ÉMILE ZOLA

HIS MASTERPIECE

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Содержание

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PREFACE

'HIS MASTERPIECE,' which in the original French bears the title of *L'Oeuvre*, is a strikingly accurate story of artistic life in Paris during the latter years of the Second Empire. Amusing at times, extremely pathetic and even painful at others, it not only contributes a necessary element to the Rougon-Macquart series of novels – a series illustrative of all phases of life in France within certain dates – but it also represents a particular period of M. Zola's own career and work. Some years, indeed, before the latter had made himself known at all widely as a novelist, he had acquired among Parisian painters and sculptors considerable notoriety as a revolutionary art critic, a fervent champion of that 'Open-air' school which came into being during the Second Empire, and which found its first real master in Edouard Manet, whose then derided works are regarded, in these later days, as masterpieces. Manet died before his genius was fully recognised; still he lived long enough to reap some measure of recognition and to see his influence triumph in more than one respect among his brother artists. Indeed, few if any painters left a stronger mark on the art of the second half of the nineteenth century than

he did, even though the school, which he suggested rather than established, lapsed largely into mere impressionism – a term, by the way, which he himself coined already in 1858; for it is an error to attribute it – as is often done – to his friend and junior, Claude Monet.

It was at the time of the Salon of 1866 that M. Zola, who criticised that exhibition in the *Evenement* newspaper,[1] first came to the front as an art critic, slashing out, to right and left, with all the vigour of a born combatant, and championing M. Manet – whom he did not as yet know personally – with a fervour born of the strongest convictions. He had come to the conclusion that the derided painter was being treated with injustice, and that opinion sufficed to throw him into the fray; even as, in more recent years, the belief that Captain Dreyfus was innocent impelled him in like manner to plead that unfortunate officer's cause. When M. Zola first championed Manet and his disciples he was only twenty-six years old, yet he did not hesitate to pit himself against men who were regarded as the most eminent painters and critics of France; and although (even as in the Dreyfus case) the only immediate result of his campaign was to bring him hatred and contumely, time, which always has its revenges, has long since shown how right he was in forecasting the ultimate victory of Manet and his principal methods.

In those days M. Zola's most intimate friend – a companion

[1] Some of the articles will be found in the volume of his miscellaneous writings entitled *Mes Haines*.

of his boyhood and youth – was Paul Cezanne, a painter who developed talent as an impressionist; and the lives of Cezanne and Manet, as well as that of a certain rather dissolute engraver, who sat for the latter's famous picture *Le Bon Bock*, suggested to M. Zola the novel which he has called *L'Oeuvre*. Claude Lantier, the chief character in the book, is, of course, neither Cezanne nor Manet, but from the careers of those two painters, M. Zola has borrowed many little touches and incidents.[2] The poverty which falls to Claude's lot is taken from the life of Cezanne, for Manet – the only son of a judge – was almost wealthy. Moreover, Manet married very happily, and in no wise led the pitiful existence which in the novel is ascribed to Claude Lantier and his helpmate, Christine. The original of the latter was a poor woman who for many years shared the life of the engraver to whom I have alluded; and, in that connection, it as well to mention that what may be called the Bennecourt episode of the novel is virtually photographed from life.

Whilst, however, Claude Lantier, the hero of *L'Oeuvre*, is unlike Manet in so many respects, there is a close analogy between the artistic theories and practices of the real painter and the imaginary one. Several of Claude's pictures are Manet's, slightly modified. For instance, the former's painting, 'In the Open Air,' is almost a replica of the latter's *Dejeuner sur l'Herbe* ('A Lunch on the Grass'), shown at the Salon of the Rejected in

[2] So far as Manet is concerned, the curious reader may consult M. Antonin Proust's interesting 'Souvenirs,' published in the *Revue Blanche*, early in 1897.

1863. Again, many of the sayings put into Claude's mouth in the novel are really sayings of Manet's. And Claude's fate, at the end of the book, is virtually that of a moody young fellow who long assisted Manet in his studio, preparing his palette, cleaning his brushes, and so forth. This lad, whom Manet painted in *L'Enfant aux Cerises* ('The Boy with the Cherries'), had artistic aspirations of his own and, being unable to justify them, ended by hanging himself.

I had just a slight acquaintance with Manet, whose studio I first visited early in my youth, and though the exigencies of life led me long ago to cast aside all artistic ambition of my own, I have been for more than thirty years on friendly terms with members of the French art world. Thus it would be comparatively easy for me to identify a large number of the characters and the incidents figuring in 'His Masterpiece'; but I doubt if such identification would have any particular interest for English readers. I will just mention that Mahoudeau, the sculptor, is, in a measure, Solari, another friend of M. Zola's boyhood and youth; that Fagerolles, in his main features, is Gervex; and that Bongrand is a commingling of Courbet, Cabanel and Gustave Flaubert. For instance, his so-called 'Village Wedding' is suggested by Courbet's 'Funeral at Ornans'; his friendship for Claude is Cabanel's friendship for Manet; whilst some of his mannerisms, such as his dislike for the praise accorded to certain of his works, are simply those of Flaubert, who (like Balzac in the case of *Eugenie Grandet*) almost invariably lost his temper if

one ventured to extol *Madame Bovary* in his presence. Courbet, by the way, so far as disposition goes, crops up again in M. Zola's pages in the person of Champbouvard, a sculptor, who, artistically, is a presentment of Clesinger.

I now come to a personage of a very different character, Pierre Sandoz, clerk, journalist, and novelist; and Sandoz, it may be frankly admitted, is simply M. Zola himself. Personal appearance, life, habits, opinions, all are those of the novelist at a certain period of his career; and for this reason, no doubt, many readers of 'His Masterpiece' will find Sandoz the most interesting personage in the book. It is needless, I think, to enter into particulars on the subject. The reader may take it from me that everything attributed in the following pages to Pierre Sandoz was done, experienced, felt or said by Emile Zola. In this respect, then 'His Masterpiece' is virtually M. Zola's 'David Copperfield' – the book into which he has put most of his real life. I may also mention, perhaps, that the long walks on the quays of Paris which in the narrative are attributed to Claude Lantier are really M. Zola's walks; for, in his youth, when he vainly sought employment after failing in his examinations, he was wont, at times of great discouragement, to roam the Paris quays, studying their busy life and their picturesque vistas, whenever he was not poring over the second-hand books set out for sale upon their parapets. From a purely literary standpoint, the pictures of the quays and the Seine to be found in *L'Oeuvre* are perhaps the best bits of the book, though it is all of interest, because it is

essentially a *livre vecu*, a work really 'lived' by its author. And if in the majority of its characters, those readers possessing some real knowledge of French art life find one man's qualities blended with another's defects, the appearance of a third, and the habits of a fourth, the whole none the less makes a picture of great fidelity to life and truth. This is the Parisian art world as it really was, with nothing improbable or overstrained in the narrative, save its very first chapter, in which romanticism is certainly allowed full play.

It is quite possible that some readers may not judge Claude Lantier, the 'hero,' very favourably; he is like the dog in the fable who forsakes the substance for the shadow; but it should be borne in mind that he is only in part responsible for his actions, for the fatal germ of insanity has been transmitted to him from his great-grandmother. He is, indeed, the son of Gervaise, the heroine of *L'Assommoir* ('The Dram Shop'), by her lover Lantier. And Gervaise, it may be remembered, was the daughter of Antoine Macquart (of 'The Fortune of the Rougons' and 'Dr. Pascal'), the latter being the illegitimate son of Adelaide Fouque, from whom sprang the insanity of the Rougon-Macquarts. At the same time, whatever view may be taken of Claude's artistic theories, whatever interest his ultimate fate may inspire, it cannot be denied that his opinions on painting are very ably expressed, and that his 'case,' from a pathological point of view, is diagnosticated by M. Zola with all the skill of a physician. Moreover, there can be but one opinion concerning the helpmate of his life, the poor

devoted Christine; and no one possessed of feeling will be able to read the history of little Jacques unmoved.

Stories of artistic life are not as a rule particularly popular with English readers, but this is not surprising when one remembers that those who take a genuine interest in art, in this country, are still a small minority. Quite apart from artistic matters, however, there is, I think, an abundance of human interest in the pages of 'His Masterpiece,' and thus I venture to hope that the present version, which I have prepared as carefully as my powers permit, will meet with the favour of those who have supported me, for a good many years now, in my endeavours to make the majority of M. Zola's works accessible in this country.

E. A. V.

MERTON, SURREY.

I

CLAUDE was passing in front of the Hotel de Ville, and the clock was striking two o'clock in the morning when the storm burst forth. He had been roaming forgetfully about the Central Markets, during that burning July night, like a loitering artist enamoured of nocturnal Paris. Suddenly the raindrops came down, so large and thick, that he took to his heels and rushed, wildly bewildered, along the Quai de la Greve. But on reaching the Pont Louis Philippe he pulled up, ragefully breathless; he considered this fear of the rain to be idiotic; and so amid the pitch-like darkness, under the lashing shower which drowned the gas-jets, he crossed the bridge slowly, with his hands dangling by his side.

He had only a few more steps to go. As he was turning on to the Quai Bourbon, on the Isle of St. Louis, a sharp flash of lightning illumined the straight, monotonous line of old houses bordering the narrow road in front of the Seine. It blazed upon the panes of the high, shutterless windows, showing up the melancholy frontages of the old-fashioned dwellings in all their details; here a stone balcony, there the railing of a terrace, and there a garland sculptured on a frieze. The painter had his studio close by, under the eaves of the old Hotel du Martoy, nearly at the corner of

the Rue de la Femme-sans-Tete.[3] So he went on while the quay, after flashing forth for a moment, relapsed into darkness, and a terrible thunder-clap shook the drowsy quarter.

When Claude, blinded by the rain, got to his door – a low, rounded door, studded with iron – he fumbled for the bell knob, and he was exceedingly surprised – indeed, he started – on finding a living, breathing body huddled against the woodwork. Then, by the light of a second flash, he perceived a tall young girl, dressed in black, and drenched already, who was shivering with fear. When a second thunder-clap had shaken both of them, Claude exclaimed:

'How you frighten one! Who are you, and what do you want?'

He could no longer see her; he only heard her sob, and stammer:

'Oh, monsieur, don't hurt me. It's the fault of the driver, whom I hired at the station, and who left me at this door, after ill-treating me. Yes, a train ran off the rails, near Nevers. We were four hours late, and a person who was to wait for me had gone. Oh, dear me; I have never been in Paris before, and I don't know where I am…'

Another blinding flash cut her short, and with dilated eyes she stared, terror-stricken, at that part of the strange capital, that violet-tinted apparition of a fantastic city. The rain had ceased falling. On the opposite bank of the Seine was the Quai des Ormes, with its small grey houses variegated below by the

[3] The street of the Headless woman. – ED.

woodwork of their shops and with their irregular roofs boldly outlined above, while the horizon suddenly became clear on the left as far as the blue slate eaves of the Hotel de Ville, and on the right as far as the leaden-hued dome of St. Paul. What startled her most of all, however, was the hollow of the stream, the deep gap in which the Seine flowed, black and turgid, from the heavy piles of the Pont Marie, to the light arches of the new Pont Louis Philippe. Strange masses peopled the river, a sleeping flotilla of small boats and yawls, a floating washhouse, and a dredger moored to the quay. Then, farther down, against the other bank, were lighters, laden with coals, and barges full of mill stone, dominated as it were by the gigantic arm of a steam crane. But, suddenly, everything disappeared again.

Claude had an instinctive distrust of women – that story of an accident, of a belated train and a brutal cabman, seemed to him a ridiculous invention. At the second thunder-clap the girl had shrunk farther still into her corner, absolutely terrified.

'But you cannot stop here all night,' he said.

She sobbed still more and stammered, 'I beseech you, monsieur, take me to Passy. That's where I was going.'

He shrugged his shoulders. Did she take him for a fool? Mechanically, however, he turned towards the Quai des Celestins, where there was a cabstand. Not the faintest glimmer of a lamp to be seen.

'To Passy, my dear? Why not to Versailles? Where do you think one can pick up a cab at this time of night, and in such

weather?'

Her only answer was a shriek; for a fresh flash of lightning had almost blinded her, and this time the tragic city had seemed to her to be spattered with blood. An immense chasm had been revealed, the two arms of the river stretching far away amidst the lurid flames of a conflagration. The smallest details had appeared: the little closed shutters of the Quai des Ormes, and the two openings of the Rue de la Masure, and the Rue du Paon-Blanc, which made breaks in the line of frontages; then near the Pont Marie one could have counted the leaves on the lofty plane trees, which there form a bouquet of magnificent verdure; while on the other side, beneath the Pont Louis Philippe, at the Mail, the barges, ranged in a quadruple line, had flared with the piles of yellow apples with which they were heavily laden. And there was also the ripple of the water, the high chimney of the floating washhouse, the tightened chain of the dredger, the heaps of sand on the banks, indeed, an extraordinary agglomeration of things, quite a little world filling the great gap which seemed to stretch from one horizon to the other. But the sky became dark again, and the river flowed on, all obscurity, amid the crashing of the thunder.

'Thank heaven it's over. Oh, heaven! what's to become of me?'

Just then the rain began to fall again, so stiffly and impelled by so strong a wind that it swept along the quay with the violence of water escaping through an open lock.

'Come, let me get in,' said Claude; 'I can stand this no longer.'

Both were getting drenched. By the flickering light of the gas lamp at the corner of the Rue de la Femme-sans-Tete the young man could see the water dripping from the girl's dress, which was clinging to her skin, in the deluge that swept against the door. He was seized with compassion. Had he not once picked up a cur on such a stormy night as this? Yet he felt angry with himself for softening. He never had anything to do with women; he treated them all as if ignorant of their existence, with a painful timidity which he disguised under a mask of bravado. And that girl must really think him a downright fool, to bamboozle him with that story of adventure – only fit for a farce. Nevertheless, he ended by saying, 'That's enough. You had better come in out of the wet. You can sleep in my rooms.'

But at this the girl became even more frightened, and threw up her arms.

'In your rooms? Oh! good heavens. No, no; it's impossible. I beseech you, monsieur, take me to Passy. Let me beg of you.'

But Claude became angry. Why did she make all this fuss, when he was willing to give her shelter? He had already rung the bell twice. At last the door opened and he pushed the girl before him.

'No, no, monsieur; I tell you, no – '

But another flash dazzled her, and when the thunder growled she bounded inside, scarce knowing what she was about. The heavy door had closed upon them, she was standing under a large archway in complete darkness.

'It's I, Madame Joseph,' cried Claude to the doorkeeper. Then he added, in a whisper, 'Give me your hand, we have to cross the courtyard.'

The girl did as she was told; she no longer resisted; she was overwhelmed, worn out. Once more they encountered the diluvian rain, as they ran side by side as hard as they could across the yard. It was a baronial courtyard, huge, and surrounded with stone arcades, indistinct amidst the gloom. However, they came to a narrow passage without a door, and he let go her hand. She could hear him trying to strike some matches, and swearing. They were all damp. It was necessary for them to grope their way upstairs.

'Take hold of the banisters, and be careful,' said Claude; 'the steps are very high.'

The staircase, a very narrow one, a former servants' staircase, was divided into three lofty flights, which she climbed, stumbling, with unskilful, weary limbs. Then he warned her that they had to turn down a long passage. She kept behind him, touching the walls on both sides with her outstretched hands, as she advanced along that endless passage which bent and came back to the front of the building on the quay. Then there were still other stairs right under the roof – creaking, shaky wooden stairs, which had no banister, and suggested the unplaned rungs of a miller's ladder. The landing at the top was so small that the girl knocked against the young man, as he fumbled in his pocket for his key. At last, however, he opened the door.

'Don't come in, but wait, else you'll hurt yourself again.'

She did not stir. She was panting for breath, her heart was beating fast, there was a buzzing in her ears, and she felt indeed exhausted by that ascent in the dense gloom. It seemed to her as if she had been climbing for hours, in such a maze, amidst such a turning and twisting of stairs that she would never be able to find her way down again. Inside the studio there was a shuffling of heavy feet, a rustling of hands groping in the dark, a clatter of things being tumbled about, accompanied by stifled objurgations. At last the doorway was lighted up.

'Come in, it's all right now.'

She went in and looked around her, without distinguishing anything. The solitary candle burned dim in that garret, more than fifteen feet high, and filled with a confused jumble of things whose big shadows showed fantastically on the walls, which were painted in grey distemper. No, she did not distinguish anything. She mechanically raised her eyes to the large studio-window, against which the rain was beating with a deafening roll like that of a drum, but at that moment another flash of lightning illumined the sky, followed almost immediately by a thunder-clap that seemed to split the roof. Dumb-stricken, pale as death, she dropped upon a chair.

'The devil!' muttered Claude, who also was rather pale. 'That clap wasn't far off. We were just in time. It's better here than in the streets, isn't it?'

Then he went towards the door, closed it with a bang and

turned the key, while she watched him with a dazed look.

'There, now, we are at home.'

But it was all over. There were only a few more thunder-claps in the distance, and the rain soon ceased altogether. Claude, who was now growing embarrassed, had examined the girl, askance. She seemed by no means bad looking, and assuredly she was young: twenty at the most. This scrutiny had the effect of making him more suspicious of her still, in spite of an unconscious feeling, a vague idea, that she was not altogether deceiving him. In any case, no matter how clever she might be, she was mistaken if she imagined she had caught him. To prove this he wilfully exaggerated his gruffness and curtness of manner.

Her very anguish at his words and demeanour made her rise, and in her turn she examined him, though without daring to look him straight in the face. And the aspect of that bony young man, with his angular joints and wild bearded face, increased her fears. With his black felt hat and his old brown coat, discoloured by long usage, he looked like a kind of brigand.

Directly he told her to make herself at home and go to bed, for he placed his bed at her disposal, she shrinkingly replied: 'Thank you; I'll do very well as I am; I'll not undress.'

'But your clothes are dripping,' he retorted. 'Come now, don't make an idiot of yourself.'

And thereupon he began to knock about the chairs, and flung aside an old screen, behind which she noticed a washstand and a tiny iron bedstead, from which he began to remove the coverlet.

'No, no, monsieur, it isn't worth while; I assure you that I shall stay here.'

At this, however, Claude became angry, gesticulating and shaking his fists.

'How much more of this comedy are we to have?' said he. 'As I give you my bed, what have you to complain of? You need not pay any attention to me. I shall sleep on that couch.'

He strode towards her with a threatening look, and thereupon, beside herself with fear, thinking that he was going to strike her, she tremblingly unfastened her hat. The water was dripping from her skirts. He kept on growling. Nevertheless, a sudden scruple seemed to come to him, for he ended by saying, condescendingly:

'Perhaps you don't like to sleep in my sheets. I'll change them.'

He at once began dragging them from the bed and flinging them on to the couch at the other end of the studio. And afterwards he took a clean pair from the wardrobe and began to make the bed with all the deftness of a bachelor accustomed to that kind of thing. He carefully tucked in the clothes on the side near the wall, shook the pillows, and turned back a corner of the coverlet.

'There, that'll do; won't it?' said he.

And as she did not answer, but remained motionless, he pushed her behind the screen. 'Good heavens! what a lot of fuss,' he thought. And after spreading his own sheets on the couch, and hanging his clothes on an easel, he quickly went to bed himself. When he was on the point of blowing out the candle, however,

he reflected that if he did so she would have to undress in the dark, and so he waited. At first he had not heard her stir; she had no doubt remained standing against the iron bedstead. But at last he detected a slight rustling, a slow, faint movement, as if amidst her preparations she also were listening, frightened perchance by the candle which was still alight. At last, after several minutes, the spring mattress creaked, and then all became still.

'Are you comfortable, mademoiselle?' now asked Claude, in a much more gentle voice.

'Yes, monsieur, very comfortable,' she replied, in a scarcely audible voice, which still quivered with emotion.

'Very well, then. Good-night.'

'Good-night.'

He blew out the candle, and the silence became more intense. In spite of his fatigue, his eyes soon opened again, and gazed upward at the large window of the studio. The sky had become very clear again, the stars were twinkling in the sultry July night, and, despite the storm, the heat remained oppressive. Claude was thinking about the girl – agitated for a moment by contrary feelings, though at last contempt gained the mastery. He indeed believed himself to be very strong-minded; he imagined a romance concocted to destroy his tranquillity, and he gibed contentedly at having frustrated it. His experience of women was very slight, nevertheless he endeavoured to draw certain conclusions from the story she had told him, struck as he was at present by certain petty details, and feeling perplexed. But why,

after all, should he worry his brain? What did it matter whether she had told him the truth or a lie? In the morning she would go off; there would be an end to it all, and they would never see each other again. Thus Claude lay cogitating, and it was only towards daybreak, when the stars began to pale, that he fell asleep. As for the girl behind the screen, in spite of the crushing fatigue of her journey, she continued tossing about uneasily, oppressed by the heaviness of the atmosphere beneath the hot zinc-work of the roof; and doubtless, too, she was rendered nervous by the strangeness of her surroundings.

In the morning, when Claude awoke, his eyes kept blinking. It was very late, and the sunshine streamed through the large window. One of his theories was, that young landscape painters should take studios despised by the academical figure painters – studios which the sun flooded with living beams. Nevertheless he felt dazzled, and fell back again on his couch. Why the devil had he been sleeping there? His eyes, still heavy with sleep, wandered mechanically round the studio, when, all at once, beside the screen he noticed a heap of petticoats. Then he at once remembered the girl. He began to listen, and heard a sound of long-drawn, regular breathing, like that of a child comfortably asleep. Ah! so she was still slumbering, and so calmly, that it would be a pity to disturb her. He felt dazed and somewhat annoyed at the adventure, however, for it would spoil his morning's work. He got angry at his own good nature; it would be better to shake her, so that she might go at once. Nevertheless

he put on his trousers and slippers softly, and walked about on tiptoes.

The cuckoo clock struck nine, and Claude made a gesture of annoyance. Nothing had stirred; the regular breathing continued. The best thing to do, he thought, would be to set to work on his large picture; he would see to his breakfast later on, when he was able to move about. But, after all, he could not make up his mind. He who lived amid chronic disorder felt worried by that heap of petticoats lying on the floor. Some water had dripped from them, but they were damp still. And so, while grumbling in a low tone, he ended by picking them up one by one and spreading them over the chairs in the sunlight. Had one ever seen the like, clothes thrown about anyhow? They would never get dry, and she would never go off! He turned all that feminine apparel over very awkwardly, got entangled with the black dress-body, and went on all fours to pick up the stockings that had fallen behind an old canvas. They were Balbriggan stockings of a dark grey, long and fine, and he examined them, before hanging them up to dry. The water oozing from the edge of the dress had soaked them, so he wrung and stretched them with his warm hands, in order that he might be able to send her away the quicker.

Since he had been on his legs, Claude had felt sorely tempted to push aside the screen and to take a look at his guest. This self-condemned curiosity only increased his bad temper. At last, with his habitual shrug of the shoulders, he was taking up his brushes, when he heard some words stammered amidst a rustling

of bed-clothes. Then, however, soft breathing was heard again, and this time he yielded to the temptation, dropping his brushes, and peeping from behind the screen. The sight that met his eyes rooted him to the spot, so fascinated that he muttered, 'Good gracious! good gracious!'

The girl, amidst the hot-house heat that came from the window, had thrown back her coverlet, and, overcome with the fatigue of a restless night, lay steeped in a flood of sunshine, unconscious of everything. In her feverish slumbers a shoulder button had become unfastened, and a sleeve slipping down allowed her bosom to be seen, with skin which looked almost gilded and soft like satin. Her right arm rested beneath her neck, her head was thrown back, and her black unwound tresses enwrapped her like a dusky cloak.

'Good gracious! But she's a beauty!' muttered Claude once more.

There, in every point, was the figure he had vainly sought for his picture, and it was almost in the right pose. She was rather spare, perhaps, but then so lithe and fresh.

With a light step, Claude ran to take his box of crayons, and a large sheet of paper. Then, squatting on a low chair, he placed a portfolio on his knees and began to sketch with an air of perfect happiness. All else vanished amidst artistic surprise and enthusiasm. No thought of sex came to him. It was all a mere question of chaste outlines, splendid flesh tints, well-set muscles. Face to face with nature, an uneasy mistrust of his

powers made him feel small; so, squaring his elbows, he became very attentive and respectful. This lasted for about a quarter of an hour, during which he paused every now and then, blinking at the figure before him. As he was afraid, however, that she might change her position, he speedily set to work again, holding his breath, lest he should awaken her.

And yet, while steadily applying himself to his work, vague fancies again assailed his mind. Who could she be? Assuredly no mere hussy. But why had she told him such an unbelievable tale? Thereupon he began to imagine other stories. Perhaps she had but lately arrived in Paris with a lover, who had abandoned her; perhaps she was some young woman of the middle classes led into bad company by a female friend, and not daring to go home to her relatives; or else there was some still more intricate drama beneath it all; something horrible, inexplicable, the truth of which he would never fathom. All these hypotheses increased his perplexity. Meanwhile, he went on sketching her face, studying it with care. The whole of the upper part, the clear forehead, as smooth as a polished mirror, the small nose, with its delicately chiselled and nervous nostrils, denoted great kindliness and gentleness. One divined the sweet smile of the eyes beneath the closed lids; a smile that would light up the whole of the features. Unfortunately, the lower part of the face marred that expression of sweetness; the jaw was prominent, and the lips, rather too full, showed almost blood-like over the strong white teeth. There was here, like a flash of passion, something

that spoke of awakening womanhood, still unconscious of itself amidst those other traits of childlike softness.

But suddenly a shiver rippled over the girl's satiny skin. Perhaps she had felt the weight of that gaze thus mentally dissecting her. She opened her eyes very wide and uttered a cry.

'Ah! great heavens!'

Sudden terror paralysed her at the sight of that strange room, and that young man crouching in his shirt-sleeves in front of her and devouring her with his eyes. Flushing hotly, she impulsively pulled up the counterpane.

'Well, what's the matter?' cried Claude, angrily, his crayon suspended in mid-air; 'what wasp has stung you now?'

He, whose knowledge of womankind was largely limited to professional models, was at a loss to understand the girl's action.

She neither spoke nor stirred, but remained with the counterpane tightly wrapped round her throat, her body almost doubled up, and scarcely showing an outline beneath her coverings.

'I won't eat you, will I?' urged Claude. 'Come, just lie as you were, there's a good girl.'

Again she blushed to her very ears. At last she stammered, 'Oh, no, monsieur, no – pray!'

But he began to lose his temper altogether. One of the angry fits to which he was subject was coming upon him. He thought her obstinacy stupid. And as in response to his urgent requests she only began to sob, he quite lost his head in despair before

his sketch, thinking that he would never be able to finish it, and would thus lose a capital study for his picture.

'Well, you won't, eh? But it's idiotic. What do you take me for? Have I annoyed you at all? You know I haven't. Besides, listen, it is very unkind of you to refuse me this service, because, after all, I sheltered you – I gave up my bed to you.'

She only continued to cry, with her head buried in the pillow.

'I assure you that I am very much in want of this sketch, else I wouldn't worry you.'

He grew surprised at the girl's abundant tears, and ashamed at having been so rough with her, so he held his tongue at last, feeling embarrassed, and wishing too that she might have time to recover a bit. Then he began again, in a very gentle tone:

'Well, as it annoys you, let's say no more about it. But if you only knew. I've got a figure in my picture yonder which doesn't make head-way at all, and you were just in the very note. As for me, when it's a question of painting, I'd kill father and mother, you know. Well, you'll excuse me, won't you? And if you'd like me to be very nice, you'd just give me a few minutes more. No, no; keep quiet as you are; I only want the head – nothing but the head. If I could finish that, it would be all right. Really now, be kind; put your arm as it was before, and I shall be very grateful to you – grateful all my life long.'

It was he who was entreating now, pitifully waving his crayon amid the emotion of his artistic craving. Besides, he had not stirred, but remained crouching on his low chair, at a distance

from the bed. At last she risked the ordeal, and uncovered her tranquillised face. What else could she do? She was at his mercy, and he looked so wretchedly unhappy.

Nevertheless, she still hesitated, she felt some last scruples. But eventually, without saying a word, she slowly brought her bare arm from beneath the coverings, and again slipped it under her head, taking care, however, to keep the counterpane tightly round her throat.

'Ah! how kind you are! I'll make haste, you will be free in a minute.'

He bent over his drawing, and only looked at her now and then with the glance of a painter who simply regards the woman before him as a model. At first she became pink again; the consciousness that she was showing her bare arm – which she would have shown in a ball-room without thinking at all about it – filled her with confusion. Nevertheless, the young man seemed so reasonable that she became reassured. The blush left her cheeks, and her lips parted in a vague confiding smile. And from between her half-opened eyelids she began to study him. How he had frightened her the previous night with his thick brown beard, his large head, and his impulsive gestures. And yet he was not ugly; she even detected great tenderness in the depths of his brown eyes, while his nose altogether surprised her. It was a finely-cut woman's nose, almost lost amidst the bristling hair on his lips. He shook slightly with a nervous anxiety which made his crayon seem a living thing in his slender hand, and which

touched her though she knew not why. She felt sure he was not bad-natured, his rough, surly ways arose from bashfulness. She did not decipher all this very clearly, but she divined it, and began to put herself at her ease, as if she were with a friend.

Nevertheless, the studio continued to frighten her a little. She cast sidelong glances around it, astonished at so much disorder and carelessness. Before the stove the cinders of the previous winter still lay in a heap. Besides the bed, the small washstand, and the couch, there was no other furniture than an old dilapidated oaken wardrobe and a large deal table, littered with brushes, colours, dirty plates, and a spirit lamp, atop of which was a saucepan, with shreds of vermicelli sticking to its sides. Some rush-bottomed chairs, their seats the worse for wear, were scattered about beside spavined easels. Near the couch the candlestick used on the previous night stood on the floor, which looked as if it had not been swept for fully a month. There was only the cuckoo clock, a huge one, with a dial illuminated with crimson flowers, that looked clean and bright, ticking sonorously all the while. But what especially frightened her were some sketches in oils that hung frameless from the walls, a serried array of sketches reaching to the floor, where they mingled with heaps of canvases thrown about anyhow. She had never seen such terrible painting, so coarse, so glaring, showing a violence of colour, that jarred upon her nerves like a carter's oath heard on the doorstep of an inn. She cast her eyes down for a moment, and then became attracted by a picture, the back of which was

turned to her. It was the large canvas at which the painter was working, and which he pushed against the wall every night, the better to judge it on the morrow in the surprise of the first glance. What could it be, that one, she wondered, since he dared not even show it? And, meantime, through the vast room, a sheet of burning sunlight, falling straight from the window panes, unchecked by any blind, spread with the flow of molten gold over all the broken-down furniture, whose devil-may-care shabbiness it threw into bold relief.

Claude began to feel the silence oppressive; he wanted to say something, no matter what, first, in order to be polite, and more especially to divert her attention from her pose. But cudgel his brain as he would, he could only think of asking: 'Pray, what is your name?'

She opened her eyes, which she had closed, as if she were feeling sleepy.

'Christine,' she said.

At which he seemed surprised. Neither had he told her his name. Since the night before they had been together, side by side, without knowing one another.

'My name is Claude.'

And, having looked at her just at that moment, he saw her burst into a pretty laugh. It was the sudden, merry peal of a big girl, still scarcely more than a hoyden. She considered this tardy exchange of names rather droll. Then something else amused her.

'How funny – Claude, Christine – they begin with the same letter.'

They both became silent once more. He was blinking at his work, growing absorbed in it, and at a loss how to continue the conversation. He fancied that she was beginning to feel tired and uncomfortable, and in his fear lest she should stir, he remarked at random, merely to occupy her thoughts, 'It feels rather warm.'

This time she checked her laughter, her natural gaiety that revived and burst forth in spite of herself ever since she had felt easier in mind. Truth to tell, the heat was indeed so oppressive that it seemed to her as if she were in a bath, with skin moist and pale with the milky pallor of a camellia.

'Yes, it feels rather warm,' she said, seriously, though mirth was dancing in her eyes.

Thereupon Claude continued, with a good-natured air:

'It's the sun falling straight in; but, after all, a flood of sunshine on one's skin does one good. We could have done with some of it last night at the door, couldn't we?'

At this both burst out laughing, and he, delighted at having hit upon a subject of conversation, questioned her about her adventure, without, however, feeling inquisitive, for he cared little about discovering the real truth, and was only intent upon prolonging the sitting.

Christine simply, and in a few words, related what had befallen her. Early on the previous morning she had left Clermont for Paris, where she was to take up a situation as reader and

companion to the widow of a general, Madame Vanzade, a rich old lady, who lived at Passy. The train was timed to reach Paris at ten minutes past nine in the evening, and a maid was to meet her at the station. They had even settled by letter upon a means of recognition. She was to wear a black hat with a grey feather in it. But, a little above Nevers, her train had come upon a goods train which had run off the rails, its litter of smashed trucks still obstructing the line. There was quite a series of mishaps and delays. First an interminable wait in the carriages, which the passengers had to quit at last, luggage and all, in order to trudge to the next station, three kilometres distant, where the authorities had decided to make up another train. By this time they had lost two hours, and then another two were lost in the general confusion which the accident had caused from one end of the line to the other, in such wise that they reached the Paris terminus four hours behind time, that is, at one o'clock in the morning.

'Bad luck, indeed,' interrupted Claude, who was still sceptical, though half disarmed, in his surprise at the neat way in which the girl arranged the details of her story.

'And, of course, there was no one at the station to meet you?' he added.

Christine had, indeed, missed Madame Vanzade's maid, who, no doubt, had grown tired of waiting. She told Claude of her utter helplessness at the Lyons terminus – that large, strange, dark station, deserted at that late hour of night. She had not dared to take a cab at first, but had kept on walking up and down, carrying

her small bag, and still hoping that somebody would come for her. When at last she made up her mind there only remained one driver, very dirty and smelling of drink, who prowled round her, offering his cab in a knowing, impudent way.

'Yes, I know, a dawdler,' said Claude, getting as interested as if he were listening to a fairy tale. 'So you got into his cab?'

Looking up at the ceiling, Christine continued, without shifting her position: 'He made me; he called me his little dear, and frightened me. When he found out that I was going to Passy, he became very angry, and whipped his horse so hard that I was obliged to hold on by the doors. After that I felt more easy, because the cab trundled along all right through the lighted streets, and I saw people about. At last I recognised the Seine, for though I was never in Paris before, I had often looked at a map. Naturally I thought he would keep along the quay, so I became very frightened again on noticing that we crossed a bridge. Just then it began to rain, and the cab, which had got into a very dark turning, suddenly stopped. The driver got down from his seat, and declared it was raining too hard for him to remain on the box – '

Claude burst out laughing. He no longer doubted. She could not have invented that driver. And as she suddenly stopped, somewhat confused, he said, 'All right, the cabman was having a joke.'

'I jumped out at once by the other door,' resumed Christine. 'Then he began to swear at me, saying that we had arrived

at Passy, and that he would tear my hat from my head if I did not pay him. It was raining in torrents, and the quay was absolutely deserted. I was losing my head, and when I had pulled out a five-franc piece, he whipped up his horse and drove off, taking my little bag, which luckily only contained two pocket-handkerchiefs, a bit of cake, and the key of my trunk, which I had been obliged to leave behind in the train.'

'But you ought to have taken his number,' exclaimed the artist indignantly. In fact he now remembered having been brushed against by a passing cab, which had rattled by furiously while he was crossing the Pont Louis Philippe, amid the downpour of the storm. And he reflected how improbable truth often was. The story he had conjured up as being the most simple and logical was utterly stupid beside the natural chain of life's many combinations.

'You may imagine how I felt under the doorway,' concluded Christine. 'I knew well enough that I was not at Passy, and that I should have to spend the night there, in this terrible Paris. And there was the thunder and the lightning – those horrible blue and red flashes, which showed me things that made me tremble.'

She closed her eyelids once more, she shivered, and the colour left her cheeks as, in her fancy, she again beheld the tragic city – that line of quays stretching away in a furnace-like blaze, the deep moat of the river, with its leaden waters obstructed by huge black masses, lighters looking like lifeless whales, and bristling with motionless cranes which stretched forth gallows-like arms.

Was that a welcome to Paris?

Again did silence fall. Claude had resumed his drawing. But she became restless, her arm was getting stiff.

'Just put your elbow a little lower, please,' said Claude. Then, with an air of concern, as if to excuse his curtness: 'Your parents will be very uneasy, if they have heard of the accident.'

'I have no parents.'

'What! neither father nor mother? You are all alone in the world?'

'Yes; all alone.'

She was eighteen years old, and had been born in Strasburg, quite by chance, though, between two changes of garrison, for her father was a soldier, Captain Hallegrain. Just as she entered upon her twelfth year, the captain, a Gascon, hailing from Montauban, had died at Clermont, where he had settled when paralysis of the legs had obliged him to retire from active service. For nearly five years afterwards, her mother, a Parisian by birth, had remained in that dull provincial town, managing as well as she could with her scanty pension, but eking it out by fan-painting, in order that she might bring up her daughter as a lady. She had, however, now been dead for fifteen months, and had left her child penniless and unprotected, without a friend, save the Superior of the Sisters of the Visitation, who had kept her with them. Christine had come straight to Paris from the convent, the Superior having succeeded in procuring her a situation as reader and companion to her old friend, Madame Vanzade, who was almost blind.

At these additional particulars, Claude sat absolutely speechless. That convent, that well-bred orphan, that adventure, all taking so romantic a turn, made him relapse into embarrassment again, into all his former awkwardness of gesture and speech. He had left off drawing, and sat looking, with downcast eyes, at his sketch.

'Is Clermont pretty?' he asked, at last.

'Not very; it's a gloomy town. Besides, I don't know; I scarcely ever went out.'

She was resting on her elbow, and continued, as if talking to herself in a very low voice, still tremulous from the thought of her bereavement.

'Mamma, who wasn't strong, killed herself with work. She spoilt me; nothing was too good for me. I had all sorts of masters, but I did not get on very well; first, because I fell ill, then because I paid no attention. I was always laughing and skipping about like a featherbrain. I didn't care for music, piano playing gave me a cramp in my arms. The only thing I cared about at all was painting.'

He raised his head and interrupted her. 'You can paint?'

'Oh, no; I know nothing, nothing at all. Mamma, who was very talented, made me do a little water-colour, and I sometimes helped her with the backgrounds of her fans. She painted some lovely ones.'

In spite of herself, she then glanced at the startling sketches with which the walls seemed ablaze, and her limpid eyes assumed

an uneasy expression at the sight of that rough, brutal style of painting. From where she lay she obtained a topsy-turvy view of the study of herself which the painter had begun, and her consternation at the violent tones she noticed, the rough crayon strokes, with which the shadows were dashed off, prevented her from asking to look at it more closely. Besides, she was growing very uncomfortable in that bed, where she lay broiling; she fidgetted with the idea of going off and putting an end to all these things which, ever since the night before, had seemed to her so much of a dream.

Claude, no doubt, became aware of her discomfort. A sudden feeling of shame brought with it one of compunction.

He put his unfinished sketch aside, and hastily exclaimed: 'Much obliged for your kindness, mademoiselle. Forgive me, I have really abused it. Yes, indeed, pray get up; it's time for you to look for your friends.'

And without appearing to understand why she did not follow his advice, but hid more and more of her bare arm in proportion as he drew nearer, he still insisted upon advising her to rise. All at once, as the real state of things struck him, he swung his arms about like a madman, set the screen in position, and went to the far end of the studio, where he began noisily setting his crockery in order, so that she might jump out and dress herself, without fear of being overheard.

Amidst the din he had thus raised, he failed to hear her hesitating voice, 'Monsieur, monsieur – '

At last he caught her words.

'Monsieur, would you be so kind – I can't find my stockings.'

Claude hurried forward. What had he been thinking of? What was she to do behind that screen, without her stockings and petticoats, which he had spread out in the sunlight? The stockings were dry, he assured himself of that by gently rubbing them together, and he handed them to her over the partition; again noticing her arm, bare, plump and rosy like that of a child. Then he tossed the skirts on to the foot of the bed and pushed her boots forward, leaving nothing but her bonnet suspended from the easel. She had thanked him and that was all; he scarcely distinguished the rustling of her clothes and the discreet splashing of water. Still he continued to concern himself about her.

'You will find the soap in a saucer on the table. Open the drawer and take a clean towel. Do you want more water? I'll give you the pitcher.'

Suddenly the idea that he was blundering again exasperated him.

'There, there, I am only worrying you. I will leave you to your own devices. Do as if you were at home.'

And he continued to potter about among the crockery. He was debating with himself whether he should ask her to stay to breakfast. He ought not to let her go like that. On the other hand, if she did stay, he would never get done; it would mean a loss of his whole morning. Without deciding anything, as soon as he

had lighted his spirit lamp, he washed his saucepan and began to make some chocolate. He thought it more *distingue*, feeling rather ashamed of his vermicelli, which he mixed with bread and soused with oil as people do in the South of France. However, he was still breaking the chocolate into bits, when he uttered a cry of surprise, 'What, already?'

It was Christine, who had pushed back the screen, and who appeared looking neat and correct in her black dress, duly laced and buttoned up, equipped, as it were, in a twinkle. Her rosy face did not even show traces of the water, her thick hair was twisted in a knot at the back of her head, not a single lock out of place. And Claude remained open-mouthed before that miracle of quickness, that proof of feminine skill in dressing well and promptly.

'The deuce, if you go about everything in that way!' said he.

He found her taller and handsomer than he had fancied. But what struck him most was her look of quiet decision. She was evidently no longer afraid of him. It seemed as though she had re-donned her armour and become an amazon again. She smiled and looked him straight in the face. Whereupon he said what he was still reluctant to say:

'You'll breakfast with me, won't you?'

But she refused the offer. 'No, thank you. I am going to the station, where my trunk must have arrived by now, and then I shall drive to Passy.'

It was in vain that he told her that she must be hungry, that it

was unreasonable for her to go out without eating something.

'Well, if you won't, I'll go down and fetch you a cab,' he ended by exclaiming.

'Pray don't take such trouble.'

'But you can't go such a distance on foot. Let me at least take you to the cabstand, as you don't know Paris.'

'No, really I do not need you. If you wish to oblige me, let me go away by myself.'

She had evidently made up her mind. She no doubt shrank from the idea of being seen with a man, even by strangers. She meant to remain silent about that strange night, she meant to tell some falsehood, and keep the recollection of her adventure entirely to herself. He made a furious gesture, which was tantamount to sending her to the devil. Good riddance; it suited him better not to have to go down. But, all the same, he felt hurt at heart, and considered that she was ungrateful.

'As you please, then. I sha'n't resort to force,' he said.

At these words, Christine's vague smile became more accentuated. She did not reply, but took her bonnet and looked round in search of a glass. Failing to find one, she tied the strings as best she could. With her arms uplifted, she leisurely arranged and smoothed the ribbons, her face turned towards the golden rays of the sun. Somewhat surprised, Claude looked in vain for the traits of childish softness that he had just portrayed; the upper part of her face, her clear forehead, her gentle eyes had become less conspicuous; and now the lower part stood out, with

its somewhat sensual jaw, ruddy mouth, and superb teeth. And still she smiled with that enigmatical, girlish smile, which was, perhaps, an ironical one.

'At any rate,' he said, in a vexed tone, 'I do not think you have anything to reproach me with.'

At which she could not help laughing, with a slight, nervous laugh.

'No, no, monsieur, not in the least.'

He continued staring at her, fighting the battle of inexperience and bashfulness over again, and fearing that he had been ridiculous. Now that she no longer trembled before him, had she become contemptuously surprised at having trembled at all? What! he had not made the slightest attempt at courtship, not even pressed a kiss on her finger-tips. The young fellow's bearish indifference, of which she had assuredly been conscious, must have hurt her budding womanly feelings.

'You were saying,' she resumed, becoming sedate once more, 'that the cabstand is at the end of the bridge on the opposite quay?'

'Yes; at the spot where there is a clump of trees.'

She had finished tying her bonnet strings, and stood ready gloved, with her hands hanging by her side, and yet she did not go, but stared straight in front of her. As her eyes met the big canvas turned to the wall she felt a wish to see it, but did not dare to ask. Nothing detained her; still she seemed to be looking around as if she had forgotten something there, something which

she could not name. At last she stepped towards the door.

Claude was already opening it, and a small loaf placed erect against the post tumbled into the studio.

'You see,' he said, 'you ought to have stopped to breakfast with me. My doorkeeper brings the bread up every morning.'

She again refused with a shake of the head. When she was on the landing she turned round, and for a moment remained quite still. Her gay smile had come back; she was the first to hold out her hand.

'Thank you, thank you very much.'

He had taken her small gloved hand within his large one, all pastel-stained as it was. Both hands remained like that for a few moments, closely and cordially pressed. The young girl was still smiling at him, and he had a question on the tip of his tongue: 'When shall I see you again?' But he felt ashamed to ask it, and after waiting a while she withdrew her hand.

'Good-bye, monsieur.'

'Good-bye, mademoiselle.'

Christine, without another glance, was already descending the steep ladder-like stairway whose steps creaked, when Claude turned abruptly into his studio, closing the door with a bang, and shouting to himself: 'Ah, those confounded women!'

He was furious – furious with himself, furious with everyone. Kicking about the furniture, he continued to ease his feelings in a loud voice. Was not he right in never allowing them to cross his threshold? They only turned a fellow's head. What proof had

he after all that yonder chit with the innocent look, who had just gone, had not fooled him most abominably? And he had been silly enough to believe in her cock-and-bull stories! All his suspicions revived. No one would ever make him swallow that fairy tale of the general's widow, the railway accident, and especially the cabman. Did such things ever happen in real life? Besides, that mouth of hers told a strange tale, and her looks had been very singular just as she was going. Ah! if he could only have understood why she had told him all those lies; but no, they were profitless, inexplicable. It was art for art's sake. How she must be laughing at him by this time.

He roughly folded up the screen and sent it flying into a corner. She had no doubt left all in disorder. And when he found that everything was in its proper place – basin, towel, and soap – he flew into a rage because she had not made the bed. With a great deal of fuss he began to make it himself, lifting the mattress in his arms, banging the pillow about with his fists, and feeling oppressed by the pure scent of youth that rose from everything. Then he had a good wash to cool himself, and in the damp towel he found the same virgin fragrance, which seemed to spread through the studio. Swearing the while, he drank his chocolate from the saucepan, so excited, so eager to set to work, as to swallow large mouthfuls of bread without taking breath.

'Why, it's enough to kill one here,' he suddenly exclaimed. 'It must be this confounded heat that's making me ill.'

After all, the sun had shifted, and it was far less hot. But he

opened a small window on a level with the roof, and inhaled, with an air of profound relief, the whiff of warm air that entered. Then he took up his sketch of Christine's head and for a long while he lingered looking at it.

II

IT had struck twelve, and Claude was working at his picture when there was a loud, familiar knock at the door. With an instinctive yet involuntary impulse, the artist slipped the sketch of Christine's head, by the aid of which he was remodelling the principal figure of his picture, into a portfolio. After which he decided to open the door.

'You, Pierre!' he exclaimed, 'already!'

Pierre Sandoz, a friend of his boyhood, was about twenty-two, very dark, with a round and determined head, a square nose, and gentle eyes, set in energetic features, girt round with a sprouting beard.

'I breakfasted earlier than usual,' he answered, 'in order to give you a long sitting. The devil! you are getting on with it.'

He had stationed himself in front of the picture, and he added almost immediately: 'Hallo! you have altered the character of your woman's features!'

Then came a long pause; they both kept staring at the canvas. It measured about sixteen feet by ten, and was entirely painted over, though little of the work had gone beyond the roughing-out. This roughing-out, hastily dashed off, was superb in its violence and ardent vitality of colour. A flood of sunlight streamed into a forest clearing, with thick walls of verdure; to the left, stretched a dark glade with a small luminous speck in the far distance. On

the grass, amidst all the summer vegetation, lay a nude woman with one arm supporting her head, and though her eyes were closed she smiled amidst the golden shower that fell around her. In the background, two other women, one fair, and the other dark, wrestled playfully, setting light flesh tints amidst all the green leaves. And, as the painter had wanted something dark by way of contrast in the foreground, he had contented himself with seating there a gentleman, dressed in a black velveteen jacket. This gentleman had his back turned and the only part of his flesh that one saw was his left hand, with which he was supporting himself on the grass.

'The woman promises well,' said Sandoz, at last; 'but, dash it, there will be a lot of work in all this.'

Claude, with his eyes blazing in front of his picture, made a gesture of confidence. 'I've lots of time from now till the Salon. One can get through a deal of work in six months. And perhaps this time I'll be able to prove that I am not a brute.'

Thereupon he set up a whistle, inwardly pleased at the sketch he had made of Christine's head, and buoyed up by one of those flashes of hope whence he so often dropped into torturing anguish, like an artist whom passion for nature consumed.

'Come, no more idling,' he shouted. 'As you're here, let us set to.'

Sandoz, out of pure friendship, and to save Claude the cost of a model, had offered to pose for the gentleman in the foreground. In four or five Sundays, the only day of the week on which he

was free, the figure would be finished. He was already donning the velveteen jacket, when a sudden reflection made him stop.

'But, I say, you haven't really lunched, since you were working when I came in. Just go down and have a cutlet while I wait here.'

The idea of losing time revolted Claude. 'I tell you I have breakfasted. Look at the saucepan. Besides, you can see there's a crust of bread left. I'll eat it. Come, to work, to work, lazy-bones.'

And he snatched up his palette and caught his brushes, saying, as he did so, 'Dubuche is coming to fetch us this evening, isn't he?'

'Yes, about five o'clock.'

'Well, that's all right then. We'll go down to dinner directly he comes. Are you ready? The hand more to the left, and your head a little more forward.'

Having arranged some cushions, Sandoz settled himself on the couch in the required attitude. His back was turned, but all the same the conversation continued for another moment, for he had that very morning received a letter from Plassans, the little Provencal town where he and the artist had known each other when they were wearing out their first pairs of trousers on the eighth form of the local college. However, they left off talking. The one was working with his mind far away from the world, while the other grew stiff and cramped with the sleepy weariness of protracted immobility.

It was only when Claude was nine years old that a lucky chance had enabled him to leave Paris and return to the little

place in Provence, where he had been born. His mother, a hardworking laundress,[4] whom his ne'er-do-well father had scandalously deserted, had afterwards married an honest artisan who was madly in love with her. But in spite of their endeavours, they failed to make both ends meet. Hence they gladly accepted the offer of an elderly and well-to-do townsman to send the lad to school and keep him with him. It was the generous freak of an eccentric amateur of painting, who had been struck by the little figures that the urchin had often daubed. And thus for seven years Claude had remained in the South, at first boarding at the college, and afterwards living with his protector. The latter, however, was found dead in his bed one morning. He left the lad a thousand francs a year, with the faculty of disposing of the principal when he reached the age of twenty-five. Claude, already seized with a passion for painting, immediately left school without even attempting to secure a bachelor's degree, and rushed to Paris whither his friend Sandoz had preceded him.

At the College of Plassans, while still in the lowest form, Claude Lantier, Pierre Sandoz, and another lad named Louis Dubuche, had been three inseparables. Sprung from three different classes of society, by no means similar in character, but simply born in the same year at a few months' interval, they had become friends at once and for aye, impelled thereto by certain secret affinities, the still vague promptings of a common ambition, the dawning consciousness of possessing

[4] Gervaise of 'The Dram Shop'(L'Assommoir). – ED.

greater intelligence than the set of dunces who maltreated them. Sandoz's father, a Spaniard, who had taken refuge in France in consequence of some political disturbances in which he had been mixed up, had started, near Plassans, a paper mill with new machinery of his own invention. When he had died, heart-broken by the petty local jealousy that had sought to hamper him in every way, his widow had found herself in so involved a position, and burdened with so many tangled law suits, that the whole of her remaining means were swallowed up. She was a native of Burgundy. Yielding to her hatred of the Provencals, and laying at their door even the slow paralysis from which she was suffering, she removed to Paris with her son, who then supported her out of a meagre clerk's salary, he himself haunted by the vision of literary glory. As for Dubuche, he was the son of a baker of Plassans. Pushed by his mother, a covetous and ambitious woman, he had joined his friends in Paris later on. He was attending the courses at the School of Arts as a pupil architect, living as best he might upon the last five-franc pieces that his parents staked on his chances, with the obstinacy of usurers discounting the future at the rate of a hundred per cent.

'Dash it!' at last exclaimed Sandoz, breaking the intense silence that hung upon the room. 'This position isn't at all easy; my wrist feels broken. Can I move for a moment?'

Claude let him stretch himself without answering. He was now working at the velveteen jacket, laying on the colour with thick strokes, However, stepping backward and blinking, he suddenly

burst into loud laughter at some reminiscence.

'I say, do you recollect, when we were in the sixth form, how, one day, Pouillaud lighted the candles in that idiot Lalubie's cupboard? And how frightened Lalubie was when, before going to his desk, he opened the cupboard to take his books, and found it transformed into a mortuary chapel? Five hundred lines to every one in the form.'

Sandoz, unable to withstand the contagion of the other's gaiety, flung himself back on the couch. As he resumed his pose, he remarked, 'Ah, that brute of a Pouillaud. You know that in his letter this morning he tells me of Lalubie's forthcoming marriage. The old hack is marrying a pretty girl. But you know her, she's the daughter of Gallissard, the haberdasher – the little fair-haired girl whom we used to serenade!'

Once on the subject of their recollections there was no stopping them, though Claude went on painting with growing feverishness, while Pierre, still turned towards the wall, spoke over his shoulders, shaking every now and then with excitement.

First of all came recollections of the college, the old, dank convent, that extended as far as the town ramparts; the two courtyards with their huge plane trees; the slimy sedge-covered pond, where they had learned to swim, and the class-rooms with dripping plaster walls on the ground floor; then the refectory, with its atmosphere constantly poisoned by the fumes of dish-water; the dormitory of the little ones, famous for its horrors, the linen room, and the infirmary, full of gentle sisters, nuns in black

gowns who looked so sweet beneath their white coifs. What a to-do there had been when Sister Angela, she whose Madonna-like face had turned the heads of all the big fellows, disappeared one morning with Hermeline, a stalwart first-form lad, who, from sheer love, purposely cut his hands with his penknife so as to get an opportunity of seeing and speaking to her while she dressed his self-inflicted injuries with gold-beater's skin.

Then they passed the whole college staff in review; a pitiful, grotesque, and terrible procession it was, with such heads as are seen on meerschaum pipes, and profiles instinct with hatred and suffering. There was the head master, who ruined himself in giving parties, in order to marry his daughters – two tall, elegant girls, the butt of constant and abominable insults, written and sketched on every wall; there was the comptroller Pifard, whose wonderful nose betrayed his presence behind every door, when he went eavesdropping; and there were all the teachers, each befouled with some insulting nickname: the severe 'Rhadamantus,' who had never been seen to smile; 'Filth,' who by the constant rubbing of his head had left his mark on the wall behind every professional seat he occupied; 'Thou-hast-deceived-me-Adele,' the professor of physics, at whom ten generations of schoolboys had tauntingly flung the name of his unfaithful wife. There were others still: Spontini, the ferocious usher, with his Corsican knife, rusty with the blood of three cousins; little Chantecaille, who was so good-natured that he allowed the pupils to smoke when out walking; and also a scullion

and a scullery maid, two ugly creatures who had been nicknamed Paraboulomenos and Paralleluca, and who were accused of kissing one another over the vegetable parings.

Then came comical reminiscences; the sudden recollection of practical jokes, at which they shook with laughter after all those years. Oh! the morning when they had burned the shoes of Mimi-la-Mort, *alias* the Skeleton Day Boarder, a lank lad, who smuggled snuff into the school for the whole of the form. And then that winter evening when they had bagged some matches lying near the lamp in the chapel, in order to smoke dry chestnut leaves in reed pipes. Sandoz, who had been the ringleader on that occasion, now frankly avowed his terror; the cold perspiration that had come upon him when he had scrambled out of the choir, wrapt in darkness. And again there was the day when Claude had hit upon the sublime idea of roasting some cockchafers in his desk to see whether they were good to eat, as people said they were. So terrible had been the stench, so dense the smoke that poured from the desk, that the usher had rushed to the water pitcher, under the impression that the place was on fire. And then their marauding expeditions; the pillaging of onion beds while they were out walking; the stones thrown at windows, the correct thing being to make the breakage resemble a well-known geographical map. Also the Greek exercises, written beforehand in large characters on the blackboard, so that every dunce might easily read them though the master remained unaware of it; the wooden seats of the courtyard sawn off and carried round the

basin like so many corpses, the boys marching in procession and singing funeral dirges. Yes! that had been a capital prank. Dubuche, who played the priest, had tumbled into the basin while trying to scoop some water into his cap, which was to serve as a holy water pot. But the most comical and amusing of all the pranks had perhaps been that devised by Pouillaud, who one night had fastened all the unmentionable crockery of the dormitory to one long string passed under the beds. At dawn – it was the very morning when the long vacation began – he had pulled the string and skedaddled down the three flights of stairs with this frightful tail of crockery bounding and smashing to pieces behind him.

At the recollection of this last incident, Claude remained grinning from ear to ear, his brush suspended in mid-air. 'That brute of a Pouillaud!' he laughed. 'And so he has written to you. What is he doing now?'

'Why, nothing at all, old man,' answered Sandoz, seating himself more comfortably on the cushions. 'His letter is idiotic. He is just finishing his law studies, and he will inherit his father's practice as a solicitor. You ought to see the style he has already assumed – all the idiotic austerity of a philistine, who has turned over a new leaf.'

They were silent once more until Sandoz added, 'You see, old boy, we have been protected against that sort of thing.'

Then they relapsed again into reminiscences, but such as made their hearts thump; the remembrance of the many happy days

they had spent far away from the college, in the open air and the full sunlight. When still very young, and only in the sixth form, the three inseparables had become passionately fond of taking long walks. The shortest holidays were eagerly seized upon to tramp for miles and miles; and, getting bolder as they grew up, they finished by scouring the whole of the country-side, by making journeys that sometimes lasted for days. They slept where they could, in the cleft of a rock, on some threshing-floor, still burning hot, where the straw of the beaten corn made them a soft couch, or in some deserted hut, the ground of which they covered with wild thyme and lavender. Those were flights far from the everyday world, when they became absorbed in healthy mother Nature herself, adoring trees and streams and mountains; revelling in the supreme joy of being alone and free.

Dubuche, who was a boarder, had only joined them on half-holidays and during the long vacation. Besides, his legs were heavy, and he had the quiet nature of a studious lad. But Claude and Sandoz never wearied; they awakened each other every Sunday morning by throwing stones at their respective shutters. In summer, above all, they were haunted by the thought of the Viorne, the torrent, whose tiny stream waters the low-lying pastures of Plassans. When scarcely twelve they already knew how to swim, and it became a passion with them to potter about in the holes where the water accumulated; to spend whole days there, stark naked, drying themselves on the burning sand, and then replunging into the river, living there as it were, on their

backs, on their stomachs, searching among the reeds on the banks, immersed up to their ears, and watching the hiding-places of the eels for hours at a stretch. That constant contact of water beneath a burning sun prolonged their childhood, as it were, and lent them the joyous laughter of truant urchins, though they were almost young men, when of an evening they returned to the town amidst the still oppressive heat of a summer sunset. Later on they became very fond of shooting, but shooting such as is carried on in a region devoid of game, where they had to trudge a score of miles to pick off half a dozen pettychaps, or fig-peckers; wonderful expeditions, whence they returned with their bags empty, or with a mere bat, which they had managed to bring down while discharging their guns at the outskirts of the town. Their eyes moistened at the recollection of those happy days; they once more beheld the white endless roads, covered with layers of dust, as if there had been a fall of snow. They paced them again and again in their imagination, happy to hear the fancied creaking of their heavy shoes. Then they cut across the fields, over the reddish-brown ferruginous soil, careering madly on and on; and there was a sky of molten lead above them, not a shadow anywhere, nothing but dwarf olive trees and almond trees with scanty foliage. And then the delicious drowsiness of fatigue on their return, their triumphant bravado at having covered yet more ground than on the precious journey, the delight of being no longer conscious of effort, of advancing solely by dint of strength acquired, spurring themselves on with some terrible

martial strain which helped to make everything like a dream.

Already at that time Claude, in addition to his powder-flask and cartridge-belt, took with him an album, in which he sketched little bits of country, while Sandoz, on his side, always had some favourite poet in his pocket. They lived in a perfect frenzy of romanticism, winged strophes alternated with coarse garrison stories, odes were flung upon the burning, flashing, luminous atmosphere that enwrapt them. And when perchance they came upon a small rivulet, bordered by half a dozen willows, casting grey shadows on the soil all ablaze with colour, they at once went into the seventh heaven. They there by themselves performed the dramas they knew by heart, inflating their voices when repeating the speeches of the heroes, and reducing them to the merest whisper when they replied as queens and love-sick maidens. On such days the sparrows were left in peace. In that remote province, amidst the sleepy stupidity of that small town, they had thus lived on from the age of fourteen, full of enthusiasm, devoured by a passion for literature and art. The magnificent scenarios devised by Victor Hugo, the gigantic phantasies which fought therein amidst a ceaseless cross-fire of antithesis, had at first transported them into the fulness of epic glory; gesticulating, watching the sun decline behind some ruins, seeing life pass by amidst all the superb but false glitter of a fifth act. Then Musset had come to unman them with his passion and his tears; they heard their own hearts throb in response to his, a new world opened to them – a world more human – that conquered them

by its cries for pity, and of eternal misery, which henceforth they were to hear rising from all things. Besides, they were not difficult to please; they showed the voracity of youth, a furious appetite for all kinds of literature, good and bad alike. So eager were they to admire something, that often the most execrable works threw them into a state of exaltation similar to that which the purest masterpieces produce.

And as Sandoz now remarked, it was their great love of bodily exercise, their very revels of literature that had protected them against the numbing influence of their ordinary surroundings. They never entered a cafe, they had a horror of the streets, even pretending to moult in them like caged eagles, whereas their schoolfellows were already rubbing their elbows over the small marble tables and playing at cards for drinks. Provincial life, which dragged other lads, when still young, within its cogged mechanism, that habit of going to one's club, of spelling out the local paper from its heading to the last advertisement, the everlasting game of dominoes no sooner finished than renewed, the same walk at the self-same hour and ever along the same roads – all that brutifies the mind, like a grindstone crushing the brain, filled them with indignation, called forth their protestations. They preferred to scale the neighbouring hills in search of some unknown solitary spot, where they declaimed verses even amidst drenching showers, without dreaming of shelter in their very hatred of town-life. They had even planned an encampment on the banks of the Viorne, where they were to

live like savages, happy with constant bathing, and the company of five or six books, which would amply suffice for their wants. Even womankind was to be strictly banished from that camp. Being very timid and awkward in the presence of the gentler sex, they pretended to the asceticism of superior intellects. For two years Claude had been in love with a 'prentice hat-trimmer, whom every evening he had followed at a distance, but to whom he had never dared to address a word. Sandoz nursed dreams of ladies met while travelling, beautiful girls who would suddenly spring up in some unknown wood, charm him for a whole day, and melt into air at dusk. The only love adventure which they had ever met with still evoked their laughter, so silly did it seem to them now. It consisted of a series of serenades which they had given to two young ladies during the time when they, the serenaders, had formed part of the college band. They passed their nights beneath a window playing the clarinet and the cornet-a-piston, and thus raising a discordant din which frightened all the folk of the neighbourhood, until one memorable evening the indignant parents had emptied all the water pitchers of the family over them.

Ah! those were happy days, and how loving was the laughter with which they recalled them. On the walls of the studio hung a series of sketches, which Claude, it so happened, had made during a recent trip southward. Thus it seemed as if they were surrounded by the familiar vistas of bright blue sky overhanging a tawny country-side. Here stretched a plain dotted with little

greyish olive trees as far as a rosy network of distant hills. There, between sunburnt russet slopes, the exhausted Viorne was almost running dry beneath the span of an old dust-bepowdered bridge, without a bit of green, nothing save a few bushes, dying for want of moisture. Farther on, the mountain gorge of the Infernets showed its yawning chasm amidst tumbled rocks, struck down by lightning, a huge chaos, a wild desert, rolling stony billows as far as the eye could reach. Then came all sorts of well remembered nooks: the valley of Repentance, narrow and shady, a refreshing oasis amid calcined fields; the wood of Les Trois Bons-Dieux, with hard, green, varnished pines shedding pitchy tears beneath the burning sun; the sheep walk of Bouffan, showing white, like a mosque, amidst a far-stretching blood-red plain. And there were yet bits of blinding, sinuous roads; ravines, where the heat seemed even to wring bubbling perspiration from the pebbles; stretches of arid, thirsty sand, drinking up rivers drop by drop; mole hills, goat paths, and hill crests, half lost in the azure sky.

'Hallo!' exclaimed Sandoz, turning towards one sketch, 'what's that?'

Claude, indignant, waved his palette. 'What! don't you remember? We were very nigh breaking our necks there. Surely you recollect the day we clambered from the very bottom of Jaumegarde with Dubuche? The rock was as smooth as your hand, and we had to cling to it with our nails, so that at one moment we could neither get up nor go down again. When we were once atop and about to cook our cutlets, we, you and I,

nearly came to blows.'

Sandoz now remembered. 'Yes, yes; each had to roast his own cutlet on rosemary sticks, and, as mine took fire, you exasperated me by chaffing my cutlet, which was being reduced to cinders.'

They both shook with laughter, until the painter resumed his work, gravely concluding, 'That's all over, old man. There is to be no more idling at present.'

He spoke the truth. Since the three inseparables had realised their dream of meeting together in Paris, which they were bent upon conquering, their life had been terribly hard. They had tried to renew the long walks of old. On certain Sunday mornings they had started on foot from the Fontainebleau gate, had scoured the copses of Verrieres, gone as far as the Bievre, crossed the woods of Meudon and Bellevue, and returned home by way of Grenelle. But they taxed Paris with spoiling their legs; they scarcely ever left the pavement now, entirely taken up as they were with their struggle for fortune and fame.

From Monday morning till Saturday night Sandoz sat fuming and fretting at the municipal building of the fifth Arrondissement in a dark corner of the registry office for births, rooted to his stool by the thought of his mother, whom his salary of a hundred and fifty francs a month helped in some fashion to keep. Dubuche, anxious to pay his parents the interest of the money placed on his head, was ever on the look-out for some petty jobs among architects, outside his studies at the School of Arts. As for Claude, thanks to his thousand francs a year, he had his full

liberty; but the latter days of each month were terrible enough, especially if he had to share the fag-end of his allowance. Luckily he was beginning to sell a little; disposing of tiny canvases, at the rate of ten and twelve francs a-piece, to Papa Malgras, a wary picture dealer. After all, he preferred starvation to turning his art into mere commerce by manufacturing portraits of tradesmen and their wives; concocting conventional religious pictures or daubing blinds for restaurants or sign-boards for accoucheuses. When first he had returned to Paris, he had rented a very large studio in the Impasse des Bourdonnais; but he had moved to the Quai de Bourbon from motives of economy. He lived there like a savage, with an absolute contempt for everything that was not painting. He had fallen out with his relatives, who disgusted him; he had even ceased visiting his aunt, who kept a pork-butcher's shop near the Central Markets, because she looked too flourishing and plump.[5] Respecting the downfall of his mother, who was being eaten out of doors and driven into the streets, he nursed a secret grief.

Suddenly he shouted to Sandoz, 'Will you be kind enough not to tumble to pieces?' But Sandoz declared that he was getting stiff, and jumped from the couch to stretch his legs a bit. They took ten minutes' rest, talking meanwhile about many things. Claude felt condescendingly good-tempered. When his work went smoothly he brightened up and became talkative; he, who

[5] This aunt is Lisa of 'The Fat and the Thin' (Le Ventre de Paris) in a few chapters of which Claude figures. – ED.

painted with his teeth set, and raged inwardly directly he felt that nature was escaping him. Hence his friend had scarcely resumed his attitude before he went on chattering, without, however, missing a stroke of his brush.

'It's going on all right, old boy, isn't it? You look all there in it. Oh, the brutes, I'll just see whether they'll refuse me this time. I am more severe for myself than they are for themselves, I'm sure of it; and whenever I pass one of my own pictures, it's more serious than if it had passed before all the hanging committees on earth. You know my picture of the markets, with the two urchins tumbling about on a heap of vegetables? Well, I've scratched it all out, it didn't come right. I found that I had got hold of a beastly machine,[6] a deal too heavy for my strength. But, never you fear, I'll take the subject up again some day, when I know better, and I'll take up others, machines which will knock them all cock-a-hoop with surprise.'

He made a magnificent gesture, as if to sweep a whole crowd away; emptied a tube of cobalt on his palette; and then began to jeer, asking what his first master would say to a picture like this? His first master indeed, Papa Belloque, a retired infantry captain, with one arm, who for a quarter of a century had taught drawing to the youth of Plassans in one of the galleries of the Museum! Then, in Paris, hadn't the celebrated Berthou, the painter of 'Nero in the Circus' – Berthou, whose lessons he had attended

[6] In familiar conversation, French artists, playwrights, and novelists invariably call their productions by the slang term 'machines.' – ED.

for six long months – told him a score of times that he would never be able to do anything? How he now regretted those six months wasted in idiotic efforts, absurd 'studies,' under the iron rule of a man whose ideas differed so much from his own. He at last began to hold forth against working at the Louvre. He would, he said, sooner chop his hand off than return there to spoil his perception of nature by undertaking one of those copies which for ever dim the vision of the world in which one lives.

Was there aught else in art than the rendering of what one felt within oneself? Was not the whole of art reduced to placing a woman in front of one – and then portraying her according to the feelings that she inspired? Was not a bunch of carrots – yes, a bunch of carrots – studied from nature, and painted unaffectedly, in a personal style, worth all the everlasting smudges of the School of Arts, all that tobacco-juice painting, cooked up according to certain given recipes? The day would come when one carrot, originally rendered, would lead to a revolution. It was because of this that he now contented himself with going to the Boutin studio, a free studio, kept by a former model, in the Rue de la Huchette. When he had paid his twenty francs he was put in front of as many men and women as he cared for, and set about his work with a will, never thinking of eating or drinking, but struggling unrestingly with nature, mad almost with the excitement of work, by the side of a pack of dandies who accused him of ignorant laziness, and arrogantly prated about their 'studies,' because they copied noses and mouths, under the

eye of a master.

'Listen to this, old man: when one of those whipper-snappers can build up a torso like that one over yonder, he may come up and tell me, and we'll have a talk together.'

With the end of his brush he pointed to a study of the nude, suspended from the wall near the door. It was really magnificent, full of masterly breadth of colouring. By its side were some other admirable bits, a girl's feet exquisite in their delicate truthfulness, and a woman's trunk with quivering satin-like skin. In his rare moments of content he felt proud of those few studies, the only ones which satisfied him, which, as it were, foretold a great painter, admirably gifted, but hampered by sudden and inexplicable fits of impotency.

Dealing sabre-like strokes at the velveteen jacket, he continued lashing himself into excitement with his uncompromising theories which respected nobody:

'They are all so many daubers of penny prints, who have stolen their reputations; a set of idiots or knaves on their knees before public imbecility! Not one among them dares to give the philistines a slap in the face. And, while we are about it, you know that old Ingres turns me sick with his glairy painting. Nevertheless, he's a brick, and a plucky fellow, and I take off my hat to him, for he did not care a curse for anybody, and he used to draw like the very devil. He ended by making the idiots, who nowadays believe they understand him, swallow that drawing of his. After him there are only two worth speaking

of, Delacroix and Courbet. The others are only numskulls. Oh, that old romantic lion, the carriage of him! He was a decorator who knew how to make the colours blaze. And what a grasp he had! He would have covered every wall in Paris if they had let him; his palette boiled, and boiled over. I know very well that it was only so much phantasmagoria. Never mind, I like it for all that, as it was needed to set the School on fire. Then came the other, a stout workman – that one, the truest painter of the century, and altogether classical besides, a fact which not one of the dullards understood. They yelled, of course; they shouted about profanation and realism, when, after all, the realism was only in the subject. The perception remained that of the old masters, and the execution resumed and continued the best bits of work one can find in our public galleries. Both Delacroix and Courbet came at the proper time. Each made a stride forward. And now – ah, now!'

He ceased speaking and drew back a few steps to judge of the effect of his picture, becoming absorbed in contemplation for a moment, and then resuming:

'Yes, nowadays we want something different – what, I don't exactly know. If I did, and could do it, I should be clever indeed. No one else would be in the race with me. All I do know and feel is that Delacroix's grand romantic scenes are foundering and splitting, that Courbet's black painting already reeks of the mustiness of a studio which the sun never penetrates. You understand me, don't you? We, perhaps, want the sun, the open

air, a clear, youthful style of painting, men and things such as they appear in the real light. In short, I myself am unable to say what our painting should be; the painting that our eyes of to-day should execute and behold.'

His voice again fell; he stammered and found himself unable to explain the formulas of the future that were rising within him. Deep silence came while he continued working at the velveteen jacket, quivering all the time.

Sandoz had been listening to him without stirring from his position. His back was still turned, and he said slowly, as if speaking to the wall in a kind of dream:

'No; one does not know, and still we ought to know. But each time a professor has wanted to impress a truth upon me, I have mistrustfully revolted, thinking: "He is either deceiving himself or deceiving me." Their ideas exasperate me. It seems to me that truth is larger, more general. How beautiful would it be if one could devote the whole of one's existence to one single work, into which one would endeavour to put everything, the beasts of the field as well as mankind; in short, a kind of immense ark. And not in the order indicated by manuals of philosophy, or according to the idiotic hierarchy on which we pride ourselves, but according to the full current of life; a world in which we should be nothing more than an accident, in which the passing cur, even the stones of the roads, would complete and explain us. In sum, the grand whole, without low or high, or clean or unclean, such as it indeed is in reality. It is certainly to science that poets and novelists

ought to address themselves, for it is the only possible source of inspiration to-day. But what are we to borrow from it? How are we to march in its company? The moment I begin to think about that sort of thing I feel that I am floundering. Ah, if I only knew, what a series of books I would hurl at the heads of the crowd!'

He also became silent. The previous winter he had published his first book: a series of little sketches, brought from Plassans, among which only a few rougher notes indicated that the author was a mutineer, a passionate lover of truth and power. And lately he had been feeling his way, questioning himself while all sorts of confused ideas throbbed in his brain. At first, smitten with the thought of undertaking something herculean, he had planned a genesis of the universe, in three phases or parts; the creation narrated according to science; mankind supervening at the appointed hour and playing its part in the chain of beings and events; then the future – beings constantly following one another, and finishing the creation of the world by the endless labour of life. But he had calmed down in presence of the venturesome hypotheses of this third phase; and he was now looking out for a more restricted, more human framework, in which, however, his vast ambition might find room.

'Ah, to be able to see and paint everything,' exclaimed Claude, after a long interval. 'To have miles upon miles of walls to cover, to decorate the railway stations, the markets, the municipal offices, everything that will be built, when architects are no longer idiots. Only strong heads and strong muscles will be

wanted, for there will be no lack of subjects. Life such as it runs about the streets, the life of the rich and the poor, in the market places, on the race-courses, on the boulevards, in the populous alleys; and every trade being plied, and every passion portrayed in full daylight, and the peasants, too, and the beasts of the fields and the landscapes – ah! you'll see it all, unless I am a downright brute. My very hands are itching to do it. Yes! the whole of modern life! Frescoes as high as the Pantheon! A series of canvases big enough to burst the Louvre!'

Whenever they were thrown together the painter and the author generally reached this state of excitement. They spurred each other mutually, they went mad with dreams of glory; and there was such a burst of youth, such a passion for work about their plans, that they themselves often smiled afterwards at those great, proud dreams which seemed to endow them with suppleness, strength, and spirit.

Claude, who had stepped back as far as the wall, remained leaning against it, and gazing at his work. Seeing which, Sandoz, overcome by fatigue, left the couch and joined him. Then both looked at the picture without saying a word. The gentleman in the velveteen jacket was entirely roughed in. His hand, more advanced than the rest, furnished a pretty fresh patch of flesh colour amid the grass, and the dark coat stood out so vigorously that the little silhouettes in the background, the two little women wrestling in the sunlight, seemed to have retreated further into the luminous quivering of the glade. The principal figure, the

recumbent woman, as yet scarcely more than outlined, floated about like some aerial creature seen in dreams, some eagerly desired Eve springing from the earth, with her features vaguely smiling and her eyelids closed.

'Well, now, what are you going to call it?' asked Sandoz.

'*The Open Air*,' replied Claude, somewhat curtly.

The title sounded rather technical to the writer, who, in spite of himself, was sometimes tempted to introduce literature into pictorial art.

'*The Open Air*! that doesn't suggest anything.'

'There is no occasion for it to suggest anything. Some women and a man are reposing in a forest in the sunlight. Does not that suffice? Don't fret, there's enough in it to make a masterpiece.'

He threw back his head and muttered between his teeth: 'Dash it all! it's very black still. I can't get Delacroix out of my eye, do what I will. And then the hand, that's Courbet's manner. Everyone of us dabs his brush into the romantic sauce now and then. We had too much of it in our youth, we floundered in it up to our very chins. We need a jolly good wash to get clear of it.'

Sandoz shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of despair. He also bewailed the fact that he had been born at what he called the confluence of Hugo and Balzac. Nevertheless, Claude remained satisfied, full of the happy excitement of a successful sitting. If his friend could give him two or three more Sundays the man in the jacket would be all there. He had enough of him for the present. Both began to joke, for, as a rule, Claude almost killed

his models, only letting them go when they were fainting, half dead with fatigue. He himself now very nigh dropped, his legs bending under him, and his stomach empty. And as the cuckoo clock struck five, he snatched at his crust of bread and devoured it. Thoroughly worn out, he broke it with trembling fingers, and scarcely chewed it, again standing before his picture, pursued by his passion to such a degree as to be unconscious even that he was eating.

'Five o'clock,' said Sandoz, as he stretched himself, with his arms upraised. 'Let's go and have dinner. Ah! here comes Dubuche, just in time.'

There was a knock at the door, and Dubuche came in. He was a stout young fellow, dark, with regular but heavy features, close-cropped hair, and moustaches already full-blown. He shook hands with both his friends, and stopped before the picture, looking nonplussed. In reality that harum-scarum style of painting upset him, such was the even balance of his nature, such his reverence as a steady student for the established formulas of art; and it was only his feeling of friendship which, as a rule, prevented him from criticising. But this time his whole being revolted visibly.

'Well, what's the matter? Doesn't it suit you?' asked Sandoz, who was watching him.

'Yes, oh yes, it's very well painted – but – '

'Well, spit it out. What is it that ruffles you?'

'Not much, only the gentleman is fully dressed, and the women

are not. People have never seen anything like that before.'

This sufficed to make both the others wild. Why, were there not a hundred pictures in the Louvre composed in precisely the same way? Hadn't all Paris and all the painters and tourists of the world seen them? And besides, if people had never seen anything like it, they would see it now. After all, they didn't care a fig for the public!

Not in the least disconcerted by these violent replies, Dubuche repeated quietly: 'The public won't understand – the public will think it indecorous – and so it is!'

'You wretched bourgeois philistine!' exclaimed Claude, exasperated. 'They are making a famous idiot of you at the School of Arts. You weren't such a fool formerly.'

These were the current amenities of his two friends since Dubuche had attended the School of Arts. He thereupon beat a retreat, rather afraid of the turn the dispute was taking, and saved himself by belabouring the painters of the School. Certainly his friends were right in one respect, the School painters were real idiots. But as for the architects, that was a different matter. Where was he to get his tuition, if not there? Besides his tuition would not prevent him from having ideas of his own, later on. Wherewith he assumed a very revolutionary air.

'All right,' said Sandoz, 'the moment you apologise, let's go and dine.'

But Claude had mechanically taken up a brush and set to work again. Beside the gentleman in the velveteen jacket the figure of

the recumbent woman seemed to be fading away. Feverish and impatient, he traced a bold outline round her so as to bring her forward.

'Are you coming?'

'In a minute; hang it, what's the hurry? Just let me set this right, and I'll be with you.'

Sandoz shook his head and then remarked very quietly, lest he should still further annoy him: 'You do wrong to worry yourself like that, old man. Yes, you are knocked up, and have had nothing to eat, and you'll only spoil your work, as you did the other day.'

But the painter waved him off with a peevish gesture. It was the old story – he did not know when to leave off; he intoxicated himself with work in his craving for an immediate result, in order to prove to himself that he held his masterpiece at last. Doubts had just driven him to despair in the midst of his delight at having terminated a successful sitting. Had he done right, after all, in making the velveteen jacket so prominent, and would he not afterwards fail to secure the brilliancy which he wished the female figure to show? Rather than remain in suspense he would have dropped down dead on the spot. Feverishly drawing the sketch of Christine's head from the portfolio where he had hidden it, he compared it with the painting on the canvas, assisting himself, as it were, by means of this document derived from life.

'Hallo!' exclaimed Dubuche, 'where did you get that from? Who is it?'

Claude, startled by the questions, did not answer; then, without reflecting, he who usually told them everything, brusquely lied, prompted by a delicate impulse to keep silent respecting the adventure of the night.

'Tell us who it is?' repeated the architect.

'Nobody at all – a model.'

'A model! a very young one, isn't she? She looks very nice. I wish you would give me her address. Not for myself, but for a sculptor I know who's on the look-out for a Psyche. Have you got the address there?'

Thereupon Dubuche turned to a corner of the greyish wall on which the addresses of several models were written in chalk, haphazard. The women particularly left their cards in that way, in awkward, childish handwriting. Zoe Piedefer, 7 Rue Campagne-Premiere, a big brunette, who was getting rather too stout, had scrawled her sign manual right across the names of little Flore Beauchamp, 32 Rue de Laval, and Judith Vaquez, 69 Rue du Rocher, a Jewess, both of whom were too thin.

'I say, have you got the address?' resumed Dubuche.

Then Claude flew into a passion. 'Don't pester me! I don't know and don't care. You're a nuisance, worrying like that just when a fellow wants to work.'

Sandoz had not said a word. Surprised at first, he had soon smiled. He was gifted with more penetration than Dubuche, so he gave him a knowing nod, and they then began to chaff. They begged Claude's pardon; the moment he wanted to keep the

young person for his personal use, they would not ask him to lend her. Ha! ha! the scamp went hunting about for pretty models. And where had he picked up that one?

More and more embarrassed by these remarks, Claude went on fidgetting. 'What a couple of idiots you are!' he exclaimed, 'If you only knew what fools you are making of yourselves. That'll do. You really make me sorry for both of you.'

His voice sounded so stern that they both became silent immediately, while he, after once more scratching out the woman's head, drew it anew and began to paint it in, following his sketch of Christine, but with a feverish, unsteady touch which went at random.

'Just give me another ten minutes, will you?' he repeated. 'I will rough in the shoulders to be ready for to-morrow, and then we'll go down.'

Sandoz and Dubuche, knowing that it was of no use to prevent him from killing himself in this fashion, resigned themselves to the inevitable. The latter lighted his pipe, and flung himself on the couch. He was the only one of the three who smoked; the others had never taken kindly to tobacco, always feeling qualmish after a cigar. And when Dubuche was stretched on his back, his eyes turned towards the clouds of smoke he raised, he began to talk about himself in an interminable monotonous fashion. Ah! that confounded Paris, how one had to work one's fingers to the bone in order to get on. He recalled the fifteen months of apprenticeship he had spent with his master, the celebrated

Dequersonniere, a former grand-prize man, now architect of the Civil Branch of Public Works, an officer of the Legion of Honour and a member of the Institute, whose chief architectural performance, the church of St. Mathieu, was a cross between a pastry-cook's mould and a clock in the so-called First Empire style. A good sort of fellow, after all, was this Dequersonniere whom Dubuche chaffed, while inwardly sharing his reverence for the old classical formulas. However, but for his fellow-pupils, the young man would not have learnt much at the studio in the Rue du Four, for the master only paid a running visit to the place some three times a week. A set of ferocious brutes, were those comrades of his, who had made his life jolly hard in the beginning, but who, at least, had taught him how to prepare a surface, outline, and wash in a plan. And how often had he had to content himself with a cup of chocolate and a roll for dejeuner in order to pay the necessary five-and-twenty francs to the superintendent! And the sheets of paper he had laboriously smudged, and the hours he had spent in poring over books before he had dared to present himself at the School! And he had narrowly escaped being plucked in spite of all his assiduous endeavours. He lacked imagination, and the drawings he submitted, a caryatide and a summer dining-room, both extremely mediocre performances, had classed him at the bottom of the list. Fortunately, he had made up for this in his oral examination with his logarithms, geometry, and history of architecture, for he was very strong in the scientific parts. Now

that he was attending the School as a second-class student, he had to toil and moil in order to secure a first-class diploma. It was a dog's life, there was no end to it, said he.

He stretched his legs apart, high upon the cushions, and smoked vigorously and regularly.

'What with their courses of perspective, of descriptive geometry, of stereotomy, of building, and of the history of art – ah! upon my word, they do make one blacken paper with notes. And every month there is a competitive examination in architecture, sometimes a simple sketch, at others a complete design. There's no time for pleasure if a fellow wishes to pass his examinations and secure the necessary honourable mentions, especially if, besides all that, he has to find time to earn his bread. As for myself, it's almost killing me.'

One of the cushions having slipped upon the floor, he fished it up with his feet. 'All the same, I'm lucky. There are so many of us scouring the town every day without getting the smallest job. The day before yesterday I discovered an architect who works for a large contractor. You can have no idea of such an ignoramus of an architect – a downright numskull, incapable even of tracing a plan. He gives me twenty-five sous an hour, and I set his houses straight for him. It came just in time, too, for my mother sent me word that she was quite cleared out. Poor mother, what a lot of money I have to refund her!'

As Dubuche was evidently talking to himself, chewing the cud of his everyday thoughts – his constant thoughts of making a

rapid fortune – Sandoz did not even trouble to listen to him. He had opened the little window, and seated himself on a level with the roof, for he felt oppressed by the heat in the studio. But all at once he interrupted the architect.

'I say, are you coming to dinner on Thursday? All the other fellows will be there – Fagerolles, Mahoudeau, Jory, Gagniere.'

Every Thursday, quite a band met at Sandoz's: friends from Plassans and others met in Paris – revolutionaries to a man, and all animated by the same passionate love of art.

'Next Thursday? No, I think not,' answered Dubuche.

'I am obliged to go to a dance at a family's I know.'

'Where you expect to get hold of a dowry, I suppose?'

'Well, it wouldn't be such a bad spec.'

He shook the ashes from his pipe on to his left palm, and then, suddenly raising his voice – 'I almost forgot. I have had a letter from Pouillaud.'

'You, too! – well, I think he's pretty well done for, Pouillaud. Another good fellow gone wrong.'

'Why gone wrong? He'll succeed his father; he'll spend his money quietly down there. He writes rationally enough. I always said he'd show us a thing or two, in spite of all his practical jokes. Ah! that beast of a Pouillaud.'

Sandoz, furious, was about to reply, when a despairing oath from Claude stopped him. The latter had not opened his lips since he had so obstinately resumed his work. To all appearance he had not even listened.

'Curse it – I have failed again. Decidedly, I'm a brute, I shall never do anything.' And in a fit of mad rage he wanted to rush at his picture and dash his fist through it. His friends had to hold him back. Why, it was simply childish to get into such a passion. Would matters be improved when, to his mortal regret, he had destroyed his work? Still shaking, he relapsed into silence, and stared at the canvas with an ardent fixed gaze that blazed with all the horrible agony born of his powerlessness. He could no longer produce anything clear or life-like; the woman's breast was growing pasty with heavy colouring; that flesh which, in his fancy, ought to have glowed, was simply becoming grimy; he could not even succeed in getting a correct focus. What on earth was the matter with his brain that he heard it bursting asunder, as it were, amidst his vain efforts? Was he losing his sight that he was no longer able to see correctly? Were his hands no longer his own that they refused to obey him? And thus he went on winding himself up, irritated by the strange hereditary lesion which sometimes so greatly assisted his creative powers, but at others reduced him to a state of sterile despair, such as to make him forget the first elements of drawing. Ah, to feel giddy with vertiginous nausea, and yet to remain there full of a furious passion to create, when the power to do so fled with everything else, when everything seemed to founder around him – the pride of work, the dreamt-of glory, the whole of his existence!

'Look here, old boy,' said Sandoz at last, 'we don't want to worry you, but it's half-past six, and we are starving. Be

reasonable, and come down with us.'

Claude was cleaning a corner of his palette. Then he emptied some more tubes on it, and, in a voice like thunder, replied with one single word, 'No.'

For the next ten minutes nobody spoke; the painter, beside himself, wrestled with his picture, whilst his friends remained anxious at this attack, which they did not know how to allay. Then, as there came a knock at the door, the architect went to open it.

'Hallo, it's Papa Malgras.'

Malgras, the picture-dealer, was a thick-set individual, with close-cropped, brush-like, white hair, and a red splotchy face. He was wrapped in a very dirty old green coat, that made him look like an untidy cabman. In a husky voice, he exclaimed: 'I happened to pass along the quay, on the other side of the way, and I saw that gentleman at the window. So I came up.'

Claude's continued silence made him pause. The painter had turned to his picture again with an impatient gesture. Not that this silence in any way embarrassed the new comer, who, standing erect on his sturdy legs and feeling quite at home, carefully examined the new picture with his bloodshot eyes. Without any ceremony, he passed judgment upon it in one phrase – half ironic, half affectionate: 'Well, well, there's a machine.'

Then, seeing that nobody said anything, he began to stroll round the studio, looking at the paintings on the walls.

Papa Malgras, beneath his thick layer of grease and grime,

was really a very cute customer, with taste and scent for good painting. He never wasted his time or lost his way among mere daubers; he went straight, as if from instinct, to individualists, whose talent was contested still, but whose future fame his flaming, drunkard's nose sniffed from afar. Added to this he was a ferocious hand at bargaining, and displayed all the cunning of a savage in his efforts to secure, for a song, the pictures that he coveted. True, he himself was satisfied with very honest profits, twenty per cent., thirty at the most. He based his calculations on quickly turning over his small capital, never purchasing in the morning without knowing where to dispose of his purchase at night. As a superb liar, moreover, he had no equal.

Pausing near the door, before the studies from the nude, painted at the Boutin studio, he contemplated them in silence for a few moments, his eyes glistening the while with the enjoyment of a connoisseur, which his heavy eyelids tried to hide. Assuredly, he thought, there was a great deal of talent and sentiment of life about that big crazy fellow Claude, who wasted his time in painting huge stretches of canvas which no one would buy. The girl's pretty legs, the admirably painted woman's trunk, filled the dealer with delight. But there was no sale for that kind of stuff, and he had already made his choice – a tiny sketch, a nook of the country round Plassans, at once delicate and violent – which he pretended not to notice. At last he drew near, and said, in an off-hand way:

'What's this? Ah! yes, I know, one of the things you brought

back with you from the South. It's too crude. I still have the two I bought of you.'

And he went on in mellow, long-winded phrases. 'You'll perhaps not believe me, Monsieur Lantier, but that sort of thing doesn't sell at all – not at all. I've a set of rooms full of them. I'm always afraid of smashing something when I turn round. I can't go on like that, honour bright; I shall have to go into liquidation, and I shall end my days in the hospital. You know me, eh? my heart is bigger than my pocket, and there's nothing I like better than to oblige young men of talent like yourself. Oh, for the matter of that, you've got talent, and I keep on telling them so – nay, shouting it to them – but what's the good? They won't nibble, they won't nibble!'

He was trying the emotional dodge; then, with the spirit of a man about to do something rash: 'Well, it sha'n't be said that I came in to waste your time. What do you want for that rough sketch?'

Claude, still irritated, was painting nervously. He dryly answered, without even turning his head: 'Twenty francs.'

'Nonsense; twenty francs! you must be mad. You sold me the others ten francs a-piece – and to-day I won't give a copper more than eight francs.'

As a rule the painter closed with him at once, ashamed and humbled at this miserable chaffering, glad also to get a little money now and then. But this time he was obstinate, and took to insulting the picture-dealer, who, giving tit for tat, all at once

dropped the formal 'you' to assume the glib 'thou,' denied his talent, overwhelmed him with invective, and taxed him with ingratitude. Meanwhile, however, he had taken from his pocket three successive five-franc pieces, which, as if playing at chuck-farthing, he flung from a distance upon the table, where they rattled among the crockery.

'One, two, three – not one more, dost hear? for there is already one too many, and I'll take care to get it back; I'll deduct it from something else of thine, as I live. Fifteen francs for that! Thou art wrong, my lad, and thou'lt be sorry for this dirty trick.'

Quite exhausted, Claude let him take down the little canvas, which disappeared as if by magic in his capacious green coat. Had it dropped into a special pocket, or was it reposing on Papa Malgras' ample chest? Not the slightest protuberance indicated its whereabouts.

Having accomplished his stroke of business, Papa Malgras abruptly calmed down and went towards the door. But he suddenly changed his mind and came back. 'Just listen, Lantier,' he said, in the honeyest of tones; 'I want a lobster painted. You really owe me that much after fleecing me. I'll bring you the lobster, you'll paint me a bit of still life from it, and keep it for your pains. You can eat it with your friends. It's settled, isn't it?'

At this proposal Sandoz and Dubuche, who had hitherto listened inquisitively, burst into such loud laughter that the picture-dealer himself became gay. Those confounded painters, they did themselves no good, they simply starved. What would

have become of the lazy beggars if he, Papa Malgras, hadn't brought a leg of mutton now and then, or a nice fresh plaice, or a lobster, with its garnish of parsley?

'You'll paint me my lobster, eh, Lantier? Much obliged.' And he stationed himself anew before the large canvas, with his wonted smile of mingled derision and admiration. And at last he went off, repeating, 'Well, well, there's a machine.'

Claude wanted to take up his palette and brushes once more. But his legs refused their service; his arms fell to his side, stiff, as if pinioned there by some occult force. In the intense melancholy silence that had followed the din of the dispute he staggered, distracted, bereft of sight before his shapeless work.

'I'm done for, I'm done for,' he gasped. 'That brute has finished me off!'

The clock had just struck seven; he had been at work for eight mortal hours without tasting anything but a crust of bread, without taking a moment's rest, ever on his legs, shaken by feverish excitement. And now the sun was setting, shadows began to darken the studio, which in the gloaming assumed a most melancholy aspect. When the light went down like this on the crisis of a bad day's work, it seemed to Claude as if the sun would never rise again, but had for ever carried life and all the jubilant gaiety of colour away.

'Come,' implored Sandoz, with all the gentleness of brotherly compassion. 'Come, there's a good fellow.'

Even Dubuche added, 'You'll see more clearly into it to-

morrow. Come and dine.'

For a moment Claude refused to surrender. He stood rooted to the spot, deaf to their friendly voices, and fiercely obstinate.

What did he want to do then, since his tired fingers were no longer able to grasp the brush? He did not know, but, however powerless he might be, he was gnawed by a mad craving to go on working still and to create in spite of everything. Even if he did nothing, he would at least stay there, he would not vacate the spot. All at once, however, he made up his mind, shaken the while as by a big sob. He clutched firmly hold of his broadest palette-knife, and, with one deep, slow sweep, he obliterated the woman's head and bosom. It was veritable murder, a pounding away of human flesh; the whole disappeared in a murky, muddy mash. By the side of the gentleman in the dark jacket, amidst the bright verdure, where the two little wrestlers so lightly tinted were disporting themselves, there remained naught of the nude, headless, breastless woman but a mutilated trunk, a vague cadaverous stump, an indistinct, lifeless patch of visionary flesh.

Sandoz and Dubuche were already descending the stairs with a great clatter, and Claude followed them, fleeing his work, in agony at having to leave it thus scarred with a gaping gash.

III

THE beginning of the week proved disastrous to Claude. He had relapsed into one of those periods of self-doubt that made him hate painting, with the hatred of a lover betrayed, who overwhelms the faithless one with insults although tortured by an uncontrollable desire to worship her yet again. So on the Thursday, after three frightful days of fruitless and solitary battling, he left home as early as eight in the morning, banging his door violently, and feeling so disgusted with himself that he swore he would never take up a brush again. When he was unhinged by one of these attacks there was but one remedy, he had to forget himself, and, to do so, it was needful that he should look up some comrades with whom to quarrel, and, above all, walk about and trudge across Paris, until the heat and odour of battle rising from her paving-stones put heart into him again.

That day, like every other Thursday, he was to dine at Sandoz's, in company with their friends. But what was he to do until the evening? The idea of remaining by himself, of eating his heart out, disgusted him. He would have gone straight to his friend, only he knew that the latter must be at his office. Then the thought of Dubuche occurred to him, but he hesitated, for their old friendship had lately been cooling down. He felt that the fraternity of the earlier times of effort no longer existed between them. He guessed that Dubuche lacked intelligence, had become

covertly hostile, and was occupied with ambitions different from his own. However, he, Claude, must go somewhere. So he made up his mind, and repaired to the Rue Jacob, where the architect rented a small room on the sixth floor of a big frigid-looking house.

Claude was already on the landing of the second floor, when the doorkeeper, calling him back, snappishly told him that M. Dubuche was not at home, and had, in fact, stayed out all night. The young man slowly descended the stairs and found himself in the street, stupefied, as it were, by so prodigious an event as an escapade on the part of Dubuche. It was a piece of inconceivable bad luck. For a moment he strolled along aimlessly; but, as he paused at the corner of the Rue de Seine, not knowing which way to go, he suddenly recollected what his friend had told him about a certain night spent at the Dequersonniere studio – a night of terrible hard work, the eve of the day on which the pupils' designs had to be deposited at the School of Arts. At once he walked towards the Rue du Four, where the studio was situated. Hitherto he had carefully abstained from calling there for Dubuche, from fear of the yells with which outsiders were greeted. But now he made straight for the place without flinching, his timidity disappearing so thoroughly before the anguish of loneliness that he felt ready to undergo any amount of insult could he but secure a companion in misfortune.

The studio was situated in the narrowest part of the Rue du Four, at the far end of a decrepit, tumble-down building.

Claude had to cross two evil-smelling courtyards to reach a third, across which ran a sort of big closed shed, a huge out-house of board and plaster work, which had once served as a packing-case maker's workshop. From outside, through the four large windows, whose panes were daubed with a coating of white lead, nothing could be seen but the bare whitewashed ceiling.

Having pushed the door open, Claude remained motionless on the threshold. The place stretched out before him, with its four long tables ranged lengthwise to the windows – broad double tables they were, which had swarms of students on either side, and were littered with moist sponges, paint saucers, iron candlesticks, water bowls, and wooden boxes, in which each pupil kept his white linen blouse, his compasses, and colours. In one corner, the stove, neglected since the previous winter, stood rusting by the side of a pile of coke that had not been swept away; while at the other end a large iron cistern with a tap was suspended between two towels. And amidst the bare untidiness of this shed, the eye was especially attracted by the walls which, above, displayed a litter of plaster casts ranged in haphazard fashion on shelves, and disappeared lower down behind forests of T-squares and bevels, and piles of drawing boards, tied together with webbing straps. Bit by bit, such parts of the partitions as had remained unoccupied had become covered with inscriptions and drawings, a constantly rising flotsam and jetsam of scrawls traced there as on the margin of an ever-open book. There were caricatures of the students themselves, coarse witticisms fit to

make a gendarme turn pale, epigrammatic sentences, addition sums, addresses, and so forth; while, above all else, written in big letters, and occupying the most prominent place, appeared this inscription: 'On the 7th of June, Gorfu declared that he didn't care a hang for Rome. – Signed, Godemard.'[7]

Claude was greeted with a growl like that of wild beasts disturbed in their lair. What kept him motionless was the strange aspect of this place on the morning of the 'truck night,' as the embryo architects termed the crucial night of labour. Since the previous evening, the whole studio, some sixty pupils, had been shut up there; those who had no designs to exhibit – 'the niggers,' as they were called remaining to help the others, the competitors who, being behind time, had to knock off the work of a week in a dozen hours. Already, at midnight, they had stuffed themselves with brawn, saveloys, and similar viands, washed down with cheap wine. Towards one o'clock they had secured the company of some 'ladies'; and, without the work abating, the feast had turned into a Roman orgy, blended with a smoking competition. On the damp, stained floor there remained a great litter of greasy paper and broken bottles; while the atmosphere reeked of burnt tallow, musk, highly seasoned sausages, and cheap bluish wine.

And now many voices savagely yelled: 'Turn him out. Oh, that mug! What does he want, that guy? Turn him out, turn him out.'

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[7] The allusion is to the French Art School at Rome, and the competitions into which students enter to obtain admission to it, or to secure the prizes offered for the best exhibits which, during their term of residence, they send to Paris. – ED.

For a moment Claude, quite dazed, staggered beneath the violence of the onslaught. But the epithets became viler, for the acme of elegance, even for the more refined among these young fellows, was to rival one's friends in beastly language. He was, nevertheless, recovering and beginning to answer, when Dubuche recognised him. The latter turned crimson, for he detested that kind of adventure. He felt ashamed of his friend, and rushed towards him, amidst the jeers, which were now levelled at himself:

'What, is it you?' he gasped. 'I told you never to come in. Just wait for me a minute in the yard.'

At that moment, Claude, who was stepping back, narrowly escaped being knocked down by a little hand-truck which two big full-bearded fellows brought up at a gallop. It was from this truck that the night of heavy toil derived its name: and for the last week the students who had got behindhand with their work, through taking up petty paid jobs outside, had been repeating the cry, 'Oh! I'm in the truck and no mistake.' The moment the vehicle appeared, a clamour arose. It was a quarter to nine o'clock, there was barely time to reach the School of Arts. However, a helter-skelter rush emptied the studio; each brought out his chases, amidst a general jostling; those who obstinately wished to give their designs a last finishing touch were knocked about and carried away with their comrades. In less than five minutes every frame was piled upon the truck, and the two bearded fellows, the most recent additions to the studio, harnessed themselves to

it like cattle and drew it along with all their strength, the others vociferating, and pushing from behind. It was like the rush of a sluice; the three courtyards were crossed amidst a torrential crash, and the street was invaded, flooded by the howling throng.

Claude, nevertheless, had set up running by the side of Dubuche, who came at the fag-end, very vexed at not having had another quarter of an hour to finish a tinted drawing more carefully.

'What are you going to do afterwards?' asked Claude.

'Oh! I've errands which will take up my whole day.'

The painter was grieved to see that even this friend escaped him. 'All right, then,' said he; 'in that case I leave you. Shall we see you at Sandoz's to-night?'

'Yes, I think so; unless I'm kept to dinner elsewhere.'

Both were getting out of breath. The band of embryo architects, without slackening their pace, had purposely taken the longest way round for the pleasure of prolonging their uproar. After rushing down the Rue du Four, they dashed across the Place Gozlin and swept into the Rue de l'Echaude. Heading the procession was the truck, drawn and pushed along more and more vigorously, and constantly rebounding over the rough paving-stones, amid the jolting of the frames with which it was laden. Its escort galloped along madly, compelling the passers-by to draw back close to the houses in order to save themselves from being knocked down; while the shop-keepers, standing open-mouthed on their doorsteps, believed in a revolution. The whole

neighbourhood seemed topsy-turvy. In the Rue Jacob, such was the rush, so frightful were the yells, that several house shutters were hastily closed. As the Rue Bonaparte was, at last, being reached, one tall, fair fellow thought it a good joke to catch hold of a little servant girl who stood bewildered on the pavement, and drag her along with them, like a wisp of straw caught in a torrent.

'Well,' said Claude, 'good-bye, then; I'll see you to-night.'

'Yes, to-night.'

The painter, out of breath, had stopped at the corner of the Rue des Beaux Arts. The court gates of the Art School stood wide open in front of him, and the procession plunged into the yard.

After drawing breath, Claude retraced his steps to the Rue de Seine. His bad luck was increasing; it seemed ordained that he should not be able to beguile a chum from work that morning. So he went up the street, and slowly walked on as far as the Place du Pantheon, without any definite aim. Then it occurred to him that he might just look into the Municipal Offices, if only to shake hands with Sandoz. That would, at any rate, mean ten minutes well spent. But he positively gasped when he was told by an attendant that M. Sandoz had asked for a day off to attend a funeral. However, he knew the trick of old. His friend always found the same pretext whenever he wanted to do a good day's work at home. He had already made up his mind to join him there, when a feeling of artistic brotherliness, the scruple of an honest worker, made him pause; yes, it would be a crime

to go and disturb that good fellow, and infect him with the discouragement born of a difficult task, at the very moment when he was, no doubt, manfully accomplishing his own work.

So Claude had to resign himself to his fate. He dragged his black melancholy along the quays until mid-day, his head so heavy, so full of thoughts of his lack of power, that he only espied the well-loved horizons of the Seine through a mist. Then he found himself once more in the Rue de la Femme-sans-Tete, where he breakfasted at Gomard's wine shop, whose sign 'The Dog of Montargis,' inspired him with interest. Some stonemasons, in their working blouses, bespattered with mortar, were there at table, and, like them, and with them, he ate his eight sous' 'ordinary' – some beef broth in a bowl, in which he soaked some bread, followed by a slice of boiled soup-beef, garnished with haricot beans, and served up on a plate damp with dish-water. However, it was still too good, he thought, for a brute unable to earn his bread. Whenever his work miscarried, he undervalued himself, ranked himself lower than a common labourer, whose sinewy arms could at least perform their appointed task. For an hour he lingered in the tavern brutifying himself by listening to the conversation at the tables around him. Once outside he slowly resumed his walk in haphazard fashion.

When he got to the Place de l'Hotel de Ville, however, a fresh idea made him quicken his pace. Why had he not thought of Fagerolles? Fagerolles was a nice fellow, gay, and by no means

a fool, although he studied at the School of Arts. One could talk with him, even when he defended bad painting. If he had lunched at his father's, in the Rue Vieille-du-Temple, he must certainly still be there.

On entering the narrow street, Claude felt a sensation of refreshing coolness come over him. In the sun it had grown very warm, and moisture rose from the pavement, which, however bright the sky, remained damp and greasy beneath the constant tramping of the pedestrians. Every minute, when a push obliged Claude to leave the footwalk, he found himself in danger of being knocked down by trucks or vans. Still the street amused him, with its straggling houses out of line, their flat frontages chequered with signboards up to the very eaves, and pierced with small windows, whence came the hum of every kind of handiwork that can be carried on at home. In one of the narrowest parts of the street a small newspaper shop made him stop. It was betwixt a hairdresser's and a tripeseller's, and had an outdoor display of idiotic prints, romantic balderdash mixed with filthy caricatures fit for a barrack-room. In front of these 'pictures,' a lank hobbledehoy stood lost in reverie, while two young girls nudged each other and jeered. He felt inclined to slap their faces, but he hurried across the road, for Fagerolles' house happened to be opposite. It was a dark old tenement, standing forward from the others, and was bespattered like them with the mud from the gutters. As an omnibus came up, Claude barely had time to jump upon the foot pavement, there reduced to the proportions of a

simple ledge; the wheels brushed against his chest, and he was drenched to his knees.

M. Fagerolles, senior, a manufacturer of artistic zinc-work, had his workshops on the ground floor of the building, and having converted two large front rooms on the first floor into a warehouse, he personally occupied a small, dark, cellar-like apartment overlooking the courtyard. It was there that his son Henri had grown up, like a true specimen of the flora of the Paris streets, at the edge of that narrow pavement constantly struck by the omnibus wheels, always soddened by the gutter water, and opposite the print and newspaper shop, flanked by the barber's and tripeseller's. At first his father had made an ornamental draughtsman of him for personal use. But when the lad had developed higher ambition, taking to painting proper, and talking about the School of Arts, there had been quarrels, blows, a series of separations and reconciliations. Even now, although Henri had already achieved some successes, the manufacturer of artistic zinc-work, while letting him have his will, treated him harshly, like a lad who was spoiling his career.

After shaking off the water, Claude went up the deep archway entrance, to a courtyard, where the light was quite greenish, and where there was a dank, musty smell, like that at the bottom of a tank. There was an overhanging roofing of glass and iron at the foot of the staircase, which was a wide one, with a wrought-iron railing, eaten with rust. As the painter passed the warehouse on the first floor, he glanced through a glass door and noticed

M. Fagerolles examining some patterns. Wishing to be polite, he entered, in spite of the artistic disgust he felt for all that zinc, coloured to imitate bronze, and having all the repulsive mendacious prettiness of spurious art.

'Good morning, monsieur. Is Henri still at home?'

The manufacturer, a stout, sallow-looking man, drew himself straight amidst all his nosegay vases and cruets and statuettes. He had in his hand a new model of a thermometer, formed of a juggling girl who crouched and balanced the glass tube on her nose.

'Henri did not come in to lunch,' he answered drily.

This cool reception upset Claude. 'Ah! he did not come back; I beg pardon for having disturbed you, then. Good-day, monsieur.'

'Good-day.'

Once more outside, Claude began to swear to himself. His ill-luck was complete, Fagerolles escaped him also. He even felt vexed with himself for having gone there, and having taken an interest in that picturesque old street; he was infuriated by the romantic gangrene that ever sprouted afresh within him, do what he might. It was his malady, perhaps, the false principle which he sometimes felt like a bar across his skull. And when he had reached the quays again, he thought of going home to see whether his picture was really so very bad. But the mere idea made him tremble all over. His studio seemed a chamber of horrors, where he could no more continue to live, as if, indeed, he had left the corpse of some beloved being there. No, no; to climb the three

flights of stairs, to open the door, to shut himself up face to face with 'that,' would have needed strength beyond his courage. So he crossed the Seine and went along the Rue St. Jacques. He felt too wretched and lonely; and, come what might, he would go to the Rue d'Enfer to turn Sandoz from his work.

Sandoz's little fourth-floor flat consisted of a dining-room, a bedroom, and a strip of kitchen. It was tenanted by himself alone; his mother, disabled by paralysis, occupied on the other side of the landing a single room, where she lived in morose and voluntary solitude. The street was a deserted one; the windows of the rooms overlooked the gardens of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, above which rose the rounded crest of a lofty tree, and the square tower of St. Jacques-du-Haut-Pas.

Claude found Sandoz in his room, bending over his table, busy with a page of 'copy.'

'I am disturbing you?' said Claude.

'Not at all. I have been working ever since morning, and I've had enough of it. I've been killing myself for the last hour over a sentence that reads anyhow, and which has worried me all through my lunch.'

The painter made a gesture of despair, and the other, seeing him so gloomy, at once understood matters.

'You don't get on either, eh? Well, let's go out. A sharp walk will take a little of the rust off us. Shall we go?'

As he was passing the kitchen, however, an old woman stopped him. It was his charwoman, who, as a rule, came only

for two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. On Thursdays, however, she remained the whole afternoon in order to look after the dinner.

'Then it's decided, monsieur?' she asked. 'It's to be a piece of skate and a leg of mutton, with potatoes.'

'Yes, if you like.'

'For how many am I to lay the cloth?'

'Oh! as for that, one never knows. Lay for five, at any rate; we'll see afterwards. Dinner at seven, eh? we'll try to be home by then.'

When they were on the landing, Sandoz, leaving Claude to wait for him, stole into his mother's room. When he came out again, in the same discreet affectionate manner, they both went downstairs in silence. Outside, having sniffed to right and left, as if to see which way the wind blew, they ended by going up the street, reached the Place de l'Observatoire, and turned down the Boulevard du Montparnasse. This was their ordinary promenade; they reached the spot instinctively, being fond of the wide expanse of the outer boulevards, where they could roam and lounge at ease. They continued silent, for their heads were heavy still, but the comfort of being together gradually made them more serene. Still it was only when they were opposite the Western Railway Station that Sandoz spoke.

'I say, suppose we go to Mahoudeau's, to see how he's getting on with his big machine. I know that he has given "his gods and saints" the slip to-day.'

'All right,' answered Claude. 'Let's go to Mahoudeau's.'

They at once turned into the Rue du Cherche-Midi. There, at a few steps from the boulevard, Mahoudeau, a sculptor, had rented the shop of a fruiterer who had failed in business, and he had installed his studio therein, contenting himself with covering the windows with a layer of whitening. At this point, the street, wide and deserted, has a quiet, provincial aspect, with a somewhat ecclesiastical touch. Large gateways stand wide open showing a succession of deep roomy yards; from a cowkeeper's establishment comes a tepid, pungent smell of litter; and the dead wall of a convent stretches away for a goodly length. It was between this convent and a herbalist's that the shop transformed into a studio was situated. It still bore on its sign-board the inscription, 'Fruit and Vegetables,' in large yellow letters.

Claude and Sandoz narrowly missed being blinded by some little girls who were skipping in the street. On the foot pavement sat several families whose barricades of chairs compelled the friends to step down on to the roadway. However, they were drawing nigh, when the sight of the herbalist's shop delayed them for a moment. Between its windows, decked with enemas, bandages, and similar things, beneath the dried herbs hanging above the doorway, whence came a constant aromatic smell, a thin, dark woman stood taking stock of them, while, behind her, in the gloom of the shop, one saw the vague silhouette of a little sickly-looking man, who was coughing and expectorating. The friends nudged each other, their eyes lighted up with bantering

mirth; and then they turned the handle of Mahoudeau's door.

The shop, though tolerably roomy, was almost filled by a mass of clay: a colossal Bacchante, falling back upon a rock. The wooden stays bent beneath the weight of that almost shapeless pile, of which nothing but some huge limbs could as yet be distinguished. Some water had been spilt on the floor, several muddy buckets straggled here and there, while a heap of moistened plaster was lying in a corner. On the shelves, formerly occupied by fruit and vegetables, were scattered some casts from the antique, covered with a tracery of cinder-like dust which had gradually collected there. A wash-house kind of dampness, a stale smell of moist clay, rose from the floor. And the wretchedness of this sculptor's studio and the dirt attendant upon the profession were made still more conspicuous by the wan light that filtered through the shop windows besmeared with whitening.

'What! is it you?' shouted Mahoudeau, who sat before his female figure, smoking a pipe.

He was small and thin, with a bony face, already wrinkled at twenty-seven. His black mane-like hair lay entangled over his very low forehead, and his sallow mask, ugly almost to ferociousness, was lighted up by a pair of childish eyes, bright and empty, which smiled with winning simplicity. The son of a stonemason of Plassans, he had achieved great success at the local art competitions, and had afterwards come to Paris as the town laureate, with an allowance of eight hundred francs per

annum, for a period of four years. In the capital, however, he had found himself at sea, defenceless, failing in his competitions at the School of Arts, and spending his allowance to no purpose; so that, at the end of his term, he had been obliged for a livelihood to enter the employment of a dealer in church statues, at whose establishment, for ten hours a day, he scraped away at St. Josephs, St. Rochs, Mary Magdalens, and, in fact, all the saints of the calendar. For the last six months, however, he had experienced a revival of ambition, on finding himself once more among his comrades of Provence, the eldest of whom he was – fellows whom he had known at Geraud's boarding-school for little boys, and who had since grown into savage revolutionaries. At present, through his constant intercourse with impassioned artists, who troubled his brain with all sorts of wild theories, his ambition aimed at the gigantic.

'The devil!' said Claude, 'there's a lump.'

The sculptor, delighted, gave a long pull at his pipe, and blew a cloud of smoke.

'Eh, isn't it? I am going to give them some flesh, and living flesh, too; not the bladders of lard that they turn out.'

'It's a woman bathing, isn't it?' asked Sandoz.

'No; I shall put some vine leaves around her head. A Bacchante, you understand.'

At this Claude flew into a violent passion.

'A Bacchante? Do you want to make fools of people? Does such a thing as a Bacchante exist? A vintaging girl, eh? And quite

modern, dash it all. I know she's nude, so let her be a peasant woman who has undressed. And that must be properly conveyed, mind; people must realise that she lives.'

Mahoudeau, taken aback, listened, trembling. He was afraid of Claude, and bowed to his ideal of strength and truth. So he even improved upon the painter's idea.

'Yes, yes, that's what I meant to say – a vintaging girl. And you'll see whether there isn't a real touch of woman about her.'

At that moment Sandoz, who had been making the tour of the huge block of clay, exclaimed: 'Why, here's that sneak of a Chaine.'

Behind the pile, indeed, sat Chaine, a burly fellow who was quietly painting away, copying the fireless rusty stove on a small canvas. It could be told that he was a peasant by his heavy, deliberate manner and his bull-neck, tanned and hardened like leather. His only noticeable feature was his forehead, displaying all the bumps of obstinacy; for his nose was so small as to be lost between his red cheeks, while a stiff beard hid his powerful jaws. He came from Saint Firmin, a village about six miles from Plassans, where he had been a cow-boy, until he drew for the conscription; and his misfortunes dated from the enthusiasm that a gentleman of the neighbourhood had shown for the walking-stick handles which he carved out of roots with his knife. From that moment, having become a rustic genius, an embryo great man for this local connoisseur, who happened to be a member of the museum committee, he had been helped by him, adulated

and driven crazy with hopes; but he had successively failed in everything – his studies and competitions – thus missing the town's purse. Nevertheless, he had started for Paris, after worrying his father, a wretched peasant, into premature payment of his heritage, a thousand francs, on which he reckoned to live for a twelvemonth while awaiting the promised victory. The thousand francs had lasted eighteen months. Then, as he had only twenty francs left, he had taken up his quarters with his friend, Mahoudeau. They both slept in the same bed, in the dark back shop; they both in turn cut slices from the same loaves of bread – of which they bought sufficient for a fortnight at a time, so that it might get very hard, and that they might thus be able to eat but little of it.

'I say, Chaine,' continued Sandoz, 'your stove is really very exact.'

Chaine, without answering, gave a chuckle of triumph which lighted up his face like a sunbeam. By a crowning stroke of imbecility, and to make his misfortunes perfect, his protector's advice had thrown him into painting, in spite of the real taste that he showed for wood carving. And he painted like a whitewasher, mixing his colours as a hodman mixes his mortar, and managing to make the clearest and brightest of them quite muddy. His triumph consisted, however, in combining exactness with awkwardness; he displayed all the naive minuteness of the primitive painters; in fact, his mind, barely raised from the clods, delighted in petty details. The stove, with its perspective all awry,

was tame and precise, and in colour as dingy as mire.

Claude approached and felt full of compassion at the sight of that painting, and though he was as a rule so harsh towards bad painters, his compassion prompted him to say a word of praise.

'Ah! one can't say that you are a trickster; you paint, at any rate, as you feel. Very good, indeed.'

However, the door of the shop had opened, and a good-looking, fair fellow, with a big pink nose, and large, blue, short-sighted eyes, entered shouting:

'I say, why does that herbalist woman next door always stand on her doorstep? What an ugly mug she's got!'

They all laughed, except Mahoudeau, who seemed very much embarrassed.

'Jory, the King of Blunderers,' declared Sandoz, shaking hands with the new comer.

'Why? What? Is Mahoudeau interested in her? I didn't know,' resumed Jory, when he had at length grasped the situation. 'Well, well, what does it matter? When everything's said, they are all irresistible.'

'As for you,' the sculptor rejoined, 'I can see you have tumbled on your lady-love's finger-nails again. She has dug a bit out of your cheek!'

They all burst out laughing anew, while Jory, in his turn, reddened. In fact, his face was scratched: there were even two deep gashes across it. The son of a magistrate of Plassans, whom he had driven half-crazy by his dissolute conduct, he

had crowned everything by running away with a music-hall singer under the pretext of going to Paris to follow the literary profession. During the six months that they had been camping together in a shady hotel of the Quartier Latin, the girl had almost flayed him alive each time she caught him paying attention to anybody else of her sex. And, as this often happened, he always had some fresh scar to show – a bloody nose, a torn ear, or a damaged eye, swollen and blackened.

At last they all began to talk, with the exception of Chaine, who went on painting with the determined expression of an ox at the plough. Jory had at once gone into ecstasies over the roughly indicated figure of the vintaging girl. He worshipped a massive style of beauty. His first writings in his native town had been some Parnassian sonnets celebrating the copious charms of a handsome pork-butcheress. In Paris – where he had fallen in with the whole band of Plassans – he had taken to art criticism, and, for a livelihood, he wrote articles for twenty francs apiece in a small, slashing paper called 'The Drummer.' Indeed, one of these articles, a study on a picture by Claude exhibited at Papa Malgras's, had just caused a tremendous scandal; for Jory had therein run down all the painters whom the public appreciated to extol his friend, whom he set up as the leader of a new school, the school of the 'open air.' Very practical at heart, he did not care in reality a rap about anything that did not conduce to his own pleasures; he simply repeated the theories he heard enunciated by his friends. 'I say, Mahoudeau,' he now exclaimed, 'you shall

have an article; I'll launch that woman of yours. What limbs, my boys! She's magnificent!'

Then suddenly changing the conversation: 'By the way,' he said, 'my miserly father has apologised. He is afraid I shall drag his name through the mud, so he sends me a hundred francs a month now. I am paying my debts.'

'Debts! you are too careful to have any,' muttered Sandoz, with a smile.

In fact, Jory displayed a hereditary tightness of fist which much amused his friends. He managed to lead a profligate life without money and without incurring debts; and with the skill he thus displayed was allied constant duplicity, a habit of incessantly lying, which he had contracted in the devout sphere of his family, where his anxiety to hide his vices had made him lie about everything at all hours, and even without occasion. But he now gave a superb reply, the cry of a sage of deep experience.

'Oh, you fellows, you don't know the worth of money!'

This time he was hooted. What a philistine! And the invectives continued, when some light taps on one of the window-panes suddenly made the din cease.

'She is really becoming a nuisance,' said Mahoudeau, with a gesture of annoyance.

'Eh? Who is it? The herbalist woman?' asked Jory. 'Let her come in; it will be great fun.'

The door indeed had already been opened, and Mahoudeau's neighbour, Madame Jabouille, or Mathilde, as she was familiarly

called, appeared on the threshold. She was about thirty, with a flat face horribly emaciated, and passionate eyes, the lids of which had a bluish tinge as if they were bruised. It was said that some members of the clergy had brought about her marriage with little Jabouille, at a time when the latter's business was still flourishing, thanks to the custom of all the pious folk of the neighbourhood. The truth was, that one sometimes espied black cassocks stealthily crossing that mysterious shop, where all the aromatic herbs set a perfume of incense. A kind of cloistral quietude pervaded the place; the devotees who came in spoke in low voices, as if in a confessional, slipped their purchases into their bags furtively, and went off with downcast eyes. Unfortunately, some very horrid rumours had got abroad – slander invented by the wine-shop keeper opposite, said pious folks. At any rate, since the widower had re-married, the business had been going to the dogs. The glass jars seemed to have lost all their brightness, and the dried herbs, suspended from the ceiling, were tumbling to dust. Jabouille himself was coughing his life out, reduced to a very skeleton. And although Mathilde professed to be religious, the pious customers gradually deserted her, being of opinion that she made herself too conspicuous with young fellows of the neighbourhood now that Jabouille was almost eaten out of house and home.

For a moment Mathilde remained motionless, blinking her eyes. A pungent smell had spread through the shop, a smell of simples, which she brought with her in her clothes and greasy,

tumbled hair; the sickly sweetness of mallow, the sharp odour of elderseed, the bitter effluvia of rhubarb, but, above all, the hot whiff of peppermint, which seemed like her very breath.

She made a gesture of feigned surprise. 'Oh, dear me! you have company – I did not know; I'll drop in again.'

'Yes, do,' said Mahoudeau, looking very vexed. 'Besides, I am going out; you can give me a sitting on Sunday.'

At this Claude, stupefied, fairly stared at the emaciated Mathilde, and then at the huge vintaging woman.

'What?' he cried, 'is it madame who poses for that figure? The dickens, you exaggerate!'

Then the laughter began again, while the sculptor stammered his explanations. 'Oh! she only poses for the head and the hands, and merely just to give me a few indications.'

Mathilde, however, laughed with the others, with a sharp, brazen-faced laughter, showing the while the gaping holes in her mouth, where several teeth were wanting.

'Yes,' resumed Mahoudeau. 'I have to go out on some business now. Isn't it so, you fellows, we are expected over yonder?'

He had winked at his friends, feeling eager for a good lounge. They all answered that they were expected, and helped him to cover the figure of the vintaging girl with some strips of old linen which were soaking in a pail of water.

However, Mathilde, looking submissive but sad, did not stir. She merely shifted from one place to another, when they pushed against her, while Chaine, who was no longer painting, glanced

at her over his picture. So far, he had not opened his lips. But as Mahoudeau at last went off with his three friends, he made up his mind to ask, in his husky voice:

'Shall you come home to-night?'

'Very late. Have your dinner and go to bed. Good-bye.'

Then Chaine remained alone with Mathilde in the damp shop, amidst the heaps of clay and the puddles of water, while the chalky light from the whitened windows glared crudely over all the wretched untidiness.

Meantime the four others, Claude and Mahoudeau, Jory and Sandoz, strolled along, seeming to take up the whole width of the Boulevard des Invalides. It was the usual thing, the band was gradually increased by the accession of comrades picked up on the way, and then came the wild march of a horde upon the war-path. With the bold assurance of their twenty summers, these young fellows took possession of the foot pavement. The moment they were together trumpets seemed to sound in advance of them; they seized upon Paris and quietly dropped it into their pockets. There was no longer the slightest doubt about their victory; they freely displayed their threadbare coats and old shoes, like destined conquerors of to-morrow who disdained bagatelles, and had only to take the trouble to become the masters of all the luxury surrounding them. And all this was attended by huge contempt for everything that was not art – contempt for fortune, contempt for the world at large, and, above all, contempt for politics. What was the good of all such rubbish? Only a

lot of incapables meddled with it. A warped view of things, magnificent in its very injustice, exalted them; an intentional ignorance of the necessities of social life, the crazy dream of having none but artists upon earth. They seemed very stupid at times, but, all the same, their passion made them strong and brave.

Claude became excited. Faith in himself revived amidst the glow of common hopes. His worry of the morning had only left a vague numbness behind, and he now once more began to discuss his picture with Sandoz and Mahoudeau, swearing, it is true, that he would destroy it the next day. Jory, who was very short-sighted, stared at all the elderly ladies he met, and aired his theories on artistic work. A man ought to give his full measure at once in the first spurt of inspiration; as for himself, he never corrected anything. And, still discussing, the four friends went on down the boulevard, which, with its comparative solitude, and its endless rows of fine trees, seemed to have been expressly designed as an arena for their disputations. When they reached the Esplanade, the wrangling became so violent that they stopped in the middle of that large open space. Beside himself, Claude called Jory a numskull; was it not better to destroy one's work than to launch a mediocre performance upon the world? Truckling to trade was really disgusting. Mahoudeau and Sandoz, on their side, shouted both together at the same time. Some passers-by, feeling uneasy, turned round to look, and at last gathered round these furious young fellows, who

seemed bent on swallowing each other. But they went off vexed, thinking that some practical joke had been played upon them, when they suddenly saw the quartette, all good friends again, go into raptures over a wet-nurse, dressed in light colours, with long cherry-tinted ribbons streaming from her cap. There, now! That was something like – what a tint, what a bright note it set amid the surroundings! Delighted, blinking their eyes, they followed the nurse under the trees, and then suddenly seemed roused and astonished to find they had already come so far. The Esplanade, open on all sides, save on the south, where rose the distant pile of the Hotel des Invalides, delighted them – it was so vast, so quiet; they there had plenty of room for their gestures; and they recovered breath there, although they were always declaring that Paris was far too small for them, and lacked sufficient air to inflate their ambitious lungs.

'Are you going anywhere particular?' asked Sandoz of Mahoudeau and Jory.

'No,' answered the latter, 'we are going with you. Where are *you* going?'

Claude, gazing carelessly about him, muttered: 'I don't know. That way, if you like.'

They turned on to the Quai d'Orsay, and went as far as the Pont de la Concorde. In front of the Corps Legislatif the painter remarked, with an air of disgust: 'What a hideous pile!'

'Jules Favre made a fine speech the other day. How he did rile Rouher,' said Jory.

However, the others left him no time to proceed, the disputes began afresh. 'Who was Jules Favre? Who was Rouher? Did they exist? A parcel of idiots whom no one would remember ten years after their death.' The young men had now begun to cross the bridge, and they shrugged their shoulders with compassion. Then, on reaching the Place de la Concorde, they stopped short and relapsed into silence.

'Well,' opined Claude at last, 'this isn't bad, by any means.'

It was four o'clock, and the day was waning amidst a glorious powdery shimmer. To the right and left, towards the Madeleine and towards the Corps Legislatif, lines of buildings stretched away, showing against the sky, while in the Tuileries Gardens rose gradients of lofty rounded chestnut trees. And between the verdant borders of the pleasure walks, the avenue of the Champs Elysees sloped upward as far as the eye could reach, topped by the colossal Arc de Triomphe, agape in front of the infinite. A double current, a twofold stream rolled along – horses showing like living eddies, vehicles like retreating waves, which the reflections of a panel or the sudden sparkle of the glass of a carriage lamp seemed to tip with white foam. Lower down, the square – with its vast footways, its roads as broad as lakes – was filled with a constant ebb and flow, crossed in every direction by whirling wheels, and peopled with black specks of men, while the two fountains plashed and streamed, exhaling delicious coolness amid all the ardent life.

Claude, quivering with excitement, kept saying: 'Ah! Paris!

It's ours. We have only to take it.'

They all grew excited, their eyes opened wide with desire. Was it not glory herself that swept from the summit of that avenue over the whole capital? Paris was there, and they longed to make her theirs.

'Well, we'll take her one day,' said Sandoz, with his obstinate air.

'To be sure we shall,' said Mahoudeau and Jory in the simplest manner.

They had resumed walking; they still roamed about, found themselves behind the Madeleine, and went up the Rue Tronchet. At last, as they reached the Place du Havre, Sandoz exclaimed, 'So we are going to Baudequin's, eh?'

The others looked as if they had dropped from the sky; in fact, it did seem as if they were going to Baudequin's.

'What day of the week is it?' asked Claude. 'Thursday, eh? Then Fagerolles and Gagniere are sure to be there. Let's go to Baudequin's.'

And thereupon they went up the Rue d'Amsterdam. They had just crossed Paris, one of their favourite rambles, but they took other routes at times – from one end of the quays to the other; or from the Porte St. Jacques to the Moulineaux, or else to Pere-la-Chaise, followed by a roundabout return along the outer boulevards. They roamed the streets, the open spaces, the crossways; they rambled on for whole days, as long as their legs would carry them, as if intent on conquering one district

after another by hurling their revolutionary theories at the house-fronts; and the pavement seemed to be their property – all the pavement touched by their feet, all that old battleground whence arose intoxicating fumes which made them forget their lassitude.

The Cafe Baudequin was situated on the Boulevard des Batignolles, at the corner of the Rue Darcet. Without the least why or wherefore, it had been selected by the band as their meeting-place, though Gagniere alone lived in the neighbourhood. They met there regularly on Sunday nights; and on Thursday afternoons, at about five o'clock, those who were then at liberty had made it a habit to look in for a moment. That day, as the weather was fine and bright, the little tables outside under the awning were occupied by rows of customers, obstructing the footway. But the band hated all elbowing and public exhibition, so they jostled the other people in order to go inside, where all was deserted and cool.

'Hallo, there's Fagerolles by himself,' exclaimed Claude.

He had gone straight to their usual table at the end of the cafe, on the left, where he shook hands with a pale, thin, young man, whose pert girlish face was lighted up by a pair of winning, satirical grey eyes, which at times flashed like steel. They all sat down and ordered beer, after which the painter resumed:

'Do you know that I went to look for you at your father's; and a nice reception he gave me.'

Fagerolles, who affected a low devil-may-care style, slapped his thighs. 'Oh, the old fellow plagues me! I hooked it this

morning, after a row. He wants me to draw some things for his beastly zinc stuff. As if I hadn't enough zinc stuff at the Art School.'

This slap at the professors delighted the young man's friends. He amused them and made himself their idol by dint of alternate flattery and blame. His smile went from one to the other, while, by the aid of a few drops of beer spilt on the table, his long nimble fingers began tracing complicated sketches. His art evidently came very easily to him; it seemed as if he could do anything with a turn of the hand.

'And Gagniere?' asked Mahoudeau; 'haven't you seen him?'

'No; I have been here for the last hour.'

Just then Jory, who had remained silent, nudged Sandoz, and directed his attention to a girl seated with a gentleman at a table at the back of the room. There were only two other customers present, two sergeants, who were playing cards. The girl was almost a child, one of those young Parisian hussies who are as lank as ever at eighteen. She suggested a frizzy poodle – with the shower of fair little locks that fell over her dainty little nose, and her large smiling mouth, set between rosy cheeks. She was turning over the leaves of an illustrated paper, while the gentleman accompanying her gravely sipped a glass of Madeira; but every other minute she darted gay glances from over the newspaper towards the band of artists.

'Pretty, isn't she?' whispered Jory. 'Who is she staring at? Why, she's looking at me.'

But Fagerolles suddenly broke in: 'I say, no nonsense. Don't imagine that I have been here for the last hour merely waiting for you.'

The others laughed; and lowering his voice he told them about the girl, who was named Irma Becot. She was the daughter of a grocer in the Rue Montorgueil, and had been to school in the neighbourhood till she was sixteen, writing her exercises between two bags of lentils, and finishing off her education on her father's doorstep, lolling about on the pavement, amidst the jostling of the throng, and learning all about life from the everlasting tittle-tattle of the cooks, who retailed all the scandal of the neighbourhood while waiting for five sous' worth of Gruyere cheese to be served them. Her mother having died, her father himself had begun to lead rather a gay life, in such wise that the whole of the grocery stores – tea, coffee, dried vegetables, and jars and drawers of sweetstuff – were gradually devoured. Irma was still going to school, when, one day, the place was sold up. Her father died of a fit of apoplexy, and Irma sought refuge with a poor aunt, who gave her more kicks than halfpence, with the result that she ended by running away, and taking her flight through all the dancing-places of Montmartre and Batignolles.

Claude listened to the story with his usual air of contempt for women. Suddenly, however, as the gentleman rose and went out after whispering in her ear, Irma Becot, after watching him disappear, bounded from her seat with the impulsiveness of a school girl, in order to join Fagerolles, beside whom she made

herself quite at home, giving him a smacking kiss, and drinking out of his glass. And she smiled at the others in a very engaging manner, for she was partial to artists, and regretted that they were generally so miserably poor. As Jory was smoking, she took his cigarette out of his mouth and set it in her own, but without pausing in her chatter, which suggested that of a saucy magpie.

'You are all painters, aren't you? How amusing! But why do those three look as if they were sulking. Just laugh a bit, or I shall make you, you'll see!'

As a matter of fact, Sandoz, Claude, and Mahoudeau, quite taken aback, were watching her most gravely. She herself remained listening, and, on hearing her companion come back, she hastily gave Fagerolles an appointment for the morrow. Then, after replacing the cigarette between Jory's lips, she strode off with her arms raised, and making a very comical grimace; in such wise that when the gentleman reappeared, looking sedate and somewhat pale, he found her in her former seat, still looking at the same engraving in the newspaper. The whole scene had been acted so quickly, and with such jaunty drollery, that the two sergeants who sat nearby, good-natured fellows both of them, almost died of laughter as they shuffled their cards afresh.

In fact, Irma had taken them all by storm. Sandoz declared that her name of Becot was very well suited for a novel; Claude asked whether she would consent to pose for a sketch; while Mahoudeau already pictured her as a Paris gamin, a statuette that would be sure to sell. She soon went off, however, and behind the

gentleman's back she wafted kisses to the whole party, a shower of kisses which quite upset the impressionable Jory.

It was five o'clock, and the band ordered some more beer. Some of the usual customers had taken possession of the adjacent tables, and these philistines cast sidelong glances at the artists' corner, glances in which contempt was curiously mingled with a kind of uneasy deference. The artists were indeed well known; a legend was becoming current respecting them. They themselves were now talking on common-place subjects: about the heat, the difficulty of finding room in the omnibus to the Odeon, and the discovery of a wine-shop where real meat was obtainable. One of them wanted to start a discussion about a number of idiotic pictures that had lately been hung in the Luxembourg Museum; but there was only one opinion on the subject, that the pictures were not worth their frames. Thereupon they left off conversing; they smoked, merely exchanging a word or a significant smile now and then.

'Well,' asked Claude at last, 'are we going to wait for Gagniere?'

At this there was a protest. Gagniere was a bore. Besides, he would turn up as soon as he smelt the soup.

'Let's be off, then,' said Sandoz. 'There's a leg of mutton this evening, so let's try to be punctual.'

Each paid his score, and they all went out. Their departure threw the cafe into a state of emotion. Some young fellows, painters, no doubt, whispered together as they pointed at Claude,

much in the same manner as if he were the redoubtable chieftain of a horde of savages. Jory's famous article was producing its effect; the very public was becoming his accomplice, and of itself was soon to found that school of the open air, which the band had so far only joked about. As they gaily said, the Cafe Baudequin was not aware of the honour they had done it on the day when they selected it to be the cradle of a revolution.

Fagerolles having reinforced the group, they now numbered five, and slowly they took their way across Paris, with their tranquil look of victory. The more numerous they were, the more did they stretch across the pavement, and carry away on their heels the burning life of the streets. When they had gone down the Rue de Clichy, they went straight along the Rue de la Chaussee d'Antin, turned towards the Rue de Richelieu, crossed the Seine by the Pont des Arts, so as to fling their gibes at the Institute, and finally reached the Luxembourg by way of the Rue de Seine, where a poster, printed in three colours, the garish announcement of a travelling circus, made them all shout with admiration. Evening was coming on; the stream of wayfarers flowed more slowly; the tired city was awaiting the shadows of night, ready to yield to the first comer who might be strong enough to take her.

On reaching the Rue d'Enfer, when Sandoz had ushered his four friends into his own apartments, he once more vanished into his mother's room. He remained there for a few moments, and then came out without saying a word, but with the tender,

gentle smile habitual to him on such occasions. And immediately afterwards a terrible hubbub, of laughter, argument, and mere shouting, arose in his little flat. Sandoz himself set the example, all the while assisting the charwoman, who burst into bitter language because it was half-past seven, and her leg of mutton was drying up. The five companions, seated at table, were already swallowing their soup, a very good onion soup, when a new comer suddenly appeared.

'Hallo! here's Gagniere,' was the vociferous chorus.

Gagniere, short, slight, and vague looking, with a doll-like startled face, set off by a fair curly beard, stood for a moment on the threshold blinking his green eyes. He belonged to Melun, where his well-to-do parents, who were both dead, had left him two houses; and he had learnt painting, unassisted, in the forest of Fontainebleau. His landscapes were at least conscientiously painted, excellent in intention; but his real passion was music, a madness for music, a cerebral bonfire which set him on a level with the wildest of the band.

'Am I in the way?' he gently asked.

'Not at all; come in!' shouted Sandoz.

The charwoman was already laying an extra knife and fork.

'Suppose she lays a place for Dubuche, while she is about it,' said Claude. 'He told me he would perhaps come.'

But they were all down upon Dubuche, who frequented women in society. Jory said that he had seen him in a carriage with an old lady and her daughter, whose parasols he was holding

on his knees.

'Where have you come from to be so late?' asked Fagerolles of Gagniere.

The latter, who was about to swallow his first spoonful of soup, set it in his plate again.

'I was in the Rue de Lancry – you know, where they have chamber music. Oh! my boy, some of Schumann's machines! You haven't an idea of them! They clutch hold of you at the back of your head just as if somebody were breathing down your back. Yes, yes, it's something much more immaterial than a kiss, just a whiff of breath. 'Pon my honour, a fellow feels as if he were going to die.'

His eyes were moistening and he turned pale, as if experiencing some over-acute enjoyment.

'Eat your soup,' said Mahoudeau; 'you'll tell us all about it afterwards.'

The skate was served, and they had the vinegar bottle put on the table to improve the flavour of the black butter, which seemed rather insipid. They ate with a will, and the hunks of bread swiftly disappeared. There was nothing refined about the repast, and the wine was mere common stuff, which they watered considerably from a feeling of delicacy, in order to lessen their host's expenses. They had just saluted the leg of mutton with a hurrah, and the host had begun to carve it, when the door opened anew. But this time there were furious protests.

'No, no, not another soul! Turn him out, turn him out.'

Dubuche, out of breath with having run, bewildered at finding himself amidst such howling, thrust his fat, pallid face forward, whilst stammering explanations.

'Really, now, I assure you it was the fault of the omnibuses. I had to wait for five of them in the Champs Elysees.'

'No, no, he's lying! – Let him go, he sha'n't have any of that mutton. Turn him out, turn him out!'

All the same, he ended by coming in, and it was then noticed that he was stylishly attired, all in black, trousers and frock-coat alike, and cravated and booted in the stiff ceremonious fashion of some respectable member of the middle classes going out to dinner.

'Hallo! he has missed his invitation,' chaffed Fagerolles. 'Don't you see that his fine ladies didn't ask him to stay to dinner, and so now he's come to gobble up our leg of mutton, as he doesn't know where else to go?'

At this Dubuche turned red, and stammered: 'Oh! what an idea! How ill-natured you are! And, besides, just attend to your own business.'

Sandoz and Claude, seated next to each other, smiled, and the former, beckoning to Dubuche, said to him: 'Lay your own place, bring a plate and a glass, and sit between us – like that, they'll leave you alone.'

However, the chaff continued all the time that the mutton was being eaten. When the charwoman had brought Dubuche a plate of soup and a piece of skate, he himself fell in with the jokes

good-naturedly. He pretended to be famished, greedily mopped out his plate, and related a story about a mother having refused him her daughter because he was an architect. The end of the dinner thus became very boisterous; they all rattled on together. The only dessert, a piece of Brie cheese, met with enormous success. Not a scrap of it was left, and the bread almost ran short. The wine did run short, so they each swallowed a clear draught of water, smacking their lips the while amidst great laughter. And, with faces beaming, and well-filled paunches, they passed into the bedroom with the supreme content of folks who have fared very sumptuously indeed.

Those were Sandoz's jolly evenings. Even at the times when he was hard up he had always had some boiled beef and broth to share with his comrades. He felt delighted at having a number of them around him, all friends, inspired by the same ideas. Though he was of their own age, he beamed with fatherly feelings and satisfied good-nature when he saw them in his rooms, around him, hand in hand, and intoxicated with hope. As he had but two rooms, the bedroom did duty as a drawing-room, and became as much theirs as his. For lack of sufficient chairs, two or three had to seat themselves on the bed. And on those warm summer evenings the window remained wide open to let in the air. From it two black silhouettes were to be seen rising above the houses, against the clear sky – the tower of St. Jacques du Haut-Pas and the tree of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum. When money was plentiful there was beer. Every one brought his own tobacco,

the room soon became full of smoke, and without seeing each other they ended by conversing far into the night, amidst the deep mournful silence of that deserted district.

On that particular evening, at about nine o'clock, the charwoman came in.

'Monsieur, I have done. Can I go?'

'Yes, go to bed. You have left the kettle on the fire, haven't you? I'll make the tea myself.'

Sandoz had risen. He went off at the heels of the charwoman, and only returned a quarter of an hour afterwards. He had no doubt been to kiss his mother, whom he tucked up every night before she dozed off.

Meanwhile the voices had risen to a high pitch again. Fagerolles was telling a story.

'Yes, old fellow; at the School they even correct Nature herself. The other day Mazel comes up to me and says: "Those two arms don't correspond"; whereupon I reply: "Look for yourself, monsieur – the model's are like that." It was little Flore Beauchamp, you know. "Well," Mazel furiously replies, "if she has them like that, it's very wrong of her."'

They almost all shrieked, especially Claude, to whom Fagerolles told the story by way of paying court. For some time previously the younger artist had yielded to the elder's influence; and although he continued to paint with purely tricky skill, he no longer talked of anything but substantial, thickly-painted work, of bits of nature thrown on to canvas, palpitating with life, such

as they really were. This did not prevent him, though, from elsewhere chaffing the adepts of the open-air school, whom he accused of impasting with a kitchen ladle.

Dubuche, who had not laughed, his sense of rectitude being offended, made so bold as to reply:

'Why do you stop at the School if you think you are being brutified there? It's simple enough, one goes away – Oh, I know you are all against me, because I defend the School. But, you see, my idea is that, when a fellow wants to carry on a trade, it is not a bad thing for him to begin by learning it.'

Ferocious shouts arose at this, and Claude had need of all his authority to secure a hearing.

'He is right. One must learn one's trade. But it won't do to learn it under the ferule of professors who want to cram their own views forcibly into your nut. That Mazel is a perfect idiot!'

He flung himself backward on the bed, on which he had been sitting, and with his eyes raised to the ceiling, he went on, in an excited tone:

'Ah! life! life! to feel it and portray it in its reality, to love it for itself, to behold in it the only real, lasting, and changing beauty, without any idiotic idea of ennobling it by mutilation. To understand that all so-called ugliness is nothing but the mark of individual character, to create real men and endow them with life – yes, that's the only way to become a god!'

His faith was coming back to him, the march across Paris had spurred him on once more; he was again seized by his passion

for living flesh. They listened to him in silence. He made a wild gesture, then calmed down.

'No doubt every one has his own ideas; but the annoyance is that at the Institute they are even more intolerant than we are. The hanging committee of the Salon is in their hands. I am sure that that idiot Mazel will refuse my picture.'

Thereupon they all broke out into imprecations, for this question of the hanging committee was the everlasting subject of their wrath. They demanded reforms; every one had a solution of the problem ready – from universal suffrage, applied to the election of a hanging committee, liberal in the widest sense of the word, down to unrestricted liberty, a Salon open to all exhibitors.[8]

While the others went on discussing the subject, Gagniere drew Mahoudeau to the open window, where, in a low voice, his eyes the while staring into space, he murmured:

'Oh, it's nothing at all, only four bars; a simple impression jotted down there and then. But what a deal there is in it! To me it's first of all a landscape, dwindling away in the distance; a bit of melancholy road, with the shadow of a tree that one cannot see; and then a woman passes along, scarcely a silhouette; on she goes and you never meet her again, no, never more again.'

Just at that moment, however, Fagerolles exclaimed, 'I say, Gagniere, what are you going to send to the Salon this year?'

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[8] The reader will bear in mind that all these complaints made by Claude and his friends apply to the old Salons, as organized under Government control, at the time of the Second Empire. – ED.

Gagniere did not hear, but continued talking, enraptured, as it were.

'In Schumann one finds everything – the infinite. And Wagner, too, whom they hissed again last Sunday!'

But a fresh call from Fagerolles made him start.

'Eh! what? What am I going to send to the Salon? A small landscape, perhaps; a little bit of the Seine. It is so difficult to decide; first of all I must feel pleased with it myself.'

He had suddenly become timid and anxious again. His artistic scruples, his conscientiousness, kept him working for months on a canvas the size of one's hand. Following the track of the French landscape painters, those masters who were the first to conquer nature, he worried about correctness of tone, pondering and pondering over the precise value of tints, till theoretical scruples ended by making his touch heavy. And he often did not dare to chance a bright dash of colour, but painted in a greyish gloomy key which was astonishing, when one remembered his revolutionary passions.

'For my part,' said Mahoudeau, 'I feel delighted at the prospect of making them squint with my woman.'

Claude shrugged his shoulders. 'Oh! you'll get in, the sculptors have broader minds than the painters. And, besides, you know very well what you are about; you have something at your fingers' ends that pleases. There will be plenty of pretty bits about your vintaging girl.'

The compliment made Mahoudeau feel serious. He posed

above all for vigour of execution; he was unconscious of his real vein of talent, and despised gracefulness, though it ever invincibly sprung from his big, coarse fingers – the fingers of an untaught working-man – like a flower that obstinately sprouts from the hard soil where the wind has flung its seed.

Fagerolles, who was very cunning, had decided to send nothing, for fear of displeasing his masters; and he chaffed the Salon, calling it 'a foul bazaar, where all the bad painting made even the good turn musty.' In his inmost heart he was dreaming of one day securing the Rome prize, though he ridiculed it, as he did everything else.

However, Jory stationed himself in the middle of the room, holding up his glass of beer. Sipping every now and then, he declared: 'Well, your hanging committee quite disgusts me! I say, shall I demolish it? I'll begin bombarding it in our very next number. You'll give me some notes, eh? and we'll knock it to pieces. That will be fine fun.'

Claude was at last fully wound up, and general enthusiasm prevailed. Yes, yes, they must start a campaign. They would all be in it, and, pressing shoulder to shoulder, march to the battle together. At that moment there was not one of them who reserved his share of fame, for nothing divided them as yet; neither the profound dissemblance of their various natures, of which they themselves were ignorant, nor their rivalries, which would some day bring them into collision. Was not the success of one the success of all the others? Their youth was fermenting,

they were brimming over with mutual devotion; they indulged anew in their everlasting dream of gathering into a phalanx to conquer the world, each contributing his individual effort; this one helping that one forward, and the whole band reaching fame at once in one row. Claude, as the acknowledged chief, was already sounding the victory, distributing laurels with such lyrical abundance that he overlooked himself. Fagerolles himself, gibing Parisian though he might be, believed in the necessity of forming an army; while even Jory, although he had a coarser appetite, with a deal of the provincial still about him, displayed much useful comradeship, catching various artistic phrases as they fell from his companions' lips, and already preparing in his mind the articles which would herald the advent of the band and make them known. And Mahoudeau purposely exaggerated his intentional roughness, and clasped his hands like an ogre kneading human flesh; while Gagniere, in ecstasy, as if freed from the everlasting greyishness of his art, sought to refine sensation to the utmost limits of intelligence; and Dubuche, with his matter-of-fact convictions, threw in but a word here and there; words, however, which were like club-blows in the very midst of the fray. Then Sandoz, happy and smiling at seeing them so united, 'all in one shirt,' as he put it, opened another bottle of beer. He would have emptied every one in the house.

'Eh?' he cried, 'we're agreed, let's stick to it. It's really pleasant to come to an understanding among fellows who have something in their nuts, so may the thunderbolts of heaven sweep all idiots

away!'

At that same moment a ring at the bell stupefied him. Amidst the sudden silence of the others, he inquired – 'Who, to the deuce, can that be – at eleven o'clock?'

He ran to open the door, and they heard him utter a cry of delight. He was already coming back again, throwing the door wide open as he said – 'Ah! it's very kind indeed to think of us and surprise us like this! Bongrand, gentlemen.'

The great painter, whom the master of the house announced in this respectfully familiar way, entered, holding out both hands. They all eagerly rose, full of emotion, delighted with that manly, cordial handshake so willingly bestowed. Bongrand was then forty-five years old, stout, and with a very expressive face and long grey hair. He had recently become a member of the Institute, and wore the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honour in the top button-hole of his unpretentious alpaca jacket. He was fond of young people; he liked nothing so much as to drop in from time to time and smoke a pipe among these beginners, whose enthusiasm warmed his heart.

'I am going to make the tea,' exclaimed Sandoz.

When he came back from the kitchen, carrying the teapot and cups, he found Bongrand installed astride a chair, smoking his short cutty, amidst the din which had again arisen. Bongrand himself was holding forth in a stentorian voice. The grandson of a farmer of the Beauce region, the son of a man risen to the middle classes, with peasant blood in his veins, indebted for his

culture to a mother of very artistic tastes, he was rich, had no need to sell his pictures, and retained many tastes and opinions of Bohemian life.

'The hanging committee? Well, I'd sooner hang myself than belong to it!' said he, with sweeping gestures. 'Am I an executioner to kick poor devils, who often have to earn their bread, out of doors?'

'Still, you might render us great service by defending our pictures before the committee,' observed Claude.

'Oh, dear, no! I should only make matters worse for you – I don't count; I'm nobody.'

There was a chorus of protestations; Fagerolles objected, in a shrill voice:

'Well, if the painter of "The Village Wedding" does not count – '

But Bongrand was getting angry; he had risen, his cheeks afire.

'Eh? Don't pester me with "The Wedding"; I warn you I am getting sick of that picture. It is becoming a perfect nightmare to me ever since it has been hung in the Luxembourg Museum.'

This 'Village Wedding' – a party of wedding guests roaming through a corn-field, peasants studied from life, with an epic look of the heroes of Homer about them – had so far remained his masterpiece. The picture had brought about an evolution in art, for it had inaugurated a new formula. Coming after Delacroix, and parallel with Courbet, it was a piece of romanticism

tempered by logic, with more correctness of observation, more perfection in the handling. And though it did not squarely tackle nature amidst the crudity of the open air, the new school claimed connection with it.

'There can be nothing more beautiful,' said Claude, 'than the two first groups, the fiddler, and then the bride with the old peasant.'

'And the strapping peasant girl, too,' added Mahoudeau; the one who is turning round and beckoning! I had a great mind to take her for the model of a statue.'

'And that gust of wind among the corn,' added Gagniere, 'and the pretty bit of the boy and girl skylarking in the distance.'

Bongrand sat listening with an embarrassed air, and a smile of inward suffering; and when Fagerolles asked him what he was doing just then, he answered, with a shrug of his shoulders:

'Well, nothing; some little things. But I sha'n't exhibit this time. I should like to find a telling subject. Ah, you fellows are happy at still being at the bottom of the hill. A man has good legs then, he feels so plucky when it's a question of getting up. But when once he is a-top, the deuce take it! the worries begin. A real torture, fisticuffs, efforts which must be constantly renewed, lest one should slip down too quickly. Really now, one would prefer being below, for the pleasure of still having everything to do – Ah, you may laugh, but you'll see it all for yourselves some day!'

They were indeed laughing, thinking it a paradox, or a little piece of affectation, which they excused. To be hailed, like

Bongrand, with the name of master – was that not the height of bliss? He, with his arms resting on the back of his chair, listened to them in silence, leisurely puffing his pipe, and renouncing the idea of trying to make them understand him.

Meanwhile, Dubuche, who had rather domesticated tastes, helped Sandoz to hand the tea round, and the din continued. Fagerolles related a story about Daddy Malgras and a female cousin by marriage, whom the dealer offered as a model on conditions that he was given a presentment of her in oils. Then they began to talk of models. Mahoudeau waxed furious, because the really well-built female models were disappearing. It was impossible to find one with a decent figure now. Then suddenly the tumult increased again; Gagniere was being congratulated about a connoisseur whose acquaintance he had made in the Palais Royal one afternoon, while the band played, an eccentric gentleman living on a small income, who never indulged in any other extravagance than that of buying pictures. The other artists laughed and asked for the gentleman's address. Then they fell foul of the picture dealers, dirty black-guards, who preyed on artists and starved them. It was really a pity that connoisseurs mistrusted painters to such a degree as to insist upon a middleman under the impression that they would thus make a better bargain. This question of bread and butter excited them yet more, though Claude showed magnificent contempt for it all. The artist was robbed, no doubt, but what did that matter, if he had painted a masterpiece, and had some water

to drink? Jory, having again expressed some low ideas about lucre, aroused general indignation. Out with the journalist! He was asked stringent questions. Would he sell his pen? Would he not sooner chop off his wrist than write anything against his convictions? But they scarcely waited for his answer, for the excitement was on the increase; it became the superb madness of early manhood, contempt for the whole world, an absorbing passion for good work, freed from all human weaknesses, soaring in the sky like a very sun. Ah! how strenuous was their desire to lose themselves, consume themselves, in that brazier of their own kindling!

Bongrand, who had not stirred the while, made a vague gesture of suffering at the sight of that boundless confidence, that boisterous joy at the prospect of attack. He forgot the hundred paintings which had brought him his glory, he was thinking of the work which he had left roughed out on his easel now. Taking his cutty from between his lips, he murmured, his eyes glistening with kindliness, 'Oh, youth, youth!'

Until two in the morning, Sandoz, who seemed ubiquitous, kept on pouring fresh supplies of hot water into the teapot. From the neighbourhood, now asleep, one now only heard the miawing of an amorous tabby. They all talked at random, intoxicated by their own words, hoarse with shouting, their eyes scorched, and when at last they made up their minds to go, Sandoz took the lamp to show them a light over the banisters, saying very softly:

'Don't make a noise, my mother is asleep.'

The hushed tread of their boots on the stairs died away at last, and deep silence fell upon the house.

It struck four. Claude, who had accompanied Bongrand, still went on talking to him in the deserted streets. He did not want to go to bed; he was waiting for daylight, with impatient fury, so that he might set to work at his picture again. This time he felt certain of painting a masterpiece, exalted as he was by that happy day of good-fellowship, his mind pregnant with a world of things. He had discovered at last what painting meant, and he pictured himself re-entering his studio as one returns into the presence of a woman one adores, his heart throbbing violently, regretting even this one day's absence, which seemed to him endless desertion. And he would go straight to his canvas, and realise his dream in one sitting. However, at every dozen steps or so, amidst the flickering light of the gaslamps, Bongrand caught him by a button of his coat, to repeat to him that, after all, painting was an accursed trade. Sharp as he, Bongrand, was supposed to be, he did not understand it yet. At each new work he undertook, he felt as if he were making a debut; it was enough to make one smash one's head against the wall. The sky was now brightening, some market gardeners' carts began rolling down towards the central markets; and the pair continued chattering, each talking for himself, in a loud voice, beneath the paling stars.

IV

SIX weeks later, Claude was painting one morning amidst a flood of sunshine that streamed through the large window of his studio. Constant rain had made the middle of August very dull, but his courage for work returned with the blue sky. His great picture did not make much progress, albeit he worked at it throughout long, silent mornings, like the obstinate, pugnacious fellow he was.

All at once there came a knock at his door. He thought that Madame Joseph, the doorkeeper, was bringing up his lunch, and as the key was always in the door, he simply called: 'Come in!'

The door had opened; there was a slight rustle, and then all became still. He went on painting without even turning his head. But the quivering silence, and the consciousness of some vague gentle breathing near him, at last made him fidgety. He looked up, and felt amazed; a woman stood there clad in a light gown, her features half-hidden by a white veil, and he did not know her, and she was carrying a bunch of roses, which completed his bewilderment.

All at once he recognised her.

'You, mademoiselle? Well, I certainly didn't expect you!'

It was Christine. He had been unable to restrain that somewhat unamiable exclamation, which was a cry from the heart itself. At first he had certainly thought of her; then, as the days went by for

nearly a couple of months without sign of life from her, she had become for him merely a fleeting, regretted vision, a charming silhouette which had melted away in space, and would never be seen again.

'Yes, monsieur, it's I. I wished to come. I thought it was wrong not to come and thank you – '

She blushed and stammered, at a loss for words. She was out of breath, no doubt through climbing the stairs, for her heart was beating fast. What! was this long-debated visit out of place after all? It had ended by seeming quite natural to her. The worst was that, in passing along the quay, she had bought that bunch of roses with the delicate intention of thereby showing her gratitude to the young fellow, and the flowers now dreadfully embarrassed her. How was she to give them to him? What would he think of her? The impropriety of the whole proceeding had only struck her as she opened the door.

But Claude, more embarrassed still, resorted to exaggerated politeness. He had thrown aside his palette and was turning the studio upside down in order to clear a chair.

'Pray be seated, mademoiselle. This is really a surprise. You are too kind.'

Once seated, Christine recovered her equanimity. He looked so droll with his wild sweeping gestures, and she felt so conscious of his shyness that she began to smile, and bravely held out the bunch of roses.

'Look here; I wished to show you that I am not ungrateful.'

At first he said nothing, but stood staring at her, thunderstruck. When he saw, though, that she was not making fun of him, he shook both her hands, with almost sufficient energy to dislocate them. Then he at once put the flowers in his water-jug, repeating:

'Ah! now you are a good fellow, you really are. This is the first time I pay that compliment to a woman, honour bright.'

He came back to her, and, looking straight into her eyes, he asked:

'Then you have not altogether forgotten me?'

'You see that I have not,' she replied, laughing.

'Why, then, did you wait two months before coming to see me?'

Again she blushed. The falsehood she was about to tell revived her embarrassment for a moment.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.