ÉMILE ZOLA

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L'Assommoir:

Содержание

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CHAPTER I

Gervaise had waited up for Lantier until two in the morning. Then, shivering from having remained in a thin loose jacket, exposed to the fresh air at the window, she had thrown herself across the bed, drowsy, feverish, and her cheeks bathed in tears.

For a week past, on leaving the "Two-Headed Calf," where they took their meals, he had sent her home with the children and never reappeared himself till late at night, alleging that he had been in search of work. That evening, while watching for his return, she thought she had seen him enter the dancing-hall of the "Grand-Balcony," the ten blazing windows of which lighted up with the glare of a conflagration the dark expanse of the exterior Boulevards; and five or six paces behind him, she had caught sight of little Adele, a burnisher, who dined at the same restaurant, swinging her hands, as if she had just quitted his arm so as not to pass together under the dazzling light of the globes at the door.

When, towards five o'clock, Gervaise awoke, stiff and sore, she broke forth into sobs. Lantier had not returned. For the first time he had slept away from home. She remained seated on the

edge of the bed, under the strip of faded chintz, which hung from the rod fastened to the ceiling by a piece of string. And slowly, with her eyes veiled by tears, she glanced round the wretched lodging, furnished with a walnut chest of drawers, minus one drawer, three rush-bottomed chairs, and a little greasy table, on which stood a broken water-jug. There had been added, for the children, an iron bedstead, which prevented any one getting to the chest of drawers, and filled two-thirds of the room. Gervaise's and Lantier's trunk, wide open, in one corner, displayed its emptiness, and a man's old hat right at the bottom almost buried beneath some dirty shirts and socks; whilst, against the walls, above the articles of furniture, hung a shawl full of holes, and a pair of trousers begrimed with mud, the last rags which the dealers in second-hand clothes declined to buy. In the centre of the mantel-piece, lying between two odd zinc candle-sticks, was a bundle of pink pawn-tickets. It was the best room of the hotel, the first floor room, looking on to the Boulevard.

The two children were sleeping side by side, with their heads on the same pillow. Claude, aged eight years, was breathing quietly, with his little hands thrown outside the coverlet; while Etienne, only four years old, was smiling, with one arm round his brother's neck. And bare-footed, without thinking to again put on the old shoes that had fallen on the floor, she resumed her position at the window, her eyes searching the pavements in the distance.

The hotel was situated on the Boulevard de la Chapelle, to

the left of the Barriere Poissonniere. It was a building of two stories high, painted a red, of the color of wine dregs, up to the second floor, and with shutters all rotted by the rain. Over a lamp with starred panes of glass, one could manage to read, between the two windows, the words, "Hotel Boncoeur, kept by Marsoullier," painted in big yellow letters, several pieces of which the moldering of the plaster had carried away. The lamp preventing her seeing, Gervaise raised herself on tiptoe, still holding the handkerchief to her lips. She looked to the right, towards the Boulevard Rochechouart, where groups of butchers, in aprons smeared with blood, were hanging about in front of the slaughter-houses; and the fresh breeze wafted occasionally a stench of slaughtered beasts. Looking to the left, she scanned a long avenue that ended nearly in front of her, where the white mass of the Lariboisiere Hospital was then in course of construction. Slowly, from one end of the horizon to the other, she followed the octroi wall, behind which she sometimes heard, during night time, the shrieks of persons being murdered; and she searchingly looked into the remote angles, the dark corners, black with humidity and filth, fearing to discern there Lantier's body, stabbed to death.

She looked at the endless gray wall that surrounded the city with its belt of desolation. When she raised her eyes higher, she became aware of a bright burst of sunlight. The dull hum of the city's awakening already filled the air. Craning her neck to look at the Poissonniere gate, she remained for a time watching

the constant stream of men, horses, and carts which flooded down from the heights of Montmartre and La Chapelle, pouring between the two squat octroi lodges. It was like a herd of plodding cattle, an endless throng widened by sudden stoppages into eddies that spilled off the sidewalks into the street, a steady procession of laborers on their way back to work with tools slung over their back and a loaf of bread under their arm. This human inundation kept pouring down into Paris to be constantly swallowed up. Gervaise leaned further out at the risk of falling when she thought she recognized Lantier among the throng. She pressed the handkerchief tighter against her mouth, as though to push back the pain within her.

The sound of a young and cheerful voice caused her to leave the window.

"So the old man isn't here, Madame Lantier?"

"Why, no, Monsieur Coupeau," she replied, trying to smile.

Coupeau, a zinc-worker who occupied a ten franc room on the top floor, having seen the door unlocked, had walked in as friends will do.

"You know," he continued, "I'm now working over there in the hospital. What beautiful May weather, isn't it? The air is rather sharp this morning."

And he looked at Gervaise's face, red with weeping. When he saw that the bed had not been slept in, he shook his head gently; then he went to the children's couch where they were sleeping, looking as rosy as cherubs, and, lowering his voice,

he said, "Come, the old man's not been home, has he? Don't worry yourself, Madame Lantier. He's very much occupied with politics. When they were voting for Eugene Sue the other day, he was acting almost crazy. He has very likely spent the night with some friends blackguarding crapulous Bonaparte."

"No, no," she murmured with an effort. "You don't think that. I know where Lantier is. You see, we have our little troubles like the rest of the world!"

Coupeau winked his eye, to indicate he was not a dupe of this falsehood; and he went off, after offering to fetch her milk, if she did not care to go out: she was a good and courageous woman, and might count upon him on any day of trouble.

As soon as he was gone, Gervaise again returned to the window. At the Barriere, the tramp of the drove still continued in the morning air: locksmiths in short blue blouses, masons in white jackets, house painters in overcoats over long smocks. From a distance the crowd looked like a chalky smear of neutral hue composed chiefly of faded blue and dingy gray. When one of the workers occasionally stopped to light his pipe the others kept plodding past him, without sparing a laugh or a word to a comrade. With cheeks gray as clay, their eyes were continually drawn toward Paris which was swallowing them one by one.

At both corners of the Rue des Poissonniers however, some of the men slackened their pace as they neared the doors of the two wine-dealers who were taking down their shutters; and, before entering, they stood on the edge of the pavement, looking

sideways over Paris, with no strength in their arms and already inclined for a day of idleness. Inside various groups were already buying rounds of drinks, or just standing around, forgetting their troubles, crowding up the place, coughing, spitting, clearing their throats with sip after sip.

Gervaise was watching Pere Colombe's wineshop to the left of the street, where she thought she had seen Lantier, when a stout woman, bareheaded and wearing an apron called to her from the middle of the roadway:

"Hey, Madame Lantier, you're up very early!"

Gervaise leaned out. "Why! It's you, Madame Boche! Oh! I've got a lot of work to-day!"

"Yes, things don't do themselves, do they?"

The conversation continued between roadway and window. Madame Boche was concierge of the building where the "Two-Headed Calf" was on the ground floor. Gervaise had waited for Lantier more than once in the concierge's lodge, so as not to be alone at table with all the men who ate at the restaurant. Madame Boche was going to a tailor who was late in mending an overcoat for her husband. She mentioned one of her tenants who had come in with a woman the night before and kept everybody awake past three in the morning. She looked at Gervaise with intense curiosity.

"Is Monsieur Lantier, then, still in bed?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes, he's asleep," replied Gervaise, who could not avoid blushing.

Madame Boche saw the tears come into her eyes; and, satisfied no doubt, she turned to go, declaring men to be a cursed, lazy set. As she went off, she called back:

"It's this morning you go to the wash-house, isn't it? I've something to wash, too. I'll keep you a place next to me, and we can chat together." Then, as if moved with sudden pity, she added:

"My poor little thing, you had far better not remain there; you'll take harm. You look quite blue with cold."

Gervaise still obstinately remained at the window during two mortal hours, till eight o'clock. Now all the shops had opened. Only a few work men were still hurrying along.

The working girls now filled the boulevard: metal polishers, milliners, flower sellers, shivering in their thin clothing. In small groups they chattered gaily, laughing and glancing here and there. Occasionally there would be one girl by herself, thin, pale, serious-faced, picking her way along the city wall among the puddles and the filth.

After the working girls, the office clerks came past, breathing upon their chilled fingers and munching penny rolls. Some of them are gaunt young fellows in ill-fitting suits, their tired eyes still fogged from sleep. Others are older men, stooped and tottering, with faces pale and drawn from long hours of office work and glancing nervously at their watches for fear of arriving late.

In time the Boulevards settle into their usual morning quiet.

Old folks come out to stroll in the sun. Tired young mothers in bedraggled skirts cuddle babies in their arms or sit on a bench to change diapers. Children run, squealing and laughing, pushing and shoving.

Then Gervaise felt herself choking, dizzy with anguish, all hopes gone; it seemed to her that everything was ended, even time itself, and that Lantier would return no more. Her eyes vacantly wandered from the old slaughter-house, foul with butchery and with stench, to the new white hospital which, through the yawning openings of its ranges of windows, disclosed the naked wards, where death was preparing to mow. In front of her on the other side of the octroi wall the bright heavens dazzled her, with the rising sun which rose higher and higher over the vast awaking city.

The young woman was seated on a chair, no longer crying, and with her hands abandoned on her lap, when Lantier quietly entered the room.

"It's you! It's you!" she cried, rising to throw herself upon his neck.

"Yes, it's me. What of it?" he replied. "You are not going to begin any of your nonsense, I hope!"

He had pushed her aside. Then, with a gesture of ill-humor he threw his black felt hat to the chest of drawers. He was a young fellow of twenty-six years of age, short and very dark, with a handsome figure, and slight moustaches which his hand was always mechanically twirling. He wore a workman's overalls and

an old soiled overcoat, which he had belted tightly at the waist, and he spoke with a strong Provencal accent.

Gervaise, who had fallen back on her chair, gently complained, in short sentences: "I've not had a wink of sleep. I feared some harm had happened to you. Where have you been? Where did you spend the night? For heaven's sake! Don't do it again, or I shall go crazy. Tell me Auguste, where have you been?"

"Where I had business, of course," he returned shrugging his shoulders. "At eight o'clock, I was at La Glaciere, with my friend who is to start a hat factory. We sat talking late, so I preferred to sleep there. Now, you know, I don't like being spied upon, so just shut up!"

The young woman recommenced sobbing. The loud voices and the rough movements of Lantier, who upset the chairs, had awakened the children. They sat up in bed, half naked, disentangling their hair with their tiny hands, and, hearing their mother weep, they uttered terrible screams, crying also with their scarcely open eyes.

"Ah! there's the music!" shouted Lantier furiously. "I warn you, I'll take my hook! And it will be for good, this time. You won't shut up? Then, good morning! I'll return to the place I've just come from."

He had already taken his hat from off the chest of drawers. But Gervaise threw herself before him, stammering: "No, no!"

And she hushed the little ones' tears with her caresses,

smoothed their hair, and soothed them with soft words. The children, suddenly quieted, laughing on their pillow, amused themselves by punching each other. The father however, without even taking off his boots, had thrown himself on the bed looking worn out, his face bearing signs of having been up all night. He did not go to sleep, he lay with his eyes wide open, looking round the room.

"It's a mess here!" he muttered. And after observing Gervaise a moment, he malignantly added: "Don't you even wash yourself now?"

Gervaise was twenty-two, tall and slim with fine features, but she was already beginning to show the strain of her hard life. She seemed to have aged ten years from the hours of agonized weeping. Lantier's mean remark made her mad.

"You're not fair," she said spiritedly. "You well know I do all I can. It's not my fault we find ourselves here. I would like to see you, with two children, in a room where there's not even a stove to heat some water. When we arrived in Paris, instead of squandering your money, you should have made a home for us at once, as you promised."

"Listen!" Lantier exploded. "You cracked the nut with me; it doesn't become you to sneer at it now!"

Apparently not listening, Gervaise went on with her own thought. "If we work hard we can get out of the hole we're in. Madame Fauconnier, the laundress on Rue Neuve, will start me on Monday. If you work with your friend from La Glaciere, in

six months we will be doing well. We'll have enough for decent clothes and a place we can call our own. But we'll have to stick with it and work hard."

Lantier turned over towards the wall, looking greatly bored. Then Gervaise lost her temper.

"Yes, that's it, I know the love of work doesn't trouble you much. You're bursting with ambition, you want to be dressed like a gentleman. You don't think me nice enough, do you, now that you've made me pawn all my dresses? Listen, Auguste, I didn't intend to speak of it, I would have waited a bit longer, but I know where you spent the night; I saw you enter the 'Grand-Balcony' with that trollop Adele. Ah! you choose them well! She's a nice one, she is! She does well to put on the airs of a princess! She's been the ridicule of every man who frequents the restaurant."

At a bound Lantier sprang from the bed. His eyes had become as black as ink in his pale face. With this little man, rage blew like a tempest.

"Yes, yes, of every man who frequents the restaurant!" repeated the young woman. "Madame Boche intends to give them notice, she and her long stick of a sister, because they've always a string of men after them on the staircase."

Lantier raised his fists; then, resisting the desire of striking her, he seized hold of her by the arms, shook her violently and sent her sprawling upon the bed of the children, who recommenced crying. And he lay down again, mumbling, like a man resolving on something that he previously hesitated to do:

"You don't know what you've done, Gervaise. You've made a big mistake; you'll see."

For an instant the children continued sobbing. Their mother, who remained bending over the bed, held them both in her embrace, and kept repeating the same words in a monotonous tone of voice.

"Ah! if it weren't for you! My poor little ones! If it weren't for you! If it weren't for you!"

Stretched out quietly, his eyes raised to the faded strip of chintz, Lantier no longer listened, but seemed to be buried in a fixed idea. He remained thus for nearly an hour, without giving way to sleep, in spite of the fatigue which weighed his eyelids down.

He finally turned toward Gervaise, his face set hard in determination. She had gotten the children up and dressed and had almost finished cleaning the room. The room looked, as always, dark and depressing with its sooty black ceiling and paper peeling from the damp walls. The dilapidated furniture was always streaked and dirty despite frequent dustings. Gervaise, devouring her grief, trying to assume a look of indifference, hurried over her work.

Lantier watched as she tidied her hair in front of the small mirror hanging near the window. While she washed herself he looked at her bare arms and shoulders. He seemed to be making comparisons in his mind as his lips formed a grimace. Gervaise limped with her right leg, though it was scarcely noticeable

except when she was tired. To-day, exhausted from remaining awake all night, she was supporting herself against the wall and dragging her leg.

Neither one spoke, they had nothing more to say. Lantier seemed to be waiting, while Gervaise kept busy and tried to keep her countenance expressionless. Finally, while she was making a bundle of the dirty clothes thrown in a corner, behind the trunk, he at length opened his lips and asked:

"What are you doing there? Where are you going?"

She did not answer at first. Then, when he furiously repeated his question, she made up her mind, and said:

"I suppose you can see for yourself. I'm going to wash all this. The children can't live in filth."

He let her pick up two or three handkerchiefs. And, after a fresh pause, he resumed: "Have you got any money?"

At these words she stood up and looked him full in the face, without leaving go of the children's dirty clothes, which she held in her hand.

"Money! And where do you think I can have stolen any? You know well enough that I got three francs the day before yesterday on my black skirt. We've lunched twice off it, and money goes quick at the pork-butcher's. No, you may be quite sure I've no money. I've four sous for the wash-house. I don't have an extra income like some women."

He let this allusion pass. He had moved off the bed, and was passing in review the few rags hanging about the room. He ended

by taking up the pair of trousers and the shawl, and searching the drawers, he added two chemises and a woman's loose jacket to the parcel; then, he threw the whole bundle into Gervaise's arms, saying:

"Here, go and pop this."

"Don't you want me to pop the children as well?" asked she. "Eh! If they lent on children, it would be a fine riddance!"

She went to the pawn-place, however. When she returned at the end of half an hour, she laid a hundred sou piece on the mantel-shelf, and added the ticket to the others, between the two candlesticks.

"That's what they gave me," said she. "I wanted six francs, but I couldn't manage it. Oh! they'll never ruin themselves. And there's always such a crowd there!"

Lantier did not pick up the five franc piece directly. He would rather that she got change, so as to leave her some of it. But he decided to slip it into his waistcoat pocket, when he noticed a small piece of ham wrapped up in paper, and the remains of a loaf on the chest of drawers.

"I didn't dare go to the milkwoman's, because we owe her a week," explained Gervaise. "But I shall be back early; you can get some bread and some chops whilst I'm away, and then we'll have lunch. Bring also a bottle of wine."

He did not say no. Their quarrel seemed to be forgotten. The young woman was completing her bundle of dirty clothes. But when she went to take Lantier's shirts and socks from the bottom

of the trunk, he called to her to leave them alone.

"Leave my things, d'ye hear? I don't want 'em touched!"

"What's it you don't want touched?" she asked, rising up. "I suppose you don't mean to put these filthy things on again, do you? They must be washed."

She studied his boyishly handsome face, now so rigid that it seemed nothing could ever soften it. He angrily grabbed his things from her and threw them back into the trunk, saying:

"Just obey me, for once! I tell you I won't have 'em touched!"

"But why?" she asked, turning pale, a terrible suspicion crossing her mind. "You don't need your shirts now, you're not going away. What can it matter to you if I take them?"

He hesitated for an instant, embarrassed by the piercing glance she fixed upon him. "Why – why – " stammered he, "because you go and tell everyone that you keep me, that you wash and mend. Well! It worries me, there! Attend to your own business and I'll attend to mine, washerwomen don't work for dogs."

She supplicated, she protested she had never complained; but he roughly closed the trunk and sat down upon it, saying, "No!" to her face. He could surely do as he liked with what belonged to him! Then, to escape from the inquiring looks she leveled at him, he went and laid down on the bed again, saying that he was sleepy, and requesting her not to make his head ache with any more of her row. This time indeed, he seemed to fall asleep. Gervaise, for a while, remained undecided. She was tempted to kick the bundle of dirty clothes on one side, and to sit down and

sew. But Lantier's regular breathing ended by reassuring her. She took the ball of blue and the piece of soap remaining from her last washing, and going up to the little ones who were quietly playing with some old corks in front of the window, she kissed them, and said in a low voice:

"Be very good, don't make any noise; papa's asleep."

When she left the room, Claude's and Etienne's gentle laughter alone disturbed the great silence beneath the blackened ceiling. It was ten o'clock. A ray of sunshine entered by the half open window.

On the Boulevard, Gervaise turned to the left, and followed the Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d'Or. As she passed Madame Fauconnier's shop, she slightly bowed her head. The wash-house she was bound for was situated towards the middle of the street, at the part where the roadway commenced to ascend.

The rounded, gray contours of the three large zinc wash tanks, studded with rivets, rose above the flat-roofed building. Behind them was the drying room, a high second story, closed in on all sides by narrow-slatted lattices so that the air could circulate freely, and through which laundry could be seen hanging on brass wires. The steam engine's smokestack exhaled puffs of white smoke to the right of the water tanks.

Gervaise was used to puddles and did not bother to tuck her skirts up before making her way through the doorway, which was cluttered with jars of bleaching water. She was already acquainted with the mistress of the wash-house, a delicate little

woman with red, inflamed eyes, who sat in a small glazed closet with account books in front of her, bars of soap on shelves, balls of blue in glass bowls, and pounds of soda done up in packets; and, as she passed, she asked for her beetle and her scouring-brush, which she had left to be taken care of the last time she had done her washing there. Then, after obtaining her number, she entered the wash-house.

It was an immense shed, with large clear windows, and a flat ceiling, showing the beams supported on cast-iron pillars. Pale rays of light passed through the hot steam, which remained suspended like a milky fog. Smoke arose from certain corners, spreading about and covering the recesses with a bluish veil. A heavy moisture hung around, impregnated with a soapy odor, a damp insipid smell, continuous though at moments overpowered by the more potent fumes of the chemicals. Along the washing-places, on either side of the central alley, were rows of women, with bare arms and necks, and skirts tucked up, showing colored stockings and heavy lace-up shoes. They were beating furiously, laughing, leaning back to call out a word in the midst of the din, or stooping over their tubs, all of them brutal, ungainly, foul of speech, and soaked as though by a shower, with their flesh red and reeking.

All around the women continuously flowed a river from hot-water buckets emptied with a sudden splash, cold-water faucets left dripping, soap suds spattering, and the dripping from rinsed laundry which was hung up. It splashed their feet and drained

away across the sloping flagstones. The din of the shouting and the rhythmic beating was joined by the patter of steady dripping. It was slightly muffled by the moisture-soaked ceiling. Meanwhile, the steam engine could be heard as it puffed and snorted ceaselessly while cloaked in its white mist. The dancing vibration of its flywheel seemed to regulate the volume of the noisy turbulence.

Gervaise passed slowly along the alley, looking to the right and left, carrying her laundry bundle under one arm, with one hip thrust high and limping more than usual. She was jostled by several women in the hubbub.

"This way, my dear!" cried Madame Boche, in her loud voice. Then, when the young woman had joined her at the very end on the left, the concierge, who was furiously rubbing a dirty sock, began to talk incessantly, without leaving off her work. "Put your things there, I've kept your place. Oh, I sha'n't be long over what I've got. Boche scarcely dirties his things at all. And you, you won't be long either, will you? Your bundle's quite a little one. Before twelve o'clock we shall have finished, and we can go off to lunch. I used to send my things to a laundress in the Rue Poulet, but she destroyed everything with her chlorine and her brushes; so now I do the washing myself. It's so much saved; it only costs the soap. I say, you should have put those shirts to soak. Those little rascals of children, on my word! One would think their bodies were covered with soot."

Gervaise, having undone her bundle, was spreading out the

little ones' shirts, and as Madame Boche advised her to take a pailful of lye, she answered, "Oh, no! warm water will do. I'm used to it." She had sorted her laundry with several colored pieces to one side. Then, after filling her tub with four pails of cold water from the tap behind her, she plunged her pile of whites into it.

"You're used to it?" repeated Madame Boche. "You were a washerwoman in your native place, weren't you, my dear?"

Gervaise, with her sleeves pushed back, displayed the graceful arms of a young blonde, as yet scarcely reddened at the elbows, and started scrubbing her laundry. She spread a shirt out on the narrow rubbing board which was water-bleached and eroded by years of use. She rubbed soap into the shirt, turned it over, and soaped the other side. Before replying to Madame Boche she grasped her beetle and began to pound away so that her shouted phrases were punctuated with loud and rhythmic thumps.

"Yes, yes, a washerwoman – When I was ten – That's twelve years ago – We used to go to the river – It smelt nicer there than it does here – You should have seen, there was a nook under the trees, with clear running water – You know, at Plassans – Don't you know Plassans? – It's near Marseilles."

"How you go at it!" exclaimed Madame Boche, amazed at the strength of her blows. "You could flatten out a piece of iron with your little lady-like arms."

The conversation continued in a very high volume. At times, the concierge, not catching what was said, was obliged to lean

forward. All the linen was beaten, and with a will! Gervaise plunged it into the tub again, and then took it out once more, each article separately, to rub it over with soap a second time and brush it. With one hand she held the article firmly on the plank; with the other, which grasped the short couch-grass brush, she extracted from the linen a dirty lather, which fell in long drips. Then, in the slight noise caused by the brush, the two women drew together, and conversed in a more intimate way.

"No, we're not married," resumed Gervaise. "I don't hide it. Lantier isn't so nice for any one to care to be his wife. If it weren't for the children! I was fourteen and he was eighteen when we had our first one. It happened in the usual way, you know how it is. I wasn't happy at home. Old man Macquart would kick me in the tail whenever he felt like it, for no reason at all. I had to have some fun outside. We might have been married, but – I forget why – our parents wouldn't consent."

She shook her hands, which were growing red in the white suds. "The water's awfully hard in Paris."

Madame Boche was now washing only very slowly. She kept leaving off, making her work last as long as she could, so as to remain there, to listen to that story, which her curiosity had been hankering to know for a fortnight past. Her mouth was half open in the midst of her big, fat face; her eyes, which were almost at the top of her head, were gleaming. She was thinking, with the satisfaction of having guessed right.

"That's it, the little one gossips too much. There's been a row."

Then, she observed out loud, "He isn't nice, then?"

"Don't mention it!" replied Gervaise. "He used to behave very well in the country; but, since we've been in Paris, he's been unbearable. I must tell you that his mother died last year and left him some money – about seventeen hundred francs. He would come to Paris, so, as old Macquart was forever knocking me about without warning, I consented to come away with him. We made the journey with two children. He was to set me up as a laundress, and work himself at his trade of a hatter. We should have been very happy; but, you see, Lantier's ambitious and a spendthrift, a fellow who only thinks of amusing himself. In short, he's not worth much. On arriving, we went to the Hotel Montmartre, in the Rue Montmartre. And then there were dinners, and cabs, and the theatre; a watch for himself and a silk dress for me, for he's not unkind when he's got the money. You understand, he went in for everything, and so well that at the end of two months we were cleaned out. It was then that we came to live at the Hotel Boncoeur, and that this horrible life began."

She interrupted herself. A lump had suddenly risen in her throat, and she could scarcely restrain her tears. She had finished brushing the things.

"I must go and fetch my hot water," she murmured.

But Madame Boche, greatly disappointed at this break off in the disclosures, called to the wash-house boy, who was passing, "My little Charles, kindly get madame a pail of hot water; she's in a hurry."

The youth took the bucket and brought it back filled. Gervaise paid him; it was a sou the pailful. She poured the hot water into the tub, and soaped the things a last time with her hands, leaning over them in a mass of steam, which deposited small beads of grey vapor in her light hair.

"Here put some soda in, I've got some by me," said the concierge, obligingly.

And she emptied into Gervaise's tub what remained of a bag of soda which she had brought with her. She also offered her some of the chemical water, but the young woman declined it; it was only good for grease and wine stains.

"I think he's rather a loose fellow," resumed Madame Boche, returning to Lantier, but without naming him.

Gervaise, bent almost double, her hands all shriveled, and thrust in amongst the clothes, merely tossed her head.

"Yes, yes," continued the other, "I have noticed several little things – " But she suddenly interrupted herself, as Gervaise jumped up, with a pale face, and staring wildly at her. Then she exclaimed, "Oh, no! I don't know anything! He likes to laugh a bit, I think, that's all. For instance, you know the two girls who lodge at my place, Adele and Virginie. Well, he larks about with 'em, but he just flirts for sport."

The young woman standing before her, her face covered with perspiration, the water dripping from her arms, continued to stare at her with a fixed and penetrating look. Then the concierge got excited, giving herself a blow on the chest, and pledging her word

of honor, she cried:

"I know nothing, I mean it when I say so!"

Then calming herself, she added in a gentle voice, as if speaking to a person on whom loud protestations would have no effect, "I think he has a frank look about the eyes. He'll marry you, my dear, I'm sure of it."

Gervaise wiped her forehead with her wet hand. Shaking her head again, she pulled another garment out of the water. Both of them kept silence for a moment. The wash-house was quieting down, for eleven o'clock had struck. Half of the washerwomen were perched on the edge of their tubs, eating sausages between slices of bread and drinking from open bottles of wine. Only housewives who had come to launder small bundles of family linen were hurrying to finish.

Occasional beetle blows could still be heard amid the subdued laughter and gossip half-choked by the greedy chewing of jawbones. The steam engine never stopped. Its vibrant, snorting voice seemed to fill the entire hall, though not one of the women even heard it. It was like the breathing of the wash-house, its hot breath collecting under the ceiling rafters in an eternal floating mist.

The heat was becoming intolerable. Through the tall windows on the left sunlight was streaming in, touching the steamy vapors with opalescent tints of soft pinks and grayish blues. Charles went from window to window, letting down the heavy canvas awnings. Then he crossed to the shady side to open the

ventilators. He was applauded by cries and hand clapping and a rough sort of gaiety spread around. Soon even the last of the beetle-pounding stopped.

With full mouths, the washerwomen could only make gestures. It became so quiet that the grating sound of the fireman shoveling coal into the engine's firebox could be heard at regular intervals from far at the other end.

Gervaise was washing her colored things in the hot water thick with lather, which she had kept for the purpose. When she had finished, she drew a trestle towards her and hung across it all the different articles; the drippings from which made bluish puddles on the floor; and she commenced rinsing. Behind her, the cold water tap was set running into a vast tub fixed to the ground, and across which were two wooden bars whereon to lay the clothes. High up in the air were two other bars for the things to finish dripping on.

"We're almost finished, and not a bad job," said Madame Boche. "I'll wait and help you wring all that."

"Oh! it's not worth while; I'm much obliged though," replied the young woman, who was kneading with her hands and sousing the colored things in some clean water. "If I'd any sheets, it would be another thing."

But she had, however, to accept the concierge's assistance. They were wringing between them, one at each end, a woolen skirt of a washed-out chestnut color, from which dribbled a yellowish water, when Madame Boche exclaimed:

"Why, there's tall Virginie! What has she come here to wash, when all her wardrobe that isn't on her would go into a pocket handkerchief?"

Gervaise jerked her head up. Virginie was a girl of her own age, taller than she was, dark and pretty in spite of her face being rather long and narrow. She had on an old black dress with flounces, and a red ribbon round her neck; and her hair was done up carefully, the chignon being enclosed in a blue silk net. She stood an instant in the middle of the central alley, screwing up her eyes as though seeking someone; then, when she caught sight of Gervaise, she passed close to her, erect, insolent, and with a swinging gait, and took a place in the same row, five tubs away from her.

"There's a freak for you!" continued Madame Boche in a lower tone of voice. "She never does any laundry, not even a pair of cuffs. A seamstress who doesn't even sew on a loose button! She's just like her sister, the brass burnisher, that hussy Adele, who stays away from her job two days out of three. Nobody knows who their folks are or how they make a living. Though, if I wanted to talk.. What on earth is she scrubbing there? A filthy petticoat. I'll wager it's seen some lovely sights, that petticoat!"

Madame Boche was evidently trying to make herself agreeable to Gervaise. The truth was she often took a cup of coffee with Adele and Virginia, when the girls had any money. Gervaise did not answer, but hurried over her work with feverish hands. She had just prepared her blue in a little tub that stood

on three legs. She dipped in the linen things, and shook them an instant at the bottom of the colored water, the reflection of which had a pinky tinge; and after wringing them lightly, she spread them out on the wooden bars up above. During the time she was occupied with this work, she made a point of turning her back on Virginie. But she heard her chuckles; she could feel her sidelong glances. Virginie appeared only to have come there to provoke her. At one moment, Gervaise having turned around, they both stared into each other's faces.

"Leave her alone," whispered Madame Boche. "You're not going to pull each other's hair out, I hope. When I tell you there's nothing to it! It isn't her, anyhow!"

At this moment, as the young woman was hanging up the last article of clothing, there was a sound of laughter at the door of the wash-house.

"Here are two brats who want their mamma!" cried Charles.

All the women leant forward. Gervaise recognized Claude and Etienne. As soon as they caught sight of her, they ran to her through the puddles, the heels of their unlaced shoes resounding on the flagstones. Claude, the eldest, held his little brother by the hand. The women, as they passed them, uttered little exclamations of affection as they noticed their frightened though smiling faces. And they stood there, in front of their mother, without leaving go of each other's hands, and holding their fair heads erect.

"Has papa sent you?" asked Gervaise.

But as she stooped to tie the laces of Etienne's shoes, she saw the key of their room on one of Claude's fingers, with the brass number hanging from it.

"Why, you've brought the key!" she said, greatly surprised. "What's that for?"

The child, seeing the key which he had forgotten on his finger, appeared to recollect, and exclaimed in his clear voice:

"Papa's gone away."

"He's gone to buy the lunch, and told you to come here to fetch me?"

Claude looked at his brother, hesitated, no longer recollecting. Then he resumed all in a breath: "Papa's gone away. He jumped off the bed, he put all the things in the trunk, he carried the trunk down to a cab. He's gone away."

Gervaise, who was squatting down, slowly rose to her feet, her face ghastly pale. She put her hands to her cheeks and temples, as though she felt her head was breaking; and she could find only these words, which she repeated twenty times in the same tone of voice:

"Ah! good heavens! – ah! good heavens! – ah! good heavens!"

Madame Boche, however, also questioned the child, quite delighted at the chance of hearing the whole story.

"Come, little one, you must tell us just what happened. It was he who locked the door and who told you to bring the key, wasn't it?" And, lowering her voice, she whispered in Claude's ear: "Was there a lady in the cab?"

The child again got confused. Then he recommenced his story in a triumphant manner: "He jumped off the bed, he put all the things in the trunk. He's gone away."

Then, when Madame Boche let him go, he drew his brother in front of the tap, and they amused themselves by turning on the water. Gervaise was unable to cry. She was choking, leaning back against her tub, her face still buried in her hands. Brief shudders rocked her body and she wailed out long sighs while pressing her hands tighter against her eyes, as though abandoning herself to the blackness of desolation, a dark, deep pit into which she seemed to be falling.

"Come, my dear, pull yourself together!" murmured Madame Boche.

"If you only knew! If you only knew!" said she at length very faintly. "He sent me this morning to pawn my shawl and my chemises to pay for that cab."

And she burst out crying. The memory of the events of that morning and of her trip to the pawn-place tore from her the sobs that had been choking her throat. That abominable trip to the pawn-place was the thing that hurt most in all her sorrow and despair. Tears were streaming down her face but she didn't think of using her handkerchief.

"Be reasonable, do be quiet, everyone's looking at you," Madame Boche, who hovered round her, kept repeating. "How can you worry yourself so much on account of a man? You loved him, then, all the same, did you, my poor darling? A little while

ago you were saying all sorts of things against him; and now you're crying for him, and almost breaking your heart. Dear me, how silly we all are!"

Then she became quite maternal.

"A pretty little woman like you! Can it be possible? One may tell you everything now, I suppose. Well! You recollect when I passed under your window, I already had my suspicions. Just fancy, last night, when Adele came home, I heard a man's footsteps with hers. So I thought I would see who it was. I looked up the staircase. The fellow was already on the second landing; but I certainly recognized Monsieur Lantier's overcoat. Boche, who was on the watch this morning, saw him tranquilly nod adieu. He was with Adele, you know. Virginie has a situation now, where she goes twice a week. Only it's highly imprudent all the same, for they've only one room and an alcove, and I can't very well say where Virginie managed to sleep."

She interrupted herself an instant, turned round, and then resumed, subduing her loud voice:

"She's laughing at seeing you cry, that heartless thing over there. I'd stake my life that her washing's all a pretence. She's packed off the other two, and she's come here so as to tell them how you take it."

Gervaise removed her hands from her face and looked. When she beheld Virginie in front of her, amidst three or four women, speaking low and staring at her, she was seized with a mad rage. Her arms in front of her, searching the ground, she stumbled

forward a few paces. Trembling all over, she found a bucket full of water, grabbed it with both hands, and emptied it at Virginie.

"The virago!" yelled tall Virginie.

She had stepped back, and her boots alone got wet. The other women, who for some minutes past had all been greatly upset by Gervaise's tears, jostled each other in their anxiety to see the fight. Some, who were finishing their lunch, got on the tops of their tubs. Others hastened forward, their hands smothered with soap. A ring was formed.

"Ah! the virago!" repeated tall Virginie. "What's the matter with her? She's mad!"

Gervaise, standing on the defensive, her chin thrust out, her features convulsed, said nothing, not having yet acquired the Paris gift of street gab. The other continued:

"Get out! This girl's tired of wallowing about in the country; she wasn't twelve years old when the soldiers were at her. She even lost her leg serving her country. That leg's rotting off."

The lookers-on burst out laughing. Virginie, seeing her success, advanced a couple of steps, drawing herself up to her full height, and yelling louder than ever:

"Here! Come a bit nearer, just to see how I'll settle you! Don't you come annoying us here. Do I even know her, the hussy? If she'd wetted me, I'd have pretty soon shown her battle, as you'd have seen. Let her just say what I've ever done to her. Speak, you vixen; what's been done to you?"

"Don't talk so much," stammered Gervaise. "You know well

enough. Some one saw my husband last night. And shut up, because if you don't I'll most certainly strangle you."

"Her husband! That's a good one! As if cripples like her had husbands! If he's left you it's not my fault. Surely you don't think I've stolen him, do you? He was much too good for you and you made him sick. Did you keep him on a leash? Has anyone here seen her husband? There's a reward."

The laughter burst forth again. Gervaise contented herself with continually murmuring in a low tone of voice:

"You know well enough, you know well enough. It's your sister. I'll strangle her – your sister."

"Yes, go and try it on with my sister," resumed Virginie sneeringly. "Ah! it's my sister! That's very likely. My sister looks a trifle different to you; but what's that to me? Can't one come and wash one's clothes in peace now? Just dry up, d'ye hear, because I've had enough of it!"

But it was she who returned to the attack, after giving five or six strokes with her beetle, intoxicated by the insults she had been giving utterance to, and worked up into a passion. She left off and recommenced again, speaking in this way three times:

"Well, yes! it's my sister. There now, does that satisfy you? They adore each other. You should just see them bill and coo! And he's left you with your children. Those pretty kids with scabs all over their faces! You got one of them from a gendarme, didn't you? And you let three others die because you didn't want to pay excess baggage on your journey. It's your Lantier who told us

that. Ah! he's been telling some fine things; he'd had enough of you!"

"You dirty jade! You dirty jade! You dirty jade!" yelled Gervaise, beside herself, and again seized with a furious trembling. She turned round, looking once more about the ground; and only observing the little tub, she seized hold of it by the legs, and flung the whole of the bluing at Virginie's face.

"The beast! She's spoilt my dress!" cried the latter, whose shoulder was sopping wet and whose left hand was dripping blue. "Just wait, you wretch!"

In her turn she seized a bucket, and emptied it over Gervaise. Then a formidable battle began. They both ran along the rows of tubs, seized hold of the pails that were full, and returned to dash the contents at each other's heads. And each deluge was accompanied by a volley of words. Gervaise herself answered now:

"There, you scum! You got it that time. It'll help to cool you."

"Ah! the carrion! That's for your filth. Wash yourself for once in your life."

"Yes, yes, I'll wash the salt out of you, you cod!"

"Another one! Brush your teeth, fix yourself up for your post to-night at the corner of the Rue Belhomme."

They ended by having to refill the buckets at the water taps, continuing to insult each other the while. The initial bucketfuls were so poorly aimed as to scarcely reach their targets, but they soon began to splash each other in earnest. Virginie was the first

to receive a bucketful in the face. The water ran down, soaking her back and front. She was still staggering when another caught her from the side, hitting her left ear and drenching her chignon which then came unwound into a limp, bedraggled string of hair.

Gervaise was hit first in the legs. One pail filled her shoes full of water and splashed up to her thighs. Two more wet her even higher. Soon both of them were soaked from top to bottom and it was impossible to count the hits. Their clothes were plastered to their bodies and they looked shrunken. Water was dripping everywhere as from umbrellas in a rainstorm.

"They look jolly funny!" said the hoarse voice of one of the women.

Everyone in the wash-house was highly amused. A good space was left to the combatants, as nobody cared to get splashed. Applause and jokes circulated in the midst of the sluice-like noise of the buckets emptied in rapid succession! On the floor the puddles were running one into another, and the two women were wading in them up to their ankles. Virginie, however, who had been meditating a treacherous move, suddenly seized hold of a pail of lye, which one of her neighbors had left there and threw it. The same cry arose from all. Everyone thought Gervaise was scalded; but only her left foot had been slightly touched. And, exasperated by the pain, she seized a bucket, without troubling herself to fill it this time, and threw it with all her might at the legs of Virginie, who fell to the ground. All the women spoke together.

"She's broken one of her limbs!"

"Well, the other tried to cook her!"

"She's right, after all, the blonde one, if her man's been taken from her!"

Madame Boche held up her arms to heaven, uttering all sorts of exclamations. She had prudently retreated out of the way between two tubs; and the children, Claude and Etienne, crying, choking, terrified, clung to her dress with the continuous cry of "Mamma! Mamma!" broken by their sobs. When she saw Virginie fall she hastened forward, and tried to pull Gervaise away by her skirt, repeating the while, "Come now, go home! Be reasonable. On my word, it's quite upset me. Never was such a butchery seen before."

But she had to draw back and seek refuge again between the two tubs, with the children. Virginie had just flown at Gervaise's throat. She squeezed her round the neck, trying to strangle her. The latter freed herself with a violent jerk, and in her turn hung on to the other's hair, as though she was trying to pull her head off. The battle was silently resumed, without a cry, without an insult. They did not seize each other round the body, they attacked each other's faces with open hands and clawing fingers, pinching, scratching whatever they caught hold of. The tall, dark girl's red ribbon and blue silk hair net were torn off. The body of her dress, giving way at the neck, displayed a large portion of her shoulder; whilst the blonde, half stripped, a sleeve gone from her loose white jacket without her knowing how, had a rent

in her underlinen, which exposed to view the naked line of her waist. Shreds of stuff flew in all directions. It was from Gervaise that the first blood was drawn, three long scratches from the mouth to the chin; and she sought to protect her eyes, shutting them at every grab the other made, for fear of having them torn out. No blood showed on Virginie as yet. Gervaise aimed at her ears, maddened at not being able to reach them. At length she succeeded in seizing hold of one of the earrings – an imitation pear in yellow glass – which she pulled out and slit the ear, and the blood flowed.

"They're killing each other! Separate them, the vixens!" exclaimed several voices.

The other women had drawn nearer. They formed themselves into two camps. Some were cheering the combatants on as the others were trembling and turning their heads away saying that it was making them sick. A large fight nearly broke out between the two camps as the women called each other names and brandished their fists threateningly. Three loud slaps rang out.

Madame Boche, meanwhile, was trying to discover the wash-house boy.

"Charles! Charles! Wherever has he got to?"

And she found him in the front rank, looking on with his arms folded. He was a big fellow, with an enormous neck. He was laughing and enjoying the sight of the skin which the two women displayed. The little blonde was as fat as a quail. It would be fun if her chemise burst open.

"Why," murmured he, blinking his eye, "she's got a strawberry birthmark under her arm."

"What! You're there!" cried Madame Boche, as she caught sight of him. "Just come and help us separate them. You can easily separate them, you can!"

"Oh, no! thank you, not if I know it," said he coolly. "To get my eye scratched like I did the other day, I suppose! I'm not here for that sort of thing; I have enough to do without that. Don't be afraid, a little bleeding does 'em good; it'll soften 'em."

The concierge then talked of fetching the police; but the mistress of the wash-house, the delicate young woman with the red, inflamed eyes, would not allow her to do this. She kept saying:

"No, no, I won't; it'll compromise my establishment."

The struggle on the ground continued. All on a sudden, Virginie raised herself up on her knees. She had just gotten hold of a beetle and held it on high. She had a rattle in her throat and in an altered voice, she exclaimed, "Here's something that'll settle you! Get your dirty linen ready!"

Gervaise quickly thrust out her hand, and also seized a beetle, and held it up like a club; and she too spoke in a choking voice, "Ah! you want to wash. Let me get hold of your skin that I may beat it into dish-cloths!"

For a moment they remained there, on their knees, menacing each other. Their hair all over their faces, their breasts heaving, muddy, swelling with rage, they watched one another, as they

waited and took breath. Gervaise gave the first blow. Her beetle glided off Virginie's shoulder, and she at once threw herself on one side to avoid the latter's beetle, which grazed her hip. Then, warming to their work they struck at each other like washerwomen beating clothes, roughly, and in time. Whenever there was a hit, the sound was deadened, so that one might have thought it a blow in a tub full of water. The other women around them no longer laughed. Several had gone off saying that it quite upset them; those who remained stretched out their necks, their eyes lighted up with a gleam of cruelty, admiring the pluck displayed. Madame Boche had led Claude and Etienne away, and one could hear at the other end of the building the sound of their sobs, mingled with the sonorous shocks of the two beetles. But Gervaise suddenly yelled. Virginie had caught her a whack with all her might on her bare arm, just above the elbow. A large red mark appeared, the flesh at once began to swell. Then she threw herself upon Virginie, and everyone thought she was going to beat her to death.

"Enough! Enough!" was cried on all sides.

Her face bore such a terrible expression, that no one dared approach her. Her strength seemed to have increased tenfold. She seized Virginie round the waist, bent her down and pressed her face against the flagstones. Raising her beetle she commenced beating as she used to beat at Plassans, on the banks of the Viorne, when her mistress washed the clothes of the garrison. The wood seemed to yield to the flesh with a damp sound. At

each whack a red weal marked the white skin.

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed the boy Charles, opening his eyes to their full extent and gloating over the sight.

Laughter again burst forth from the lookers-on, but soon the cry, "Enough! Enough!" recommenced. Gervaise heard not, neither did she tire. She examined her work, bent over it, anxious not to leave a dry place. She wanted to see the whole of that skin beaten, covered with contusions. And she talked, seized with a ferocious gaiety, recalling a washerwoman's song,

> "Bang! Bang! Margot at her tub.
> Bang! Bang! Beating rub-a-dub.
> Bang! Bang! Tries to wash her heart.
> Bang! Bang! Black with grief to part."

And then she resumed,

> "That's for you, that's for your sister.
> That's for Lantier.
> When you next see them,
> You can give them that.
> Attention! I'm going to begin again.
> That's for Lantier, that's for your sister.
> That's for you.
> Bang! Bang! Margot at her tub.
> Bang! Bang! Beating rub-a-dub – "

The others were obliged to drag Virginie away from her. The

tall, dark girl, her face bathed in tears and purple with shame, picked up her things and hastened away. She was vanquished. Gervaise slipped on the sleeve of her jacket again, and fastened up her petticoats. Her arm pained her a good deal, and she asked Madame Boche to place her bundle of clothes on her shoulder. The concierge referred to the battle, spoke of her emotions, and talked of examining the young woman's person, just to see.

"You may, perhaps, have something broken. I heard a tremendous blow."

But Gervaise wanted to go home. She made no reply to the pitying remarks and noisy ovation of the other women who surrounded her, erect in their aprons. When she was laden she gained the door, where the children awaited her.

"Two hours, that makes two sous," said the mistress of the wash-house, already back at her post in the glazed closet.

Why two sous? She no longer understood that she was asked to pay for her place there. Then she gave the two sous; and limping very much beneath the weight of the wet clothes on her shoulder, the water dripping from off her, her elbow black and blue, her cheek covered with blood, she went off, dragging Claude and Etienne with her bare arms, whilst they trotted along on either side of her, still trembling, and their faces besmeared with their tears.

Once she was gone, the wash-house resumed its roaring tumult. The washerwomen had eaten their bread and drunk their wine. Their faces were lit up and their spirits enlivened by the

fight between Gervaise and Virginie.

The long lines of tubs were astir again with the fury of thrashing arms, of craggy profiles, of marionettes with bent backs and slumping shoulders that twisted and jerked violently as though on hinges. Conversations went on from one end to the other in loud voices. Laughter and coarse remarks crackled through the ceaseless gurgling of the water. Faucets were sputtering, buckets spilling, rivulets flowing underneath the rows of washboards. Throughout the huge shed rising wisps of steam reflected a reddish tint, pierced here and there by disks of sunlight, golden globes that had leaked through holes in the awnings. The air was stiflingly warm and odorous with soap.

Suddenly the hall was filled with a white mist. The huge copper lid of the lye-water kettle was rising mechanically along a notched shaft, and from the gaping copper hollow within its wall of bricks came whirling clouds of vapor. Meanwhile, at one side the drying machines were hard at work; within their cast-iron cylinders bundles of laundry were being wrung dry by the centrifugal force of the steam engine, which was still puffing, steaming, jolting the wash-house with the ceaseless labor of its iron limbs.

When Gervaise turned into the entry of the Hotel Boncoeur, her tears again mastered her. It was a dark, narrow passage, with a gutter for the dirty water running alongside the wall; and the stench which she again encountered there caused her to think of the fortnight she had passed in the place with Lantier – a fortnight

of misery and quarrels, the recollection of which was now a bitter regret. It seemed to bring her abandonment home to her.

Upstairs the room was bare, in spite of the sunshine which entered through the open window. That blaze of light, that kind of dancing golden dust, exposed the lamentable condition of the blackened ceiling, and of the walls half denuded of paper, all the more. The only thing left hanging in the room was a woman's small neckerchief, twisted like a piece of string. The children's bedstead, drawn into the middle of the apartment, displayed the chest of drawers, the open drawers of which exposed their emptiness. Lantier had washed himself and had used up the last of the pomatum – two sous' worth of pomatum in a playing card; the greasy water from his hands filled the basin. And he had forgotten nothing. The corner which until then had been filled by the trunk seemed to Gervaise an immense empty space. Even the little mirror which hung on the window-fastening was gone. When she made this discovery, she had a presentiment. She looked on the mantel-piece. Lantier had taken away the pawn tickets; the pink bundle was no longer there, between the two odd zinc candlesticks.

She hung her laundry over the back of a chair and just stood there, gazing around at the furniture. She was so dulled and bewildered that she could no longer cry. She had only one sou left. Then, hearing Claude and Etienne laughing merrily by the window, their troubles already forgotten, she went to them and put her arms about them, losing herself for a moment in

contemplation of that long gray avenue where, that very morning, she had watched the awakening of the working population, of the immense work-shop of Paris.

At this hour immense heat was rising from the pavement and from all the furnaces in the factories, setting alight a reflecting oven over the city and beyond the octroi wall. Out upon this very pavement, into this furnace blast, she had been tossed, alone with her little ones. As she glanced up and down the boulevard, she was seized with a dull dread that her life would be fixed there forever, between a slaughter-house and a hospital.

CHAPTER II

Three weeks later, towards half-past eleven, one beautiful sunshiny day, Gervaise and Coupeau, the zinc-worker, were each partaking of a plum preserved in brandy, at "l'Assommoir" kept by Pere Colombe. Coupeau, who had been smoking a cigarette on the pavement, had prevailed on her to go inside as she returned from taking home a customer's washing; and her big square laundress's basket was on the floor beside her, behind the little zinc covered table.

Pere Colombe's l'Assommoir was at the corner of Rue des Poissonniers and Boulevard de Rochechouart. The sign, in tall blue letters stretching from one end to the other said: Distillery. Two dusty oleanders planted in half casks stood beside the doorway. A long bar with its tin measuring cups was on the left as you entered. The large room was decorated with casks painted a gay yellow, bright with varnish, and gleaming with copper taps and hoops.

On the shelves above the bar were liquor bottles, jars of fruit preserved in brandy, and flasks of all shapes. They completely covered the wall and were reflected in the mirror behind the bar as colorful spots of apple green, pale gold, and soft brown. The main feature of the establishment, however, was the distilling apparatus. It was at the rear, behind an oak railing in a glassed-in area. The customers could watch its functioning, long-necked

still-pots, copper worms disappearing underground, a devil's kitchen alluring to drink-sodden work men in search of pleasant dreams.

L'Assommoir was nearly empty at the lunch hour. Pere Colombe, a heavy man of forty, was serving a ten year old girl who had asked him to place four sous' worth of brandy into her cup. A shaft of sunlight came through the entrance to warm the floor which was always damp from the smokers' spitting. From everything, the casks, the bar, the entire room, a liquorish odor arose, an alcoholic aroma which seemed to thicken and befuddle the dust motes dancing in the sunlight.

Coupeau was making another cigarette. He was very neat, in a short blue linen blouse and cap, and was laughing and showing his white teeth. With a projecting under jaw and a slightly snub nose, he had handsome chestnut eyes, and the face of a jolly dog and a thorough good fellow. His coarse curly hair stood erect. His skin still preserved the softness of his twenty-six years. Opposite to him, Gervaise, in a thin black woolen dress, and bareheaded, was finishing her plum which she held by the stalk between the tips of her fingers. They were close to the street, at the first of the four tables placed alongside the barrels facing the bar.

When the zinc-worker had lit his cigarette, he placed his elbows on the table, thrust his face forward, and for an instant looked without speaking at the young woman, whose pretty fair face had that day the milky transparency of china. Then, alluding to a matter known to themselves alone, and already discussed

between them, he simply asked in a low voice:

"So it's to be 'no'? you say 'no'?"

"Oh! most decidedly 'no' Monsieur Coupeau," quietly replied Gervaise with a smile. "I hope you're not going to talk to me about that here. You know you promised me you would be reasonable. Had I known, I wouldn't have let you treat me."

Coupeau kept silence, looking at her intently with a boldness. She sat still, at ease and friendly. At the end of a brief silence she added:

"You can't really mean it. I'm an old woman; I've a big boy eight years old. Whatever could we two do together?"

"Why!" murmured Coupeau, blinking his eyes, "what the others do, of course, get married!"

She made a gesture of feeling annoyed. "Oh! do you think it's always pleasant? One can very well see you've never seen much of living. No, Monsieur Coupeau, I must think of serious things. Burdening oneself never leads to anything, you know! I've two mouths at home which are never tired of swallowing, I can tell you! How do you suppose I can bring up my little ones, if I only sit here talking indolently? And listen, besides that, my misfortune has been a famous lesson to me. You know I don't care a bit about men now. They won't catch me again for a long while."

She spoke with such cool objectivity that it was clear she had resolved this in her mind, turning it about thoroughly.

Coupeau was deeply moved and kept repeating: "I feel so sorry for you. It causes me a great deal of pain."

"Yes, I know that," resumed she, "and I am sorry, Monsieur Coupeau. But you mustn't take it to heart. If I had any idea of enjoying myself, *mon Dieu!*, I would certainly rather be with you than anyone else. You're a good boy and gentle. Only, where's the use, as I've no inclination to wed? I've been for the last fortnight, now, at Madame Fauconnier's. The children go to school. I've work, I'm contented. So the best is to remain as we are, isn't it?"

And she stooped down to take her basket.

"You're making me talk; they must be expecting me at the shop. You'll easily find someone else prettier than I, Monsieur Coupeau, and who won't have two boys to drag about with her."

He looked at the clock inserted in the frame-work of the mirror, and made her sit down again, exclaiming:

"Don't be in such a hurry! It's only eleven thirty-five. I've still twenty-five minutes. You don't have to be afraid that I shall do anything foolish; there's the table between us. So you detest me so much that you won't stay and have a little chat with me."

She put her basket down again, so as not to disoblige him; and they conversed like good friends. She had eaten her lunch before going out with the laundry. He had gulped down his soup and beef hurriedly to be able to wait for her. All the while she chatted amiably, Gervaise kept looking out the window at the activity on the street. It was now unusually crowded with the lunch time rush.

Everywhere were hurried steps, swinging arms, and pushing elbows. Some late comers, hungry and angry at being kept extra

long at the job, rushed across the street into the bakery. They emerged with a loaf of bread and went three doors farther to the Two-Headed Calf to gobble down a six-sou meat dish.

Next door to the bakery was a grocer who sold fried potatoes and mussels cooked with parsley. A procession of girls went in to get hot potatoes wrapped in paper and cups of steaming mussels. Other pretty girls bought bunches of radishes. By leaning a bit, Gervaise could see into the sausage shop from which children issued, holding a fried chop, a sausage or a piece of hot blood pudding wrapped in greasy paper. The street was always slick with black mud, even in clear weather. A few laborers had already finished their lunch and were strolling aimlessly about, their open hands slapping their thighs, heavy from eating, slow and peaceful amid the hurrying crowd. A group formed in front of the door of l'Assommoir.

"Say, Bibi-the-Smoker," demanded a hoarse voice, "aren't you going to buy us a round of *vitriol*?"

Five laborers came in and stood by the bar.

"Ah! Here's that thief, Pere Colombe!" the voice continued. "We want the real old stuff, you know. And full sized glasses, too."

Pere Colombe served them as three more laborers entered. More blue smocks gathered on the street corner and some pushed their way into the establishment.

"You're foolish! You only think of the present," Gervaise was saying to Coupeau. "Sure, I loved him, but after the disgusting

way in which he left me – "

They were talking of Lantier. Gervaise had not seen him again; she thought he was living with Virginie's sister at La Glaciere, in the house of that friend who was going to start a hat factory. She had no thought of running after him. She had been so distressed at first that she had thought of drowning herself in the river. But now that she had thought about it, everything seemed to be for the best. Lantier went through money so fast, that she probably never could have raised her children properly. Oh, she'd let him see his children, all right, if he bothered to come round. But as far as she was concerned, she didn't want him to touch her, not even with his finger tips.

She told all this to Coupeau just as if her plan of life was well settled. Meanwhile, Coupeau never forgot his desire to possess her. He made a jest of everything she said, turning it into ribaldry and asking some very direct questions about Lantier. But he proceeded so gaily and which such a smile that she never thought of being offended.

"So, you're the one who beat him," said he at length. "Oh! you're not kind. You just go around whipping people."

She interrupted him with a hearty laugh. It was true, though, she had whipped Virginie's tall carcass. She would have delighted in strangling someone on that day. She laughed louder than ever when Coupeau told her that Virginie, ashamed at having shown so much cowardice, had left the neighborhood. Her face, however, preserved an expression of childish gentleness as she

put out her plump hands, insisting she wouldn't even harm a fly.

She began to tell Coupeau about her childhood at Plassans. She had never cared overmuch for men; they had always bored her. She was fourteen when she got involved with Lantier. She had thought it was nice because he said he was her husband and she had enjoyed playing a housewife. She was too soft-hearted and too weak. She always got passionately fond of people who caused her trouble later. When she loved a man, she wasn't thinking of having fun in the present; she was dreaming about being happy and living together forever.

And as Coupeau, with a chuckle, spoke of her two children, saying they hadn't come from under a bolster, she slapped his fingers; she added that she was, no doubt made on the model of other women; women thought of their home, slaved to keep the place clean and tidy, and went to bed too tired at night not to go to sleep at once. Besides, she resembled her mother, a stout laboring woman who died at her work and who had served as beast of burden to old Macquart for more than twenty years. Her mother's shoulders had been heavy enough to smash through doors, but that didn't prevent her from being soft-hearted and madly attracted to people. And if she limped a little, she no doubt owed that to the poor woman, whom old Macquart used to belabor with blows. Her mother had told her about the times when Macquart came home drunk and brutally bruised her. She had probably been born with her lame leg as a result of one of those times.

"Oh! it's scarcely anything, it's hardly perceptible," said Coupeau gallantly.

She shook her head; she knew well enough that it could be seen; at forty she would look broken in two. Then she added gently, with a slight laugh: "It's a funny fancy of yours to fall in love with a cripple."

With his elbows still on the table, he thrust his face closer to hers and began complimenting her in rather dubious language as though to intoxicate her with his words. But she kept shaking her head "no," and didn't allow herself to be tempted although she was flattered by the tone of his voice. While listening, she kept looking out the window, seeming to be fascinated by the interesting crowd of people passing.

The shops were now almost empty. The grocer removed his last panful of fried potatoes from the stove. The sausage man arranged the dishes scattered on his counter. Great bearded workmen were as playful as young boys, clumping along in their hobnailed boots. Other workmen were smoking, staring up into the sky and blinking their eyes. Factory bells began to ring in the distance, but the workers, in no hurry, relit their pipes. Later, after being tempted by one wineshop after another, they finally decided to return to their jobs, but were still dragging their feet.

Gervaise amused herself by watching three workmen, a tall fellow and two short ones who turned to look back every few yards; they ended by descending the street, and came straight to Pere Colombe's l'Assommoir.

"Ah, well," murmured she, "there're three fellows who don't seem inclined for work!"

"Why!" said Coupeau, "I know the tall one, it's My-Boots, a comrade of mine."

Pere Colombe's l'Assommoir was now full. You had to shout to be heard. Fists often pounded on the bar, causing the glasses to clink. Everyone was standing, hands crossed over belly or held behind back. The drinking groups crowded close to one another. Some groups, by the casks, had to wait a quarter of an hour before being able to order their drinks of Pere Colombe.

"Hallo! It's that aristocrat, Young Cassis!" cried My-Boots, bringing his hand down roughly on Coupeau's shoulder. "A fine gentleman, who smokes paper, and wears shirts! So we want to do the grand with our sweetheart; we stand her little treats!"

"Shut up! Don't bother me!" replied Coupeau, greatly annoyed.

But the other added, with a chuckle, "Right you are! We know what's what, my boy. Muffs are muffs, that's all!"

He turned his back after leering terribly as he looked at Gervaise. The latter drew back, feeling rather frightened. The smoke from the pipes, the strong odor of all those men, ascended in the air, already foul with the fumes of alcohol; and she felt a choking sensation in her throat, and coughed slightly.

"Oh, what a horrible thing it is to drink!" said she in a low voice.

And she related that formerly at Plassans she used to drink

anisette with her mother. But on one occasion it nearly killed her, and that disgusted her with it; now, she could never touch any liqueurs.

"You see," added she, pointing to her glass, "I've eaten my plum; only I must leave the juice, because it would make me ill."

For himself, Coupeau couldn't understand how anyone could drink glass after glass of cheap brandy. A brandied plum occasionally could not hurt, but as for cheap brandy, absinthe and the other strong stuff, no, not for him, no matter how much his comrades teased him about it. He stayed out on the sidewalk when his friends went into low establishments. Coupeau's father had smashed his head open one day when he fell from the eaves of No. 25 on Rue Coquenard. He was drunk. This memory keeps Coupeau's entire family from the drink. Every time Coupeau passed that spot, he thought he would rather lick up water from the gutter than accept a free drink in a bar. He would always say: "In our trade, you have to have steady legs."

Gervaise had taken up her basket again. She did not rise from her seat however, but held the basket on her knees, with a vacant look in her eyes and lost in thought, as though the young workman's words had awakened within her far-off thoughts of existence. And she said again, slowly, and without any apparent change of manner:

"*Mon Dieu*! I'm not ambitious; I don't ask for much. My desire is to work in peace, always to have bread to eat and a decent place to sleep in, you know; with a bed, a table, and two chairs,

nothing more. If I can, I'd like to raise my children to be good citizens. Also, I'd like not to be beaten up, if I ever again live with a man. It's not my idea of amusement." She pondered, thinking if there was anything else she wanted, but there wasn't anything of importance. Then, after a moment she went on, "Yes, when one reaches the end, one might wish to die in one's bed. For myself, having trudged through life, I should like to die in my bed, in my own home."

And she rose from her seat. Coupeau, who cordially approved her wishes, was already standing up, anxious about the time. But they did not leave yet. Gervaise was curious enough to go to the far end of the room for a look at the big still behind the oak railing. It was chugging away in the little glassed-in courtyard. Coupeau explained its workings to her, pointing at the different parts of the machinery, showing her the trickling of the small stream of limpid alcohol. Not a single gay puff of steam was coming forth from the endless coils. The breathing could barely be heard. It sounded muffled as if from underground. It was like a sombre worker, performing dark deeds in the bright daylight, strong but silent.

My-Boots, accompanied by his two comrades, came to lean on the railing until they could get a place at the bar. He laughed, looking at the machine. *Tonnerre de Dieu*, that's clever. There's enough stuff in its big belly to last for weeks. He wouldn't mind if they just fixed the end of the tube in his mouth, so he could feel the fiery spirits flowing down to his heels like a river. It would

be better than the tiny sips doled out by Pere Colombe! His two comrades laughed with him, saying that My-Boots was quite a guy after all.

The huge still continued to trickle forth its alcoholic sweat. Eventually it would invade the bar, flow out along the outer Boulevards, and inundate the immense expanse of Paris.

Gervaise stepped back, shivering. She tried to smile as she said:

"It's foolish, but that still and the liquor gives me the creeps."

Then, returning to the idea she nursed of a perfect happiness, she resumed: "Now, ain't I right? It's much the nicest isn't it – to have plenty of work, bread to eat, a home of one's own, and to be able to bring up one's children and to die in one's bed?"

"And never to be beaten," added Coupeau gaily. "But I would never beat you, if you would only try me, Madame Gervaise. You've no cause for fear. I don't drink and then I love you too much. Come, shall it be marriage? I'll get you divorced and make you my wife."

He was speaking low, whispering at the back of her neck while she made her way through the crowd of men with her basket held before her. She kept shaking her head "no." Yet she turned around to smile at him, apparently happy to know that he never drank. Yes, certainly, she would say "yes" to him, except she had already sworn to herself never to start up with another man. Eventually they reached the door and went out.

When they left, l'Assommoir was packed to the door, spilling

its hubbub of rough voices and its heavy smell of vitriol into the street. My-Boots could be heard railing at Pere Colombe, calling him a scoundrel and accusing him of only half filling his glass. He didn't have to come in here. He'd never come back. He suggested to his comrades a place near the Barriere Saint-Denis where you drank good stuff straight.

"Ah," sighed Gervaise when they reached the sidewalk. "You can breathe out here. Good-bye, Monsieur Coupeau, and thank you. I must hurry now."

He seized her hand as she started along the boulevard, insisting, "Take a walk with me along Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. It's not much farther for you. I've got to see my sister before going back to work. We'll keep each other company."

In the end, Gervaise agreed and they walked beside each other along the Rue des Poissonniers, although she did not take his arm. He told her about his family. His mother, an old vest-maker, now had to do housekeeping because her eyesight was poor. Her birthday was the third of last month and she was sixty-two. He was the youngest. One of his sisters, a widow of thirty-six, worked in a flower shop and lived in the Batignolles section, on Rue des Moines. The other sister was thirty years old now. She had married a deadpan chainmaker named Lorilleux. That's where he was going now. They lived in a big tenement on the left side. He ate with them in the evenings; it saved a bit for all of them. But he had been invited out this evening and he was going to tell her not to expect him.

Gervaise, who was listening to him, suddenly interrupted him to ask, with a smile: "So you're called 'Young Cassis,' Monsieur Coupeau?"

"Oh!" replied he, "it's a nickname my mates have given me because I generally drink 'cassis' when they force me to accompany them to the wineshop. It's no worse to be called Young Cassis than My-Boots, is it?"

"Of course not. Young Cassis isn't an ugly name," observed the young woman.

And she questioned him about his work. He was still working there, behind the octroi wall at the new hospital. Oh! there was no want of work, he would not be finished there for a year at least. There were yards and yards of gutters!

"You know," said he, "I can see the Hotel Boncoeur when I'm up there. Yesterday you were at the window, and I waved my arms, but you didn't notice me."

They had already gone about a hundred paces along the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, when he stood still and raising his eyes, said:

"That's the house. I was born farther on, at No. 22. But this house is, all the same, a fine block of masonry! It's as big as a barrack inside!"

Gervaise looked up, examining the facade. On the street side, the tenement had five stories, each with fifteen windows, whose black shutters with their broken slats gave an air of desolation to the wide expanse of wall. Four shops occupied the ground floor. To the right of the entrance, a large, greasy hash house,

and to the left, a coal dealer, a notions seller, and an umbrella merchant. The building appeared even larger than it was because it had on each side a small, low building which seemed to lean against it for support. This immense, squared-off building was outlined against the sky. Its unplastered side walls were as bare as prison walls, except for rows of roughly jutting stones which suggested jaws full of decayed teeth yawning vacantly.

Gervaise was gazing at the entrance with interest. The high, arched doorway rose to the second floor and opened onto a deep porch, at the end of which could be seen the pale daylight of a courtyard. This entranceway was paved like the street, and down the center flowed a streamlet of pink-stained water.

"Come in," said Coupeau, "no one will eat you."

Gervaise wanted to wait for him in the street. However, she could not resist going through the porch as far as the concierge's room on the right. And there, on the threshold, she raised her eyes. Inside, the building was six stories high, with four identical plain walls enclosing the broad central court. The drab walls were corroded by yellowish spots and streaked by drippings from the roof gutters. The walls went straight up to the eaves with no molding or ornament except the angles on the drain pipes at each floor. Here the sink drains added their stains. The glass window panes resembled murky water. Mattresses of checkered blue ticking were hanging out of several windows to air. Clothes lines stretched from other windows with family washing hanging to dry. On a third floor line was a baby's diaper, still implanted

with filth. This crowded tenement was bursting at the seams, spilling out poverty and misery through every crevice.

Each of the four walls had, at ground level, a narrow entrance, plastered without a trace of woodwork. This opened into a vestibule containing a dirt-encrusted staircase which spiraled upward. They were each labeled with one of the first four letters of the alphabet painted on the wall.

Several large work-shops with weather-blackened skylights were scattered about the court. Near the concierge's room was the dyeing establishment responsible for the pink streamlet. Puddles of water infested the courtyard, along with wood shavings and coal cinders. Grass and weeds grew between the paving stones. The unforgiving sunlight seemed to cut the court into two parts. On the shady side was a dripping water tap with three small hens scratching for worms with their filth-smeared claws.

Gervaise slowly gazed about, lowering her glance from the sixth floor to the paving stones, then raising it again, surprised at the vastness, feeling as it were in the midst of a living organ, in the very heart of a city, and interested in the house, as though it were a giant before her.

"Is madame seeking for any one?" called out the inquisitive concierge, emerging from her room.

The young woman explained that she was waiting for a friend. She returned to the street; then as Coupeau did not come, she went back to the courtyard seized with the desire to take another

look. She did not think the house ugly. Amongst the rags hanging from the windows she discovered various cheerful touches – a wall-flower blooming in a pot, a cage of chirruping canaries, shaving-glasses shining like stars in the depth of the shadow. A carpenter was singing in his work-shop, accompanied by the whining of his plane. The blacksmith's hammers were ringing rhythmically.

In contrast to the apparent wretched poverty, at nearly every open window appeared the begrimed faces of laughing children. Women with peaceful faces could be seen bent over their sewing. The rooms were empty of men who had gone back to work after lunch. The whole tenement was tranquil except for the sounds from the work-shops below which served as a sort of lullaby that went on, unceasingly, always the same.

The only thing she did not like was the courtyard's dampness. She would want rooms at the rear, on the sunny side. Gervaise took a few more steps into the courtyard, inhaling the characteristic odor of the slums, comprised of dust and rotten garbage. But the sharp odor of the waste water from the dye shop was strong, and Gervaise thought it smelled better here than at the Hotel Boncoeur. She chose a window for herself, the one at the far left with a small window box planted with scarlet runners.

"I'm afraid I've kept you waiting rather a long time," said Coupeau, whom she suddenly heard close beside her. "They always make an awful fuss whenever I don't dine with them, and it was worse than ever to-day as my sister had bought some veal."

And as Gervaise had slightly started with surprise, he continued glancing around in his turn:

"You were looking at the house. It's always all let from the top to the bottom. There are three hundred lodgers, I think. If I had any furniture, I would have secured a small room. One would be comfortable here, don't you think so?"

"Yes, one would be comfortable," murmured Gervaise. "In our street at Plassans there weren't near so many people. Look, that's pretty – that window up on the fifth floor, with the scarlet runners."

The zinc-worker's obstinate desire made him ask her once more whether she would or she wouldn't. They could rent a place here as soon as they found a bed. She hurried out the arched entranceway, asking him not to start that subject again. There was as much chance of this building collapsing as there was of her sleeping under the same blanket with him. Still, when Coupeau left her in front of Madame Fauconnier's shop, he was allowed to hold her hand for a moment.

For a month the young woman and the zinc-worker were the best of friends. He admired her courage, when he beheld her half killing herself with work, keeping her children tidy and clean, and yet finding time at night to do a little sewing. Often other women were hopelessly messy, forever nibbling or gadding about, but she wasn't like them at all. She was much too serious. Then she would laugh, and modestly defend herself. It was her misfortune that she had not always been good, having been with

a man when only fourteen. Then too, she had often helped her mother empty a bottle of anisette. But she had learned a few things from experience. He was wrong to think of her as strong-willed; her will power was very weak. She had always let herself be pushed into things because she didn't want to hurt someone's feelings. Her one hope now was to live among decent people, for living among bad people was like being hit over the head. It cracks your skull. Whenever she thought of the future, she shivered. Everything she had seen in life so far, especially when a child, had given her lessons to remember.

Coupeau, however, chaffed her about her gloomy thoughts, and brought back all her courage by trying to pinch her hips. She pushed him away from her, and slapped his hands, whilst he called out laughingly that, for a weak woman, she was not a very easy capture. He, who always joked about everything did not trouble himself regarding the future. One day followed another, that was all. There would always be somewhere to sleep and a bite to eat. The neighborhood seemed decent enough to him, except for a gang of drunkards that ought to be cleaned out of the gutters.

Coupeau was not a bad sort of fellow. He sometimes had really sensible things to say. He was something of a dandy with his Parisian working man's gift for banter, a regular gift of gab, and besides, he was attractive.

They had ended by rendering each other all sorts of services at the Hotel Boncoeur. Coupeau fetched her milk, ran her errands,

carried her bundles of clothes; often of an evening, as he got home first from work, he took the children for a walk on the exterior Boulevard. Gervaise, in return for his polite attentions, would go up into the narrow room at the top of the house where he slept, and see to his clothes, sewing buttons on his blue linen trousers, and mending his linen jackets. A great familiarity existed between them. She was never bored when he was around. The gay songs he sang amused her, and so did his continuous banter of jokes and jibes characteristic of the Paris streets, this being still new to her.

On Coupeau's side, this continual familiarity inflamed him more and more until it began to seriously bother him. He began to feel tense and uneasy. He continued with his foolish talk, never failing to ask her, "When will it be?" She understood what he meant and teased him. He would then come to visit her carrying his bedroom slippers, as if he were moving in. She joked about it and continued calmly without blushing at the allusions with which he was always surrounding her. She stood for anything from him as long as he didn't get rough. She only got angry once when he pulled a strand of her hair while trying to force a kiss from her.

Towards the end of June, Coupeau lost his liveliness. He became most peculiar. Gervaise, feeling uneasy at some of his glances, barricaded herself in at night. Then, after having sulked ever since the Sunday, he suddenly came on the Tuesday night about eleven o'clock and knocked at her room. She would not

open to him; but his voice was so gentle and so trembling that she ended by removing the chest of drawers she had pushed against the door. When he entered, she thought he was ill; he looked so pale, his eyes were so red, and the veins on his face were all swollen. And he stood there, stuttering and shaking his head. No, no, he was not ill. He had been crying for two hours upstairs in his room; he wept like a child, biting his pillow so as not to be heard by the neighbors. For three nights past he had been unable to sleep. It could not go on like that.

"Listen, Madame Gervaise," said he, with a swelling in his throat and on the point of bursting out crying again; "we must end this, mustn't we? We'll go and get married. It's what I want. I've quite made up my mind."

Gervaise showed great surprise. She was very grave.

"Oh! Monsieur Coupeau," murmured she, "whatever are you thinking of? You know I've never asked you for that. I didn't care about it – that was all. Oh, no, no! it's serious now; think of what you're saying, I beg of you."

But he continued to shake his head with an air of unalterable resolution. He had already thought it all over. He had come down because he wanted to have a good night. She wasn't going to send him back to weep again he supposed! As soon as she said "yes," he would no longer bother her, and she could go quietly to bed. He only wanted to hear her say "yes." They could talk it over on the morrow.

"But I certainly can't say 'yes' just like that," resumed

Gervaise. "I don't want you to be able to accuse me later on of having incited you to do a foolish thing. You shouldn't be so insistent, Monsieur Coupeau. You can't really be sure that you're in love with me. If you didn't see me for a week, it might fade away. Sometimes men get married and then there's day after day, stretching out into an entire lifetime, and they get pretty well bored by it all. Sit down there; I'm willing to talk it over at once."

Then until one in the morning, in the dark room and by the faint light of a smoky tallow candle which they forgot to snuff, they talked of their marriage, lowering their voices so as not to wake the two children, Claude and Etienne, who were sleeping, both heads on the same pillow. Gervaise kept pointing out the children to Coupeau, what a funny kind of dowry they were. She really shouldn't burden him with them. Besides, what would the neighbors say? She'd feel ashamed for him because everyone knew about the story of her life and her lover. They wouldn't think it decent if they saw them getting married barely two months later.

Coupeau replied by shrugging his shoulders. He didn't care about the neighbors! He never bothered about their affairs. So, there was Lantier before him, well, so what? What's so bad about that? She hadn't been constantly bringing men upstairs, as some women did, even rich ladies! The children would grow up, they'd raise them right. Never had he known before such a woman, such sound character, so good-hearted. Anyway, she could have been anything, a streetwalker, ugly, lazy and good-for-nothing, with a

whole gang of dirty kids, and so what? He wanted her.

"Yes, I want you," he repeated, bringing his hand down on his knee with a continuos hammering. "You understand, I want you. There's nothing to be said to that, is there?"

Little by little, Gervaise gave way. Her emotions began to take control when faced with his encompassing desire. Still, with her hands in her lap and her face suffused with a soft sweetness, she hesitantly offered objections. From outside, through the half-open window, a lovely June night breathed in puffs of sultry air, disturbing the candle with its long wick gleaming red like a glowing coal. In the deep silence of the sleeping neighborhood the only sound was the infantile weeping of a drunkard lying in the middle of the street. Far away, in the back room of some restaurant, a violin was playing a dance tune for some late party.

Coupeau was silent. Then, knowing she had no more arguments, he smiled, took hold of her hands and pulled her toward him. She was in one of those moments of weakness she so greatly mistrusted, persuaded at last, too emotionally stirred to refuse anything or to hurt anyone's feelings. Coupeau didn't realize that she was giving way. He held her wrists so tightly as to almost crush them. Together they breathed a long sigh that to both of them meant a partial satisfaction of their desire.

"You'll say 'yes,' won't you," asked he.

"How you worry me!" she murmured. "You wish it? Well then, 'yes.' Ah! we're perhaps doing a very foolish thing."

He jumped up, and, seizing her round the waist, kissed her

roughly on the face, at random. Then, as this caress caused a noise, he became anxious, and went softly and looked at Claude and Etienne.

"Hush, we must be careful," said he in a whisper, "and not wake the children. Good-bye till to-morrow."

And he went back to his room. Gervaise, all in a tremble, remained seated on the edge of her bed, without thinking of undressing herself for nearly an hour. She was touched; she felt that Coupeau was very honorable; for at one moment she had really thought it was all over, and that he would forget her. The drunkard below, under the window, was now hoarsely uttering the plaintive cry of some lost animal. The violin in the distance had left off its saucy tune and was now silent.

During the following days Coupeau sought to get Gervaise to call some evening on his sister in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or; but the young woman, who was very timid, showed a great dread of this visit to the Lorilleux. She knew that Coupeau had a lingering fear of that household, even though he certainly wasn't dependent on his sister, who wasn't even the oldest of the family. Mamma Coupeau would certainly give her consent at once, as she never refused her only son anything. The thing was that the Lorilleuxs were supposed to be earning ten francs a day or more and that gave them a certain authority. Coupeau would never dare to get married unless his wife was acceptable to them.

"I have spoken to them of you, they know our plans," explained he to Gervaise. "Come now! What a child you are!

Let's call on them this evening. I've warned you, haven't I? You'll find my sister rather stiff. Lorilleux, too, isn't always very amiable. In reality they are greatly annoyed, because if I marry, I shall no longer take my meals with them, and it'll be an economy the less. But that doesn't matter, they won't turn you out. Do this for me, it's absolutely necessary."

These words only frightened Gervaise the more. One Saturday evening, however, she gave in. Coupeau came for her at half-past eight. She had dressed herself in a black dress, a crape shawl with yellow palms, and a white cap trimmed with a little cheap lace. During the six weeks she had been working, she had saved the seven francs for the shawl, and the two and a half francs for the cap; the dress was an old one cleaned and made up afresh.

"They're expecting you," said Coupeau to her, as they went round by the Rue des Poissonniers. "Oh! they're beginning to get used to the idea of my being married. They seem nice indeed, to-night. And you know if you've never seen gold chains made, it'll amuse you to watch them. They just happen to have a pressing order for Monday."

"They've got gold in their room?" asked Gervaise.

"I should think so; there's some on the walls, on the floor, in fact everywhere."

They had passed the arched doorway and crossed the courtyard. The Lorilleuxs lived on the sixth floor, staircase B. Coupeau laughingly told her to hold the hand-rail tight and not to leave go of it. She looked up, and blinked her eyes, as she

perceived the tall hollow tower of the staircase, lighted by three gas jets, one on every second landing; the last one, right up at the top looked like a star twinkling in a black sky, whilst the other two cast long flashes of light, of fantastic shapes, among the interminable windings of the stairs.

"By Jove!" said the zinc-worker as he reached the first floor, smiling, "there's a strong smell of onion soup. Someone's having onion soup, I'm sure."

Staircase B, with its gray, dirty steps and hand-rail, its scratched walls and chipped plaster, was full of strong kitchen odors. Long corridors, echoing with noise, led away from each landing. Doors, painted yellow, gaped open, smeared black around the latch from dirty hands. A sink on each landing gave forth a fetid humidity, adding its stench to the sharp flavor of the cooking of onions. From the basement, all the way to the sixth floor, you could hear dishes clattering, saucepans being rinsed, pots being scraped and scoured.

On the first floor Gervaise saw a half-opened door with the word "Designer" written on it in large letters. Inside were two men sitting by a table, the dishes cleared away from its oilcloth cover, arguing furiously amid a cloud of pipe smoke. The second and third floors were quieter, and through cracks in the woodwork only such sounds filtered as the rhythm of a cradle rocking, the stifled crying of a child, a woman's voice sounding like the dull murmur of running water with no words distinct. Gervaise read the various signs on the doors giving the names of

the occupants: "Madame Gaudron, wool-carder" and "Monsieur Madinier, cardboard boxes." There was a fight in progress on the fourth floor: a stomping of feet that shook the floor, furniture banged around, a racket of curses and blows; but this did not bother the neighbors opposite, who were playing cards with their door opened wide to admit more air.

When Gervaise reached the fifth floor, she had to stop to take a breath; she was not used to going up so high; that wall for ever turning, the glimpses she had of the lodgings following each other, made her head ache. Anyway, there was a family almost blocking the landing: the father washing the dishes over a small earthenware stove near the sink and the mother sitting with her back to the stair-rail and cleaning the baby before putting it to bed.

Coupeau kept urging Gervaise along, and they finally reached the sixth floor. He encouraged her with a smile; they had arrived! She had been hearing a voice all the way up from the bottom and she was gazing upward, wondering where it could be coming from, a voice so clear and piercing that it had dominated all the other sounds. It came from a little old woman in an attic room who sang while putting dresses on cheap dolls. When a tall girl came by with a pail of water and entered a nearby apartment, Gervaise saw a tumbled bed on which a man was sprawled, his eyes fixed on the ceiling. As the door closed behind her, Gervaise saw the hand-written card: "Mademoiselle Clemence, ironing."

Now that she had finally made it to the top, her legs weary and

her breath short, Gervaise leaned over the railing to look down. Now it was the gaslight on the first floor which seemed a distant star at the bottom of a narrow well six stories deep. All the odors and all the murmurings of the immense variety of life within the tenement came up to her in one stifling breath that flushed her face as she hazarded a worried glance down into the gulf below.

"We're not there yet," said Coupeau. "Oh! It's quite a journey!"

He had gone down a long corridor on the left. He turned twice, the first time also to the left, the second time to the right. The corridor still continued branching off, narrowing between walls full of crevices, with plaster peeling off, and lighted at distant intervals by a slender gas-jet; and the doors all alike, succeeded each other the same as the doors of a prison or a convent, and nearly all open, continued to display homes of misery and work, which the hot June evening filled with a reddish mist. At length they reached a small passage in complete darkness.

"We're here," resumed the zinc-worker. "Be careful, keep to the wall; there are three steps."

And Gervaise carefully took another ten steps in the obscurity. She stumbled and then counted the three steps. But at the end of the passage Coupeau had opened a door, without knocking. A brilliant light spread over the tiled floor. They entered.

It was a narrow apartment, and seemed as if it were the continuation of the corridor. A faded woolen curtain, raised up just then by a string, divided the place in two. The first part

contained a bedstead pushed beneath an angle of the attic ceiling, a cast-iron stove still warm from the cooking of the dinner, two chairs, a table and a wardrobe, the cornice of which had had to be sawn off to make it fit in between the door and the bedstead. The second part was fitted up as a work-shop; at the end, a narrow forge with its bellows; to the right, a vise fixed to the wall beneath some shelves on which pieces of old iron lay scattered; to the left near the window, a small workman's bench, encumbered with greasy and very dirty pliers, shears and microscopical saws, all very dirty and grimy.

"It's us!" cried Coupeau advancing as far as the woolen curtain.

But no one answered at first. Gervaise, deeply affected, moved especially by the thought that she was about to enter a place full of gold, stood behind the zinc-worker, stammering and venturing upon nods of her head by way of bowing. The brilliant light, a lamp burning on the bench, a brazier full of coals flaring in the forge, increased her confusion still more. She ended however, by distinguishing Madame Lorilleux – little, red-haired and tolerably strong, pulling with all the strength of her short arms, and with the assistance of a big pair of pincers, a thread of black metal which she passed through the holes of a draw-plate fixed to the vise. Seated in front of the bench, Lorilleux, quite as small of stature, but more slender in the shoulders, worked with the tips of his pliers, with the vivacity of a monkey, at a labor so minute, that it was impossible to follow it between his scraggy fingers. It

was the husband who first raised his head – a head with scanty locks, the face of the yellow tinge of old wax, long, and with an ailing expression.

"Ah! it's you; well, well!" murmured he. "We're in a hurry you know. Don't come into the work-room, you'd be in our way. Stay in the bedroom."

And he resumed his minute task, his face again in the reflection of a glass globe full of green-colored water, through which the lamp shed a circle of bright light over his work.

"Take the chairs!" called out Madame Lorilleux in her turn. "It's that lady, isn't it? Very well, very well!"

She had rolled the wire and she carried it to the forge, and then, reviving the fire of the brazier with a large wooden fan, she proceeded to temper the wire before passing it through the last holes of the draw-plate.

Coupeau moved the chairs forward and seated Gervaise by the curtain. The room was so narrow that he could not sit beside her, so he sat behind her, leaning over her shoulder to explain the work in progress. Gervaise was intimidated by this strange reception and felt uneasy. She had a buzzing in her ears and couldn't hear clearly. She thought the wife looked older than her thirty years and not very neat with her hair in a pigtail dangling down the back of her loosely worn wrapper. The husband, who was only a year older, appeared already an old man with mean, thin lips, as he sat there working in his shirt sleeves with his bare feet thrust into down at the heel slippers. Gervaise was dismayed

by the smallness of the shop, the grimy walls, the rustiness of the tools, and the black soot spread all over what looked like the odds and ends of a scrap-iron peddler's wares.

"And the gold?" asked Gervaise in a low voice.

Her anxious glances searched the corners and sought amongst all that filth for the resplendence she had dreamt of. But Coupeau burst out laughing.

"Gold?" said he; "why there's some; there's some more, and there's some at your feet!"

He pointed successively to the fine wire at which his sister was working, and to another roll of wire, similar to the ordinary iron wire, hanging against the wall close to the vise; then going down on all fours, he picked up, beneath the wooden screen which covered the tiled floor of the work-room, a piece of waste, a tiny fragment resembling the point of a rusty needle. But Gervaise protested; that couldn't be gold, that blackish piece of metal as ugly as iron! He had to bite into the piece and show her the gleaming notch made by his teeth. Then he continued his explanations: the employers provided the gold wire, already alloyed; the craftsmen first pulled it through the draw-plate to obtain the correct size, being careful to anneal it five or six times to keep it from breaking. It required a steady, strong hand, and plenty of practice. His sister would not let her husband touch the wire-drawing since he was subject to coughing spells. She had strong arms for it; he had seen her draw gold to the fineness of a hair.

Lorilleux, seized with a fit of coughing, almost doubled up on his stool. In the midst of the paroxysm, he spoke, and said in a choking voice, still without looking at Gervaise, as though he was merely mentioning the thing to himself:

"I'm making the herring-bone chain."

Coupeau urged Gervaise to get up. She might draw nearer and see. The chainmaker consented with a grunt. He wound the wire prepared by his wife round a mandrel, a very thin steel rod. Then he sawed gently, cutting the wire the whole length of the mandrel, each turn forming a link, which he soldered. The links were laid on a large piece of charcoal. He wetted them with a drop of borax, taken from the bottom of a broken glass beside him; and he made them red-hot at the lamp beneath the horizontal flame produced by the blow-pipe. Then, when he had soldered about a hundred links he returned once more to his minute work, propping his hands against the edge of the *cheville*, a small piece of board which the friction of his hands had polished. He bent each link almost double with the pliers, squeezed one end close, inserted it in the last link already in place and then, with the aid of a point opened out again the end he had squeezed; and he did this with a continuous regularity, the links joining each other so rapidly that the chain gradually grew beneath Gervaise's gaze, without her being able to follow, or well understand how it was done.

"That's the herring-bone chain," said Coupeau. "There's also the long link, the cable, the plain ring, and the spiral. But that's

the herring-bone. Lorilleux only makes the herring-bone chain."

The latter chuckled with satisfaction. He exclaimed, as he continued squeezing the links, invisible between his black finger-nails.

"Listen to me, Young Cassis! I was making a calculation this morning. I commenced work when I was twelve years old, you know. Well! Can you guess how long a herring-bone chain I must have made up till to-day?"

He raised his pale face, and blinked his red eye-lids.

"Twenty-six thousand feet, do you hear? Two leagues! That's something! A herring-bone chain two leagues long! It's enough to twist round the necks of all the women of the neighborhood. And you know, it's still increasing. I hope to make it long enough to reach from Paris to Versailles."

Gervaise had returned to her seat, disenchanted and thinking everything very ugly. She smiled to be polite to the Lorilleuxs. The complete silence about her marriage bothered her. It was the sole reason for her having come. The Lorilleuxs were treating her as some stranger brought in by Coupeau. When a conversation finally did get started, it concerned the building's tenants. Madame Lorilleux asked her husband if he had heard the people on the fourth floor having a fight. They fought every day. The husband usually came home drunk and the wife had her faults too, yelling in the filthiest language. Then they spoke of the designer on the first floor, an uppity show-off with a mound of debts, always smoking, always arguing loudly with

his friends. Monsieur Madinier's cardboard business was barely surviving. He had let two girl workers go yesterday. The business ate up all his money, leaving his children to run around in rags. And that Madame Gaudron was pregnant again; this was almost indecent at her age. The landlord was going to evict the Coquets on the fifth floor. They owed nine months' rent, and besides, they insisted on lighting their stove out on the landing. Last Saturday the old lady on the sixth floor, Mademoiselle Remanjou, had arrived just in time to save the Linguerlot child from being badly burned. Mademoiselle Clemence, one who took in ironing, well, she lived life as she pleased. She was so kind to animals though and had such a good heart that you couldn't say anything against her. It was a pity, a fine girl like her, the company she kept. She'd be walking the streets before long.

"Look, here's one," said Lorilleux to his wife, giving her the piece of chain he had been working on since his lunch. "You can trim it." And he added, with the persistence of a man who does not easily relinquish a joke: "Another four feet and a half. That brings me nearer to Versailles."

Madame Lorilleux, after tempering it again, trimmed it by passing it through the regulating draw-plate. Then she put it in a little copper saucepan with a long handle, full of lye-water, and placed it over the fire of the forge. Gervaise, again pushed forward by Coupeau, had to follow this last operation. When the chain was thoroughly cleansed, it appeared a dull red color. It was finished, and ready to be delivered.

"They're always delivered like that, in their rough state," the zinc-worker explained. "The polishers rub them afterwards with cloths."

Gervaise felt her courage failing her. The heat, more and more intense, was suffocating her. They kept the door shut, because Lorilleux caught cold from the least draught. Then as they still did not speak of the marriage, she wanted to go away and gently pulled Coupeau's jacket. He understood. Besides, he also was beginning to feel ill at ease and vexed at their affectation of silence.

"Well, we're off," said he. "We mustn't keep you from your work."

He moved about for a moment, waiting, hoping for a word or some allusion or other. At length he decided to broach the subject himself.

"I say, Lorilleux, we're counting on you to be my wife's witness."

The chainmaker pretended, with a chuckle, to be greatly surprised; whilst his wife, leaving her draw-plates, placed herself in the middle of the work-room.

"So it's serious then?" murmured he. "That confounded Young Cassis, one never knows whether he is joking or not."

"Ah! yes, madame's the person involved," said the wife in her turn, as she stared rudely at Gervaise. "*Mon Dieu!* We've no advice to give you, we haven't. It's a funny idea to go and get married, all the same. Anyhow, it's your own wish. When it

doesn't succeed, one's only got oneself to blame, that's all. And it doesn't often succeed, not often, not often."

She uttered these last words slower and slower, and shaking her head, she looked from the young woman's face to her hands, and then to her feet as though she had wished to undress her and see the very pores of her skin. She must have found her better than she expected.

"My brother is perfectly free," she continued more stiffly. "No doubt the family might have wished – one always makes projects. But things take such funny turns. For myself, I don't want to have any unpleasantness. Had he brought us the lowest of the low, I should merely have said: 'Marry her and go to blazes!' He was not badly off though, here with us. He's fat enough; one can very well see he didn't fast much; and he always found his soup hot right on time. I say, Lorilleux, don't you think madame's like Therese – you know who I mean, that woman who used to live opposite, and who died of consumption?"

"Yes, there's a certain resemblance," replied the chainmaker.

"And you've got two children, madame? Now, I must admit I said to my brother: 'I can't understand how you can want to marry a woman who's got two children.' You mustn't be offended if I consult his interests; its only natural. You don't look strong either. Don't you think, Lorilleux, that madame doesn't look very strong?"

"No, no, she's not strong."

They did not mention her leg; but Gervaise understood by

their side glances, and the curling of their lips, that they were alluding to it. She stood before them, wrapped in her thin shawl with the yellow palms, replying in monosyllables, as though in the presence of her judges. Coupeau, seeing she was suffering, ended by exclaiming:

"All that's nothing to do with it. What you are talking about isn't important. The wedding will take place on Saturday, July 29. I calculated by the almanac. Is it settled? Does it suit you?"

"Oh, it's all the same to us," said his sister. "There was no necessity to consult us. I shan't prevent Lorilleux being witness. I only want peace and quiet."

Gervaise, hanging her head, not knowing what to do with herself had put the toe of her boot through one of the openings in the wooden screen which covered the tiled floor of the work-room; then afraid of having disturbed something when she had withdrawn it, she stooped down and felt about with her hand. Lorilleux hastily brought the lamp, and he examined her fingers suspiciously.

"You must be careful," said he, "the tiny bits of gold stick to the shoes, and get carried away without one knowing it."

It was all to do with business. The employers didn't allow a single speck for waste. He showed her the rabbit's foot he used to brush off any flecks of gold left on the *cheville* and the leather he kept on his lap to catch any gold that fell. Twice weekly the shop was swept out carefully, the sweepings collected and burned and the ashes sifted. This recovered up to twenty-five or thirty

francs' worth of gold a month.

Madame Lorilleux could not take her eyes from Gervaise's shoes.

"There's no reason to get angry," murmured she with an amiable smile. "But, perhaps madame would not mind looking at the soles of her shoes."

And Gervaise, turning very red, sat down again, and holding up her feet showed that there was nothing clinging to them. Coupeau had opened the door, exclaiming: "Good-night!" in an abrupt tone of voice. He called to her from the corridor. Then she in her turn went off, after stammering a few polite words: she hoped to see them again, and that they would all agree well together. Both of the Lorilleux had already gone back to their work at the far end of their dark hole of a work-room. Madame Lorilleux, her skin reflecting the red glow from the bed of coals, was drawing on another wire, each effort swelling her neck and making the strained muscles stand out like taut cords. Her husband, hunched over beneath the greenish gleam of the globe was starting another length of chain, twisting each link with his pliers, pressing it on one side, inserting it into the next link above, opening it again with the pointed tool, continuously, mechanically, not wasting a motion, even to wipe the sweat from his face.

When Gervaise emerged from the corridor on to the landing, she could not help saying, with tears in her eyes:

"That doesn't promise much happiness."

Coupeau shook his head furiously. He would get even with Lorilleux for that evening. Had anyone ever seen such a miserly fellow? To think that they were going to walk off with two or three grains of his gold dust! All the fuss they made was from pure avarice. His sister thought perhaps that he would never marry, so as to enable her to economize four sous on her dinner every day. However, it would take place all the same on July 29. He did not care a hang for them!

Nevertheless, Gervaise still felt depressed. Tormented by a foolish fearfulness, she peered anxiously into every dark shadow along the stair-rail as she descended. It was dark and deserted at this hour, lit only by a single gas jet on the second floor. In the shadowy depths of the dark pit, it gave a spot of brightness, even with its flame turned so low. It was now silent behind the closed doors; the weary laborers had gone to sleep after eating. However, there was a soft laugh from Mademoiselle Clemence's room and a ray of light shone through the keyhole of Mademoiselle Remanjou's door. She was still busy cutting out dresses for the dolls. Downstairs at Madame Gaudron's, a child was crying. The sinks on the landings smelled more offensive than ever in the midst of the darkness and stillness.

In the courtyard, Gervaise turned back for a last look at the tenement as Coupeau called out to the concierge. The building seemed to have grown larger under the moonless sky. The drip-drip of water from the faucet sounded loud in the quiet. Gervaise felt that the building was threatening to suffocate her and a chill

went through her body. It was a childish fear and she smiled at it a moment later.

"Watch your step," warned Coupeau.

To get to the entrance, Gervaise had to jump over a wide puddle that had drained from the dye shop. The puddle was blue now, the deep blue of a summer sky. The reflections from the night light of the concierge sparkled in it like stars.

CHAPTER III

Gervaise did not want to have a wedding-party! What was the use of spending money? Besides, she still felt somewhat ashamed; it seemed to her quite unnecessary to parade the marriage before the whole neighborhood. But Coupeau cried out at that. One could not be married without having a feed. He did not care a button for the people of the neighborhood! Nothing elaborate, just a short walk and a rabbit ragout in the first eating-house they fancied. No music with dessert. Just a glass or two and then back home.

The zinc-worker, chaffing and joking, at length got the young woman to consent by promising her that there should be no larks. He would keep his eye on the glasses, to prevent sunstrokes. Then he organized a sort of picnic at five francs a head, at the "Silver Windmill," kept by Auguste, on the Boulevard de la Chapelle. It was a small cafe with moderate charges and had a dancing place in the rear, beneath the three acacias in the courtyard. They would be very comfortable on the first floor. During the next ten days, he got hold of guests in the house where his sister lived in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or – Monsieur Madinier, Mademoiselle Remanjou, Madame Gaudron and her husband. He even ended by getting Gervaise to consent to the presence of two of his comrades – Bibi-the-Smoker and My-Boots. No doubt My-Boots was a boozer; but then he had such a fantastic appetite

that he was always asked to join those sort of gatherings, just for the sight of the caterer's mug when he beheld that bottomless pit swallowing his twelve pounds of bread. The young woman on her side, promised to bring her employer Madame Fauconnier and the Boches, some very agreeable people. On counting, they found there would be fifteen to sit down to table, which was quite enough. When there are too many, they always wind up by quarrelling.

Coupeau however, had no money. Without wishing to show off, he intended to behave handsomely. He borrowed fifty francs of his employer. Out of that, he first of all purchased the wedding-ring – a twelve franc gold wedding-ring, which Lorilleux procured for him at the wholesale price of nine francs. He then bought himself a frock coat, a pair of trousers and a waistcoat at a tailor's in the Rue Myrrha, to whom he gave merely twenty-five francs on account; his patent leather shoes and his hat were still good enough. When he had put by the ten francs for his and Gervaise's share of the feast – the two children not being charged for – he had exactly six francs left – the price of a low mass at the altar of the poor. He had no liking for those black crows, the priests. It would gripe him to pay his last six francs to keep their whistles wet; however, a marriage without a mass wasn't a real marriage at all.

Going to the church himself, he bargained for a whole hour with a little old priest in a dirty cassock who was as sharp at dealing as a push-cart peddler. Coupeau felt like boxing his

ears. For a joke, he asked the priest if he didn't have a second-hand mass that would do for a modest young couple. The priest, mumbling that God would take small pleasure in blessing their union, finally let him have his mass for five francs. Well after all, that meant twenty sous saved.

Gervaise also wanted to look decent. As soon as the marriage was settled, she made her arrangements, worked extra time in the evenings, and managed to put thirty francs on one side. She had a great longing for a little silk mantle marked thirteen francs in the Rue du Faubourg Poissonniere. She treated herself to it, and then bought for ten francs off the husband of a washerwoman who had died in Madame Fauconnier's house a blue woolen dress, which she altered to fit herself. With the seven francs remaining she procured a pair of cotton gloves, a rose for her cap, and some shoes for Claude, her eldest boy. Fortunately the youngsters' blouses were passable. She spent four nights cleaning everything, and mending the smallest holes in her stockings and chemise.

On Friday night, the eve of the great day, Gervaise and Coupeau had still a good deal of running about to do up till eleven o'clock, after returning home from work. Then before separating for the night they spent an hour together in the young woman's room, happy at being about to be released from their awkward position. In spite of the fact that they had originally resolved not to put themselves out to impress the neighbors, they had ended by taking it seriously and working themselves till they were weary. By the time they said "Good-night," they were almost asleep on

their feet. They breathed a great sigh of relief now that everything was ready.

Coupeau's witnesses were to be Monsieur Madinier and Bibi-the-Smoker. They were counting on Lorilleux and Boche for Gervaise's witnesses. They were to go quietly to the mayor's office and the church, just the six of them, without a whole procession of people trailing behind them. The bridegroom's two sisters had even declared that they would stay home, their presence not being necessary. Coupeau's mother, however, had sobbed and wailed, threatening to go ahead of them and hide herself in some corner of the church, until they had promised to take her along. The meeting of the guests was set for one o'clock at the Silver Windmill. From there, they would go to Saint-Denis, going out by railroad and returning on foot along the highway in order to work up an appetite. The party promised to be quite all right.

Saturday morning, while getting dressed, Coupeau felt a qualm of uneasiness in view of the single franc in his pocket. He began to think that it was a matter of ordinary courtesy to offer a glass of wine and a slice of ham to the witnesses while awaiting dinner. Also, there might be unforeseen expenses. So, after taking Claude and Etienne to stay with Madame Boche, who was to bring them to the dinner later that afternoon, he hurried over to the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or to borrow ten francs from Lorilleux. Having to do that griped him immensely as he could guess the attitude his brother-in-law would take. The latter

did grumble a bit, but ended by lending him two five-franc pieces. However, Coupeau overheard his sister muttering under her breath, "This is a fine beginning."

The ceremony at the mayor's was to take place at half-past ten. It was beautiful weather – a magnificent sun seemed to roast the streets. So as not to be stared at the bride and bridegroom, the old mother, and the four witnesses separated into two bands. Gervaise walked in front with Lorilleux, who gave her his arm; whilst Monsieur Madinier followed with mother Coupeau. Then, twenty steps behind on the opposite side of the way, came Coupeau, Boche, and Bibi-the-Smoker. These three were in black frock coats, walking erect and swinging their arms. Boche's trousers were bright yellow. Bibi-the-Smoker didn't have a waistcoat so he was buttoned up to the neck with only a bit of his cravat showing. The only one in a full dress suit was Monsieur Madinier and passers-by gazed at this well-dressed gentleman escorting the huge bulk of mother Coupeau in her green shawl and black bonnet with red ribbons.

Gervaise looked very gay and sweet in her dress of vivid blue and with her new silk mantle fitted tightly to her shoulders. She listened politely to the sneering remarks of Lorilleux, who seemed buried in the depths of the immense overcoat he was wearing. From time to time, Gervaise would turn her head a little to smile brightly at Coupeau, who was rather uncomfortable under the hot sun in his new clothes.

Though they walked very slowly, they arrived at the mayor's

quite half an hour too soon. And as the mayor was late, their turn was not reached till close upon eleven o'clock. They sat down on some chairs and waited in a corner of the apartment, looking by turns at the high ceiling and bare walls, talking low, and over-politely pushing back their chairs each time that one of the attendants passed. Yet among themselves they called the mayor a sluggard, saying he must be visiting his blonde to get a massage for his gout, or that maybe he'd swallowed his official sash.

However, when the mayor did put in his appearance, they rose respectfully in his honor. They were asked to sit down again and they had to wait through three other marriages. The hall was crowded with the three bourgeois wedding parties: brides all in white, little girls with carefully curled hair, bridesmaids wearing wide sashes, an endless procession of ladies and gentlemen dressed in their best and looking very stylish.

When at length they were called, they almost missed being married altogether, Bibi-the-Smoker having disappeared. Boche discovered him outside smoking his pipe. Well! They were a nice lot inside there to humbug people about like that, just because one hadn't yellow kid gloves to shove under their noses! And the various formalities – the reading of the Code, the different questions to be put, the signing of all the documents – were all got through so rapidly that they looked at each other with an idea that they had been robbed of a good half of the ceremony. Gervaise, dizzy, her heart full, pressed her handkerchief to her

lips. Mother Coupeau wept bitterly. All had signed the register, writing their names in big struggling letters with the exception of the bridegroom, who not being able to write, had put his cross. They each gave four sous for the poor. When an attendant handed Coupeau the marriage certificate, the latter, prompted by Gervaise who nudged his elbow, handed him another five sous.

It was a fair walk from the mayor's office in the town hall to the church. The men stopped along the way to have a beer. Mother Coupeau and Gervaise took cassis with water. Then they had to trudge along the long street where the sun glared straight down without the relief of shade.

When they arrived at the church they were hurried along and asked if they came so late in order to make a mockery of religion. A priest came forward, his face pale and resentful from having to delay his lunch. An altar boy in a soiled surplice ran before him.

The mass went very fast, with the priest turning, bowing his head, spreading out his arms, making all the ritual gestures in haste while casting sidelong glances at the group. Gervaise and Coupeau, before the altar, were embarrassed, not knowing when they should kneel or rise or seat themselves, expecting some indication from the attendant. The witnesses, not knowing what was proper, remained standing during the ceremony. Mother Coupeau was weeping again and shedding her tears into the missal she had borrowed from a neighbor.

Meanwhile, the noon chimes had sounded and the church began to fill with noise from the shuffling feet of sacristans and

the clatter of chairs being put back in place. The high altar was apparently being prepared for some special ceremony.

Thus, in the depths of this obscure chapel, amid the floating dust, the surly priest placed his withered hands on the bared heads of Gervaise and Coupeau, blessing their union amid a hubbub like that of moving day. The wedding party signed another registry, this time in the sacristy, and then found themselves out in the bright sunlight before the church doors where they stood for a moment, breathless and confused from having been carried along at such a break-neck speed.

"Voila!" said Coupeau with an embarrassed laugh. "Well, it sure didn't take long. They shove it at you so; it's like being at the painless dentist's who doesn't give you time to cry out. Here you get a painless wedding!"

"Yes, it's a quick job," Lorilleux smirked. "In five minutes you're tied together for the rest of your life. You poor Young Cassis, you've had it."

The four witnesses whacked Coupeau on the shoulders as he arched his back against the friendly blows. Meanwhile Gervaise was hugging and kissing mother Coupeau, her eyes moist, a smile lighting her face. She replied reassuringly to the old woman's sobbing: "Don't worry, I'll do my best. I want so much to have a happy life. If it doesn't work out it won't be my fault. Anyhow, it's done now. It's up to us to get along together and do the best we can for each other."

After that they went straight to the Silver Windmill. Coupeau

had taken his wife's arm. They walked quickly, laughing as though carried away, quite two hundred steps ahead of the others, without noticing the houses or the passers-by, or the vehicles. The deafening noises of the faubourg sounded like bells in their ears. When they reached the wineshop, Coupeau at once ordered two bottles of wine, some bread and some slices of ham, to be served in the little glazed closet on the ground floor, without plates or table cloth, simply to have a snack. Then, noticing that Boche and Bibi-the-Smoker seemed to be very hungry, he had a third bottle brought, as well as a slab of brie cheese. Mother Coupeau was not hungry, being too choked up to be able to eat. Gervaise found herself very thirsty, and drank several large glasses of water with a small amount of wine added.

"I'll settle for this," said Coupeau, going at once to the bar, where he paid four francs and five sous.

It was now one o'clock and the other guests began to arrive. Madame Fauconnier, a fat woman, still good looking, first put in an appearance; she wore a chintz dress with a flowery pattern, a pink tie and a cap over-trimmed with flowers. Next came Mademoiselle Remanjou, looking very thin in the eternal black dress which she seemed to keep on even when she went to bed; and the two Gaudrons – the husband, like some heavy animal and almost bursting his brown jacket at the slightest movement, the wife, an enormous woman, whose figure indicated evident signs of an approaching maternity and whose stiff violet colored skirt still more increased her rotundity. Coupeau explained that they

were not to wait for My-Boots; his comrade would join the party on the Route de Saint-Denis.

"Well!" exclaimed Madame Lerat as she entered, "it'll pour in torrents soon! That'll be pleasant!"

And she called everyone to the door of the wineshop to see the clouds as black as ink which were rising rapidly to the south of Paris. Madame Lerat, eldest of the Coupeaus, was a tall, gaunt woman who talked through her nose. She was unattractively dressed in a puce-colored robe that hung loosely on her and had such long dangling fringes that they made her look like a skinny poodle coming out of the water. She brandished her umbrella like a club. After greeting Gervaise, she said, "You've no idea. The heat in the street is like a slap on the face. You'd think someone was throwing fire at you."

Everyone agreed that they knew the storm was coming. It was in the air. Monsieur Madinier said that he had seen it as they were coming out of the church. Lorilleux mentioned that his corns were aching and he hadn't been able to sleep since three in the morning. A storm was due. It had been much too hot for three days in a row.

"Well, maybe it will just be a little mist," Coupeau said several times, standing at the door and anxiously studying the sky. "Now we have to wait only for my sister. We'll start as soon as she arrives."

Madame Lorilleux was late. Madame Lerat had stopped by so they could come together, but found her only beginning to

get dressed. The two sisters had argued. The widow whispered in her brother's ear, "I left her flat! She's in a dreadful mood. You'll see."

And the wedding party had to wait another quarter of an hour, walking about the wineshop, elbowed and jostled in the midst of the men who entered to drink a glass of wine at the bar. Now and again Boche, or Madame Fauconnier, or Bibi-the-Smoker left the others and went to the edge of the pavement, looking up at the sky. The storm was not passing over at all; a darkness was coming on and puffs of wind, sweeping along the ground, raised little clouds of white dust. At the first clap of thunder, Mademoiselle Remanjou made the sign of the cross. All the glances were anxiously directed to the clock over the looking-glass; it was twenty minutes to two.

"Here it goes!" cried Coupeau. "It's the angels who're weeping."

A gush of rain swept the pavement, along which some women flew, holding down their skirts with both hands. And it was in the midst of this first shower that Madame Lorilleux at length arrived, furious and out of breath, and struggling on the threshold with her umbrella that would not close.

"Did any one ever see such a thing?" she exclaimed. "It caught me just at the door. I felt inclined to go upstairs again and take my things off. I should have been wise had I done so. Ah! it's a pretty wedding! I said how it would be. I wanted to put it off till next Saturday; and it rains because they wouldn't listen to me! So

much the better, so much the better! I wish the sky would burst!"

Coupeau tried to pacify her without success. He wouldn't have to pay for her dress if it was spoilt! She had on a black silk dress in which she was nearly choking, the bodice, too tight fitting, was almost bursting the button-holes, and was cutting her across the shoulders; while the skirt only allowed her to take very short steps in walking. However, the ladies present were all staring at her, quite overcome by her costume.

She appeared not to notice Gervaise, who was sitting beside mother Coupeau. She asked her husband for his handkerchief. Then she went into a corner and very carefully wiped off the raindrops that had fallen on her silk dress.

The shower had abruptly ceased. The darkness increased, it was almost like night – a livid night rent at times by large flashes of lightning. Bibi-the-Smoker said laughingly that it would certainly rain priests. Then the storm burst forth with extreme violence. For half an hour the rain came down in bucketsful, and the thunder rumbled unceasingly. The men standing up before the door contemplated the grey veil of the downpour, the swollen gutters, the splashes of water caused by the rain beating into the puddles. The women, feeling frightened, had sat down again, holding their hands before their eyes. They no longer conversed, they were too upset. A jest Boche made about the thunder, saying that St. Peter was sneezing up there, failed to raise a smile. But, when the thunder-claps became less frequent and gradually died away in the distance, the wedding guests began to get impatient,

enraged against the storm, cursing and shaking their fists at the clouds. A fine and interminable rain now poured down from the sky which had become an ashy grey.

"It's past two o'clock," cried Madame Lorilleux. "We can't stop here for ever."

Mademoiselle Remanjou, having suggested going into the country all the same, even though they went no farther than the moat of the fortifications, the others scouted the idea: the roads would be in a nice state, one would not even be able to sit down on the grass; besides, it did not seem to be all over yet, there might perhaps be another downpour. Coupeau, who had been watching a workman, completely soaked, yet quietly walking along in the rain, murmured:

"If that animal My-Boots is waiting for us on the Route de Saint-Denis, he won't catch a sunstroke."

That made some of them laugh; but the general ill-humor increased. It was becoming ludicrous. They must decide on something unless they planned to sit there, staring at each other, until time for dinner. So for the next quarter of an hour, while the persistent rain continued, they tried to think of what to do. Bibi-the-Smoker suggested that they play cards. Boche slyly suggesting a most amusing game, the game of true confessions. Madame Gaudron thought of going to eat onion tarts on the Chaussee Clignancourt. Madame Lerat wanted to hear some stories. Gaudron said he wasn't a bit put out and thought they were quite well off where they were, out of the downpour. He

suggested sitting down to dinner immediately.

There was a discussion after each proposal. Some said that this would put everybody to sleep or that that would make people think they were stupid. Lorilleux had to get his word in. He finally suggested a walk along the outer Boulevards to Pere Lachaise cemetery. They could visit the tomb of Heloise and Abelard. Madame Lorilleux exploded, no longer able to control herself. She was leaving, she was. Were they trying to make fun of her? She got all dressed up and came out in the rain. And for what? To be wasting time in a wineshop. No, she had had enough of this wedding party. She'd rather be in her own home. Coupeau and Lorilleux had to get between her and the door to keep her from leaving. She kept telling them, "Get out of my way! I am leaving, I tell you!"

Lorilleux finally succeeded in calming her down. Coupeau went over to Gervaise, who had been sitting quietly in a corner with mother Coupeau and Madame Fauconnier.

"You haven't suggested anything," he said to her.

"Oh! Whatever they want," she replied, laughing. "I don't mind. We can go out or stay here."

She seemed aglow with contentment. She had spoken to each guest as they arrived. She spoke sensibly, in her soft voice, not getting into any disagreements. During the downpour, she had sat with her eyes wide open, watching the lightning as though she could see the future in the sudden flashes.

Monsieur Madinier had up to this time not proposed anything.

He was leaning against the bar, with the tails of his dress coat thrust apart, while he fully maintained the important air of an employer. He kept on expectorating, and rolled his big eyes about.

"*Mon Dieu*!" said he, "we might go to the Museum."

And he stroked his chin, as he blinkingly consulted the other members of the party.

"There are antiquities, pictures, paintings, a whole heap of things. It is very instructive. Perhaps you have never been there. Oh! it is quite worth seeing at least once in a while."

They looked at each other interrogatively. No, Gervaise had never been; Madame Fauconnier neither, nor Boche, nor the others. Coupeau thought he had been one Sunday, but he was not sure. They hesitated, however, when Madame Lorilleux, greatly impressed by Monsieur Madinier's importance, thought the suggestion a very worthy and respectable one. As they were wasting the day, and were all dressed up, they might as well go somewhere for their own instruction. Everyone approved. Then, as it still rained a little, they borrowed some umbrellas from the proprietor of the wineshop, old blue, green, and brown umbrellas, forgotten by different customers, and started off to the Museum.

The wedding party turned to the right, and descended into Paris along the Faubourg Saint-Denis. Coupeau and Gervaise again took the lead, almost running and keeping a good distance in front of the others. Monsieur Madinier now gave his arm to

Madame Lorilleux, mother Coupeau having remained behind in the wineshop on account of her old legs. Then came Lorilleux and Madame Lerat, Boche and Madame Fauconnier, Bibi-the-Smoker and Mademoiselle Remanjou, and finally the two Gaudrons. They were twelve and made a pretty long procession on the pavement.

"I swear to you, we had nothing to do with it," Madame Lorilleux explained to Monsieur Madinier. "We don't even know how they met, or, we know only too well, but that's not for us to discuss. My husband even had to buy the wedding ring. We were scarcely out of bed this morning when he had to lend them ten francs. And, not a member of her family at her wedding, what kind of bride is that? She says she has a sister in Paris who works for a pork butcher. Why didn't she invite her?" She stopped to point at Gervaise, who was limping awkwardly because of the slope of the pavement. "Just look at her. Clump-clump."

"Clump-clump" ran through the wedding procession. Lorilleux laughed under his breath, and said they ought to call her that, but Madame Fauconnier stood up for Gervaise. They shouldn't make fun of her; she was neat as a pin and did a good job when there was washing to be done.

When the wedding procession came out of the Faubourg Saint-Denis, they had to cross the boulevard. The street had been transformed into a morass of sticky mud by the storm. It had started to pour again and they had opened the assorted umbrellas. The women picked their way carefully through the mud, holding

their skirts high as the men held the sorry-looking umbrellas over their heads. The procession stretched out the width of the street.

"It's a masquerade!" yelled two street urchins.

People turned to stare. These couples parading across the boulevard added a splash of vivid color against the damp background. It was a parade of a strange medley of styles showing fancy used clothing such as constitute the luxury of the poor. The gentlemen's hats caused the most merriment, old hats preserved for years in dark and dusty cupboards, in a variety of comical forms: tall ones, flattened ones, sharply peaked ones, hats with extraordinary brims, curled back or flat, too narrow or too wide. Then at the very end, Madame Gaudron came along with her bright dress over her bulging belly and caused the smiles of the audience to grow even wider. The procession made no effort to hasten its progress. They were, in fact, rather pleased to attract so much attention and admiration.

"Look! Here comes the bride!" one of the urchins shouted, pointing to Madame Gaudron. "Oh! Isn't it too bad! She must have swallowed something!"

The entire wedding procession burst into laughter. Bibi-the-Smoker turned around and laughed. Madame Gaudron laughed the most of all. She wasn't ashamed as she thought more than one of the women watching had looked at her with envy.

They turned into the Rue de Clery. Then they took the Rue du Mail. On reaching the Place des Victoires, there was a halt. The bride's left shoe lace had come undone, and as she tied it up

again at the foot of the statue of Louis XIV., the couples pressed behind her waiting, and joking about the bit of calf of her leg that she displayed. At length, after passing down the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, they reached the Louvre.

Monsieur Madinier politely asked to be their cicerone. It was a big place, and they might lose themselves; besides, he knew the best parts, because he had often come there with an artist, a very intelligent fellow from whom a large dealer bought designs to put on his cardboard boxes. Down below, when the wedding party entered the Assyrian Museum, a slight shiver passed through it. The deuce! It was not at all warm there; the hall would have made a capital cellar. And the couples slowly advanced, their chins raised, their eyes blinking, between the gigantic stone figures, the black marble gods, dumb in their hieratic rigidity, and the monstrous beasts, half cats and half women, with death-like faces, attenuated noses, and swollen lips. They thought all these things very ugly. The stone carvings of the present day were a great deal better. An inscription in Phoenician characters amazed them. No one could possibly have ever read that scrawl. But Monsieur Madinier, already up on the first landing with Madame Lorilleux, called to them, shouting beneath the vaulted ceiling:

"Come along! They're nothing, all those things! The things to see are on the first floor!"

The severe barrenness of the staircase made them very grave. An attendant, superbly attired in a red waistcoat and a coat trimmed with gold lace, who seemed to be awaiting them on

the landing, increased their emotion. It was with great respect, and treading as softly as possible, that they entered the French Gallery.

Then, without stopping, their eyes occupied with the gilding of the frames, they followed the string of little rooms, glancing at the passing pictures too numerous to be seen properly. It would have required an hour before each, if they had wanted to understand it. What a number of pictures! There was no end to them. They must be worth a mint of money. Right at the end, Monsieur Madinier suddenly ordered a halt opposite the "Raft of the Medusa" and he explained the subject to them. All deeply impressed and motionless, they uttered not a word. When they started off again, Boche expressed the general feeling, saying it was marvellous.

In the Apollo Gallery, the inlaid flooring especially astonished the party – a shining floor, as clear as a mirror, and which reflected the legs of the seats. Mademoiselle Remanjou kept her eyes closed, because she could not help thinking that she was walking on water. They called to Madame Gaudron to be careful how she trod on account of her condition. Monsieur Madinier wanted to show them the gilding and paintings of the ceiling; but it nearly broke their necks to look up above, and they could distinguish nothing. Then, before entering the Square Salon, he pointed to a window, saying:

"That's the balcony from which Charles IX. fired on the people."

He looked back to make sure the party was following. In the middle of the Salon Carre, he held up his hand. "There are only masterpieces here," he said, in a subdued voice, as though in church. They went all around the room. Gervaise wanted to know about "The Wedding at Cana." Coupeau paused to stare at the "Mona Lisa," saying that she reminded him of one of his aunts. Boche and Bibi-the-Smoker snickered at the nudes, pointing them out to each other and winking. The Gaudrons looked at the "Virgin" of Murillo, he with his mouth open, she with her hands folded on her belly.

When they had been all around the Salon, Monsieur Madinier wished them to go round it again, it was so worth while. He was very attentive to Madame Lorilleux, because of her silk dress; and each time that she questioned him he answered her gravely, with great assurance. She was curious about "Titian's Mistress" because the yellow hair resembled her own. He told her it was "La Belle Ferronniere," a mistress of Henry IV. about whom there had been a play at the Ambigu.

Then the wedding party invaded the long gallery occupied by the Italian and Flemish schools. More paintings, always paintings, saints, men and women, with faces which some of them could understand, landscapes that were all black, animals turned yellow, a medley of people and things, the great mixture of the colors of which was beginning to give them all violent headaches. Monsieur Madinier no longer talked as he slowly headed the procession, which followed him in good order,

with stretched necks and upcast eyes. Centuries of art passed before their bewildered ignorance, the fine sharpness of the early masters, the splendors of the Venetians, the vigorous life, beautiful with light, of the Dutch painters. But what interested them most were the artists who were copying, with their easels planted amongst the people, painting away unrestrainedly; an old lady, mounted on a pair of high steps, working a big brush over the delicate sky of an immense painting, struck them as something most peculiar.

Slowly the word must have gone around that a wedding party was visiting the Louvre. Several painters came over with big smiles. Some visitors were so curious that they went to sit on benches ahead of the group in order to be comfortable while they watched them pass in review. Museum guards bit back comments. The wedding party was now quite weary and beginning to drag their feet.

Monsieur Madinier was reserving himself to give more effect to a surprise that he had in store. He went straight to the "Kermesse" of Rubens; but still he said nothing. He contented himself with directing the others' attention to the picture by a sprightly glance. The ladies uttered faint cries the moment they brought their noses close to the painting. Then, blushing deeply they turned away their heads. The men though kept them there, cracking jokes, and seeking for the coarser details.

"Just look!" exclaimed Boche, "it's worth the money. There's one spewing, and another, he's watering the dandelions; and that

one – oh! that one. Ah, well! They're a nice clean lot, they are!"

"Let us be off," said Monsieur Madinier, delighted with his success. "There is nothing more to see here."

They retraced their steps, passing again through the Salon Carre and the Apollo Gallery. Madame Lerat and Mademoiselle Remanjou complained, declaring that their legs could scarcely bear them. But the cardboard box manufacturer wanted to show Lorilleux the old jewelry. It was close by in a little room which he could find with his eyes shut. However, he made a mistake and led the wedding party astray through seven or eight cold, deserted rooms, only ornamented with severe looking-glass cases, containing numberless broken pots and hideous little figures.

While looking for an exit they stumbled into the collection of drawings. It was immense. Through room after room they saw nothing interesting, just scribblings on paper that filled all the cases and covered the walls. They thought there was no end to these drawings.

Monsieur Madinier, losing his head, not willing to admit that he did not know his way, ascended a flight of stairs, making the wedding party mount to the next floor. This time they traversed the Naval Museum, among models of instruments and cannons, plans in relief, and vessels as tiny as playthings. After going a long way, and walking for a quarter of an hour, the party came upon another staircase; and, having descended this, found itself once more surrounded by the drawings. Then despair took possession

of them as they wandered at random through long halls, following Monsieur Madinier, who was furious and mopping the sweat from his forehead. He accused the government of having moved the doors around. Museum guards and visitors looked on with astonishment as the procession, still in a column of couples, passed by. They passed again through the Salon Carre, the French Gallery and then along the cases where minor Eastern divinities slumbered peacefully. It seemed they would never find their way out. They were getting tired and made a lot of noise.

"Closing time! Closing time!" called out the attendants, in a loud tone of voice.

And the wedding party was nearly locked in. An attendant was obliged to place himself at the head of it, and conduct it to a door. Then in the courtyard of the Louvre, when it had recovered its umbrellas from the cloakroom, it breathed again. Monsieur Madinier regained his assurance. He had made a mistake in not turning to the left, now he recollected that the jewelry was to the left. The whole party pretended to be very pleased at having seen all they had.

Four o'clock was striking. There were still two hours to be employed before the dinner time, so it was decided they should take a stroll, just to occupy the interval. The ladies, who were very tired, would have preferred to sit down; but, as no one offered any refreshments, they started off, following the line of quays. There they encountered another shower and so sharp a one that in spite of the umbrellas, the ladies' dresses began to

get wet. Madame Lorilleux, her heart sinking within her each time a drop fell upon her black silk, proposed that they should shelter themselves under the Pont-Royal; besides if the others did not accompany her, she threatened to go all by herself. And the procession marched under one of the arches of the bridge. They were very comfortable there. It was, most decidedly a capital idea! The ladies, spreading their handkerchiefs over the paving-stones, sat down with their knees wide apart, and pulled out the blades of grass that grew between the stones with both hands, whilst they watched the dark flowing water as though they were in the country. The men amused themselves with calling out very loud, so as to awaken the echoes of the arch. Boche and Bibi-the-Smoker shouted insults into the air at the top of their voices, one after the other. They laughed uproariously when the echo threw the insults back at them. When their throats were hoarse from shouting, they made a game of skipping flat stones on the surface of the Seine.

The shower had ceased but the whole party felt so comfortable that no one thought of moving away. The Seine was flowing by, an oily sheet carrying bottle corks, vegetable peelings, and other refuse that sometimes collected in temporary whirlpools moving along with the turbulent water. Endless traffic rumbled on the bridge overhead, the noisy bustle of Paris, of which they could glimpse only the rooftops to the left and right, as though they were in the bottom of a deep pit.

Mademoiselle Remanjou sighed; if the leaves had been out

this would have reminded her of a bend of the Marne where she used to go with a young man. It still made her cry to think of him.

At last, Monsieur Madinier gave the signal for departure. They passed through the Tuileries gardens, in the midst of a little community of children, whose hoops and balls upset the good order of the couples. Then as the wedding party on arriving at the Place Vendome looked up at the column, Monsieur Madinier gallantly offered to treat the ladies to a view from the top. His suggestion was considered extremely amusing. Yes, yes, they would go up; it would give them something to laugh about for a long time. Besides, it would be full of interest for those persons who had never been higher than a cow pasture.

"Do you think Clump-clump will venture inside there with her leg all out of place?" murmured Madame Lorilleux.

"I'll go up with pleasure," said Madame Lerat, "but I won't have any men walking behind me."

And the whole party ascended. In the narrow space afforded by the spiral staircase, the twelve persons crawled up one after the other, stumbling against the worn steps, and clinging to the walls. Then, when the obscurity became complete, they almost split their sides with laughing. The ladies screamed when the gentlemen pinched their legs. But they were weren't stupid enough to say anything! The proper plan is to think that it is the mice nibbling at them. It wasn't very serious; the men knew when to stop.

Boche thought of a joke and everyone took it up. They called

down to Madame Gaudron to ask her if she could squeeze her belly through. Just think! If she should get stuck there, she would completely block the passage, and how would they ever get out? They laughed so at the jokes about her belly that the column itself vibrated. Boche was now quite carried away and declared that they were growing old climbing up this chimney pipe. Was it ever coming to an end, or did it go right up to heaven? He tried to frighten the ladies by telling them the structure was shaking.

Coupeau, meanwhile, said nothing. He was behind Gervaise, with his arm around her waist, and felt that she was everything perfect to him. When they suddenly emerged again into the daylight, he was just in the act of kissing her on the cheek.

"Well! You're a nice couple; you don't stand on ceremony," said Madame Lorilleux with a scandalized air.

Bibi-the-Smoker pretended to be furious. He muttered between his teeth. "You made such a noise together! I wasn't even able to count the steps."

But Monsieur Madinier was already up on the platform, pointing out the different monuments. Neither Madame Fauconnier nor Mademoiselle Remanjou would on any consideration leave the staircase. The thought of the pavement below made their blood curdle, and they contented themselves with glancing out of the little door. Madame Lerat, who was bolder, went round the narrow terrace, keeping close to the bronze dome; but, *mon Dieu*, it gave one a rude emotion to think that one only had to slip off. The men were a little paler than

usual as they stared down at the square below. You would think you were up in mid-air, detached from everything. No, it wasn't fun, it froze your very insides.

Monsieur Madinier told them to raise their eyes and look straight into the distance to avoid feeling dizzy. He went on pointing out the Invalides, the Pantheon, Notre Dame and the Montmartre hill. Madame Lorilleux asked if they could see the place where they were to have dinner, the Silver Windmill on the Boulevard de la Chapelle. For ten minutes they tried to see it, even arguing about it. Everyone had their own idea where it was.

"It wasn't worth while coming up here to bite each other's noses off," said Boche, angrily as he turned to descend the staircase.

The wedding party went down, unspeaking and sulky, awakening no other sound beyond that of shoes clanking on the stone steps. When it reached the bottom, Monsieur Madinier wished to pay; but Coupeau would not permit him, and hastened to place twenty-four sous into the keeper's hand, two sous for each person. So they returned by the Boulevards and the Faubourg du Poissonniers. Coupeau, however, considered that their outing could not end like that. He bundled them all into a wineshop where they took some vermouth.

The repast was ordered for six o'clock. At the Silver Windmill, they had been waiting for the wedding party for a good twenty minutes. Madame Boche, who had got a lady living in the same house to attend to her duties for the evening, was conversing

with mother Coupeau in the first floor room, in front of the table, which was all laid out; and the two youngsters, Claude and Etienne, whom she had brought with her, were playing about beneath the table and amongst the chairs. When Gervaise, on entering caught sight of the little ones, whom she had not seen all the day, she took them on her knees, and caressed and kissed them.

"Have they been good?" asked she of Madame Boche. "I hope they haven't worried you too much."

And as the latter related the things the little rascals had done during the afternoon, and which would make one die with laughing, the mother again took them up and pressed them to her breast, seized with an overpowering outburst of maternal affection.

"It's not very pleasant for Coupeau, all the same," Madame Lorilleux was saying to the other ladies, at the end of the room.

Gervaise had kept her smiling peacefulness from the morning, but after the long walk she appeared almost sad at times as she watched her husband and the Lorilleuxs in a thoughtful way. She had the feeling that Coupeau was a little afraid of his sister. The evening before, he had been talking big, swearing he would put them in their places if they didn't behave. However, she could see that in their presence he was hanging on their words, worrying when he thought they might be displeased. This gave the young bride some cause for worry about the future.

They were now only waiting for My-Boots, who had not yet

put in an appearance.

"Oh! blow him!" cried Coupeau, "let's begin. You'll see, he'll soon turn up, he's got a hollow nose, he can scent the grub from afar. I say he must be amusing himself, if he's still standing like a post on the Route de Saint-Denis!"

Then the wedding party, feeling very lively, sat down making a great noise with the chairs. Gervaise was between Lorilleux and Monsieur Madinier, and Coupeau between Madame Fauconnier and Madame Lorilleux. The other guests seated themselves where they liked, because it always ended with jealousies and quarrels, when one settled their places for them. Boche glided to a seat beside Madame Lerat. Bibi-the-Smoker had for neighbors Mademoiselle Remanjou and Madame Gaudron. As for Madame Boche and mother Coupeau, they were right at the end of the table, looking after the children, cutting up their meat and giving them something to drink, but not much wine.

"Does nobody say grace?" asked Boche, whilst the ladies arranged their skirts under the table-cloth, so as not to get them stained.

But Madame Lorilleux paid no attention to such pleasantries. The vermicelli soup, which was nearly cold, was gulped down very quickly, their lips making a hissing noise against the spoons. Two waiters served at table, dressed in little greasy jackets and not over-clean white aprons. By the four open windows overlooking the acacias of the courtyard there entered the clear light of the close of a stormy day, with the atmosphere purified

thereby though without sufficiently cooling it. The light reflected from the humid corner of trees tinged the haze-filled room with green and made leaf shadows dance along the table-cloth, from which came a vague aroma of dampness and mildew.

Two large mirrors, one at each end of the room, seemed to stretch out the table. The heavy crockery with which it was set was beginning to turn yellow and the cutlery was scratched and grimed with grease. Each time a waiter came through the swinging doors from the kitchen a whiff of odorous burnt lard came with him.

"Don't all talk at once," said Boche, as everyone remained silent with his nose in his plate.

They were drinking the first glass of wine as their eyes followed two meat pies which the waiters were handing round when My-Boots entered the room.

"Well, you're a scurvy lot, you people!" said he. "I've been wearing my pins out for three hours waiting on that road, and a gendarme even came and asked me for my papers. It isn't right to play such dirty tricks on a friend! You might at least have sent me word by a commissionaire. Ah! no, you know, joking apart, it's too bad. And with all that, it rained so hard that I got my pickets full of water. Honor bright, you might still catch enough fish in 'em for a meal."

The others wriggled with laughter. That animal My-Boots was just a bit on; he had certainly already stowed away his two quarts of wine, merely to prevent his being bothered by all that frog's

liquor with which the storm had deluged his limbs.

"Hallo! Count Leg-of-Mutton!" said Coupeau, "just go and sit yourself there, beside Madame Gaudron. You see you were expected."

Oh, he did not mind, he would soon catch the others up; and he asked for three helpings of soup, platefuls of vermicelli, in which he soaked enormous slices of bread. Then, when they had attacked the meat pies, he became the profound admiration of everyone at the table. How he stowed it away! The bewildered waiters helped each other to pass him bread, thin slices which he swallowed at a mouthful. He ended by losing his temper; he insisted on having a loaf placed on the table beside him. The landlord, very anxious, came for a moment and looked in at the door. The party, which was expecting him, again wriggled with laughter. It seemed to upset the caterer. What a rum card he was that My-Boots! One day he had eaten a dozen hard-boiled eggs and drank a dozen glasses of wine while the clock was striking twelve! There are not many who can do that. And Mademoiselle Remanjou, deeply moved, watched My-Boots chew whilst Monsieur Madinier, seeking for a word to express his almost respectful astonishment, declared that such a capacity was extraordinary.

There was a brief silence. A waiter had just placed on the table a ragout of rabbits in a vast dish as deep as a salad-bowl. Coupeau, who liked fun, started another joke.

"I say, waiter, that rabbit's from the housetops. It still mews."

And in fact, a faint mew perfectly imitated seemed to issue from the dish. It was Coupeau who did that with his throat, without opening his lips; a talent which at all parties, met with decided success, so much so that he never ordered a dinner abroad without having a rabbit ragout. After that he purred. The ladies pressed their napkins to their mouths to try and stop their laughter. Madame Fauconnier asked for a head, she only liked that part. Mademoiselle Remanjou had a weakness for the slices of bacon. And as Boche said he preferred the little onions when they were nicely broiled, Madame Lerat screwed up her lips, and murmured:

"I can understand that."

She was a dried up stick, living the cloistered life of a hard-working woman imprisoned within her daily routine, who had never had a man stick his nose into her room since the death of her husband; yet she had an obsession with double meanings and indecent allusions that were sometimes so far off the mark that only she understood them.

As Boche leaned toward her and, in a whisper, asked for an explanation, she resumed:

"Little onions, why of course. That's quite enough, I think."

The general conversation was becoming grave. Each one was talking of his trade. Monsieur Madinier raved about the cardboard business. There were some real artists. For an example, he mentioned Christmas gift boxes, of which he'd seen samples that were marvels of splendor.

Lorilleux sneered at this; he was extremely vain because of working with gold, feeling that it gave a sort of sheen to his fingers and his whole personality. "In olden times jewelers wore swords like gentlemen." He often cited the case of Bernard Palissy, even though he really knew nothing about him.

Coupeau told of a masterpiece of a weather vane made by one of his fellow workers which included a Greek column, a sheaf of wheat, a basket of fruit, and a flag, all beautifully worked out of nothing but strips of zinc shaped and soldered together.

Madame Lerat showed Bibi-the-Smoker how to make a rose by rolling the handle of her knife between her bony fingers.

All the while, their voices had been rising louder and louder, competing for attention. Shrill comments by Madame Fauconnier were heard. She complained about the girls who worked for her, especially a little apprentice who was nothing but a tart and had badly scorched some sheets the evening before.

"You may talk," Lorilleux cried, banging his fist down on the table, "but gold is gold."

And, in the midst of the silence caused by the statement of this fact, the only sound heard was Mademoiselle Remanjou's shrill voice continuing:

"Then I turn up the skirt and stitch it inside. I stick a pin in the head to keep the cap on, and that's all; and they are sold for thirteen sous a piece."

She was explaining how she dressed her dolls to My-Boots, whose jaws were working slowly like grindstones. He did not

listen, though he kept nodding his head, but looked after the waiters to prevent them removing any of the dishes he had not cleaned out. They had now finished a veal stew with green beans. The roast was brought in, two scrawny chickens resting on a bed of water cress which was limp from the warming oven.

Outside, only the higher branches of the acacias were touched by the setting sun. Inside, the greenish reflected light was thickened by wisps of steam rising from the table, now messy with spilled wine and gravy and the debris of the dinner. Along the wall were dirty dishes and empty bottles which the waiters had piled there like a heap of refuse. It was so hot that the men took off their jackets and continued eating in their shirt sleeves.

"Madame Boche, please don't spread their butter so thick," said Gervaise, who spoke but little, and who was watching Claude and Etienne from a distance.

She got up from her seat, and went and talked for a minute while standing behind the little ones' chairs. Children did not reason; they would eat all day long without refusing a single thing; and then she herself helped them to some chicken, a little of the breast. But mother Coupeau said they might, just for once in a while, risk an attack of indigestion. Madame Boche, in a low voice accused Boche of caressing Madame Lerat's knees. Oh, he was a sly one, but he was getting a little too gay. She had certainly seen his hand disappear. If he did it again, drat him! she wouldn't hesitate throwing a pitcher of water over his head.

In the partial silence, Monsieur Madinier was talking politics.

"Their law of May 31, is an abominable one. Now you must reside in a place for two years. Three millions of citizens are struck off the voting lists. I've been told that Bonaparte is, in reality, very much annoyed for he loves the people; he has given them proofs."

He was a republican; but he admired the prince on account of his uncle, a man the like of whom would never be seen again. Bibi-the-Smoker flew into a passion. He had worked at the Elysee; he had seen Bonaparte just as he saw My-Boots in front of him over there. Well that muff of a president was just like a jackass, that was all! It was said that he was going to travel about in the direction of Lyons; it would be a precious good riddance of bad rubbish if he fell into some hole and broke his neck. But, as the discussion was becoming too heated, Coupeau had to interfere.

"Ah, well! How simple you all are to quarrel about politics. Politics are all humbug! Do such things exist for us? Let there be any one as king, it won't prevent me earning my five francs a day, and eating and sleeping; isn't that so? No, it's too stupid to argue about!"

Lorilleux shook his head. He was born on the same day as the Count of Chambord, the 29th of September, 1820. He was greatly struck with this coincidence, indulging himself in a vague dream, in which he established a connection between the king's return to France and his own private fortunes. He never said exactly what he was expecting, but he led people to suppose

that when that time arrived something extraordinarily agreeable would happen to him. So whenever he had a wish too great to be gratified, he would put it off to another time, when the king came back.

"Besides," observed he, "I saw the Count de Chambord one evening."

Every face was turned towards him.

"It's quite true. A stout man, in an overcoat, and with a good-natured air. I was at Pequignot's, one of my friends who deals in furniture in the Grand Rue de la Chapelle. The Count of Chambord had forgotten his umbrella there the day before; so he came in, and just simply said, like this: 'Will you please return me my umbrella?' Well, yes, it was him; Pequignot gave me his word of honor it was."

Not one of the guests suggested the smallest doubt. They had now arrived at dessert and the waiters were clearing the table with much clattering of dishes. Madame Lorilleux, who up to then had been very genteel, very much the lady, suddenly let fly with a curse. One of the waiters had spilled something wet down her neck while removing a dish. This time her silk dress would be stained for sure. Monsieur Madinier had to examine her back, but he swore there was nothing to be seen.

Two platters of cheese, two dishes of fruit, and a floating island pudding of frosted eggs in a deep salad-bowl had now been placed along the middle of the table. The pudding caused a moment of respectful attention even though the overdone egg

whites had flattened on the yellow custard. It was unexpected and seemed very fancy.

My-Boots was still eating. He had asked for another loaf. He finished what there was of the cheese; and, as there was some cream left, he had the salad-bowl passed to him, into which he sliced some large pieces of bread as though for a soup.

"The gentleman is really remarkable," said Monsieur Madinier, again giving way to his admiration.

Then the men rose to get their pipes. They stood for a moment behind My-Boots, patting him on the back, and asking him if he was feeling better. Bibi-the-Smoker lifted him up in his chair; but *tonnerre de Dieu!* the animal had doubled in weight. Coupeau joked that My-Boots was only getting started, that now he was going to settle down and really eat for the rest of the night. The waiters were startled and quickly vanished from sight.

Boche, who had gone downstairs for a moment, came up to report the proprietor's reaction. He was standing behind his bar, pale as death. His wife, dreadfully upset, was wondering if any bakeries were still open. Even the cat seemed deep in despair. This was as funny as could be, really worth the price of the dinner. It was impossible to have a proper dinner party without My-Boots, the bottomless pit. The other men eyed him with a brooding jealousy as they puffed on their pipes. Indeed, to be able to eat so much, you had to be very solidly built!

"I wouldn't care to be obliged to support you," said Madame Gaudron. "Ah, no; you may take my word for that!"

"I say, little mother, no jokes," replied My-Boots, casting a side glance at his neighbor's rotund figure. "You've swallowed more than I have."

The others applauded, shouting "Bravo!" – it was well answered. It was now pitch dark outside, three gas-jets were flaring in the room, diffusing dim rays in the midst of the tobacco-smoke. The waiters, after serving the coffee and the brandy, had removed the last piles of dirty plates. Down below, beneath the three acacias, dancing had commenced, a cornet-a-piston and two fiddles playing very loud, and mingling in the warm night air with the rather hoarse laughter of women.

"We must have a punch!" cried My-Boots; "two quarts of brandy, lots of lemon, and a little sugar."

But Coupeau, seeing the anxious look on Gervaise's face in front of him, got up from the table, declaring that there should be no more drink. They had emptied twenty-five quarts, a quart and a half to each person, counting the children as grown-up people; that was already too much. They had had a feed together in good fellowship, and without ceremony, because they esteemed each other, and wished to celebrate the event of the day amongst themselves. Everything had been very nice; they had had lots of fun. It wouldn't do to get cockeyed drunk now, out of respect to the ladies. That was all he had to say, they had come together to toast a marriage and they had done so.

Coupeau delivered the little speech with convincing sincerity and punctuated each phrase by placing his hand on his heart.

He won whole-hearted approval from Lorilleux and Monsieur Madinier; but the other four men, especially My-Boots, were already well lit and sneered. They declared in hoarse drunken voices that they were thirsty and wanted drinks.

"Those who're thirsty are thirsty, and those who aren't thirsty aren't thirsty," remarked My-Boots. "Therefore, we'll order the punch. No one need take offence. The aristocrats can drink sugar-and-water."

And as the zinc-worker commenced another sermon, the other, who had risen on his legs, gave himself a slap, exclaiming:

"Come, let's have no more of that, my boy! Waiter, two quarts of your aged stuff!"

So Coupeau said very well, only they would settle for the dinner at once. It would prevent any disputes. The well-behaved people did not want to pay for the drunkards; and it just happened that My-Boots, after searching in his pockets for a long time, could only produce three francs and seven sous. Well, why had they made him wait all that time on the Route de Saint-Denis? He could not let himself be drowned and so he had broken into his five-franc piece. It was the fault of the others, that was all! He ended by giving the three francs, keeping the seven sous for the morrow's tobacco. Coupeau, who was furious, would have knocked him over had not Gervaise, greatly frightened, pulled him by his coat, and begged him to keep cool. He decided to borrow the two francs of Lorilleux, who after refusing them, lent them on the sly, for his wife would never have consented to his

doing so.

Monsieur Madinier went round with a plate. The spinster and the ladies who were alone – Madame Lerat, Madame Fauconnier, Mademoiselle Remanjou – discreetly placed their five-franc pieces in it first. Then the gentlemen went to the other end of the room, and made up the accounts. They were fifteen; it amounted therefore to seventy-five francs. When the seventy-five francs were in the plate, each man added five sous for the waiters. It took a quarter of an hour of laborious calculations before everything was settled to the general satisfaction.

But when Monsieur Madinier, who wished to deal direct with the landlord, had got him to step up, the whole party became lost in astonishment on hearing him say with a smile that there was still something due to him. There were some extras; and, as the word "extras" was greeted with angry exclamations, he entered into details: – Twenty-five quarts of wine, instead of twenty, the number agreed upon beforehand; the frosted eggs, which he had added, as the dessert was rather scanty; finally, a quarter of a bottle of rum, served with the coffee, in case any one preferred rum. Then a formidable quarrel ensued. Coupeau, who was appealed to, protested against everything; he had never mentioned twenty quarts; as for the frosted eggs, they were included in the dessert, so much the worse for the landlord if he choose to add them without being asked to do so. There remained the rum, a mere nothing, just a mode of increasing the bill by putting on the table spirits that no one thought anything about.

"It was on the tray with the coffee," he cried; "therefore it goes with the coffee. Go to the deuce! Take your money, and never again will we set foot in your den!"

"It's six francs more," repeated the landlord. "Pay me my six francs; and with all that I haven't counted the four loaves that gentleman ate!"

The whole party, pressing forward, surrounded him with furious gestures and a yelping of voices choking with rage. The women especially threw aside all reserve, and refused to add another centime. This was some wedding dinner! Mademoiselle Remanjou vowed she would never again attend such a party. Madame Fauconnier declared she had had a very disappointing meal; at home she could have had a finger-licking dish for only two francs. Madame Gaudron bitterly complained that she had been shoved down to the worst end of the table next to My-Boots who had ignored her. These parties never turned out well, one should be more careful whom one invites. Gervaise had taken refuge with mother Coupeau near one of the windows, feeling shamed as she realized that all these recriminations would fall back upon her.

Monsieur Madinier ended by going down with the landlord. One could hear them arguing below. Then, when half an hour had gone by the cardboard box manufacturer returned; he had settled the matter by giving three francs. But the party continued annoyed and exasperated, constantly returning to the question of the extras. And the uproar increased from an act of vigor on

Madame Boche's part. She had kept an eye on Boche, and at length detected him squeezing Madame Lerat round the waist in a corner. Then, with all her strength, she flung a water pitcher, which smashed against the wall.

"One can easily see that your husband's a tailor, madame," said the tall widow, with a curl of the lip, full of a double meaning. "He's a petticoat specialist, even though I gave him some pretty hard kicks under the table."

The harmony of the evening was altogether upset. Everyone became more and more ill-tempered. Monsieur Madinier suggested some singing, but Bibi-the-Smoker, who had a fine voice, had disappeared some time before; and Mademoiselle Remanjou, who was leaning out of the window, caught sight of him under the acacias, swinging round a big girl who was bare-headed. The cornet-a-piston and two fiddles were playing "*Le Marchand de Moutarde*." The party now began to break up. My-Boots and the Gaudrons went down to the dance with Boche sneaking along after them. The twirling couples could be seen from the windows. The night was still as though exhausted from the heat of the day. A serious conversation started between Lorilleux and Monsieur Madinier. The ladies examined their dresses carefully to see if they had been stained.

Madame Lerat's fringe looked as though it had been dipped in the coffee. Madame Fauconnier's chintz dress was spotted with gravy. Mother Coupeau's green shawl, fallen from off a chair, was discovered in a corner, rolled up and trodden upon.

But it was Madame Lorilleux especially who became more ill-tempered still. She had a stain on the back of her dress; it was useless for the others to declare that she had not – she felt it. And, by twisting herself about in front of a looking-glass, she ended by catching a glimpse of it.

"What did I say?" cried she. "It's gravy from the fowl. The waiter shall pay for the dress. I will bring an action against him. Ah! this is a fit ending to such a day. I should have done better to have stayed in bed. To begin with, I'm off. I've had enough of their wretched wedding!"

And she left the room in a rage, causing the staircase to shake beneath her heavy footsteps. Lorilleux ran after her. But all she would consent to was that she would wait five minutes on the pavement outside, if he wanted them to go off together. She ought to have left directly after the storm, as she wished to do. She would make Coupeau sorry for that day. Coupeau was dismayed when he heard how angry she was. Gervaise agreed to leave at once to avoid embarrassing him any more.

There was a flurry of quick good-night kisses. Monsieur Madinier was to escort mother Coupeau home. Madame Boche would take Claude and Etienne with her for the bridal night. The children were sound asleep on chairs, stuffed full from the dinner. Just as the bridal couple and Lorilleux were about to go out the door, a quarrel broke out near the dance floor between their group and another group. Boche and My-Boots were kissing a lady and wouldn't give her up to her escorts, two soldiers.

It was scarcely eleven o'clock. On the Boulevard de la Chapelle, and in the entire neighborhood of the Goutte-d'Or, the fortnight's pay, which fell due on that Saturday, produced an enormous drunken uproar. Madame Lorilleux was waiting beneath a gas-lamp about twenty paces from the Silver Windmill. She took her husband's arm, and walked on in front without looking round, at such a rate, that Gervaise and Coupeau got quite out of breath in trying to keep up with them. Now and again they stepped off the pavement to leave room for some drunkard who had fallen there. Lorilleux looked back, endeavoring to make things pleasant.

"We will see you as far as your door," said he.

But Madame Lorilleux, raising her voice, thought it a funny thing to spend one's wedding night in such a filthy hole as the Hotel Boncoeur. Ought they not to have put their marriage off, and have saved a few sous to buy some furniture, so as to have had a home of their own on the first night? Ah! they would be comfortable, right up under the roof, packed into a little closet, at ten francs a month, where there was not even the slightest air.

"I've given notice, we're not going to use the room up at the top of the house," timidly interposed Coupeau. "We are keeping Gervaise's room, which is larger."

Madame Lorilleux forgot herself. She turned abruptly round.

"That's worse than all!" cried she. "You're going to sleep in Clump-clump's room."

Gervaise became quite pale. This nickname, which she

received full in the face for the first time, fell on her like a blow. And she fully understood it, too, her sister-in-law's exclamation: the Clump-clump's room was the room in which she had lived for a month with Lantier, where the shreds of her past life still hung about. Coupeau did not understand this, but merely felt hurt at the harsh nickname.

"You do wrong to christen others," he replied angrily. "You don't know perhaps, that in the neighborhood they call you Cow's-Tail, because of your hair. There, that doesn't please you, does it? Why should we not keep the room on the first floor? To-night the children won't sleep there, and we shall be very comfortable."

Madame Lorilleux added nothing further, but retired into her dignity, horribly annoyed at being called Cow's-Tail. To cheer up Gervaise, Coupeau squeezed her arm softly. He even succeeded in making her smile by whispering into her ear that they were setting up housekeeping with the grand sum of seven sous, three big two-sou pieces and one little sou, which he jingled in his pocket.

When they reached the Hotel Boncoeur, the two couples wished each other good-night, with an angry air; and as Coupeau pushed the two women into each other's arms, calling them a couple of ninnies, a drunken fellow, who seemed to want to go to the right, suddenly slipped to the left and came tumbling between them.

"Why, it's old Bazouge!" said Lorilleux. "He's had his fill to-

day."

Gervaise, frightened, squeezed up against the door of the hotel. Old Bazouge, an undertaker's helper of some fifty years of age, had his black trousers all stained with mud, his black cape hooked on to his shoulder, and his black feather hat knocked in by some tumble he had taken.

"Don't be afraid, he's harmless," continued Lorilleux. "He's a neighbor of ours – the third room in the passage before us. He would find himself in a nice mess if his people were to see him like this!"

Old Bazouge, however, felt offended at the young woman's evident terror.

"Well, what!" hiccoughed he, "we ain't going to eat any one. I'm as good as another any day, my little woman. No doubt I've had a drop! When work's plentiful one must grease the wheels. It's not you, nor your friends, who would have carried down the stiff 'un of forty-seven stone whom I and a pal brought from the fourth floor to the pavement, and without smashing him too. I like jolly people."

But Gervaise retreated further into the doorway, seized with a longing to cry, which spoilt her day of sober-minded joy. She no longer thought of kissing her sister-in-law, she implored Coupeau to get rid of the drunkard. Then Bazouge, as he stumbled about, made a gesture of philosophical disdain.

"That won't prevent you passing though our hands, my little woman. You'll perhaps be glad to do so, one of these days. Yes, I

know some women who'd be much obliged if we did carry them off."

And, as Lorilleux led him away, he turned around, and stuttered out a last sentence, between two hiccoughs.

"When you're dead – listen to this – when you're dead, it's for a long, long time."

CHAPTER IV

Then followed four years of hard work. In the neighborhood, Gervaise and Coupeau had the reputation of being a happy couple, living in retirement without quarrels, and taking a short walk regularly every Sunday in the direction of St. Ouen. The wife worked twelve hours a day at Madame Fauconnier's, and still found means to keep their lodging as clean and bright as a new coined sou and to prepare the meals for all her little family, morning and evening. The husband never got drunk, brought his wages home every fortnight, and smoked a pipe at his window in the evening, to get a breath of fresh air before going to bed. They were frequently alluded to on account of their nice, pleasant ways; and as between them they earned close upon nine francs a day, it was reckoned that they were able to put by a good deal of money.

However, during their first months together they had to struggle hard to get by. Their wedding had left them owing two hundred francs. Also, they detested the Hotel Boncoeur as they didn't like the other occupants. Their dream was to have a home of their own with their own furniture. They were always figuring how much they would need and decided three hundred and fifty francs at least, in order to be able to buy little items that came up later.

They were in despair at ever being able to collect such a large

sum when a lucky chance came their way. An old gentleman at Plassans offered to take the older boy, Claude, and send him to an academy down there. The old man, who loved art, had previously been much impressed by Claude's sketches. Claude had already begun to cost them quite a bit. Now, with only Etienne to support, they were able to accumulate the money in a little over seven months. One day they were finally able to buy their own furniture from a second-hand dealer on Rue Belhomme. Their hearts filled with happiness, they celebrated by walking home along the exterior Boulevards.

They had purchased a bed, a night table, a chest of drawers with a marble top, a wardrobe, a round table covered with oilcloth, and six chairs. All were of dark mahogany. They also bought blankets, linen, and kitchen utensils that were scarcely used. It meant settling down and giving themselves a status in life as property owners, as persons to be respected.

For two months past they had been busy seeking some new apartments. At first they wanted above everything to hire these in the big house of the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. But there was not a single room to let there; so that they had to relinquish their old dream. To tell the truth, Gervaise was rather glad in her heart; the neighborhood of the Lorilleux almost door to door, frightened her immensely. Then, they looked about elsewhere. Coupeau, very properly did not wish to be far from Madame Fauconnier's so that Gervaise could easily run home at any hour of the day. And at length they met with exactly what suited them, a large

room with a small closet and a kitchen, in the Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d'Or, almost opposite the laundress's. This was in a small two-story building with a very steep staircase. There were two apartments on the second floor, one to the left, the other to the right, The ground floor was occupied by a man who rented out carriages, which filled the sheds in the large stable yard by the street.

Gervaise was delighted with this as it made her feel she was back in a country town. With no close neighbors there would be no gossip to worry about in this little corner. It reminded her of a small lane outside the ramparts of Plassans. She could even see her own window while ironing at the laundry by just tilting her head to the side.

They took possession of their new abode at the April quarter. Gervaise was then eight months advanced. But she showed great courage, saying with a laugh that the baby helped her as she worked; she felt its influence growing within her and giving her strength. Ah, well! She just laughed at Coupeau whenever he wanted her to lie down and rest herself! She would take to her bed when the labor pains came. That would be quite soon enough as with another mouth to feed, they would have to work harder than ever.

She made their new place bright and shiny before helping her husband install the furniture. She loved the furniture, polishing it and becoming almost heart-broken at the slightest scratch. Any time she knocked into the furniture while cleaning she would

stop with a sudden shock as though she had hurt herself.

The chest of drawers was especially dear to her. She thought it handsome, sturdy and most respectable-looking. The dream that she hadn't dared to mention was to get a clock and put it right in the middle of the marble top. It would make a splendid effect. She probably would have bought one right away except for the expected baby.

The couple were thoroughly enchanted with their new home. Etienne's bed occupied the small closet, where there was still room to put another child's crib. The kitchen was a very tiny affair and as dark as night, but by leaving the door wide open, one could just manage to see; besides, Gervaise had not to cook meals for thirty people, all she wanted was room to make her soup. As for the large room, it was their pride. The first thing in the morning, they drew the curtains of the alcove, white calico curtains; and the room was thus transformed into a dining-room, with the table in the centre, and the wardrobe and chest of drawers facing each other.

They stopped up the chimney since it burned as much as fifteen sous of coal a day. A small cast-iron stove on the marble hearth gave them enough warmth on cold days for only seven sous. Coupeau had also done his best to decorate the walls. There was a large engraving showing a marshal of France on horseback with a baton in his hand. Family photographs were arranged in two rows on top of the chest of drawers on each side of an old holy-water basin in which they kept matches. Busts of Pascal and

Beranger were on top of the wardrobe. It was really a handsome room.

"Guess how much we pay here?" Gervaise would ask of every visitor she had.

And whenever they guessed too high a sum, she triumphed and delighted at being so well suited for such a little money, cried:

"One hundred and fifty francs, not a sou more! Isn't it almost like having it for nothing!"

The street, Rue Neuve de la Goutte d'Or, played an important part in their contentment. Gervaise's whole life was there, as she traveled back and forth endlessly between her home and Madame Fauconnier's laundry. Coupeau now went down every evening and stood on the doorstep to smoke his pipe. The poorly-paved street rose steeply and had no sidewalks. Toward Rue de la Goutte d'Or there were some gloomy shops with dirty windows. There were shoemakers, coopers, a run-down grocery, and a bankrupt cafe whose closed shutters were covered with posters. In the opposite direction, toward Paris, four-story buildings blocked the sky. Their ground floor shops were all occupied by laundries with one exception – a green-painted store front typical of a small-town hair-dresser. Its shop windows were full of variously colored flasks. It lighted up this drab corner with the gay brightness of its copper bowls which were always shining.

The most pleasant part of the street was in between, where the buildings were fewer and lower, letting in more sunlight. The carriage sheds, the plant which manufactured soda water, and

the wash-house opposite made a wide expanse of quietness. The muffled voices of the washerwomen and the rhythmic puffing of the steam engine seemed to deepen the almost religious silence. Open fields and narrow lanes vanishing between dark walls gave it the air of a country village. Coupeau, always amused by the infrequent pedestrians having to jump over the continuous streams of soapy water, said it reminded him of a country town where his uncle had taken him when he was five years old. Gervaise's greatest joy was a tree growing in the courtyard to the left of their window, an acacia that stretched out a single branch and yet, with its meager foliage, lent charm to the entire street.

It was on the last day of April that Gervaise was confined. The pains came on in the afternoon, towards four o'clock, as she was ironing a pair of curtains at Madame Fauconnier's. She would not go home at once, but remained there wriggling about on a chair, and continuing her ironing every time the pain allowed her to do so; the curtains were wanted quickly and she obstinately made a point of finishing them. Besides, perhaps after all it was only a colic; it would never do to be frightened by a bit of a stomach-ache. But as she was talking of starting on some shirts, she became quite pale. She was obliged to leave the work-shop, and cross the street doubled in two, holding on to the walls. One of the workwomen offered to accompany her; she declined, but begged her to go instead for the midwife, close by, in the Rue de la Charbonniere. This was only a false alarm; there was no need to make a fuss. She would be like that no doubt all through the

night. It was not going to prevent her getting Coupeau's dinner ready as soon as she was indoors; then she might perhaps lie down on the bed a little, but without undressing. On the staircase she was seized with such a violent pain, that she was obliged to sit down on one of the stairs; and she pressed her two fists against her mouth to prevent herself from crying out, for she would have been ashamed to have been found there by any man, had one come up. The pain passed away; she was able to open her door, feeling relieved, and thinking that she had decidedly been mistaken. That evening she was going to make a stew with some neck chops. All went well while she peeled the potatoes. The chops were cooking in a saucepan when the pains returned. She mixed the gravy as she stamped about in front of the stove, almost blinded with her tears. If she was going to give birth, that was no reason why Coupeau should be kept without his dinner. At length the stew began to simmer on a fire covered with cinders. She went into the other room, and thought she would have time to lay the cloth at one end of the table. But she was obliged to put down the bottle of wine very quickly; she no longer had strength to reach the bed; she fell prostrate, and she had more pains on a mat on the floor. When the midwife arrived, a quarter of an hour later, she found mother and baby lying there on the floor.

The zinc-worker was still employed at the hospital. Gervaise would not have him disturbed. When he came home at seven o'clock, he found her in bed, well covered up, looking very pale on the pillow, and the child crying, swathed in a shawl at its

mother's feet.

"Ah, my poor wife!" said Coupeau, kissing Gervaise. "And I was joking only an hour ago, whilst you were crying with pain! I say, you don't make much fuss about it – the time to sneeze and it's all over."

She smiled faintly; then she murmured: "It's a girl."

"Right!" the zinc-worker replied, joking so as to enliven her, "I ordered a girl! Well, now I've got what I wanted! You do everything I wish!" And, taking the child up in his arms, he continued: "Let's have a look at you, miss! You've got a very black little mug. It'll get whiter, never fear. You must be good, never run about the streets, and grow up sensible like your papa and mamma."

Gervaise looked at her daughter very seriously, with wide open eyes, slowly overshadowed with sadness, for she would rather have had a boy. Boys can talk care of themselves and don't have to run such risks on the streets of Paris as girls do. The midwife took the infant from Coupeau. She forbade Gervaise to do any talking; it was bad enough there was so much noise around her.

Then the zinc-worker said that he must tell the news to mother Coupeau and the Lorilleuxs, but he was dying with hunger, he must first of all have his dinner. It was a great worry to the invalid to see him have to wait on himself, run to the kitchen for the stew, eat it out of a soup plate, and not be able to find the bread. In spite of being told not to do so, she bewailed her condition,

and fidgeted about in her bed. It was stupid of her not to have managed to set the cloth, the pains had laid her on her back like a blow from a bludgeon. Her poor old man would not think it kind of her to be nursing herself up there whilst he was dining so badly. At least were the potatoes cooked enough? She no longer remembered whether she had put salt in them.

"Keep quiet!" cried the midwife.

"Ah! if only you could stop her from wearing herself out!" said Coupeau with his mouth full. "If you were not here, I'd bet she'd get up to cut my bread. Keep on your back, you big goose! You mustn't move about, otherwise it'll be a fortnight before you'll be able to stand on your legs. Your stew's very good. Madame will eat some with me, won't you, Madame?"

The midwife declined; but she was willing to accept a glass of wine, because it had upset her, said she to find the poor woman with the baby on the mat. Coupeau at length went off to tell the news to his relations. Half an hour later he returned with all of them, mother Coupeau, the Lorilleuxs, and Madame Lerat, whom he had met at the latter's.

"I've brought you the whole gang!" cried Coupeau. "It can't be helped! They wanted to see you. Don't open your mouth, it's forbidden. They'll stop here and look at you without ceremony, you know. As for me, I'm going to make them some coffee, and of the right sort!"

He disappeared into the kitchen. Mother Coupeau after kissing Gervaise, became amazed at the child's size. The two

other women also kissed the invalid on her cheeks. And all three, standing before the bed, commented with divers exclamations on the details of the confinement – a most remarkable confinement, just like having a tooth pulled, nothing more.

Madame Lerat examined the baby all over, declared she was well formed, even added that she could grow up into an attractive woman. Noticing that the head had been squeezed into a point on top, she kneaded it gently despite the infant's cries, trying to round it a bit. Madame Lorilleux grabbed the baby from her; that could be enough to give the poor little thing all sorts of vicious tendencies, meddling with it like that while her skull was still soft. She then tried to figure out who the baby resembled. This almost led to a quarrel. Lorilleux, peering over the women's shoulders, insisted that the little girl didn't look the least bit like Coupeau. Well, maybe a little around the nose, nothing more. She was her mother all over again, with big eyes like hers. Certainly there were no eyes like that in the Coupeau family.

Coupeau, however, had failed to reappear. One could hear him in the kitchen struggling with the grate and the coffee-pot. Gervaise was worrying herself frightfully; it was not the proper thing for a man to make coffee; and she called and told him what to do, without listening to the midwife's energetic "hush!"

"Here we are!" said Coupeau, entering with the coffee-pot in his hand. "Didn't I just have a bother with it! It all went wrong on purpose! Now we'll drink out of glasses, won't we? Because you know, the cups are still at the shop."

They seated themselves around the table, and the zinc-worker insisted on pouring out the coffee himself. It smelt very strong, it was none of that weak stuff. When the midwife had sipped hers up, she went off; everything was going on nicely, she was not required. If the young woman did not pass a good night they were to send for her on the morrow. She was scarcely down the staircase, when Madame Lorilleux called her a glutton and a good-for-nothing. She put four lumps of sugar in her coffee, and charged fifteen francs for leaving you with your baby all by yourself. But Coupeau took her part; he would willingly fork out the fifteen francs. After all those sort of women spent their youth in studying, they were right to charge a good price.

It was then Lorilleux who got into a quarrel with Madame Lerat by maintaining that, in order to have a son, the head of the bed should be turned to the north. She shrugged her shoulders at such nonsense, offering another formula which consisted in hiding under the mattress, without letting your wife know, a handful of fresh nettles picked in bright sunlight.

The table had been pushed over close to the bed. Until ten o'clock Gervaise lay there, smiling although she was only half awake. She was becoming more and more weary, her head turned sideways on the pillow. She no longer had the energy to venture a remark or a gesture. It seemed to her that she was dead, a very sweet death, from the depths of which she was happy to observe the others still in the land of the living. The thin cries of her baby daughter rose above the hum of heavy voices that were discussing

a recent murder on Rue du Bon Puits, at the other end of La Chapelle.

Then, as the visitors were thinking of leaving, they spoke of the christening. The Lorilleux had promised to be godfather and godmother; they looked very glum over the matter. However, if they had not been asked to stand they would have felt rather peculiar. Coupeau did not see any need for christening the little one; it certainly would not procure her an income of ten thousand francs, and besides she might catch a cold from it. The less one had to do with priests the better. But mother Coupeau called him a heathen. The Lorilleux, without going and eating consecrated bread in church, plumed themselves on their religious sentiments.

"It shall be next Sunday, if you like," said the chainmaker.

And Gervaise having consented by a nod, everyone kissed her and told her to take good care of herself. They also wished the baby good-bye. Each one went and leant over the little trembling body with smiles and loving words as though she were able to understand. They called her Nana, the pet name for Anna, which was her godmother's name.

"Good night, Nana. Come be a good girl, Nana."

When they had at length gone off, Coupeau drew his chair close up to the bed and finished his pipe, holding Gervaise's hand in his. He smoked slowly, deeply affected and uttering sentences between the puffs.

"Well, old woman, they've made your head ache, haven't they? You see I couldn't prevent them coming. After all, it shows their

friendship. But we're better alone, aren't we? I wanted to be alone like this with you. It has seemed such a long evening to me! Poor little thing, she's had a lot to go through! Those shrimps, when they come out into the world, have no idea of the pain they cause. It must really almost be like being split in two. Where does it hurt the most, that I may kiss it and make it well?"

He had carefully slid one of his big hands under her back, and now he drew her toward him, bending over to kiss her stomach through the covers, touched by a rough man's compassion for the suffering of a woman in childbirth. He inquired if he was hurting her. Gervaise felt very happy, and answered him that it didn't hurt any more at all. She was only worried about getting up as soon as possible, because there was no time to lie about now. He assured her that he'd be responsible for earning the money for the new little one. He would be a real bum if he abandoned her and the little rascal. The way he figured it, what really counted was bringing her up properly. Wasn't that so?

Coupeau did not sleep much that night. He covered up the fire in the stove. Every hour he had to get up to give the baby spoonfuls of lukewarm sugar and water. That did not prevent his going off to his work in the morning as usual. He even took advantage of his lunch-hour to make a declaration of the birth at the mayor's. During this time Madame Boche, who had been informed of the event, had hastened to go and pass the day with Gervaise. But the latter, after ten hours of sleep, bewailed her position, saying that she already felt pains all over her through

having been so long in bed. She would become quite ill if they did not let her get up. In the evening, when Coupeau returned home, she told him all her worries; no doubt she had confidence in Madame Boche, only it put her beside herself to see a stranger installed in her room, opening the drawers, and touching her things.

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