a lively heat on the backs of the row on the right. Three spits were turning on which were chickens, pigeons and legs of

mutton, and an appetizing odor of roast beef and gravy dripping over the nicely browned skin rose from the hearth, increased the jovialness and made everybody's mouth water.

All the aristocracy of the plow ate there at Maître Jourdain's, tavern keeper and horse dealer, a rascal who had money.

The dishes were passed and emptied, as were the jugs of yellow cider. Everyone told his affairs, his purchases and sales. They discussed the crops. The weather was favorable for the green things but not for the wheat.

Suddenly the drum beat in the court before the house. Everybody rose, except a few indifferent persons, and ran to the door or to the windows, their mouths still full and napkins in their hands.

After the public crier had ceased his drumbeating he called out in a jerky voice, speaking his phrases irregularly:

"It is hereby made known to the inhabitants of Goderville, and in general to all persons present at the market, that there was lost this morning on the road to Benzeville, between nine and ten o'clock, a black leather pocketbook containing five hundred francs and some business papers. The finder is requested to return same with all haste to the mayor's office or to Maître Fortune Houlbreque of Manneville; there will be twenty francs reward."

Then the man went away. The heavy roll of the drum and the crier's voice were again heard at a distance.

Then they began to talk of this event, discussing the chances that Maître Houlbreque had of finding or not finding his pocketbook.

And the meal concluded. They were finishing their coffee when a chief of the gendarmes appeared upon the threshold.

He inquired:

"Is Maître Hauchecome of Breaute here?"

Maître Hauchecome, seated at the other end of the table, replied:

"Here I am."

And the officer resumed:

"Maître Hauchecome, will you have the goodness to accompany me to the mayor's office? The mayor would like to talk to you."

The peasant, surprised and disturbed, swallowed at a draught his tiny glass of brandy, rose and, even more bent than in the morning, for the first steps after each rest were specially difficult, set out, repeating: "Here I am, here I am."

The mayor was awaiting him, seated on an armchair. He was the notary of the vicinity, a stout, serious man with pompous phrases.

"Maître Hauchecome," said he, "you were seen this morning to pick up, on the road to Benzeville, the pocketbook lost by Maître Houlbreque of Manneville."

The countryman, astounded, looked at the mayor, already terrified by this suspicion resting on him without his knowing why.

"Me? Me? Me pick up the pocketbook?"

"Yes, you yourself."

"Word of honor, I never heard of it."

"But you were seen."

"I was seen, me? Who says he saw me?"

"Monsieur Malandain, the harness maker."

The old man remembered, understood and flushed with anger.

"Ah, he saw me, the clodhopper, he saw me pick up this string here, M'sieu the Mayor." And rummaging in his pocket, he drew out the little piece of string.

But the mayor, incredulous, shook his head.

"You will not make me believe, Maître Hauchecome, that Monsieur Malandain, who is a man worthy of credence, mistook this cord for a pocketbook."

The peasant, furious, lifted his hand, spat at one side to attest his honor, repeating:

"It is nevertheless the truth of the good God, the sacred truth, M'sieu the Mayor. I repeat it on my soul and my salvation."

The mayor resumed:

"After picking up the object you stood like a stilt, looking a long while in the mud to see if any piece of money had fallen out."

The good old man choked with indignation and fear.

"How anyone can tell−−how anyone can tell−−such lies to take away an honest man's reputation! How can anyone−−−"

There was no use in his protesting; nobody believed him. He was con.

fronted with Monsieur Malandain, who repeated and maintained his affirmation. They abused each other for an hour. At his own request Maître Hauchecome was searched; nothing was found on him.

Finally the mayor, very much perplexed, discharged him with the warning that he would consult the public prosecutor and ask for further orders.

The news had spread. As he left the mayor's office the old man was sun rounded and questioned with a serious or bantering curiosity in which there was no indignation. He began to tell the story of the string. No one believed him. They laughed at him.

He went along, stopping his friends, beginning endlessly his statement and his protestations, showing his pockets turned inside out to prove that he had nothing.

They said:

"Old rascal, get out!"

And he grew angry, becoming exasperated, hot and distressed at not

being believed, not knowing what to do and always repeating himself.

Night came. He must depart. He started on his way with three neighbors to whom he pointed out the place where he had picked up the bit of string, and all along the road he spoke of his adventure.

In the evening he took a turn in the village of Breaute in order to tell it to everybody. He only met with incredulity.

It made him ill at night.

The next day about one o'clock in the afternoon Marius Paumelle, a hired man in the employ of Maître Breton, husbandman at Ymanville, returned the pocketbook and its contents to Maître Houlbreque of Manneville.

This man claimed to have found the object in the road, but not knowing how to read, he had carried it to the house and given it to his employer.

The news spread through the neighborhood. Maître Hauchecome was informed of it. He immediately went the circuit and began to recount his story completed by the happy climax. He was in triumph.

"What grieved me so much was not the thing itself as the lying. There is nothing so shameful as to be placed under a cloud on account of a lie."

He talked of his adventure all day long; he told it on the highway to people who were passing by, in the wineshop to people who were drinking there and to persons coming out of church the following Sunday. He stopped strangers to tell them about it. He was calm now, and yet something disturbed him without his knowing exactly what it was. People had the air of joking while they listened. They did not seem convinced. He seemed to feel that remarks were being made behind his back.

On Tuesday of the next week he went to the market at Goderville, urged solely by the necessity he felt of discussing the case.

Malandain, standing at his door, began to laugh on seeing him pass. Why?

He approached a farmer from Crequetot who did not let him finish and, giving him a thump in the stomach, said to his face:

"You big rascal."

Then he turned his back on him.

Maître Hauchecome was confused; why was he called a big rascal?

When he was seated at the table in Jourdain's tavern he commenced to explain "the affair."

A horse dealer from Monvilliers called to him:

"Come, come, old sharper, that's an old trick; I know all about your piece of string!"

Hauchecome stammered:

"But since the pocketbook was found."

But the other man replied:

"Shut up, papa, there is one that finds and there is one that reports. At any rate you are mixed with it."

The peasant stood choking. He understood. They accused him of having had the pocketbook returned by a confederate, by an accomplice.

He tried to protest. All the table began to laugh.

He could not finish his dinner and went away in the midst of jeers.

He went home ashamed and indignant, choking with anger and confusion, the more dejected that he was capable, with his Norman cunning, of doing what they had accused him of and ever boasting of it as of a good turn. His innocence to him, in a confused way, was impossible to prove, as his sharpness was known. And he was stricken to the heart by the injustice of the suspicion.

Then he began to recount the adventures again, prolonging his history every day, adding each time new reasons, more energetic protestations, more solemn oaths which he imagined and prepared in his hours of solitude, his whole mind given up to the story of the string. He was believed so much the less as his defense was more complicated and his arguing more subtile.

"Those are lying excuses," they said behind his back.

He felt it, consumed his heart over it and wore himself out with useless efforts. He wasted away before their very eyes.

The wags now made him tell about the string to amuse them, as they make a soldier who has been on a campaign tell about his battles. His mind, touched to the depth, began to weaken.

Toward the end of December he took to his bed.

He died in the first days of January, and in the delirium of his death struggles he kept claiming his innocence, reiterating:

"A piece of string, a piece of string−−look−−here it is, M'sieu the Mayor."

An Affair of State

Paris had just heard of the disaster of Sedan. The Republic was proclaimed. All France was panting from a madness that lasted until the time of the commonwealth. Everybody was playing at soldier from one end of the country to the other.

Capmakers became colonels, assuming the duties of generals; revolvers and daggers were displayed on large rotund bodies enveloped in red sashes; common citizens turned warriors, commanding battalions of noisy volunteers and swearing like troopers to emphasize their importance.

The very fact of bearing arms and handling guns with a system excited a people who hitherto had only handled scales and measures and made them formidable to the first comer, without reason. They even executed a few innocent people to prove that they knew how to kill, and in roaming through virgin fields still belonging to the Prussians they shot stray dogs, cows chewing the cud in peace or sick horses put out to pasture. Each believed himself called upon to play a great role in military affairs. The cafès of the smallest villages, full of tradesmen in uniform, resembled barracks or field hospitals.

Now the town of Canneville did not yet know the exciting news of the army and the capital. It had, however, been greatly agitated for a month over an encounter between the rival political parties. The mayor, Viscount de Varnetot, a small thin man, already old, remained true to the Empire, especially since he saw rising up against him a powerful adversary in the great, sanguine form of Dr. Massarel, head of the Republican party in the district, venerable chief of the Masonic lodge, president of the Society of Agriculture and the Fire Department and organizer of the rural militia designed to save the country.

In two weeks he had induced sixty−three men to volunteer in defense of their country−−married men, fathers of families, prudent farmers and merchants of the town. These he drilled every morning in front of the mayor's window.

Whenever the mayor happened to appear Commander Massarel, covered with pistols, passing proudly up and down in front of his troops, would make them shout, "Long live our country!" And this, they noticed, disturbed the little viscount, who no doubt heard in it menace and defiance and perhaps some odious recollection of the great Revolution.

On the morning of the fifth of September, in uniform, his revolver on the table, the doctor gave consultation to an old peasant couple. The husband had suffered with a varicose vein for seven years but had waited until his wife had one too, so that they might go and hunt up a physician together, guided by the postman when he should come with the newspaper.

Dr Massarel opened the door, grew pale, straightened himself abruptly and, raising his arms to heaven in a gesture of exaltation, cried out with all his might, in the face of the amazed rustics:

"Long live the Republic! Long live the Republic! Long live the Republic!"

Then he dropped into his armchair weak with emotion.

When the peasant explained that this sickness commenced with a feeling as if ants were running up and down his legs the doctor exclaimed: "Hold your peace. I have spent too much time with you stupid people. The Republic is proclaimed! The Emperor is a prisoner! France is saved! Long live the Republic!" And, running to the door, he bellowed: "Celeste! Quick! Celeste!"

The frightened maid hastened in. He stuttered, so rapidly did he try to speak" "My boots, my saber−−my cartridge box−−and−−the Spanish dagger which is on my night table. Hurry now!"

The obstinate peasant, taking advantage of the moment's silence, began again: "This seemed like some cysts that hurt me when I walked."

The exasperated physician shouted: "Hold your peace! For heaven's sake! If you had washed your feet oftener, it would not have happened." Then, seizing him by the neck, he hissed in his face: "Can you not comprehend that we are living in a republic, stupid;"

But the professional sentiment calmed him suddenly, and he let the astonished old couple out of the house, repeating all the time:

"Return tomorrow, return tomorrow, my friends; I have no more time today."

While equipping himself from head to foot he gave another series of urgent orders to the maid:

"Run to Lieutenant Picard's and to Sublieutenant Pommel's and say to them that I want them here immediately. Send Torcheboeuf to me too, with his drum. Quick now! Quick!" And when Celeste was gone he collected his thoughts and prepared to surmount the difficulties of the situation.

The three men arrived together. They were in their working clothes. The commander, who had expected to see them in uniform, had a fit of surprise.

"You know nothing, then? The Emperor has been taken prisoner. A republic is proclaimed. My position is delicate, not to say perilous."

He reflected for some minutes before the astonished faces of his subordinates and then continued:

"It is necessary to act, not to hesitate. Minutes now are worth hours at other times. Everything depends upon promptness of decision. You, Picard, go and find the curate and get him to ring the bell to bring the people together, while I get ahead of them. You, Torcheboeuf, beat the call to assemble the militia in arms, in the square, from even as far as the hamlets of Gerisaie and Salmare. You, Pommel, put on your uniform at once, that is, the jacket and cap. We, together, are going to take possession of the mairie and summon Monsieur de Varnetot to transfer his authority to me. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Act, then, and promptly. I will accompany you to your house, Pommel, Since we are to work together."

Five minutes later the commander and his subaltern, armed to the teeth, appeared in the square just at the moment when the little Viscount de Varnetot, with hunting gaiters on and his rifle on his shoulder, appeared by another street, walking rapidly and followed by three guards in green jackets, each carrying a knife at his side and a gun over his shoulder.

While the doctor slapped, half stupefied, the four men entered the mayor's house and the door closed behind them.

"We are forestalled," murmured the doctor; "it will be necessary now to wait for reinforcements; nothing can be done for a quarter of an hour."

Here Lieutenant Picard appeared. "The curate refuses to obey," said he; "he has even shut himself up in the church with the beadle and the porter."

On the other side of the square, opposite the white closed front of the mairie, the church, mute and black, showed its great oak door with the wrought−iron trimmings.

Then, as the puzzled inhabitants put their noses out of the windows or came out upon the steps of their houses, the rolling of a drum was heard, and Torcheboeuf suddenly appeared, beating with fury the three quick strokes of the call to arms. He crossed the square with disciplined step and then disappeared on a road leading to the country.

The commander drew his sword, advanced alone to the middle distance between the two buildings where the enemy was barricaded and, waving his weapon above his head, roared at the top of his lungs: "Long live the Republic! Death to traitors!" Then he fell back where his officers were. The butcher, the baker and the apothecary, feeling a little uncertain, put up their shutters and closed their shops. The grocery alone remained open.

Meanwhile the men of the militia were arriving little by little, variously clothed but all wearing caps, the cap constituting the whole uniform of the corps. They were armed with their old rusty guns, guns that had hung on chimney pieces in kitchens for thirty years, and looked quite like a detachment of country soldiers.

When there were about thirty around him the commander explained in a few words the state of affairs. Then, turning toward his major, he said: "Now we must act."

While the inhabitants collected, talked over and discussed the matter the doctor quickly formed his plan of campaign.

"Lieutenant Picard, you advance to the windows of the mayor's house and order Monsieur de Varnetot to turn over the town hall to me in the name of the Republic."

But the lieutenant was a master mason and refused.

"You are a scamp, you are. Trying to make a target of me! Those fellows in there are good shots, you know that. No, thanks! Execute your commissions yourself!"

The commander turned red. "I order you to go in the name of discipline," said he.

"I am not spoiling my features without knowing why," the lieutenant returned.

Men of influence, in a group near by, were heard laughing. One of them called out: "You are right, Picard, it is not the proper time." The doctor, under his breath, muttered: "Cowards!" And placing his sword and his revolver in the hands of a soldier, he advanced with measured step, his eye fixed on the windows as if he expected to see a gun or a cannon pointed at him.

When he was within a few steps of the building the doors at the two extremities, affording an entrance to two schools, opened, and a flood of little creatures, boys on one side, girls on the other, poured out and began playing in the open space, chattering around the doctor like a flock of birds. He scarcely knew what to make of it.

As soon as the last were out the doors closed. The greater part of the little monkeys finally scattered, and then the commander called out in a loud voice:

"Monsieur de Varnetot?" A window in the first story opened and M. de Varnetot appeared.

The commander began: "Monsieur, you are aware of the great events which have changed the system of government. The party you represent no longer exists. The side I represent now comes into power. Under these sad but decisive circumstances I come to demand you, in the name of the Republic, to put in my hand the authority vested in you by the outgoing power."

M. de Varnetot replied: "Doctor Massarel, I am mayor of Canneville, so placed by the proper authorities, and mayor of Canneville I shall remain until the title is revoked and replaced by an order from my superiors. As mayor, I am at home in the mairie, and there I shall stay. Furthermore, just try to put me out." And he closed the window.

The commander returned to his troops. But before explaining anything, measuring Lieutenant Picard from head to foot, he said:

"You are a numskull, you are−−a goose, the disgrace of the army. I shall degrade you."

The lieutenant replied: "I'll attend to that myself." And he went over to a group of muttering civilians.

Then the doctor hesitated. What should he do? Make an assault? Would his men obey him? And then was he surely in the right? An idea burst upon him. He ran to the telegraph office on the other side of the square and hurriedly sent three dispatches: "To the Members of the Republican Government at Paris"; "To the New Republican Prefect of the Lower Seine at Rouen"; "To the New Republican Subprefect of Dieppe."

He exposed the situation fully; told of the danger run by the commonwealth from remaining in the hands of the monarchistic mayor, offered his devout services, asked for orders and signed his name, following it up with all his titles. Then he returned to his army corps and, drawing ten francs out of his pocket, said:

"Now, my friends, go and eat and drink a little something. Only leave here a detachment of ten men, so that no one leaves the mayor's house."

Ex−Lieutenant Picard, chatting with the watchmaker, overheard this. With a sneer he remarked: "Pardon me, but if they go out, there will be an opportunity for you to go in. Otherwise I can't see how you are to get in there!"

The doctor made no reply but went away to luncheon. In the afternoon he disposed of offices all about town, having the air of knowing of an impending surprise. Many times he passed before the doors of the mairie and of the church without noticing anything suspicious; one could have believed the two buildings empty.

The butcher, the baker and the apothecary reopened their shops and stood gossiping on the steps. If the Emperor had been taken prisoner, there must be a traitor somewhere. They did not feel sure of the revenue of a new republic.

Night came on. Toward nine o'clock the doctor returned quietly and alone to the mayor's residence, persuaded that his adversary had retired. And as he was trying to force an entrance with a few blows of a pickax the loud voice of a guard demanded suddenly: "Who goes there?" M. Massarel beat a retreat at the top of his speed.

Another day dawned without any change in the situation. The militia in arms occupied the square. The inhabitants stood around awaiting the solution. People from neighboring villages came to look on. Finally the doctor, realizing that his reputation was at stake, resolved to settle the thing in one way or another. He had just decided that it must be something energetic when the door of the telegraph office opened and the little servant of the directress appeared, holding in her hand two papers.

She went directly to the commander and gave him one of the dispatches; then, crossing the square, intimidated by so many eyes fixed upon her, with lowered head and mincing steps, she rapped gently at the door of the barricaded house as if ignorant that a part of the army was concealed there.

The door opened slightly; the hand of a man received the message, and the girl returned, blushing and ready to weep from being stared at.

The doctor demanded with stirring voice: "A little silence, if you please." And after the populace became quiet he continued proudly:

Here is a communication which I have received from the government." And, raising the dispatch, he read:

"Old mayor deposed. Advise us what is most necessary. Instructions later.

"For the Subprefect, "SAPIN, Counselor."

He had triumphed. His heart was beating with joy. His hand trembled, when Picard, his old subaltern, cried out to him from the neighboring group:

"That's all right; but if the others in there won't go out, your paper hasn't a leg to stand on." The doctor grew a little pale. If they would not go out−−in fact, he must go ahead now. It was not only his right but his duty. And he looked anxiously at the house of the mayoralty, hoping that he might see the door open and his adversary show himself. But the door remained closed. What was to be done? The crowd was increasing, surrounding the militia. Some laughed.

One thought, especially, tortured the doctor. If he should make an assault, he must march at the head of his men; and as with him dead all contest would cease, it would be at him and at him alone that M. de Varnetot and the three guards would aim. And their aim was good, very good! Picard had reminded him of that.

But an idea shone in upon him, and turning to Pommel, he said: "Go, quickly, and ask the apothecary to send me a napkin and a pole."

The lieutenant hurried off. The doctor was going to make a political banner, a white one, that would, perhaps, rejoice the heart of that old legitimist, the mayor.

Pommel returned with the required linen and a broom handle. With some pieces of string they improvised a standard, which Massarel seized in both hands. Again he advanced toward the house of mayoralty, bearing the standard before him. When in front of the door, he called out: "Monsieur de Varnetot!"

The door opened suddenly, and M. de Varnetot and the three guards appeared on the threshold. The doctor recoiled instinctively. Then he saluted his enemy courteously and announced, almost strangled by emotion: "I have come, sir, to communicate to you the instructions I have just received."

That gentleman, without any salutation whatever, replied: "I am going to withdraw, sir, but you must understand that it is not because of fear or in obedience to an odious government that has usurped the power." And, biting off each word, he declared: "I do not wish to have the appearance of serving the Republic for a single day. That is all."

Massarel, amazed, made no reply; and M. de Varnetot, walking off at a rapid pace, disappeared around the corner, followed closely by his escort. Then the doctor, slightly dismayed, returned to the crowd. When he was near enough to be heard he cried: "Hurrah! Hurrah! The Republic triumphs all along the line!"

But no emotion was manifested. The doctor tried again. "The people are free! You are free and independent! Do you understand? Be proud of it!"

The listless villagers looked at him with eyes unlit by glory. In his turn he looked at them, indignant at their indifference, seeking for some word that could make a grand impression, electrify this placid country and make good his mission. The inspiration came, and turning to Pommel, he said "Lieutenant, go and get the bust of the ex−emperor, which is in the Council Hall, and bring it to me with a chair."

And soon the man reappears, carrying on his right shoulder Napoleon II in plaster and holding in his left hand a straw−bottomed chair.

Massarel met him, took the chair, placed it on the ground, put the white image upon it, fell back a few steps and called out in sonorous voice:

"Tyrant! Tyrant! Here do you fall! Fall in the dust and in the mire. An expiring country groans under your feet. Destiny has called you to Avenger. Defeat and shame cling to you. You fall conquered, a prisoner to the Prussians, and upon the ruins of the crumbling Empire the young and radiant Republic arises, picking up your broken sword."

He awaited applause. But there was no voice, no sound. The bewildered peasants remained silent. And the bust, with its pointed mustaches extending beyond the cheeks on each side, the bust, so motionless and well groomed as to be fit for a hairdresser's sign, seemed to be looking at M. Massarel with a plaster smile, a smile

ineffaceable and mocking.

They remained thus face to face, Napoleon on the chair, the doctor in front of him about three steps away. Suddenly the commander grew angry.

What was to be done? What was there that would move this people and bring about a definite victory in opinion? His hand happened to rest on his hip and to come in contact there with the butt end of his revolver under his red sash. No inspiration, no further word would come. But he drew his pistol, advanced two steps and, taking aim, fired at the late monarch. The ball entered the forehead, leaving a little black hole like a spot, nothing more. There was no effect. Then he fired a second shot, which made a second hole, then a third; and then, without stopping, he emptied his revolver. The brow of Napoleon disappeared in white powder, but the eyes, the nose and the fine points of the mustaches remained intact. Then, exasperated, the doctor overturned the chair with a blow of his fist and, resting a foot on the remainder of the bust in a position of triumph, he shouted: "So let all tyrants perish!"

Still no enthusiasm was manifest, and as the spectators seemed to be in a kind of stupor from astonishment the commander called to the militiamen:

You may now go to your homes." And he went toward his own house with great strides, as if he were pursued.

His maid, when he appeared, told him that some patients had been waiting in his office for three hours. He hastened in. There were the two varicose−vein patients, who had returned at daybreak, obstinate but patient.

The old man immediately began his explanation: "This began by a feeling like ants running up and down the legs."

Old Mongilet

IN THE OFFICE OLD MONGILET WAS LOOKED ON AS A "character." He was an old employee, a good−natured creature, who had never been outside Paris but once in his life.

It was the end of July, and we all went every Sunday to roll in the grass, or bathe in the river in the country near by. Asnieres, Argenteuil, Chatou, Bougival, Maisons, Poissy, had their habitues and their ardent admirers. We argued about the merits and advantages of all these places, celebrated and delightful to all employees in Paris.

Old Mongilet would say:

"You are like a lot of sheep! A nice place, this country you talk of!"

And we would ask:

"Well, how about you, Mongilet? Don't you ever go on an excursion?"

"Yes, indeed. I go in an omnibus. When I have had a good luncheon, without any hurry, at the wine shop below, I look up my route with a plan of Paris and the time−table of the lines and connections. And then I climb up on top of the bus, open my umbrella and off we go. Oh, I see lots of things, more than you, I bet! I change my surroundings. It is as though I were taking a journey across the world, the people are so different in one street and another. I know my Paris better than anyone. And then, there is nothing more amusing than the entresols. You would not believe what one sees in there at a glance. One can guess a domestic scene simply by seeing the face of a man shouting; one is amused on passing by a barber's shop to see the barber leave his customer all covered with lather to look out in the street. One exchanges heartfelt glances with the milliners just for fun, as one has no time to alight. Ah, how many things one sees!

"It is the drama, real, true, natural drama that one sees as the horses trot by. Heavens I I would not give my excursions in the omnibus for all your stupid excursions in the woods."

"Come and try it, Mongilet, come to the country once just to see."

"I was there once," he replied, "twenty years ago, and you will never catch me there again."

"Tell us about it, Mongilet."

"If you wish to hear it. This is how it was: You knew Boivin, the old clerk, whom we called Boileau?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"He was my office chum. The rascal had a house at Colombes and always invited me to spend Sunday with him. He would say:

"'Come alone, Maculotte (he called me Maculotte for fun). You will see what a nice walk we shall take.'

"I let myself be trapped like an animal, and set out one morning by the eight o'clock train. I arrived at a kind of town, a country town where there is nothing to see, and I at length found my way to an old wooden door with an iron bell, at the end of an alley between two walls.

"I rang, and waited a long time, and at last the door was opened. What was it that opened it? I could not tell at the first glance. A woman or an ape? The creature was old, ugly, covered with old clothes that looked dirty and wicked. It had chickens' feathers in its hair and looked as though it would devour me.

"'What do you want?' she said.

"'M. Boivin.'

"'What do you want of him, of M. Boivin?'

"I felt ill at ease on being questioned by this fury. I stammered: 'Why−−he expects me.'

"'Ah, it is you who are coming to lunch?'

"'Yes,' I stammered, trembling.

"Then, turning toward the house, she cried in an angry tone:

"'Boivin, here is your man!'

"It was my friend's wife. Little Boivin appeared immediately on the threshold of a sort of barrack of plaster covered with zinc, that looked like a foot−warmer. He wore white duck trousers covered with stains and a dirty Panama−hat.

"After shaking my hands warmly, he took me into what he called his garden. It was at the end of another

alleyway enclosed by high walls and was a little square the size of a pockethandkerchief, surrounded by houses that were so high that the sun could reach it only two or three hours in the day. Pansies, pinks, wallflowers and a few rose bushes were languishing in this airless well which was as hot as an oven from the refraction of heat from the roofs.

"'I have no trees,' said Boivin, 'but the neighbours' walls take their place. I have as much shade as in a wood.'

"Then he took hold of a button of my coat and said in a low tone:

"'You can do me a service. You saw the wife. She is not agreeable, eh? To−day, as I had invited you, she gave me clean clothes; but if I spot them all is lost. I counted on you to water my plants.'

"I agreed. I took off my coat, rolled up my sleeves, and began to work the handle of a kind of pump that wheezed, puffed and rattled like a consumptive as it emitted a thread of water like a Wallace drinking−fountain. It took me ten minutes to fill the watering−pot, and I was in a bath of perspiration. Boivin directed me:

"'Here−−this plant−−a little more; enough−−now this one.'

"The watering−pot leaked and my feet got more water than the flowers. The bottoms of my trousers were soaking and covered with mud. And twenty times running I kept it up, soaking my feet afresh each time, and perspiring anew as I worked the handle of the pump. And when I was tired out and wanted to stop, Boivin, in a tone of entreaty, said as he put his hand on my arm:

"'Just one more watering−potful−−just one, and that will be all.'

"To thank me he gave me a rose, a big rose, but hardly had it touched my buttonhole than it fell to pieces, leaving of my decoration only a hard little green knot. I was surprised, but said nothing.

"Mme Boivin's voice was heard in the distance: 'Are you ever coming? I tell you lunch is ready!'

"We went towards the foot−warmer. If the garden was in the shade, the house, on the other hand, was in the blazing sun, and the sweating−room of a Turkish bath is not so hot as my friend's dining−room was.

"Three plates, at the side of which were some half−washed forks, were placed in a table of yellow wood. In the middle stood an earthenware dish containing warmed−up boiled beef and potatoes. We began to eat.

"A large water−bottle full of water lightly coloured with wine attracted my attention. Boivin, embarrassed, said to his wife:

"'See here, my dear, just on a special occasion, are you not going to give us a little undiluted wine?'

"She looked at him furiously.

"'So that you may both get tipsy, is that it, and stay here gabbing all day? A fine special occasion!'

"He said no more. After the stew she brought in another dish of potatoes cooked with bacon. When this dish was finished, still in silence, she announced:

"'That is all! Now get out!'

"Boivin looked at her in astonishment.

"'But the pigeon−−the pigeon you plucked this morning?'

"She put her hands on her hips:

"'Perhaps you have not had enough? Because you bring people here is no reason why we should devour all that there is in the house. What is there for me to eat this evening?'

"We rose. Boivin whispered:

"'Wait for me a second, and we will skip.'

"He went into the kitchen where his wife had gone, and I overheard him say:

"'Give me twenty sous, my dear.'

"'What do you want with twenty sous?'

"'Why, one does not know what may happen. It is always better to have some money.'

"She yelled so that I should hear:

"'No, I will not give it to you!

As the man has had luncheon here, the least he can do is to pay your expenses for the day.'

"Boivin came back to fetch me. As I wished to be polite I bowed to the mistress of the house, stammering:

"'Madame−−many thanks−−kind welcome.'

"'That's all right,' she replied. 'But do not bring him back drunk, for you will have to answer to me, you know!'

"We set out. We had to cross a perfectly bare plain under the burning sun. I attempted to gather a flower along the road and gave a cry of pain. It had hurt my hand frightfully. They call these plants nettles. And, everywhere,

there was a smell of manure, enough to turn your stomach.

"Boivin said, 'Have a little patience and we will reach the river bank.'

"We reached the river. Here there was an odour of mud and dirty water, and the sun blazed down on the water so that it burned my eyes. I begged Boivin to go under cover somewhere. He took me into a kind of shanty filled with men, a river boatmen's tavern.

"He said:

"'This does not look very grand, but it is very comfortable.'

"I was hungry. I ordered an omelet. But lo and behold, at the second glass of wine, that cursed Boivin lost his head, and I understand why his wife gave him water in his wine.

"He got up, declaimed, wanted to show his strength, interfered in a quarrel between two drunken men who were fighting, and, but for the landlord, who came to the rescue, we should both have been killed.

"I dragged him away, holding him up until we reached the first bush, where I deposited him. I lay down beside him and apparently I fell asleep. We must certainly have slept a long time, for it was dark when I awoke. Boivin was snoring at my side. I shook him; he rose, but he was still drunk, though a little less so.

"We set out through the darkness across the plain. Boivin said he knew the way. He made me turn to the left, then to the right, then to the left. We could see neither sky nor earth, and found ourselves lost in the midst of a kind of forest of wooden stakes, that came as high as our noses. It was a vineyard and these were the supports. There was not a single light on the horizon. We wandered about in this vineyard for about an hour or two, hesitating, reaching out our arms without coming to the end, for we kept retracing our steps.

"At length Boivin fell against a stake that tore his cheek and he remained in a sitting posture on the ground, uttering with all his might long and resounding hellos, while I screamed 'Help! Help!' as loud as I could, lighting wax−matches to show the way to our rescuers, and also to keep up my courage.

"At last a belated peasant heard us and put us on our right road. I took Boivin to his home, but as I was leaving him on the threshold of his garden, the door opened suddenly and his wife appeared, a candle in her hand. She frightened me horribly.

"As soon as she saw her husband, whom she must have been waiting for since dark, she screamed, as she darted toward me:

"'Ah, scoundrel, I knew you would bring him back drunk!'

"My, how I made my escape, running all the way to the station, and as I thought the fury was pursuing me I shut myself in an inner room, as the train was not due for half an hour.

"That is why I never married, and why I never go out of Paris."

A Coward

SOCIETY CALLED HIM HANDSOME SIGNOLES. HIS NAME was Viscount Gontran−Joseph de Signoles.

An orphan, and possessed of an adequate income, he cut a dash, as the saying is. He had a good figure and a good carriage, a sufficient flow of words to pass for wit, a certain natural grace, an air of nobility and pride, a gallant moustache and an eloquent eye, attributes which women like.

He was in demand in drawing−rooms, sought after for valses, and in men he inspired that smiling hostility which is reserved for vital and attractive rivals. He had been suspected of several love−affairs of a sort calculated to create a good opinion of a youngster. He lived a happy, care−free life, in the most complete well−being of body and mind. He was known to be a fine swordsman and a still finer shot with the pistol.

"When I come to fight a duel," he would say, "I shall choose pistols. With that weapon, I'm sure of killing my man."

One evening, he went to the theatre with two ladies, quite young, friends of his, whose husbands were also of the party, and after the performance he invited them to take ices at Tortoni's.

They had been sitting there for a few minutes when he noticed a gentleman at a neighbouring table staring obstinately at one of the ladies of the party. She seemed embarrassed and ill at ease, and bent her head. At last she said to her husband:

"There's a man staring at me. I don't know him; do you?"

The husband, who had seen nothing, raised his eyes, but declared:

"No, not in the least."

Half smiling, half in anger, she replied:

"It's very annoying; the creature's spoiling my ice."

Her husband shrugged his shoulders.

"Deuce take him, don't appear to notice it. If we had to deal with all the discourteous people one meets, we'd never have done with them."

But the Viscount had risen abruptly. He could not permit this stranger to spoil an ice of his giving. It was to him that the insult was addressed, since it was at his invitation and on his account that his friends had come to the cafe. The affair was no business of anyone but himself.

He went up to the man and said:

"You have a way of looking at those ladies, sir, which I cannot stomach. Please be so good as to set a limit to your persistence."

"You hold your tongue," replied the other.

"Take care, sir," retorted the Viscount, clenching his teeth;" you'll force me to overstep the bounds of common politeness."

The gentleman replied with a single word, a vile word which rang across the cafe from one end to the other, and, like the release of a spring, jerked every person present into an abrupt movement. All those with their backs towards him turned round, all the rest raised their heads; three waiters spun round on their heels like tops; the two ladies behind the counter started, then the whole upper half of their bodies twisted round, as though they were a couple of automata worked by the same handle.

There was a profound silence. Then suddenly a sharp noise resounded in the air. The Viscount had boxed his adversary's ears. Every one rose to intervene. Cards were exchanged.

Back in his home, the Viscount walked for several minutes up and down his room with long quick strides. He was too excited to think. A solitary idea dominated his mind: "a duel"; but as yet the idea stirred in him no emotion of any kind. He had done what he was compelled to do; he had shown himself to be what he ought to be. People would talk of it, would approve of him, congratulate him. He repeated aloud, speaking as a man speaks in severe mental distress:

"What a hound the fellow is!"

Then he sat down and began to reflect. In the morning he must find seconds. Whom should he choose? He

searched his mind for the most important and celebrated names of his acquaintance. At last he decided on the Marquis de la Tour−Noire and Colonel Bourdin, an aristocrat and a soldier; they would do excellently. Their names would look well in the papers. He realised that he was thirsty, and drank three glasses of water one after the other; then he began to walk up and down again. He felt full of energy. If he played the gallant, showed himself determined, insisted on the most strict and dangerous arrangements, demanded a serious duel, a thoroughly serious duel, a positively terrible duel, his adversary would probably retire and apologist.

He took up once more the card which he had taken from his pocket and thrown down upon the table, and read it again as he had read it before, in the cafe, at a glance, and in the cab, by the light of each gas−lamp, on his way home.

"Georges Lamil, 51 rue Moncey." Nothing more.

He examined the grouped letters; they seemed to him mysterious, full of confused meaning. Georges Lamil? Who was this man? What did he do? Why had he looked at the woman in that way? Was it not revolting that a stranger, an unknown man, could thus disturb a man's life, without warning, just because he chose to fix his insolent eyes upon a woman? Again the Viscount repeated aloud:

"What a hound!"

Then he remained standing stock−still, lost in thought, his eyes still fixed upon the card. A fury against this scrap of paper awoke in him, a fury of hatred in which was mingled a queer sensation of uneasiness. This sort of thing was so stupid! He took up an open knife which lay close at hand and thrust it through the middle of the printed name, as though he had stabbed a man.

So he must fight. Should he choose swords or pistols?−−for he regarded himself as the insulted party. With swords there would be less risk, but with pistols there was a chance that his adversary might withdraw. It is very rare that a duel with swords is fatal, for mutual prudence is apt to restrain combatants from engaging at sufficiently close quarters for a point to penetrate deeply. With pistols he ran a grave risk of death; but he might also extricate himself from the affair with all the honours of the situation and without actually coming to a meeting.

"I must be firm," he said. "He will take fright."

The sound of his voice set him trembling, and he looked round. He felt very nervous. He drank another glass of water, then began to undress for bed.

As soon as he was in bed, he blew out the light and closed his eyes.

"I've the whole of to−morrow," he thought, "in which to set my affairs in order. I'd better sleep now, so that I shall be quite calm."

He was very warm in the blankets, but he could not manage to compose himself to sleep. He turned this way and that, lay for five minutes upon his back, turned on to his left side, then rolled over on to his right.

He was still thirsty. He got up to get a drink. A feeling of uneasiness crept over him:

"Is it possible that I'm afraid?"

Why did his heart beat madly at each familiar sound in his room? When the clock was about to strike, the faint squeak of the rising spring made him start; so shaken he was that for several seconds afterwards he had to open his mouth to get his breath.

He began to reason with himself on the possibility of his being afraid.

"Shall I be afraid?"

No, of course he would not be afraid, since he was resolved to see the matter through, and had duly made up his mind to fight and not to tremble. But he felt so profoundly distressed that he wondered:

"Can a man be afraid in spite of himself?"

He was attacked by this doubt, this uneasiness, this terror; suppose a force more powerful than himself, masterful, irresistible, overcame him, what would happen? Yes, what might not happen? Assuredly he would go to the place of the meeting, since he was quite ready to go. But supposing he trembled? Supposing he fainted? He thought of the scene, of his reputation, his good name.

There came upon him a strange need to get up and look at himself in the mirror. He relit his candle. When he saw his face reflected in the polished glass, he scarcely recognised it, it seemed to him as though he had never yet seen himself. His eyes looked to him enormous; and he was pale; yes, without doubt he was pale, very pale.

He remained standing in front of the mirror. He put out his tongue, as though to ascertain the state of his

health, and abruptly the thought struck him like a bullet:

"The day after to−morrow, at this very hour, I may be dead."

His heart began again its furious beating.

"The day after to−morrow, at this very hour, I may be dead. This person facing me, this me I see in the mirror, will be no more. Why, here I am, I look at myself, I feel myself alive, and in twenty−four hours I shall be lying in that bed, dead, my eyes closed, cold, inanimate, vanished."

He turned back towards the bed, and distinctly saw himself lying on his back in the very sheets he had just left. He had the hollow face of a corpse, his hands had the slackness of hands that will never make another movement.

At that he was afraid of his bed, and, to get rid of the sight of it, went into the smoking−room. Mechanically he picked up a cigar, lit it, and began to walk up and down again. He was cold; he went to the bell to wake his valet; but he stopped, even as he raised his hand to the rope.

"He will see that I am afraid."

He did not ring; he lit the fire. His hands shook a little, with a nervous tremor, whenever they touched anything. His brain whirled, his troubled thoughts became elusive, transitory, and gloomy; his mind suffered all the effects of intoxication, as though he were actually drunk.

Over and over again he thought:

"What shall I do? What is to become of me?"

His whole body trembled, seized with a jerky shuddering; he got up and, going to the window, drew back the curtains.

Dawn was at hand, a summer dawn. The rosy sky touched the town, its roofs and walls, with its own hue. A broad descending ray, like the caress of the rising sun, enveloped the awakened world; and with the light, hope−−a gay, swift, fierce hope−−filled the Viscount's heart! Was he mad, that he had allowed himself to be struck down by fear, before anything was settled even, before his seconds had seen those of this Georges Lamil, before he knew whether he was going to fight?

He washed, dressed, and walked out with a firm step.

He repeated to himself, as he walked:

"I must be energetic, very energetic. I must prove that I am not afraid."

His seconds, the Marquis and the Colonel, placed themselves at his disposal, and after hearty handshakes discussed the conditions.

"You are anxious for a serious duel? " asked the Colonel.

"Yes, a very serious one," replied the Viscount.

"You still insist on pistols?" said the Marquis.

"Yes."

"You will leave us free to arrange the rest?"

In a dry, jerky voice the Viscount stated:

"Twenty paces; at the signal, raising the arm, and not lowering it. Exchange of shots till one is seriously wounded."

"They are excellent conditions," declared the Colonel in a tone of satisfaction. "You shoot well, you have every chance."

They departed. The Viscount went home to wait for them. His agitation, momentarily quietened, was now growing minute by minute. He felt a strange shivering, a ceaseless vibration, down his arms, down his legs, in his chest; he could not keep still in one place, neither seated nor standing. There was not the least moistening of saliva in his mouth, and at every instant he made a violent movement of his tongue, as though to prevent it sticking to his palate.

He was eager to have breakfast, but could not eat. Then the idea came to him to drink in order to give himself courage, and he sent for a decanter of rum, of which he swallowed six liqueur glasses full one after the other.

A burning warmth flooded through his body, followed immediately by a sudden dizziness of the mind and spirit.

"Now I know what to do," he thought. "Now it is all right."

But by the end of an hour he had emptied the decanter, and his state of agitation had once more become

intolerable. He was conscious of a wild need to roll on the ground, to scream, to bite. Night was falling.

The ringing of a bell gave him such a shock that he had not strength to rise and welcome his seconds.

He did not even dare to speak to them, to say "Good evening" to them, to utter a single word, for fear they guessed the whole thing by the alteration in his voice.

"Everything is arranged in accordance with the conditions you fixed," observed the Colonel. "At first your adversary claimed the privileges of the insulted party, but he yielded almost at once, and has accepted everything. His seconds are two military men."

"Thank you," said the Viscount.

"Pardon us," interposed the Marquis, "if we merely come in and leave again immediately, but we have a thousand things to see to. We must have a good doctor, since the combat is not to end until a serious wound is inflicted, and you know that pistol bullets are no laughing−matter. We must appoint the ground, near a house to which we may carry the wounded man if necessary, etc. In fact, we shall be occupied for two or three hours arranging all that there is to arrange."

"Thank you," said the Viscount a second time.

"You are all right?" asked the Colonel. "You are calm?"

"Yes, quite calm, thank you."

The two men retired.

When he realised that he was once more alone, he thought that he was going mad. His servant had lit the lamps, and he sat down at the table to write letters. After tracing, at the head of a sheet: "This is my will," he rose shivering and walked away, feeling incapable of connecting two ideas, of taking a resolution, of making any decision whatever.

So he was going to fight! He could no longer avoid it. Then what was the matter with him? He wished to fight, he had absolutely decided upon this plan of action and taken his resolve, and he now felt clearly, in spite of every effort of mind and forcing of will, that he could not retain even the strength necessary to get him to the place of meeting. He tried to picture the duel, his own attitude and the bearing of his adversary.

From time to time his teeth chattered in his mouth with a slight clicking noise. He tried to read, and took down Chateauvillard's code of duelling. Then he wondered:

"Does my adversary go to shooting−galleries? Is he well known? Is he classified anywhere? How can I find out?"

He bethought himself of Baron Vaux's book on marksmen with the pistol, and ran through it from end to end. Georges Lamil was not mentioned in it. Yet if the man were not a good shot, he would surely not have promptly agreed to that dangerous weapon and those fatal conditions?

He opened, in passing, a case by Gastinne Renette standing on a small table, and took out one of the pistols, then placed himself as though to shoot and raised his arm. But he was trembling from head to foot and the barrel moved in every direction.

At that, he said to himself:

"It's impossible. I cannot fight in this state."

He looked at the end of the barrel, at the little, black, deep hole that spits death; he thought of the disgrace, of the whispers at the club, of the laughter in drawing−rooms, of the contempt of women, of the allusions in the papers, of the insults which cowards would fling at him.

He was still looking at the weapon, and, raising the hammer, caught a glimpse of a cap gleaming beneath it like a tiny red flame; By good fortune or forgetfulness, the pistol had been left loaded. At the knowledge, he was filled with a confused inexplicable sense of joy.

If, when face to face with the other man, he did not show a proper gallantry and calm, he would be lost for ever. He would be sullied, branded with a mark of infamy, hounded out of society. And he would not be able to achieve that calm, that swaggering poise; he knew it, he felt it. Yet he was brave, since he wanted to fight I ... He was brave, since....

The thought which hovered in him did not even fulfil itself in his mind; but, opening his mouth wide, he thrust in the barrel of his pistol with savage gesture until it reached his throat, and pressed on the trigger.

When his valet ran in, at the sound of the report, he found him lying dead upon his back. A shower of blood had splashed the white paper on the table, and made a great red mark beneath these four words:

"This is my will."

Confessing

THE NOON SUN POURED FIERCELY DOWN UPON THE FIELDS. They stretched in undulating folds between the clumps of trees that marked each farmhouse; the different crops, ripe rye and yellowing wheat, pale−green oats, dark−green clover, spread a vast striped cloak, soft and rippling, over the naked body of the earth.

In the distance, on the crest of a slope, was an endless line of cows, ranked like soldiers, some lying down, others standing, their large eyes blinking in the burning light, chewing the cud and grazing on a field of clover as broad as a lake.

Two women, mother and daughter, were walking with a swinging step, one behind the other, towards this regiment of cattle. Each carried two zinc pails, slung outwards from the body on a hoop from a cask; at each step the metal sent out a dazzling white flash under the sun that struck full upon it.

The women did not speak. They were on their way to milk the cows. When they arrive, they set down one of their pails and approach the first two cows, making them stand up with a kick in the ribs from wooden−shod feet. The beast rises slowly, first on its forelegs, then with more difficulty raises its large hind quarters, which seem to be weighted down by the enormous udder of livid pendulous flesh.

The two Malivoires, mother and daughter, kneeling beneath the animal's belly, tug with a swift movement of their hands at the swollen teat, which at each squeeze sends a slender jet of milk into the pail. The yellowish froth mounts to the brim, and the women go from cow to cow until they reach the end of the long line.

As soon as they finish milking a beast, they change its position, giving it a fresh patch of grass on which to graze.

Then they start on their way home, more slowly now, weighed down by the load of milk, the mother in front, the daughter behind.

Abruptly the latter halts, sets down her burden, Sits down, and begins to cry.

Madame Malivoire, missing the sound of steps behind her, turns round and is quite amazed.

"What's the matter with you?" she said.

Her daughter Celeste, a tall girl with flaming red hair and flaming cheeks, flecked with freckles as though sparks of fire had fallen upon her face one day as she worked in the sun, murmurs, moaning softly, like a beaten child:

"I can't carry the milk any further."

Her mother looked at her suspiciously.

"What's the matter with you?" she repeated.

"It drags too heavy, I can't," replied Celeste, who had collapsed and was lying on the ground between the two pails, hiding her eyes in her apron.

"What's the matter with you, then?" said her mother for the third time. The girl moaned:

"I think there's a baby on the way." And she broke into sobs.

The old woman now in her turn set down her load, so amazed that she could find nothing to say. At last she stammered:

"You . . . you . . . you're going to have a baby, you clod! How can that be?"

The Malivoires were prosperous farmers, wealthy and of a certain position, widely respected, good business folk, of some importance in the district.

"I think I am, all the same," faltered Celeste.

The frightened mother looked at the weeping girl grovelling at her feet. After a few seconds she cried:

"You're going to have a baby! A baby! Where did you get it, you slut?"

Celeste, shaken with emotion, murmured:

"I think it was in Polyte's coach."

The old woman tried to understand, tried to imagine, to realise who could have brought this misfortune upon her daughter. If the lad was well off and of decent position, an arrangement might be come to. The damage could still be repaired. Celeste was not the first to be in the same way, but it was annoying all the same, seeing their

position and the way people talked.

"And who was it, you slut?" she repeated.

Celeste, resolved to make a clean breast of it, stammered:

"I think it was Polyte."

At that Madame Malivoire, mad with rage, rushed upon her daughter and began to beat her with such fury that her hat fell off in the effort.

With great blows of the fist she struck her on the head, on the back, all over her body; Celeste, prostrate between the two pails, which afforded her some slight protection, shielded just her face with her hands.

All the cows, disturbed, had stopped grazing and turned round, staring with their great eyes. The last one mooed, stretching out its muzzle towards the women.

After beating her daughter till she was out of breath, Madame Malivoire stopped, exhausted; her spirits reviving a little, she tried to get a thorough understanding of the situation.

"−−− Polyte! Lord save us, it's not possible! How could you, with a carrier? You must have lost your wits. He must have played you a trick, the good−for−nothing!"

Celeste, still prostrate, murmured in the dust:

"I didn't pay my fare!"

And the old Norman woman understood.

Every week, on Wednesday and on Saturday, Celeste went to town with the farm produce, poultry, cream, and eggs.

She started at seven with her two huge baskets on her arm, the dairy produce in one, the chickens in the other, and went to the main road to wait for the coach to Yvetot.

She set down her wares and sat in the ditch, while the chickens with their short pointed beaks and the ducks with their broad flat bills thrust their heads between the wicker bars and looked about them with their round, stupid, surprised eyes.

Soon the bus, a sort of yellow box with a black leather cap on the top, came up, jerking and quivering with the trotting of the old white horse.

Polyte the coachman, a big, jolly fellow, stout though still young, and so burnt up by sun and wind, soaked by rain, and coloured with brandy that his face and neck were brick−red, cracked his whip and shouted from the distance:

"Morning, Mam'selle Celeste. In good health, I hope?"

She gave him her baskets, one after the other, which he stowed in the boot; then she got in, lifting her leg high up to reach the step, and exposing a sturdy leg clad in a blue stocking.

Every time Polyte repeated the same joke: "Well, it's not got any thinner."

She laughed, thinking this funny.

Then he uttered a "Gee up, old girl!" which started off the thin horse. Then Celeste, reaching for her purse in the depths of her pocket, slowly took out fivepence, threepence for herself and twopence for the baskets, and handed them to Polyte over his shoulder.

He took them, saying:

"Aren't we going to have our little bit of sport to−day?"

And he laughed heartily, turning round towards her so as to stare at her at his ease.

She found it a big expense, the half−franc for a journey of two miles. And when she had no coppers she felt it still more keenly; it was hard to make up her mind to part with a silver coin.

One day, as she was paying, she asked:

"From a good customer like me you oughtn't to take more than threepence."

He burst out laughing.

"Threepence, my beauty; why, you're worth more than that."

She insisted on the point.

"But you make a good two francs a month out of me."

He whipped up his horse and exclaimed:

"Look here, I'm an obliging fellow! We'll call it quits for a bit of sport."

"What do you mean?" she asked with an air of innocence.

He was so amused that he laughed till he coughed.

"A bit of sport is a bit of sport, damn it; a game for a lad and a lass, a dance for two without music."

She understood, blushed, and declared:

"I don't care for that sort of game, Monsieur Polyte."

But he was in no way abashed, and repeated, with growing merriment:

"You'll come to it some day, my beauty, a bit of sport for a lad and a lass!"

And since that day he had taken to asking her, each time that she paid her fare:

"Aren't we going to have our bit of sport to−day?"

She, too, joked about it by this time, and replied:

"Not to−day, Monsieur Polyte, but Saturday, for certain!"

And amid peals of laughter he answered:

"Saturday, then, my beauty."

But inwardly she calculated that, during the two years the affair had been going on, she had paid Polyte forty−eight whole francs, and in the country forty−eight francs is not a sum which can be picked up on the roadside; she also calculated that in two more years she would have paid nearly a hundred francs.

To such purpose she meditated that, one spring day as they jogged on alone, when he made his customary inquiry: "Aren't we going to have our bit of sport yet?" She replied:

"Yes, if you like, Monsieur Polyte."

He was not at all surprised, and clambered over the back of his seat, murmuring with a complacent air:

"Come along, then. I knew you'd come to it some day."

The old white horse trotted so gently that she seemed to be dancing upon the same spot, deaf to the voice which cried at intervals, from the depths of the vehicle: "Gee up, old girl! Gee up, then!"

Three months later Celeste discovered that she was going to have a child.

All this she had told her mother in a tearful voice. Pale with fury, the old woman asked:

"Well, what did it cost?"

"Four months; that makes eight francs, doesn't it?" replied Celeste.

At that the peasant woman's fury was utterly unleashed, and, falling once more upon her daughter, she beat her a second time until she was out of breath. Then she rose and said:

"Have you told him about the baby?"

"No, of course not."

"Why haven't you told him?"

"Because very likely he'd have made me pay for all the free rides!"

The old woman pondered awhile, then picked up her milkpails.

"Come on, get up, and try to walk home," she said, and, after a pause, continued:

"And don't tell him as long as he doesn't notice anything, and we'll make six or eight months' fares out of him."

And Celeste, who had risen, still crying, dishevelled and swollen round the eyes, started off again with dragging steps, murmuring:

"Of course I won't say."

Humiliation

THE TWO YOUNG WOMEN had the appearance of being buried in a bed of flowers. They were alone in an immense landau filled with bouquets like a giant basket. Upon the seat before them were two small hampers full of Nice violets, and upon the bearskin which covered their knees was a heap of roses, gillyflowers, marguerites, tuberoses and orange flowers, bound together with silk ribbons, which seemed to crush the two delicate bodies, only allowing to appear above the spread−out, perfumed bed the shoulders, arms and a little of their bodices, one of which was blue and the other lilac.

The coachman's whip bore a sheath of anemones; the horses' heads were decorated with wallflowers; the spokes of the wheels were clothed in mignonette, and in place of lanterns, there were two round, enormous bouquets, which seemed like the two eyes of this strange, rolling, flowery beast.

The landau went along Antibes Street at a brisk trot, preceded, followed and accompanied by a crowd of other garlanded carriages full of women concealed under a billow of violets. For it was the Flower Festival at Cannes

They arrived at the Fonciere Boulevard where the battle took place. The whole length of the immense avenue, a double line of bedecked equipages was going and coming, like a ribbon without end. They threw flowers from one to the other. Flowers passed in the air like balls, hit the fair faces, hovered and fell in the dust where an army of street urchins gathered them.

A compact crowd, clamorous but orderly' looked on, standing in rows upon the sidewalks and held in place by policemen on horseback who passed along, pushing back the curious brutally with their feet, in order that the villains might not mingle with the rich.

Now the people in the carriages recognized each other, called to each other and bombarded one another with roses. A chariot full of pretty young women, clothed in red like devils, attracted and held all eyes. One gentleman who resembled the portraits of Henry IV, threw repeatedly, with joyous ardor, a huge bouquet retained by an elastic. At the threat of the blow the women lowered their heads and hid their eyes, but the gracious projectile only described a curve and again returned to its master, who immediately threw it again to a new face.

The two young women emptied their arsenal with full hands and received a shower of bouquets; then after an hour of battle, a little wearied at the last, they ordered the coachman to take the road to the Juan Gulf, which skirts the sea.

The sun disappeared behind the Esterel, outlining in black upon a background of fire the lacy silhouette of the stretched−out mountain. The calm sea was spread out blue and clear as far as the horizon, where it mingled with the sky and with the squadron anchored in the middle of the gulf, having the appearance of a troop of monstrous beasts, unmovable upon the water, apocalyptic animals, humpbacked and clothed in coats of mail, capped with thin masts like plumes and with eyes that lighted up when night came on.

The young women, stretched out under the fur robe, looked upon it languidly. Finally one of them said:

"How delicious these evenings are! Everything seems good. Is it not so, Margot?"

The other replied: "Yes, it is good. But there is always something, lacking."

What is it? For my part, I am completely happy. I have need of nothing."

"Yes? You think so, perhaps. But whatever well−being surrounds our bodies, we always desire something more−−for the heart."

Said the other, smiling: "A little love?"

"Yes."

They were silent, looking straight before them; then the one called Marguerite said: "Life does not seem supportable to me without that. I need to be loved, if only by a dog. And we are all so, whatever you may say, Simone."

"No, no, my dear. I prefer not to be loved at all than to be loved by no one of importance. Do you think, for example, that it would be agreeable to me to be loved by−−by−−−"

She looked for someone by whom she could possibly be loved, casting her eyes over the neighboring country. Her eyes, after having made the tour of the whole horizon, fell upon the two metal buttons shining on the coachman's back, and she continued, laughing, "By my coachman?"

Mlle Marguerite scarcely smiled as she replied:

"I can assure you it is very amusing to be loved by a domestic. This has happened to me two or three times. They roll their eyes so queerly that one is dying to laugh. Naturally, the more one is loved, the more severe she becomes, since otherwise, one puts herself in the way of being made ridiculous for some very slight cause, if anyone happened to observe it."

Mlle Simone listened, her look fixed straight before her; then she declared:

"No, decidedly, the heart of my valet at my feet would not appear to me sufficient. But tell me how you perceived that you were loved."

"I perceived it in them as I do in other men; they become so stupid!"

"But others do not appear so stupid to me when they are in love."

"Idiots, my dear, incapable of chatting, of answering, of comprehending anything."

"And you? What effect did it have on you to be loved by a domestic? Were you moved−−flattered?"

"Moved? No. Flattered? Yes, a little. One is always flattered by the love of a man, whoever he may be."

"Oh, now, Margot!"

"Yes, my dear. Wait! I will tell you a singular adventure that happened to me. You will see what curious things take place among us in such cases.

"It was four years ago in the autumn, when I found myself without a maid. I had tried five or six, one after the other, all of them incompetent, and almost despaired of finding one, when I read in the advertisements of a newspaper of a young girl knowing how to sew, embroider and dress hair, who was seeking a place and could furnish the best of references. She could also speak English.

"I wrote to the address given, and the next day the person in question presented herself. She was rather tall, thin, a little pale, with a very timid air. She had beautiful black eyes, a charming color, and she pleased me at once. I asked for her references; she gave me one written in English, because she had come, she said, from the house of Lady Ryswell, where she had been for ten years.

"The certificate attested that the girl was returning to France of her own will and that she had nothing to reproach her for during her long service with her, except a little of the French coquettishness.

"The modest turn of the English phrase made me smile a little, and I engaged the maid immediately. She came to my house the same day; she called herself Rose.

"At the end of a month I adored her. She was a treasure, a pearl, phenomenon.

"She could dress my hair with exquisite taste; she could flute the lace of a cap better than the best of the professionals, and she could make frocks. I was amazed at her ability. Never had I been so well served.

"She dressed me rapidly with an astonishing lightness of hand. I never felt her fingers upon my skin, and nothing is more disagreeable to me than contact with a maid's hand. I immediately got into excessively idle habits, so pleasant was it to let her dress me from head to foot, from chemise to gloves−−this tall, timid girl, always blushing a little and never speaking. After my bath she would rub me and massage me while I slept a little while on my divan; indeed, I came to look upon her more as a friend in poorer circumstances than a servant.

"One morning the concierge, with some show of mystery, said he wished to speak to me. I was surprised but let him enter. He was an old soldier, once orderly for my husband.

"He appeared to hesitate at what he was going to say. Finally he said stammeringly: 'Madame, the police captain for this district is downstairs.'

"I asked: 'What does he want?'

"'He wants to search the house.'

"Certainly the police are necessary, but I do detest them. I never can make it seem a noble profession. And I answered, irritated as well as wounded:

"'Why search here? For what purpose? There has been no burglary?'

He answered:

"'He thinks that a criminal is concealed somewhere here.'

"I began to be a little afraid and ordered the police captain to be brought that I might have some explanation. He was a man rather well brought up and decorated with the Legion of Honor. He excused himself, asked my pardon. then asserted that I had among my servants a convict!

"I was thunderstruck and answered that I could vouch for every one of them and that I would make a review

of them for his satisfaction.

"'There is Peter Courtin, an old soldier.'

"It was not he.

"'The coachman, Francis Pingau, a peasant, son of my father's farmer.'

"It was not he.

"'A stableboy, also from Champagne and also a son of peasants I had known, and no more except the footman, whom you have seen.'

"It was not any of them.

"'Then, sir, you see that you have been deceived.'

"'Pardon me, madame, but I am sure I am not deceived. As he has not at all the appearance of a criminal, will you have the goodness to have all your servants appear here before you and me, all of them?'

"I hesitated at first, then I yielded, summoning all my people, men and women.

"He looked at them all for an instant, then declared:

"'This is not all.'

"'Your pardon, sir,' I replied; 'this is all, except my own maid who could not possibly be confounded with a convict.'

"He asked: 'Could I see her too?'

"'Certainly.'

"I rang and Rose appeared immediately. Scarcely had she entered when he gave a signal, and two men, whom I had not seen, concealed behind the door, threw themselves upon her, seized her hands and bound them with cords.

"I uttered a cry of fury and was going to try and defend her. The captain stopped me:

"'This girl, madame, is a man who calls himself John Nicholas Lecapet, condemned to death in 1879 for assassination preceded by violation. His sentence was changed to life imprisonment. He escaped four months ago. We have been on the search for him ever since.'

"I was dismayed, struck dumb. I could not believe it. The policeman continued, laughing:

"'I can only give you one proof. His right arm is tattooed.'

"His sleeve was rolled up. It was true. The policeman added, certainly in bad taste:

"'Doubtless you will be satisfied without the other proofs.'

"And he led away my maid!

"Well, if you will believe it, the feeling which was uppermost in me was that of anger at having been played with in this way, deceived and made ridiculous; it was not shame at having been dressed, undressed, handled and touched by this man, but−−a−−profound humiliation−−the humiliation of a woman. Do you understand?"

"No, not exactly."

"Let us see. Think a minute. He had been condemned−−for violation, this young man−−and that−−that humiliated me−−there! Now do you understand?"

And Mlle Simone did not reply. She looked straight before her, with her eyes singularly fixed upon the two shining buttons of the livery and with that sphinx's smile that women have sometimes.

The Vendetta

PAOLO SAVERINI'S WIDOW LIVED ALONE WITH HER SON IN A poor little house on the ramparts of Bonifacio. The town, built on a spur of the mountains, in places actually overhanging the sea, looks across a channel bristling with reefs, to the lower shores of Sardinia. At its foot, on the other side and almost completely surrounding it, is the channel that serves as its harbour, cut in the cliff like a gigantic corridor. Through a long circuit between steep walls, the channel brings to the very foot of the first houses the little Italian or Sardinian fishing−boats, and, every fortnight, the old steamboat that runs to and from Ajaccio.

Upon the white mountain the group of houses form a whiter patch still. They look like the nests of wild birds, perched so upon the rock, dominating that terrible channel through which hardly ever a ship risks a passage. The unresting wind harasses the sea and eats away the bare shore, clad with a sparse covering of grass; it rushes into the ravine and ravages its two sides. The trailing wisps of white foam round the black points of countless rocks that everywhere pierce the waves, look like rags of canvas floating and heaving on the surface of the water.

The widow Saverini's house held for dear life to the very edge of the cliff; its three windows looked out over this wild and desolate scene.

She lived there alone with her son Antoine and their bitch Semillante, a large, thin animal with long, shaggy hair, of the sheep−dog breed. The young man used her for hunting.

One evening, after a quarrel, Antoine Saverini was treacherously slain by a knife−thrust from Nicolas Ravolati, who got away to Sardinia the same night.

When his old mother received his body, carried home by bystanders, she did not weep, but for a long time stayed motionless, looking at it; then, stretching out her wrinkled hand over the body, she swore vendetta against him. She would have no one stay with her, and shut herself up with the body, together with the howling dog. The animal howled continuously, standing at the foot of the bed, her head thrust towards her master, her tail held tightly between her legs. She did not stir, nor did the mother, who crouched over the body with her eyes fixed steadily upon it, and wept great silent tears.

The young man, lying on his back, clad in his thick serge coat with a hole torn across the front, looked as though he slept; but everywhere there was blood; on the shirt, torn off for the first hasty dressing; on his waistcoat, on his breeches, on his face, on his hands. Clots of blood had congealed in his beard and in his hair.

The old mother began to speak to him. At the sound of her voice the dog was silent.

"There, there, you shall be avenged, my little one, my boy, my poor child. Sleep, sleep, you shall be avenged, do you hear! Your mother swears it! And your mother always keeps her word; you know she does."

Slowly she bent over him, pressing her cold lips on the dead lips.

Then Semillante began to howl once more. She uttered long cries, monotonous, heart−rending, horrible cries.

They remained there, the pair of them, the woman and the dog, till morning.

Antoine Saverini was buried next day, and before long there was no more talk of him in Bonifacio.

He had left neither brothers nor close cousins. No man was there to carry on the vendetta. Only his mother, an old woman, brooded over it.

On the other side of the channel she watched from morning till night a white speck on the coast. It was a little Sardinian village, Longosardo, where Corsican bandits fled for refuge when too hard pressed. They formed almost the entire population of this hamlet, facing the shores of their own country, and there they awaited a suitable moment to come home, to return to the maquis of Corsica. She knew that Nicolas Ravolati had taken refuge in this very village.

All alone, all day long, sitting by the window, she looked over there and pondered revenge. How could she do it without another's help, so feeble as she was, so near to death? But she had promised, she had sworn upon the body. She could not forget, she could not wait. What was she to do? She could no longer sleep at night, she had no more sleep nor peace; obstinately she searched for a way. The dog slumbered at her feet and sometimes, raising her head, howled into the empty spaces. Since her master had gone, she often howled thus, as though she were calling him, as though her animal soul, inconsolable, had retained an ineffaceable memory of him.

One night, as Semillante was beginning to moan again, the mother had a sudden idea, an idea quite natural to

a vindictive and ferocious savage. She meditated on it till morning, then, rising at the approach of day, she went to church. She prayed, kneeling on the stones, prostrate before God, begging Him to aid her, to sustain her, to grant her poor worn−out body the strength necessary to avenge her son.

Then she returned home. There stood in the yard an old barrel with its sides stove in, which held the rain−water; she overturned it, emptied it, and fixed it to the ground with stakes and stones; then she chained up Semillante in this kennel, and went into the house.

Next she began to walk up and down her room, taking no rest, her eyes still turned to the coast of Sardinia. He was there, the murderer.

All day long and all night long the dog howled. In the morning the old woman took her some water in a bowl, but nothing else; no soup, no bread.

Another day went by. Semillante, exhausted, was asleep. Next day her eyes were shining, her hair on end, and she tugged desperately at the chain.

Again the old woman gave her nothing to eat. The animal, mad with hunger, barked hoarsely. Another night went by.

When day broke, Mother Saverini went to her neighbour to ask him to give her two trusses of straw. She took the old clothes her husband had worn and stuffed them with the straw into the likeness of a human figure.

Having planted a post in the ground opposite Semillante's kennel, she tied the dummy figure to it, which looked now as though it were standing. Then she fashioned a head with a roll of old linen.

The dog, surprised, looked at this straw man, and was silent, although devoured with hunger.

Then the woman went to the pork−butcher and bought a long piece of black pudding. She returned home, lit a wood fire in her yard, close to the kennel, and grilled the black pudding. Semillante, maddened, leapt about and foamed at the mouth, her eyes fixed on the food, the flavour of which penetrated to her very stomach.

Then with the smoking sausage the mother made a collar for the straw man. She spent a long time lashing it round his neck, as though to stuff it right in. When it was done, she unchained the dog.

With a tremendous bound the animal leapt upon the dummy's throat and with her paws on his shoulders began to rend it. She fell back with a piece of the prey in her mouth, then dashed at it again, sank her teeth into the cords, tore away a few fragments of food, fell back again, and leapt once more, ravenous.

With great bites she rent away the face, and tore the whole neck to shreds.

The old woman watched, motionless and silent, a gleam in her eyes. Then she chained up her dog again, made her go without food for two more days, and repeated the strange performance.

For three months she trained the dog to this struggle, the conquest of a meal by fangs. She no longer chained her up, but launched her upon the dummy with a sign.

She had taught the dog to rend and devour it without hiding food in its throat. Afterwards she would reward the dog with the gift of the black pudding she had cooked for her.

As soon as she saw the man, Semillante would tremble, then turn her eyes towards her mistress, who would cry "Off!" in a whistling tone, raising her finger.

When she judged that the time was come, Mother Saverini went to confession and took communion one Sunday morning with an ecstatic fervour; then, putting on a man's clothes, like an old ragged beggar, she bargained with a Sardinian fisherman, who took her, accompanied by the dog, to the other side of the straits.

In a canvas bag she had a large piece of black pudding. Semillante had had nothing to eat for two days. Every minute the old woman made her smell the savoury food, stimulating her hunger with it.

They came to Longosardo. The Corsican woman was limping slightly. She went to the baker's and inquired for Nicolas Ravolati's house. He had resumed his old occupation, that of a joiner. He was working alone at the back of his shop.

The old woman pushed open the door and called him:

"Hey! Nicolas!"

He turned round; then, letting go of her dog, she cried:

"Off, off, bite him, bite him!"

The maddened beast dashed forward and seized his throat.

The man put out his arms, clasped the dog, and rolled upon the ground. For a few minutes he writhed, beating the ground with his feet; then he remained motionless while Semillante nuzzled at his throat and tore it out in

ribbons.

Two neighbours, sitting at their doors, plainly recollected having seen a poor old man come out with a lean black dog which ate, as it walked, something brown that its master was giving to it.

In the evening the old woman returned home. That night she slept well.

Bellflower

HOW STRANGE are those old recollections which haunt us without our being able to get rid of them! This one is so very old that I cannot understand how it has clung so vividly and tenaciously to my memory. Since then I have seen so many sinister things, either affecting or terrible, that I am astonished at not being able to pass a single day without the face of Mother Bellflower recurring to my mind's eye, just as I knew her formerly long, long ago, when I was ten or twelve years old.

She was an old seamstress who came to my parents' house once a week, every Thursday, to mend the linen. My parents lived in one of those country houses called chateaux, which are merely old houses with pointed roofs, to which are attached three or four adjacent farms.

The village, a large village, almost a small market town, was a few hundred yards off and nestled round the church, a red brick church, which had become black with age.

Well, every Thursday Mother Bellflower came between half−past six and seven in the morning and went immediately into the linen room and began to work. She was a tall, thin, bearded or rather hairy woman, for she had a beard all over her face, a surprising, an unexpected beard, growing in improbable tufts, in curly bunches which looked as if they had been sown by a madman over that great face, the face of a gendarme in petticoats. She had them on her nose, under her nose, round her nose, on her chin, on her cheeks, and her eyebrows, which were extraordinarily thick and long and quite gray, bushy and bristling, looked exactly like a pair of mustaches stuck on there by mistake.

She limped, not like lame people generally do, but like a ship pitching. When she planted her great bony, vibrant body on her sound leg, she seemed to be preparing to mount some enormous wave, and then suddenly she dipped as if to disappear in an abyss and buried herself in the ground. Her walk reminded one of a ship in a storm, and her head, which was always covered with an enormous white cap, whose ribbons fluttered down her back, seemed to traverse the horizon from north to south and from south to north at each limp.

I adored Mother Bellflower. As soon as I was up I used to go into the linen room, where I found her installed at work with a foot warmer under her feet. As soon as I arrived she made me take the foot warmer and sit upon it, so that I might not catch cold in that large chilly room under the roof.

"That draws the blood from your head," she would say to me.

She told me stories while mending the linen with her long, crooked, nimble fingers; behind her magnifying spectacles, for age had impaired her sight, her eyes appeared enormous to me, strangely profound, double.

As far as I can remember from the things which she told me and by which my childish heart was moved, she had the large heart of a poor woman. She told me what had happened in the village, how a cow had escaped from the cow house and had been found the next morning in front of Prosper Malet's mill looking at the sails turning, or about a hen's egg which had been found in the church belfry without anyone being able to understand what creature had been there to lay it, or the queer story of Jean Pila's dog who had gone ten leagues to bring back his master's breeches which a tramp had stolen while they were hanging up to dry out of doors after he had been caught in the rain. She told me these simple adventures in such a manner that in my mind they assumed the proportions of never−to−be−forgotten dramas, of grand and mysterious poems; and the ingenious stories invented by the poets, which my mother told me in the evening, had none of the flavor, none of the fullness or of the vigor of the peasant woman's narratives.

Well, one Thursday when I had spent all the morning in listening to Mother Clochette, I wanted to go upstairs to her again during the day after picking hazelnuts with the manservant in the wood behind the farm. I remember it all as clearly as what happened only yesterday.

On opening the door of the linen room I saw the old seamstress lying on the floor by the side of her chair, her face turned down and her arms stretched out, but still holding her needle in one hand and one of my shirts in the other. One of her legs in a blue stocking, the longer one no doubt, was extended under her chair, and her spectacles glistened by the wall, where they had rolled away from her.

I ran away uttering shrill cries. They all came running, and in a few minutes I was told that Mother Clochette was dead.

I cannot describe the profound, poignant, terrible emotion which stirred my childish heart. I went slowly down into the drawing room and hid myself in a dark corner in the depths of a great old armchair, where I knelt and wept. I remained there for a long time, no doubt, for night came on. Suddenly someone came in with a lamp−−without seeing me, however−−and heard my father and mother talking with the medical man, whose voice recognized.

He had been sent for immediately, and he was explaining the cause of the accident, of which I understood nothing, however. Then he sat down and had a glass of liqueur and a biscuit.

He went on talking, and what he then said will remain engraved on my mind until I die. I think that I can give the exact words which he used.

"Ah!" he said. "The poor woman! she broke her leg the day of my arrival here. I had not even had time to wash my hands after getting off the diligence before I was sent for in all haste, for it was a bad case, very bad.

"She was seventeen and a pretty girl, very pretty! Would anyone believe it? I have never told her story before; in fact, no one but myself and one other person, who is no longer living in this part of the country, ever knew it. Now that she is dead I may be less discreet.

"A young assistant teacher had just come to live in the village; he was good looking and had the bearing of a soldier. All the girls ran after him, but he was disdainful. Besides that, he was very much afraid of his superior, the schoolmaster, old Grabu, who occasionally got out of bed the wrong foot first.

"Old Grabu already employed pretty Hortense, who has just died here and who was afterward nicknamed Clochette. The assistant master singled out the pretty young girl who was no doubt flattered at being chosen by this disdainful conqueror; at any rate, she fell in love with him, and he succeeded in persuading her to give him a first meeting in the hayloft behind the school at night after she had done her day's sewing.

"She pretended to go home, but instead of going downstairs when she left the Grabus', she went upstairs and hid among the hay to wait for her lover. He soon joined her, and he was beginning to say pretty things to her, when the door of the hayloft opened and the schoolmaster appeared and asked: 'What are you doing up there, Sigisbert?' Feeling sure that he would be caught, the young schoolmaster lost his presence of mind and replied stupidly: 'I came up here to rest a little among the bundles of hay, Monsieur Grabu.'

The loft was very large and absolutely dark. Sigisbert pushed the frightened girl to the farther end and said: 'Go, there and hide yourself. I shall lose my situation, so get away and hide yourself.'

"When the schoolmaster heard the whispering he continued: 'Why, you are not by yourself.'

"'Yes, I am, Monsieur Grabu!'

"'But you are not, for you are talking.'

"'I swear I am, Monsieur Grabu.'

"'I will soon find out,' the old man replied and, double−locking the door, he went down to get a light.

"Then the young man, who was a coward such as one sometimes meets, lost his head, and he repeated, having grown furious all of a sudden: 'Hide yourself, so that he may not find you. You will deprive me of my bread for my whole life; you will ruin my whole career! Do hide yourself!'

"They could hear the key turning in the lock again, and Hortense ran to the window which looked out onto the street, opened it quickly and then in a low and determined voice said: 'You will come and pick me up when he is gone,' and she jumped out.

"Old Grabu found nobody and went down again in great surprise! A quarter of an hour later Monsieur Sigisbert came to me and related his adventure. The girl had remained at the foot of the wall, unable to get up, as she had fallen from the second story, and I went with him to fetch her. It was raining in torrents, and I brought the unfortunate girl home with me, for the right leg was broken in three places, and the bones had come out through the flesh. She did not complain and merely said with admirable resignation: 'I am punished, well punished!'

"I sent for assistance and for the workgirl's friends and told them a made−up story of a runaway carriage which had knocked her down and lamed her outside my door. They believed me, and the gendarmes for a whole month tried in vain to kind the author of this accident.

"That is all! Now I say that this woman was a heroine and had the fiber of those who accomplish the grandest deeds in history.

"That was her only love affair, and she died a virgin. She was a martyr, a noble soul, a sublimely devoted woman! And if I did not absolutely admire her I should not have told you this story, which I would never tell

anyone during her life; you understand why."

The doctor ceased; Mamma cried, and Papa said some words which I did not catch; then they left the room, and I remained on my knees in the armchair and sobbed, while I heard a strange noise of heavy footsteps and something knocking against the side of the staircase.

They were carrying away Clochette's body.