

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

THE WORKS OF GUY DE
MAUPASSANT, VOLUME 1

Ги д. Мопассан

**The Works of Guy de
Maupassant, Volume 1**

«Public Domain»

Мопассан Г. д.

The Works of Guy de Maupassant, Volume 1 / Г. д. Мопассан —
«Public Domain»,

Содержание

INTRODUCTION	5
BOULE DE SUIF	7
MISS HARRIET	28
I	29
II	33
III	37
FRANCESCA AND CARLOTTA RONDOLI	41
I	41
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	42

Guy de Maupassant

The Works of Guy de Maupassant,

Vol. 1 Boule de Suif and Other Stories

INTRODUCTION

BY

ARTHUR SYMONS

The first aim of art, no doubt, is the representation of things as they are. But then things are as our eyes see them and as our minds make them; and it is thus of primary importance for the critic to distinguish the precise qualities of the eyes and minds which make the world into imaginative literature. Reality may be so definite and so false, just as it may be so fantastic and so true; and, among work which we can apprehend as dealing justly with reality, there may be quite as much difference in all that constitutes outward form and likeness as there is between a Dutch interior by Peter van der Hooch, the portrait of a king by Velasquez, and the image of a woman smiling by Leonardo da Vinci. The soul, for instance, is at heart as real as the body; but, as we can hear it only through the body speaking, and see it only through bodily eyes, and measure it, often enough, only in the insignificant moment of its action, it may come to seem to us, at all events less realizable; and thus it is that we speak of those who have vividly painted exterior things as realists. Properly speaking, Maupassant is no more a realist than Maeterlinck. He paints a kind of reality which it is easier for us to recognize; that is all.

Every artist has his own vision of the world. Maupassant's vision was of solid superficies, of texture which his hands could touch, of actions which his mind could comprehend from the mere sight of its incidents. He saw the world as the Dutch painters saw it, and he was as great a master of form, of rich and sober color, of the imitation of the outward gestures of life, and of the fashion of external things. He had the same view of humanity, and shows us, with the same indifference, the same violent ferment of life – the life of full-blooded people who have to elbow their way through the world. His sense of desire, of greed, of all the baser passions, was profound: he had the terrible logic of animalism. Love-making, drunkenness, cheating, quarreling, the mere idleness of sitting drowsily in a chair, the gross life of the farmyard and the fields, civic dissensions, the sordid provincial dance of the seven deadly sins, he saw in the same direct, unilluminating way as the Dutch painters; finding, indeed, no beauty in any of these things, but getting his beauty in the deft arrangement of them, in the mere act of placing them in a picture. The world existed for him as something formless which could be cut up into little pictures. He saw no farther than the lines of his frame. The interest of the thing began inside that frame, and what remained outside was merely material.

A story of Maupassant, more than almost anything in the world, gives you the impression of manual dexterity. It is adequately thought out, but it does not impress you by its thought; it is clearly seen, but it does not impress you specially by the fidelity of its detail; it has just enough of ordinary human feeling for the limits it has imposed on itself. What impresses you is the extreme ingenuity of its handling; the way in which this juggler keeps his billiard-balls harmoniously rising and falling in the air. Often, indeed, you cannot help noticing the conscious smile which precedes the trick, and the confident bow which concludes it. He does not let you into the secret of the trick, but he prevents you from ignoring that it is after all, only a trick which you have been watching.

There is a philosophy of one kind or another behind the work of every artist. Maupassant's was a simple one, sufficient for his needs as he understood them, though perhaps really consequent

upon his artistic methods, rather than at the root of them. It was the philosophy of cynicism: the most effectual means of limiting one's outlook, of concentrating all one's energies on the task in hand. Maupassant wrote for men of the world, and men of the world are content with the wisdom of their counting-houses. The man of the world is perfectly willing to admit that he is no better than you, because he takes it for granted that you will admit yourself to be no better than he. It is a way of avoiding comparison. To Maupassant this cynical point of view was invaluable for his purpose. He wanted to tell stories just for the pleasure of telling them; he wanted to concern himself with his story simply as a story; incidents interested him, not ideas, nor even characters, and he wanted every incident to be immediately effective. Now cynicism, in France, supplies a sufficient basis for all these requirements; it is the equivalent, for popular purposes, of that appeal to the average which in England is sentimentality. Compare, for instance, the admirable story "Boule de Suif," perhaps the best story which Maupassant ever wrote, with a story of somewhat similar motive – Bret Harte's "Outcasts of Poker Flat." Both stories are pathetic; but the pathos of the American (who had formed himself upon Dickens, and in the English tradition) becomes sentimental, and gets its success by being sentimental; while the pathos of the Frenchman (who has formed himself on Flaubert, and on French lines) gets its success precisely by being cynical.

And then the particular variety of Maupassant's cynicism was just that variation of the artistic idea upon the temperament which puts the best finish upon work necessarily so limited, obliged to be so clenching, as the short story. Flaubert's gigantic dissatisfaction with life, his really philosophic sense of its vanity, would have overweighted a writer so thoroughly equipped for his work as the writer of "Boule de Suif" and "La Maison Tellier." Maupassant had no time, he allowed himself no space, to reason about life; the need was upon him to tell story after story, each with its crisis, its thrill, its summing up of a single existence or a single action. The sharp, telling thrust that his conception of art demanded could be given only by a very specious, not very profound, very forthright, kind of cynicism, like the half kindly, half contemptuous laugh of the man who tells a good story at the club. For him it was the point of the epigram.

Maupassant was the man of his period, and his period was that of Naturalism. In "Les Soirees de Medan," the volume in which "Boule de Suif" appeared, there is another story called "Sac au Dos," in which another novelist made his appearance among the five who "publicly affirmed their literary tendencies" about the central figure of Zola. J. K. Huysmans, then but at the outset of his slow and painful course through schools and experiments, was in time to sum up the new tendencies of a new period, as significantly as Maupassant summed up in his short and brilliant, and almost undeviating career, the tendencies of that period in which Taine and science seemed to have at last found out the physical basis of life. Now it is a new realism which appeals to us: it is the turn of the soul. The battle which the "Soirees de Medan" helped to win has been won; having gained our right to deal with humble and unpleasant and sordidly tragic things in fiction, we are free to concern ourselves with other things. But though the period has passed, and will not return, the masterpieces of the period remain. Among these masterpieces are the novels and short stories of Guy de Maupassant.

Arthur Symons.

BOULE DE SUIF

For several days, straggling remnants of the routed army had passed through the town. There was no question of organized troops, it was simply a disjointed rabble, the men unshaven and dirty, their uniforms in tatters, slouching along without regimental colors, without order – worn out, broken down, incapable of thought or resolution, marching from pure habit and dropping with fatigue the moment they stopped. The majority belonged to the militia, men of peaceful pursuits, retired tradespeople, sinking under the weight of their accouterments; quick-witted little moblets as prone to terror as they were to enthusiasm, as ready to attack as they were to fly; and here and there a few red trousers, remnants of a company mowed down in one of the big battles; somber-coated artillerymen, side by side with these various uniforms of the infantry, and now and then the glittering helmet of a heavily booted dragoon who followed with difficulty the march of the lighter-footed soldiers of the line.

Companies of franc-tireurs, heroically named "Avengers of the Defeat," "Citizens of the Tomb," "Companies in Death," passed in their turn, looking like a horde of bandits.

Their chiefs – formerly drapers or corn-dealers, retired soap-boilers or suet-refiners, warriors of circumstance created officers for their money or the length of their moustaches, heaped with arms, flannels, and gold lace – talked loudly, discussed plans of campaign, and gave you to understand that they were the sole support of France in her death-agony; but they were generally in terror of their own soldiers, men "of the sack and cord," most of them brave to foolhardiness, all of them given to pillage and debauchery.

Report said that the Prussians were about to enter Rouen. The National Guard, which for two months past had made the most careful reconnoiterings in the neighboring wood, even to the extent of occasionally shooting their own sentries and putting themselves in battle array if a rabbit stirred in the brushwood, had now retired to their domestic hearths; their arms, their uniforms, all the murderous apparatus with which they had been wont to strike terror to the hearts of all beholders for three leagues round, had vanished.

Finally, the last of the French soldiery crossed the Seine on their way to Pont-Audemer by Saint Sever and Bourg-Achard; and then, last of all, came their despairing general tramping on foot between two orderlies, powerless to attempt any action with these disjointed fragments of his forces, himself utterly dazed and bewildered by the downfall of a people accustomed to victory and now so disastrously beaten in spite of its traditional bravery.

After that a profound calm, the silence of terrified suspense, fell over the city. Many a rotund bourgeois, emasculated by a purely commercial life, awaited the arrival of the victors with anxiety, trembling lest their meat-skewers and kitchen carving-knives should come under the category of arms.

Life seemed to have come to a standstill, the shops were closed, the streets silent. From time to time an inhabitant, intimidated by their silence, would flit rapidly along the pavement, keeping close to the walls.

In this anguish of suspense, men longed for the coming of the enemy.

In the latter part of the day following the departure of the French troops, some Uhlans, appearing from goodness knows where, traversed the city hastily. A little later, a black mass descended from the direction of Sainte-Catherine, while two more invading torrents poured in from the roads from Darnetal and Bois-guillaume. The advance guards of the three corps converged at the same moment into the square of the Hotel de Ville, while battalion after battalion of the German army wound in through the adjacent streets, making the pavement ring under their heavy rhythmic tramp.

Orders shouted in strange and guttural tones were echoed back by the apparently dead and deserted houses, while from behind the closed shutters eyes peered furtively at the conquerors, masters by right of might, of the city and the lives and fortunes of its inhabitants. The people in their

darkened dwellings fell a prey to the helpless bewilderment which comes over men before the floods, the devastating upheavals of the earth, against which all wisdom and all force are unavailing. The same phenomenon occurs each time that the established order of things is overthrown, when public security is at an end, and when all that the laws of man or of nature protect is at the mercy of some blind elemental force. The earthquake burying an entire population under its falling houses; the flood that carries away the drowned body of the peasant with the carcasses of his cattle and the beams torn from his roof-tree; or the victorious army massacring those who defend their lives, and making prisoners of the rest – pillaging in the name of the sword, and thanking God to the roar of cannon – are so many appalling scourges which overthrow all faith in eternal justice, all the confidence we are taught to place in the protection of Providence and the reason of man.

Small detachments now began knocking at the doors and then disappearing into the houses. It was the occupation after the invasion. It now behooved the vanquished to make themselves agreeable to the victors.

After a while, the first alarms having subsided, a new sense of tranquillity began to establish itself. In many families the Prussian officer shared the family meals. Not infrequently he was a gentleman, and out of politeness expressed his commiseration with France and his repugnance at having to take part in such a war. They were grateful enough to him for this sentiment – besides, who knew when they might not be glad of his protection? By gaining his good offices one might have fewer men to feed. And why offend a person on whom one was utterly dependent? That would not be bravery but temerity, a quality of which the citizens of Rouen could no longer be accused as in the days of those heroic defenses by which the city had made itself famous. Above all, they said, with the unassailable urbanity of the Frenchman, it was surely permissible to be on politely familiar terms in private, provided one held aloof from the foreign soldier in public. In the street, therefore, they ignored one another's existence, but once indoors they were perfectly ready to be friendly, and each evening found the German staying longer at the family fireside.

The town itself gradually regained its wonted aspect. The French inhabitants did not come out much, but the Prussian soldiers swarmed in the streets. For the rest, the blue hussar officers who trailed their mighty implements of death so arrogantly over the pavement did not appear to entertain a vastly deeper grade of contempt for the simple townsfolk than did the officers of the Chasseurs who had drunk in the same cafés the year before. Nevertheless there was a something in the air; something subtle and indefinable, an intolerably unfamiliar atmosphere like a widely diffused odor – the odor of invasion. It filled the private dwellings and the public places, it affected the taste of food, and gave one the impression of being on a journey, far away from home, among barbarous and dangerous tribes.

The conquerors demanded money – a great deal of money. The inhabitants paid and went on paying; for the matter of that, they were rich. But the wealthier a Normandy tradesman becomes, the more keenly he suffers at each sacrifice each time he sees the smallest particle of his fortune pass into the hands of another.

Two or three leagues beyond the town, however, following the course of the river about Croisset Dieppedalle or Biessard, the sailors and the fishermen would often drag up the swollen corpse of some uniformed German, killed by a knife-thrust or a kick, his head smashed in by a stone, or thrown into the water from some bridge. The slime of the river bed swallowed up many a deed of vengeance, obscure, savage, and legitimate; unknown acts of heroism, silent onslaughts more perilous to the doer than battles in the light of day and without the trumpet blasts of glory.

For hatred of the Alien is always strong enough to arm some intrepid beings who are ready to die for an Idea.

At last, seeing that though the invaders had subjected the city to their inflexible discipline they had not committed any of the horrors with which rumor had accredited them throughout the length of their triumphal progress, the worthy tradespeople took heart of grace and the commercial spirit began once more to stir within them. Some of them who had grave interests at stake at Havre, then

occupied by the French army, purposed trying to reach that port by going overland to Dieppe and there taking ship.

They took advantage of the influence of German officers whose acquaintance they had made, and a passport was obtained from the general in command.

Having therefore engaged a large diligence with four horses for the journey, and ten persons having entered their names at the livery stable office, they resolved to start on the Tuesday morning before daybreak, to avoid all public remark.

For some days already the ground had been hard with frost, and on the Monday, about three o'clock in the afternoon, thick dark clouds coming up from the north brought the snow, which fell without intermission all the evening and during the whole night.

At half past four the travelers were assembled in the courtyard of the Hotel de Normandie, from whence they were to start.

They were all still half asleep, their teeth chattering with cold in spite of their thick wraps. It was difficult to distinguish one from another in the darkness, their heaped-up winter clothing making them look like fat priests in long cassocks. Two of the men, however, recognized each other; they were joined by a third, and they began to talk. "I am taking my wife with me," said one. "So am I." "And I too." The first one added: "We shall not return to Rouen, and if the Prussians come to Havre we shall slip over to England."

They were all like-minded and all had the same project.

Meanwhile there was no sign of the horses being put in. A small lantern carried by a hostler appeared from time to time out of one dark doorway only to vanish instantly into another. There was a stamping of horses' hoofs deadened by the straw of the litter, and the voice of a man speaking to the animals and cursing sounded from the depths of the stables. A faint sound of bells gave evidence of harnessing, and became presently a clear and continuous jingle timed by the movement of the beast, now stopping, now going on again with a brisk shake, and accompanied by the dull tramp of hob-nailed sabots.

A door closed sharply. All sound ceased. The frozen travelers were silent, standing stiff and motionless. A veil of white snow-flakes glistened incessantly as it fell to the ground, blotting out the shape of things, powdering everything with an icy froth; and in the utter stillness of the town, quiet and buried under its winter pall, nothing was audible but this faint, fluttering, and indefinable rustle of falling snow – more a sensation than a sound – the intermingling of ethereal atoms seeming to fill space, to cover the world.

The man reappeared with his lantern, dragging after him by a rope a dejected and unwilling horse. He pushed it against the pole, fixed the traces, and was occupied for a long time in buckling the harness, having only the use of one hand as he carried the lantern in the other. As he turned away to fetch the other horse he caught sight of the motionless group of travelers, by this time white with snow. "Why don't you get inside the carriage?" he said, "you would at least be under cover."

It had never occurred to them, and they made a rush for it. The three men packed their wives into the upper end and then got in themselves, after which other distinct and veiled forms took the remaining seats without exchanging a word.

The floor of the vehicle was covered with straw into which the feet sank. The ladies at the end, who had brought little copper charcoal foot-warmers, proceeded to light them, and for some time discussed their merits in subdued tones, repeating to one another things which they had known all their lives.

At last, the diligence having been furnished with six horses instead of four on account of the difficulties of the road, a voice outside asked, "Is everybody here?" A voice from within answered "Yes," and they started.

The conveyance advanced slowly – slowly – the wheels sinking in the snow; the whole vehicle groaned and creaked, the horses slipped, wheezed, and smoked, and the driver's gigantic whip cracked

incessantly, flying from side to side, twining and untwining like a slender snake, and cutting sharply across one or other of the six humping backs, which would thereupon straighten up with a more violent effort.

Imperceptibly the day grew. The airy flakes which a traveler – a Rouennais "pur sang" – once likened to a shower of cotton, had ceased to fall; a dirty gray light filtered through the heavy thick clouds which served to heighten the dazzling whiteness of the landscape, where now a long line of trees crusted with icicles would appear, now a cottage with a hood of snow.

In the light of this melancholy dawn the occupants of the diligence began to examine one another curiously.

Right at the end, in the best seats, opposite to one another, dozed Madame and Monsieur Loiseau, whole-sale wine merchant of the Rue Grand Pont.

The former salesman of a master who had become bankrupt, Loiseau had bought up the stock and made his fortune. He sold very bad wine at very low prices to the small country retail dealers, and enjoyed the reputation among his friends and acquaintances of being an unmitigated rogue, a thorough Norman full of trickery and jovial humor.

His character for knavery was so well established that one evening at the Prefecture, Monsieur Tournel, a man of keen and trenchant wit, author of certain fables and songs – a local glory – seeing the ladies growing drowsy, proposed a game of "L'oiseau vole."¹ The pun itself flew through the prefect's reception rooms and afterwards through the town, and for a whole month called up a grin on every face in the province.

Loiseau was himself a noted wag and famous for his jokes both good and bad, and nobody ever mentioned him without adding immediately, "That Loiseau is simply priceless!"

He was of medium height with a balloon-like stomach and a rubicund face framed in grizzled whiskers. His wife – tall, strong, resolute, loud in voice and rapid of decision – represented order and arithmetic in the business, which he enlivened by his jollity and bustling activity.

Beside them, in a more dignified attitude as befitted his superior station, sat Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, a man of weight; an authority on cotton, proprietor of three branch businesses, officer of the Legion of Honor and member of the General Council. All the time of the Empire he had remained leader of a friendly opposition, for the sole purpose of making a better thing out of it when he came round to the cause which he had fought with polite weapons, to use his own expression. Madame Carré-Lamadon, who was much younger than her husband, was the consolation of all officers of good family who might be quartered at the Rouen garrison. She sat there opposite to her husband, very small, very dainty, very pretty, wrapped in her furs, and regarding the lamentable interior of the vehicle with despairing eyes.

Their neighbors, the Count and Countess Hubert de Breville, bore one of the most ancient and noble names in Normandy. The Count, an elderly gentleman of dignified appearance, did all in his power to accentuate by every artifice of the toilet his natural resemblance to Henri Quatre, who, according to a legend of the utmost glory to the family, had honored with his royal embraces a Dame de Breville, whose husband had, in consequence, been made Count and Governor of the province.

A colleague of Monsieur Carré-Lamadon in the General Council, Count Hubert represented the Orleanist faction in the department. The history of his marriage with the daughter of a small tradesman of Nantes had always remained a mystery. But as the Countess had an air of grandeur, understood better than any one else the art of receiving, passed even for having been beloved by one of the sons of Louis Philippe, the neighboring nobility bowed down to her, and her salon held the first place in the county, the only one which preserved the traditions of the *viel le galanterie* and to which the *entree* was difficult.

¹ Literally, "The bird flies" – a pun on the verb *voler*, which means both "to fly" and "to steal."

The fortune of the Brevilles – all in Government Funds – was reported to yield them an income of five hundred thousand francs.

The six passengers occupied the upper end of the conveyance, the representatives of reformed society, serene in the consciousness of its strength – honest well-to-do people possessed of Religion and Principles.

By some strange chance all the women were seated on the same side, the Countess having two sisters of Mercy for neighbors, wholly occupied in fingering their long rosaries and mumbling Paters and Aves. One of them was old and so deeply pitted with the small-pox that she looked as if she had received a charge of grape shot full in the face; the other was very shadowy and frail, with a pretty unhealthy little face, a narrow phthisical chest, consumed by that devouring faith which creates martyrs and ecstasies.

Seated opposite to the two nuns were a man and woman who excited a good deal of attention.

The man, who was well known, was Cornudet, "the demon," the terror of all respectable, law-abiding people. For twenty years he had dipped his great red beard into the beer mugs of all the democratic café's. In the company of kindred spirits he had managed to run through a comfortable little fortune inherited from his father, a confectioner, and he looked forward with impatience to the Republic, when he should obtain the well-merited reward for so many revolutionary draughts. On the Fourth of September – probably through some practical joke – he understood that he had been appointed prefect, but on attempting to enter upon his duties the clerks, who had remained sole masters of the offices, refused to recognize him, and he was constrained to retire. For the rest, he was a good fellow, inoffensive and serviceable, and had busied himself with incomparable industry in organizing the defense of the town; had had holes dug all over the plain, cut down all the young trees in the neighboring woods, scattered pitfalls up and down all the high roads, and at the threatened approach of the enemy – satisfied with his preparations – had fallen back with all haste on the town. He now considered that he would be more useful in Havre, where fresh entrenchments would soon become necessary.

The woman, one of the so-called "gay" sisterhood, was noted for her precocious stoutness, which had gained her the nickname of "Boule de Suif" – "ball of fat." She was a little roly-poly creature, cushioned with fat, with podgy fingers squeezed in at the joints like rows of thick, short sausages; her skin tightly stretched and shiny, her bust enormous, and yet with it all so wholesomely, temptingly fresh and appetizing that it was a pleasure to look at her. Her face was like a ruddy apple – a peony rose just burst into bloom – and out of it gazed a pair of magnificent dark eyes overshadowed by long thick lashes that deepened their blackness; and lower down, a charming little mouth, dewy to the kiss, and furnished with a row of tiny milk-white teeth. Over and above all this she was, they said, full of inestimable qualities.

No sooner was her identity recognized than a whisper ran through the ladies in which the words "prostitute" and "public scandal," were so conspicuously distinct that she raised her head and retaliated by sweeping her companions with such a bold and defiant look that deep silence instantly fell upon them, and they all cast down their eyes with the exception of Loiseau, who watched her with a kindling eye.

However, conversation was soon resumed between the three ladies, whom the presence of this "person" had suddenly rendered friendly – almost intimate. It seemed to them that they must, as it were, raise a rampart of their dignity as spouses between them and this shameless creature who made a traffic of herself; for legalized love always takes a high hand with her unlicensed sister.

The three men too, drawn to one another by a conservative instinct at sight of Cornudet, talked money in a certain tone of contempt for the impecunious. Count Hubert spoke of the damage inflicted on him by the Prussians, of the losses which would result to him from the seizing of cattle and from ruined crops, but with all the assurance of a great landed proprietor, ten times millionaire, whom these ravages might inconvenience for the space of a year at most. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, of

great experience in the cotton industry, had taken the precaution to send six hundred thousand francs across to England as provision against a rainy day. As for Loiseau, he made arrangements to sell all the wine in his cellars to the French commission of supplies, consequently the Government owed him a formidable sum, which he counted upon receiving at Havre.

The three exchanged rapid and amicable glances. Although differing in position they felt themselves brothers in money, and of the great freemasonry of those who possess, of those who can make the gold jingle when they put their hands in the breeches-pockets.

The diligence went so slowly that by ten o'clock in the morning they had not made four leagues. The men got out three times and climbed the hill on foot. They began to grow anxious, for they were to have lunched at Totes, and now they despaired of reaching that place before night. Everybody was on the look-out for some inn by the way, when the vehicle stuck fast in a snowdrift, and it took two hours to get it out.

Meanwhile the pangs of hunger began to affect them severely both in mind and body, and yet not an inn, not a tavern even, was to be seen; the approach of the Prussians and the passage of the famished French troops had frightened away all trade.

The gentlemen foraged diligently for the provisions in the farms by the roadside; but they failed to obtain so much as a piece of bread, for the mistrustful peasant hid all reserve stores for fear of being pillaged by the soldiers, who, having no food supplied to them, took by force everything they could lay their hands on.

Towards one o'clock Loiseau announced that he felt a very decided void in his stomach. Everybody had been suffering in the same manner for a long time, and the violent longing for food had extinguished conversation.

From time to time some one would yawn, to be almost immediately imitated by another and then each of the rest in turn, and according to their disposition, manners, or social standing, would open their mouth noisily, or modestly cover with the hand the gaping cavity from which the breath issued in a vapor.

Boule de Suif had several times stooped down as if feeling for something under her skirts. She hesitated a moment, looked at her companions, and then composedly resumed her former position. The faces were pale and drawn. Loiseau declared he would give a thousand francs for a ham. His wife made a faint movement as to protest, but restrained herself. It always affected her painfully to hear of money being thrown away, nor could she even understand a joke upon the subject.

"To tell the truth," said the Count, "I do not feel quite myself either – how could I have omitted to think of bringing provisions?" And everybody reproached themselves with the same neglectfulness.

Cornudet, however, had a flask of rum which he offered round. It was coldly refused. Loiseau alone accepted a mouthful, and handed back the flask with thanks saying, "That's good! that warms you up and keeps the hunger off a bit." The alcohol raised his spirits somewhat, and he proposed that they should do the same as on the little ship in the song – eat the fattest of the passengers. This indirect but obvious allusion to Boule De Suif shocked the gentle people. Nobody responded and only Cornudet smiled. The two Sisters of Mercy had ceased to tell their beads and sat motionless, their hands buried in their wide sleeves, their eyes obstinately lowered, doubtless engaged in offering back to Heaven the sacrifice of suffering which it sent them.

At last, at three o'clock, when they were in the middle of an interminable stretch of bare country without a single village in sight, Boule de Suif, stooping hurriedly, drew from under the seat a large basket covered with a white napkin.

Out of it she took, first of all, a little china plate and a delicate silver drinking-cup, and then an immense dish, in which two whole fowls ready carved lay stiffened in their jelly. Other good things were visible in the basket: patties, fruits, pastry – in fact provisions for a three days' journey in order to be independent of inn cookery. The necks of four bottles protruded from between the parcels of

food. She took the wing of a fowl and began to eat it daintily with one of those little rolls which they call "Regence" in Normandy.

Every eye was fixed upon her. As the odor of the food spread through the carriage nostrils began to quiver and mouths to fill with water, while the jaws, just below the ears contracted painfully. The dislike entertained by the ladies for this abandoned young woman grew savage, almost to the point of longing to murder her or at least to turn her out into the snow, her and her drinking-cup and her basket and her provisions.

Loiseau, however, was devouring the dish of chicken with his eyes. "Madame has been more prudent than we," he said. "Some people always think of everything."

She turned her head in his direction. "If you would care for any, Monsieur – ? It is not comfortable to fast for so long."

He bowed. "Ma foi! – frankly, I won't refuse. I can't stand this any longer – the fortune of war, is it not, madame?" And with a comprehensive look he added: "In moments such as this we are only too glad to find any one who will oblige us." He had a newspaper which he spread on his knee to save his trousers, and with the point of a knife which he always carried in his pocket he captured a drumstick all glazed with jelly, tore it with his teeth, and then proceeded to chew it with satisfaction so evident that a deep groan of distress went up from the whole party.

Upon this Boule de Suif in a gentle and humble tone invited the two Sisters to share the collation. They both accepted on the spot, and without raising their eyes began to eat very hurriedly, after stammering a few words of thanks. Nor did Cornudet refuse his neighbor's offer, and with the Sisters they formed a kind of table by spreading out newspapers on their knees.

The jaws opened and shut without a pause, biting, chewing, gulping ferociously. Loiseau, hard at work in his corner, urged his wife in a low voice to follow his example. She resisted for some time, then, after a pang which gripped her very vitals, she gave in. Whereupon her husband, rounding off his phrases, asked if their "charming fellow-traveler" would permit him to offer a little something to Madame Loiseau.

"Why, yes, certainly, Monsieur," she answered with a pleasant smile, and handed him the dish.

There was a moment of embarrassment when the first bottle of claret was uncorked – there was but the one drinking-cup. Each one wiped it before passing it to the rest. Cornudet alone, from an impulse of gallantry no doubt, placed his lips on the spot still wet from the lips of his neighbor.

Then it was that, surrounded by people who were eating, suffocated by the fragrant odor of the viands, the Count and Countess de Breville and Monsieur and Madame Carré-Lamadon suffered the agonies of that torture which has ever been associated with the name of Tantalus. Suddenly the young wife of the cotton manufacturer gave a deep sigh. Every head turned towards her; she was as white as the snow outside, her eyes closed, her head fell forward – she had fainted. Her husband, distraught with fear, implored assistance of the whole company. All lost their heads till the elder of the two Sisters, who supported the unconscious lady, forced Boule de Suif's drinking-cup between her lips and made her swallow a few drops of wine. The pretty creature stirred, opened her eyes, smiled and then declared in an expiring voice that she felt quite well now. But to prevent her being overcome again in the same manner, the Sister induced her to drink a full cup of wine, adding, "It is simply hunger – nothing else."

At this Boule de Suif, blushing violently, looked at the four starving passengers and faltered shyly, "Mon Dieu! If I might make so bold as to offer the ladies and gentlemen – " She stopped short, fearing a rude rebuff.

Loiseau, however, at once threw himself into the breach. "Parbleu! under such circumstances we are all companions in misfortune and bound to help each other. Come, ladies, don't stand on ceremony – take what you can get and be thankful: who knows whether we shall be able to find so much as a house where we can spend the night? At this rate we shall not reach Totes till to-morrow afternoon."

They still hesitated, nobody having the courage to take upon themselves the responsibility of the decisive "Yes." Finally the Count seized the bull by the horns. Adopting his most grandiose air, he turned with a bow to the embarrassed young woman and said, "We accept your offer with thanks, madame."

The first step only was difficult. The Rubicon once crossed, they fell to with a will. They emptied the basket, which contained, besides the provisions already mentioned; a *pate de foie gras*, a lark pie, a piece of smoked tongue, some pears, a slab of gingerbread, mixed biscuits, and a cup of pickled onions and gherkins in vinegar – for, like all women, *Boule de Suif* adored crudities.

They could not well eat the young woman's provisions and not speak to her, so they conversed – stiffly at first, and then, seeing that she showed no signs of presuming, with less reserve. *Mesdames de Breville* and *Carré-Lamadon*, having a great deal of "savoir vivre," knew how to make themselves agreeable with tact and delicacy. The Countess, in particular, exhibited the amiable condescension of the extremely high-born lady whom no contact can sully, and was charming. But big *Madame Loiseau*, who had the soul of a *gendarme*, remained unmoved, speaking little and eating much.

The conversation naturally turned upon the war. They related horrible deeds committed by the Prussians and examples of the bravery of the French; all these people who were flying rendering full homage to the courage of those who remained behind. Incidents of personal experience soon followed, and *Boule de Suif* told, with that warmth of coloring which women of her type often employ in expressing their natural feelings, how she had come to leave Rouen.

"I thought at first I should be able to hold out," she said, "for I had plenty of provisions in my house, and would much rather feed a few soldiers than turn out of my home and go goodness knows where. But when I saw them – these Prussians – it was too much for me. They made my blood boil with rage, and I cried the whole day for shame. Oh, if I had only been a man! – well, there! I watched them from my window – fat pigs that they were with their spiked helmets – and my servant had to hold my hands to prevent me throwing the furniture down on the top of them. Then some of them came to be quartered on me, and I flew at the throat of the first one – they are not harder to strangle than any one else – and would have finished him too if they had not dragged me off by the hair. Of course I had to lie low after that. So as soon as I found an opportunity I left – and here I am."

Everybody congratulated her. She rose considerably in the estimation of her companions, who had not shown themselves of such valiant mettle, and listening to her tale, *Cornudet* smiled the benignant and approving smile of an apostle – as a priest might on hearing a devout person praise the Almighty; democrats with long beards having the monopoly of patriotism as the men of the cassock possess that of religion. He then took up the parable in a didactic tone with the phraseology culled from the notices posted each day on the walls, and finished up with a flourish of eloquence in which he scathingly alluded to "that blackguard of a *Badinguet*."²

But *Boule de Suif* fired up at this for she was a Bonapartist. She turned upon him with scarlet cheeks and stammering with indignation, "Ah! I should just like to have seen any of you in his place! A nice mess you would have made of it! It is men of your sort that ruined him, poor man. There would be nothing for it but to leave France for good if we were governed by cowards like you!"

Cornudet, nothing daunted, preserved a disdainful and superior smile, but there was a feeling in the air that high words would soon follow, whereupon the Count interposed, and managed, not without difficulty, to quiet the infuriated young woman by asserting authoritatively that every sincere opinion was to be respected. Nevertheless the Countess and the manufacturer's wife, who nourished in their hearts the unreasoning hatred of all well-bred people for the Republic and at the same time that instinctive weakness of all women for uniformed and despotic governments, felt drawn, in spite of themselves, to this woman of the street who had so much sense of the fitness of things and whose opinions so closely resembled their own.

² Nickname for Napoleon III.

The basket was empty – this had not been difficult among ten of them – they only regretted it was not larger. The conversation was kept up for some little time longer, although somewhat more coldly after they had finished eating.

The night fell, the darkness grew gradually more profound, and the cold, to which digestion rendered them more sensitive, made even Boule de Suif shiver in spite of her fat. Madame de Breuille thereupon offered her her charcoal foot-warmer, which had been replenished several times since the morning; she accepted with alacrity, for her feet were like ice. Mesdames Carré-Lamadon and Loiseau lent theirs to the two Sisters.

The driver had lit his lanterns, which shed a vivid light over the cloud of vapor that hung over the steaming back of the horses and over the snow at each side of the road, which seemed to open out under the shifting reflection of the lights.

Inside the conveyance nothing could be distinguished any longer, but there was a sudden movement between Boule de Suif and Cornudet, and Loiseau, peering through the gloom, fancied he saw the man with the beard start back quickly as if he had received a well-directed but noiseless blow.

Tiny points of fire appeared upon the road in front. It was Totes. The travelers had been driving for eleven hours, which, with the four half-hours for food and rest to the horses, made thirteen. They entered the town and stopped in front of the Hotel de la Commerce.

The door opened. A familiar sound caused every passenger to tremble – it was the clink of a scabbard on the stones. At the same moment a German voice called out something.

Although the diligence had stopped, nobody attempted to get out, as though they expected to be massacred on setting foot to the ground. The driver then appeared holding up one of the lanterns, which suddenly illumined the vehicle to its farthest corner and revealed the two rows of bewildered faces with their open mouths and startled eyes wide with alarm.

Beside the driver in the full glare of the light stood a German officer, a tall young man excessively slender and blonde, compressed into his uniform like a girl in her stays, and wearing, well over one ear, a flat black wax-cloth cap like the "Boots" of an English hotel. His preposterously long moustache, which was drawn out stiff and straight, and tapered away indefinitely to each side till it finished off in a single thread so thin that it was impossible to say where it ended, seemed to weigh upon the corners of his mouth and form a deep furrow in either cheek.

In Alsatian-French and stern accents he invited the passengers to descend: "Vill you get out, chentlemen and laties?"

The two Sisters were the first to obey with the docility of holy women accustomed to unflinching submission. The Count and Countess appeared next, followed by the manufacturer and his wife, and after them Loiseau pushing his better half in front of him. As he set foot to the ground he remarked to the officer, more from motives of prudence than politeness, "Good evening, Monsieur," to which the other with the insolence of the man in possession, vouchsafed no reply but a stare.

Boule de Suif and Cornudet, though the nearest the door, were the last to emerge – grave and haughty in face of the enemy. The buxom young woman struggled hard to command herself and be calm; the democrat tugged at his long rusty beard with a tragic and slightly trembling hand. They sought to preserve their dignity, realizing that in such encounters each one, to a certain extent, represents his country; and the two being similarly disgusted at the servile readiness of their companions, she endeavored to show herself prouder than her fellow travelers who were honest women, while he, feeling that he must set an example, continued in his attitude his mission of resistance begun by digging pitfalls in the high roads.

They all entered the huge kitchen of the inn, and the German, having been presented with the passport signed by the general in command – where each traveler's name was accompanied by a personal description and a statement as to his or her profession – he proceeded to scrutinize the party for a long time, comparing the persons with the written notices.

Finally, he exclaimed unceremoniously, "C'est bien – that's all right," and disappeared.

They breathed again more freely. Hunger having reasserted itself, supper was ordered. It would take half an hour to prepare, so while two servants were apparently busied about it the travelers dispersed to look at their rooms. These were all together down each side of a long passage ending in a door with ground glass panels.

At last, just as they were sitting down to table, the innkeeper himself appeared. He was a former horse-dealer, a stout asthmatic man with perpetual wheezings and blowings and rattlings of phlegm in his throat. His father had transmitted to him the name of Follenvie.

"Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset?" he said.

Boule de Suif started and turned round. "That is my name."

"Mademoiselle, the Prussian officer wants to speak to you at once."

"To me?"

"Yes, if you really are Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset."

She hesitated, thought for a moment, and then declared roundly: "That may be, but I'm not going."

There was a movement round about her – everybody was much exercised as to the reason of this summons. The Count came over to her.

"You may do wrong to refuse, madame, for it may entail considerable annoyance not only to yourself but on the rest of your companions. It is a fatal mistake ever to offer resistance to people who are stronger than ourselves. The step can have no possible danger for you – it is probably about some little formality that has been omitted."

One and all concurred with him, implored and urged and scolded, till they ended by convincing her; for they were all apprehensive of the results of her contumacy.

"Well, I do it for you sure enough!" she said at last. The Countess pressed her hand. "And we are most grateful to you."

She left the room, and the others agreed to wait for her before beginning the meal. Each one lamented at not having been asked for instead of this hot-headed, violent young woman, and mentally prepared any number of platitudes for the event of being called in their turn.

At the end of ten minutes she returned, crimson with rage, choking, snorting, – "Oh, the blackguard; the low blackguard!" she stammered.

They all crowded round her to know what had happened, but she would not say, and the Count becoming insistent, she answered with much dignity, "No, it does not concern anybody! I can't speak of it."

They then seated themselves round a great soup tureen from which steamed a smell of cabbage. In spite of this little contretemps the supper was a gay one. The cider, of which the Loiseaus and the two nuns partook from motives of economy, was good. The rest ordered wine and Cornudet called for beer. He had a particular way with him of uncorking the bottle, of making the liquid froth, of gazing at it while he tilted the glass, which he then held up between his eye and the light to criticise the color; while he drank, his great beard, which had the tints of his favorite beverage, seemed to quiver fondly, his eyes squinting that he might not lose sight of his tankard for a moment, and altogether he had the appearance of fulfilling the sole function for which he had been born. You would have said that he established in his own mind some connection or affinity between the two great passions that monopolized his life – Ale and Revolution – and most assuredly he never dipped into the one without thinking of the other.

Monsieur and Madame Follenvie supped at the farther end of the table. The husband – puffing and blowing like a bursting locomotive – had too much cold on the chest to be able to speak and eat at the same time, but his wife never ceased talking. She described her every impression at the arrival of the Prussians and all they did and all they said, execrating them in the first place because they cost so much, and secondly because she had two sons in the army. She addressed herself chiefly to the Countess, as it flattered her to be able to say she had conversed with a lady of quality.

She presently lowered her voice and proceeded to recount some rather delicate matters, her husband breaking in from time to time with – "You had much better hold your tongue, Madame Follenvie," – to which she paid not the slightest attention, but went on.

"Well, madame, as I was saying – these men, they do nothing but eat potatoes and pork and pork and potatoes from morning till night. And as for their habits – ! And you should see them exercising for hours and days together out there in the fields – It's forward march and backward march, and turn this way and turn that. If they even worked in the fields or mended the roads in their own country! But, no, madame, these soldiers are no good to anybody, and the poor people have to keep them and feed them simply that they may learn how to massacre. I know I am only a poor ignorant old woman, but when I see these men wearing themselves out by tramping up and down from morning till night, I cannot help saying to myself, if there are some people who make a lot of useful discoveries, why should others give themselves so much trouble to do harm? After all, isn't it an abomination to kill anybody, no matter whether they are Prussians, or English, or Poles, or French? If you revenge yourself on some one who has harmed you that is wicked, and you are taken up and punished; but let them shoot down our sons as if they were game, and it is all right, and they give medals to the man who kills the most. No, no, look you, I shall never be able to see any rhyme or reason in that!"

"War is barbarous if one attacks an unoffending neighbor – it is a sacred duty if one defends one's country," remarked Cornudet in a declamatory tone.

The old woman nodded assent. "Yes – defending oneself, of course, that is quite another thing; but wouldn't it be better to kill all these kings who do this for their pleasure?"

Cornudet's eyes flashed. "Bravo, citizeness!" he cried.

Monsieur Carré-Lamadon was lost in thought. Although he was an ardent admirer of famous military men, the sound common sense of this peasant woman's observations made him reflect upon the wealth which would necessarily accrue to the country if all these unemployed and consequently ruinous hands – so much unproductive force – were available for the great industrial works that would take centuries to complete.

Loiseau meanwhile had left his seat and gone over beside the innkeeper, to whom he began talking in a low voice. The fat man laughed, coughed, and spat, his unwieldy stomach shaking with mirth at his neighbor's jokes, and he bought six hogsheads of claret from him for the spring when the Prussians would have cleared out.

Supper was scarcely over when, dropping with fatigue, everybody went off to bed.

Loiseau, however, who had made certain observations, let his wife go to bed and proceeded to glue first his ear and then his eye to the keyhole, endeavoring to penetrate what he called "the mysteries of the corridor."

After about half an hour he heard a rustling, and hurrying to the keyhole, he perceived Boule de Suif looking ampler than ever in a dressing-gown of blue cashmere trimmed with white lace. She had a candle in her hand and was going towards the end of the corridor. Then a door at one side opened cautiously, and when she returned after a few minutes, Cornudet in his shirt sleeves was following her. They were talking in a low voice and presently stood still; Boule de Suif apparently defending the entrance of her room with much energy. Unfortunately Loiseau was unable to hear what they said till, at the last, as they raised their voices somewhat, he caught a word or two. Cornudet was insisting eagerly. "Look here," he said, "you are really very ridiculous – what difference can it make to you?"

And she with an offended air retorted, "No! – let me tell you there are moments when that sort of thing won't do; and besides – here – it would be a crying shame."

He obviously did not understand. "Why?"

At this she grew angry. "Why?" and she raised her voice still more, "you don't see why? and there are Prussians in the house – in the next room for all you know!"

He made no reply. This display of patriotic prudery evidently aroused his failing dignity, for with a brief salute he made for his own door on tiptoe.

Loiseau deeply thrilled and amused, executed a double shuffle in the middle of the room, donned his nightcap, and slipped into the blankets where the bony figure of his spouse already reposed.

The whole house sank to silence. But anon there arose from somewhere – it might have been the cellar, it might have been the attics – impossible to determine the direction – a rumbling – sonorous, even, regular, dull, prolonged roar as of a boiler under high steam pressure: Monsieur Follenvie slept.

It had been decided that they should start at eight o'clock the next morning, so they were all assembled in the kitchen by that hour; but the diligence, roofed with snow, stood solitary in the middle of the courtyard without horses or driver. The latter was sought for in vain either in the stables or the coachhouse. The men of the party then resolved to beat the country round for him, and went out accordingly. They found themselves in the public square with the church at one end, and low-roofed houses down each side in which they caught sight of Prussian soldiers. The first one they came upon was peeling potatoes; farther on another was washing out a barber's shop; while a third, bearded to the eyes, was soothing a crying child and rocking it to and fro on his knee to quiet it. The big peasant woman whose men were all "with the army in the war" were ordering about their docile conquerors and showing them by signs what work they wanted done – chopping wood, grinding coffee, fetching water; one of them was even doing the washing for his hostess, a helpless old crone.

The Count, much astonished, stopped the beadle, who happened to come out of the vestry at that moment, and asked the meaning of it all.

"Oh," replied the old church rat, "these are not at all bad. From what I hear they are not Prussians, either; they come from farther off, but where I can't say; and they have all left a wife and children at home. I am very sure the women down there are crying for their men, too, and it will all make a nice lot of misery for them as well as for us. We are not so badly off here for the moment, because they do not harm and are working just as if they were in their own homes. You see, Monsieur, the poor always help one another; it is the great people who make the wars."

Cornudet, indignant at the friendly understanding established between the victors and the vanquished, retired from the scene, preferring to shut himself up in the inn. Loiseau of course must have his joke. "They are re-populating," he said. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon found a more fitting expression. "They are repairing."

But the driver was nowhere to be found. At last he was unearthed in the village café hobnobbing fraternally with the officer's orderly.

"Did you not have orders to have the diligence ready by eight o'clock?" the Count asked him.

"Oh, yes, but I got another order later on."

"What?"

"Not to put the horses in at all."

"Who gave you that order?"

"Ma foi – the Prussian commandant."

"Why?"

"I don't know – you had better ask him. I am told not to harness the horses, and so I don't harness them – there you are."

"Did he tell you so himself?"

"No, Monsieur, the innkeeper brought me the message from him."

"When was that?"

"Last night, just as I was going to bed."

The three men returned much disconcerted. They asked for Monsieur Follenvie, but were informed by the servant that on account of his asthma he never got up before ten o'clock – he had even positively forbidden them to awaken him before then except in case of fire.

Then they asked to see the officer, but that was absolutely impossible, although he lodged at the inn.

Monsieur Follenvie alone was authorized to approach him on non-military matters. So they had to wait. The women returned to their rooms and occupied themselves as best they could.

Cornudet installed himself in the high chimney-corner of the kitchen, where a great fire was burning. He had one of the little coffee-room tables brought to him and a can of beer, and puffed away placidly at his pipe, which enjoyed among the democrats almost equal consideration with himself, as if in serving Cornudet it served the country also. The pipe was a superb meerschaum, admirably colored, black as the teeth of its owner, but fragrant, curved, shining familiar to his hand, and the natural complement to his physiognomy. He sat there motionless, his eyes fixed alternately on the flame of the hearth and the foam on the top of his tankard, and each time after drinking he passed his bony fingers with a self-satisfied gesture through his long greasy hair, while he wiped the fringe of froth from his moustache.

Under the pretext of stretching his legs, Loiseau went out and palmed off his wines on the country retail dealers. The Count and the manufacturer talked politics. They forecast the future of France, the one putting his faith in the Orleans, the other in an unknown savior, a hero who would come to the fore when things were at their very worst – a Du Guesclin, a Joan of Arc perhaps, or even another Napoleon I. Ah, if only the Prince Imperial were not so young! Cornudet listened to them with the smile of a man who could solve the riddle of Fate if he would. His pipe perfumed the whole kitchen with its balmy fragrance.

On the stroke of ten Monsieur Follenvie made his appearance. They instantly attacked him with questions, but he had but one answer which he repeated two or three times without variation. "The officer said to me, 'Monsieur Follenvie, you will forbid them to harness the horses for these travelers to-morrow morning. They are not to leave till I give my permission. You understand?' That is all."

They demanded to see the officer; the Count sent up his card, on which Monsieur Carré-Lamadon added his name and all his titles. The Prussian sent word that he would admit the two men to his presence after he had lunched, that is to say, about one o'clock.

The ladies came down and they all managed to eat a little in spite of their anxiety. Boule de Suif looked quite ill and very much agitated.

They were just finishing coffee when the orderly arrived to fetch the two gentlemen.

Loiseau joined them, but when they proposed to bring Cornudet along to give more solemnity to their proceedings, he declared haughtily that nothing would induce him to enter into any communication whatsoever with the Germans, and he returned to his chimney-corner and ordered another bottle of beer.

The three men therefore went upstairs without him, and were shown into the best room of the inn, where they were received by the officer lolling in an armchair, his heels on the chimney-piece, smoking a long porcelain pipe, and arrayed in a flamboyant dressing-gown, taken, no doubt, from the abandoned dwelling-house of some bourgeois of inferior taste. He did not rise, he vouchsafed them no greeting of any description, he did not even look at them – a brilliant sample of the victorious military cad.

At last after some moments waiting he said: "Vat do you vant?"

The Count acted as spokesman.

"We wish to leave, Monsieur."

"No."

"May I take the liberty of asking the reason for this refusal?"

"Pecause I do not shoose."

"With all due respect, Monsieur, I would draw your attention to the fact that your general gave us a permit for Dieppe, and I cannot see that we have done anything to justify your hard measures."

"I do not shoose – dat's all – you can co town."

They all bowed and withdrew.

The afternoon was miserable. They could make nothing of this caprice of the German's, and the most far-fetched ideas tortured their minds. The whole party remained in the kitchen engaging in endless discussions, imagining the most improbable things. Were they to be kept as hostages? – but if so, to what end? – or taken prisoners – or asked a large ransom? This last suggestion threw them into a cold perspiration of fear. The wealthiest were seized with the worst panic and saw themselves forced, if they valued their lives, to empty bags of gold into the rapacious hands of this soldier. They racked their brains for plausible lies to dissemble their riches, to pass themselves off as poor – very poor. Loiseau pulled off his watch-chain and hid it in his pocket. As night fell their apprehensions increased. The lamp was lighted, and as there were still two hours till supper Madame Loiseau proposed a game of "trente et un." It would be some little distraction, at any rate. The plan was accepted; even Cornudet, who had put out his pipe from motives of politeness, taking a hand.

The Count shuffled the cards, dealt, Boule de Suif had "trente et un" at the first deal; and very soon the interest in the game allayed the fears which beset their minds. Cornudet, however, observed that the two Loiseaus were in league to cheat.

Just as they were sitting down to the evening meal Monsieur appeared and said in his husky voice: "The Prussian officer wishes to know if Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset has not changed her mind yet?"

Boule de Suif remained standing and turned very pale, then suddenly her face flamed and she fell into such a paroxysm of rage that she could not speak. At last she burst out: "You can tell that scoundrel – that low scum of a Prussian – that I won't – and I never will – do you hear? – never! never! never!"

The fat innkeeper retired. They instantly surrounded Boule de Suif, questioning, entreating her to disclose the mystery of her visit. At first she refused, but presently, carried away by her indignation, she told them in plain terms what he demanded of her.

The general indignation was so violent that nobody was shocked. Cornudet brought his beer glass down on the table with such a bang that it broke. There was a perfect babel of invective against the base wretch, a hurricane of wrath, a union of all for resistance, as if each had been required to contribute a portion of the sacrifice demanded of the one. The Count protested with disgust that these people behaved really as if they were early barbarians. The women, in particular, accorded her the most lively and affectionate sympathy. The nuns, who only appeared at meals, dropped their eyes and said nothing.

The first fury of the storm having abated, they sat down to supper, but there was little conversation and a good deal of thoughtful abstraction.

The ladies retired early; the men, while they smoked, got up a game of *ecarté*, which Monsieur Follenvie was invited to join, as they intended pumping him skillfully as to the means that could be employed for overcoming the officer's opposition to their departure. Unfortunately, he would absorb himself wholly in his cards, and neither listened to what they said nor gave any answer to their questions, but repeated incessantly, "Play, gentlemen, play!" His attention was so deeply engaged that he forgot to cough, with the result of eliciting organ tones from his chest; his wheezing lungs running through the whole gamut of asthma from notes of the profoundest bass to the shrill, hoarse crow of the young cock.

He refused to go to bed when his wife, who was dropping with sleep, came to fetch him. She therefore departed alone, for on her devolved the "day duty," and she always rose with the sun, while her husband took the "night day," and was always ready to sit up all night with friends. He merely called out, "Mind you put my chicken broth in front of the fire!" and returned to his cards. When they were convinced that there was nothing to be got out of him, they declared that it was high time to go to bed, and left him.

They were up again pretty early the next day, filled with an indefinite hope, a still keener desire to be gone, and a horror of another day to be got through in this odious tavern.

Alas! the horses were still in the stable and the coachman remained invisible. For lack of something better to do, they sadly wandered round the diligence.

Lunch was very depressing, and a certain chilliness had sprung up with regard to Boule de Suif, for the night – which brings counsel – had somewhat modified the heat of their opinions. They were almost vexed with the girl now for not having gone to the Prussian secretly, and thus prepared a pleasant surprise for her companions in the morning. What could be simpler, and, after all, who would have been any the wiser? She might have saved appearances by telling the officer that she could not bear to see their distress any longer. It could make so very little difference to her one way or another!

But, as yet, nobody confessed to these thoughts.

In the afternoon, as they were feeling bored to extinction, the Count proposed a walk round the village. Everybody wrapped up carefully and the little party started, with the exception of Cornudet, who preferred sitting by the fire, and the two Sisters, who passed their days in the church or with the curé.

The cold – grown more intense each day – nipped their noses and ears viciously, and the feet became so painful that every step was anguish; but when they caught sight of the open stretch of country it appeared to them so appallingly lugubrious under its illimitable white covering that they turned back with one accord, their hearts constricted, their spirits below zero. The four ladies walked in front, the three men following a little behind.

Loiseau, who thoroughly took in the situation, suddenly broke out, "How long was this fool of a girl going to keep them hanging on in this hole?" The Count, courteous as ever, observed that one could not demand so painful a sacrifice of any woman – the offer must come from her. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon remarked that if – as there was every reason to believe – the French made an offensive counter-march by way of Dieppe, the collision could only take place at Totes. This reflection greatly alarmed the other two. "Why not escape on foot?" suggested Loiseau. The Count shrugged his shoulders. "How can you think of such a thing in this snow – and with our wives? Besides which, we should instantly be pursued, caught in ten minutes, and brought back prisoners at the mercy of these soldiers." This was incontestable – there was nothing more to be said.

The ladies talked dress, but a certain constraint seemed to have risen up between them.

All at once, at the end of the street, the officer came in sight, his tall figure, like a wasp in uniform, silhouetted against the dazzling background of snow, and walking with his knees well apart, with that movement peculiar to the military when endeavoring to save their carefully polished boots from the mud.

In passing the ladies he bowed, but only stared contemptuously at the men, who, be it said, had the dignity not to lift their hats, though Loiseau made a faint gesture in that direction.

Boule de Suif blushed up to her eyes, and the three married women felt it a deep humiliation to have encountered this soldier while they were in the company of the young woman he had treated so cavalierly.

The conversation then turned upon him, his general appearance, his face. Madame Carré-Lamadon, who had known a great many officers and was competent to judge of them "en connoisseur," considered this one really not half bad – she even regretted that he was not French, he would have made such a fascinating hussar, and would certainly have been much run after.

Once indoors again, they did not know what to do with themselves. Sharp words were exchanged on the most insignificant pretexts. The silent dinner did not last long, and they shortly afterwards went to bed, hoping to kill time by sleep.

They came down next morning with jaded faces and tempers on the thin edge. The women scarcely addressed a word to Boule de Suif.

Presently the church bell began to ring; it was for a christening. Boule de Suif had a child out at nurse with some peasants near Yvetot. She did not see it once in a year and never gave it a thought,

but the idea of this baby which was going to be baptized filled her heart with sudden and violent tenderness for her own, and nothing would satisfy her but that she should assist at the ceremony.

No sooner was she gone than they all looked at one another and proceeded to draw up their chairs; for everybody felt that things had come to that point that something must be decided upon. Loiseau had an inspiration: that they should propose to the officer to keep Boule de Suif and let the rest go.

Monsieur Follenvie undertook the mission, but returned almost immediately. The German, who had some knowledge of human nature, had simply turned him out of the room. He meant to retain the whole party so long as his desire was unsatisfied.

At this Madame Loiseau's plebeian tendencies got the better of her. "But surely we are not going to sit down calmly here and die of old age! As that is her trade, I don't see that she has any right to refuse one man more than another. Why, she took anybody she could get in Rouen, down to the very cab drivers. Oh, yes, I know it positively from the coachman of the Prefecture, who bought his wine at our shop. And now, when it lies with her to get us out of this scrape, she pretends to be particular – the brazen hussy! For my part, I consider the officer has behaved very well! He has probably not had a chance for some time, and there were three here whom, no doubt, he would have preferred; but no – he is content to take the one who is public property. He respects married women. Remember, he is master here. He had only to say 'I will,' and he could have taken us by force with his soldiers!"

A little shudder ran through the other two women. Pretty little Madame Carré-Lamadon's eyes shone and she turned rather pale as though she already felt herself forcibly seized by the officer.

The men, who had been arguing the matter in a corner, now joined them. Loiseau, foaming with rage, was for delivering up "the hussy" bound hand and foot to the enemy. But the Count, coming of three generations of ambassadors, and gifted with the physique of the diplomatist, was on the side of skill as opposed to brute force.

"She must be persuaded," he said. Whereupon they conspired.

The women drew up closer together, voices were lowered, and the discussion became general, each one offering his or her advice. Nothing was said to shock the proprieties. The ladies, in particular, were most expert in felicitous turns of phrase, charming subtleties of speech for expressing the most ticklish things. A foreigner would have understood nothing, the language was so carefully veiled. But as the slight coating of modesty with which every woman of the world is enveloped is hardly more than skin deep, they expanded under the influence of this equivocal adventure, enjoying themselves wildly at bottom, thoroughly in their element, dabbling in sensuality with the gusto of an epicurean cook preparing a toothsome delicacy for somebody else.

The story finally appeared to them so funny that they quite recovered their spirits. The Count indulged in some rather risky pleasantries, but so well put that they raised a responsive smile; Loiseau, in his turn, rapped out some decidedly strong jokes which nobody took in bad part, and the brutal proposition expressed by his wife swayed all their minds: "As that is her trade, why refuse one man more than another?" Little Madame Carré-Lamadon seemed even to think that in her place she would refuse this one less readily than another.

They were long in preparing the blockade, as if against an invested fortress. Each one agreed upon the part they would play, the arguments they would bring forward, the maneuvers they would execute. They arranged the plan of attack, the stratagems to be employed, and the surprises of the assault for forcing this living citadel to receive the enemy within its gates. Cornudet alone held aloof, completely outside the affair.

They were so profoundly occupied with the matter in hand that they never heard Boule de Suif enter the room. But the Count breathed a low warning "Hush!" and they lifted their heads. She was there. The talking ceased abruptly, and a certain feeling of embarrassment prevented them from addressing her at first, till the Countess, more versed than the others in the duplicities of the drawing-room, asked how she had enjoyed the christening.

Still full of emotion at what she had witnessed, Boule de Suif described every detail – the people's faces, their attitudes, even the appearance of the church. It was so nice to pray now and then, she added.

Till luncheon, however, the ladies confined themselves merely to being agreeable to her in order to increase her confidence in them and her docility to their counsels. But once seated at the table, the attack began. It first took the form of a desultory conversation on devotion to a cause. Examples from ancient history were cited: Judith and Holofernes, and then, without any apparent connection, Lucretia and Sextus, Cleopatra admitting to her couch all the hostile generals, and reducing them to the servility of slaves. Then began a fantastic history, which had sprung up in the minds of these ignorant millionaires, in which the women of Rome were seen on their way to Capua, to rock Hannibal to sleep in their arms, and his officers along with him, and the phalanxes of the mercenaries. The women were mentioned who had arrested the course of conquerors, made of their bodies a rampart, a means of dominating, a weapon; who had vanquished by their heroic embraces beings hideous or repulsive, and sacrificed their chastity to vengeance or patriotism.

And all this in so discreet and moderate a manner, with now and then a little burst of warm enthusiasm, admirably calculated to excite emulation. To hear them you would have finally come to the conclusion that woman's sole mission here below was to perpetually sacrifice her person, to abandon herself continually to the caprices of the warrior.

The two Sisters appeared to be deaf to it all, sunk in profound thought. Boule de Suif said nothing.

They allowed her all the afternoon for reflection, but instead of calling her "Madame," as they had done up till now, they addressed her simply as "Mademoiselle" – nobody could have said exactly why – as if to send her down a step in the esteem she had gained, and force her to feel the shame of her position.

In the evening just as the soup was being brought to the table Monsieur Follenvie made his appearance again with the same message as before: "The Prussian officer sends to ask Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset if she had not changed her mind."

"No, Monsieur," Boule de Suif replied curtly.

At supper the coalition weakened. Loiseau made three jokes that hung fire; everybody beat their brains for fresh instances to the point; and found none, when the Countess, possibly without premeditation and only from a vague desire to render homage to religion, interrogated the older of the two Sisters on the main incidents in the lives of the saints. Now, several of them had committed acts which would be counted crimes in our eyes, but the Church readily pardons such misdeeds when they are accomplished for the glory of God or the benefit of our neighbors. Then by one of those tacit agreements, those veiled complaisances in which every one who wears ecclesiastical habit excels, or perhaps simply from a happy want of intelligence, a helpful stupidity, the old nun brought formidable support to the conspiracy. They had imagined her timid; she proved herself bold, verbose, violent. She was not troubled by any of the shilly-shallyings of casuistry, her doctrine was like a bar of iron, her faith never wavered, her conscience knew no scruples. She considered Abraham's sacrifice a very simple affair, for she herself would have instantly killed father or mother at an order from above, and nothing, she averred, could displease the Lord if the intention were commendable. The Countess, taking advantage of the sacred authority of her unexpected ally, drew her on to make an edifying paraphrase, as it were, on the well-known moral maxim: "The end justifies the means."

"Then, Sister," she inquired, "you think God approves of every pathway that leads to Him, and pardons the deed if the motive be a pure one?"

"Who can doubt it, Madame? An action blamable in itself is often rendered meritorious by the impulse which inspires it."

And she continued in the same strain, unraveling the intricacies of the will of the Almighty, predicting His decisions, making Him interest Himself in matters which, of a truth, did not concern Him at all.

All this was skillfully and discreetly wrapped up, but each word of the pious woman in the big white cap made a breach in the indignant resistance of the courtesan. The conversation then glancing off slightly, the woman of the pendent rosaries went on to speak of the religious houses of her Order, of her superior, of herself and her fragile little companion, her dear little Sister St. Nicephora. They had been sent for to Havre to nurse the hundreds of soldiers there down with small-pox. She described the condition of these poor wretches, gave details of their disorder; and while they were thus stopped upon the road by the whim of this Prussian, many French soldiers might die whom perhaps they could have saved. That was her specialty – nursing soldiers. She had been in the Crimea, in Italy, in Austria; and relating her campaigns, she suddenly revealed herself as one of those Sisters of the fife and drum who seem made for following the camp, picking up the wounded in the thick of battle, and better than any officer for quelling with a word the great hulking undisciplined recruits – a regular Sister Rataplan, her ravaged face all riddled with pits, calling up an image of the devastations of war.

No one spoke after her for fear of spoiling the excellent effect.

Immediately after dinner they hurried to their rooms, not to reappear till pretty late the next morning.

Luncheon passed off quietly. They allowed the seed sown yesterday time to grow and bear fruit.

In the afternoon the Countess proposed a walk, whereupon the Count, following the preconcerted arrangement, took Boule de Suif's arm and fell behind with her a little. He adopted that familiar, paternal, somewhat contemptuous tone which elderly men affect towards such girls, calling her "my dear child," treating her from the height of his social position and indisputable respectability.

He came to the point without further preamble. "So you prefer to keep us here exposed like yourself to all the violence which must inevitably follow a check to the Prussian arms, rather than consent to accord one of those favors you have so often dispensed in your time?"

Boule de Suif did not reply.

He then appealed to her kindness of heart, her reason, her sentiment. He knew how to remain "Monsieur le Comte," yet showing himself at the same time chivalrous, flattering – in a word, altogether amiable. He exalted the sacrifice she would be making for them, touched upon their gratitude, and with a final flash of roguishness, "Besides, my dear, he may think himself lucky – he will not find many such pretty girls as you in his own country!"

Boule de Suif said nothing and rejoined the rest of the party.

When they returned, she went straight to her room and did not come down again. The anxiety was terrible. What was she going to do? How unspeakably mortifying if she still persisted in her refusal!

The dinner-hour arrived, they waited for her in vain. Monsieur Follenvie, entering presently, announced that Mademoiselle Rousset was indisposed, and that there was consequently no need to delay supper any longer. They all pricked up their ears. The Countess approached the innkeeper with a whispered "All right?"

"Yes."

For propriety's sake he said nothing to his companions, but he made them a slight sign of the head. A great sigh of relief went up from every heart, every face lit up with joy.

"Saperlipopette!" cried Loiseau, "I will stand champagne if there is such a thing in this establishment!"

Madame Loiseau suffered a pang of anguish when the innkeeper returned with four bottles in his hands. Everybody suddenly turned communicative and cheerful, and their hearts overflowed with brotherly love. The Count seemed all at once to become aware that Madame Carré-Lamadon was

charming; the manufacturer paid compliments to the Countess. Conversation became lively, sprightly, and full of sparkle.

By the end of the repast the women themselves were indulging in decidedly risky witticisms. Eyes grew bright, tongues were loosened, a good deal of wine had been consumed. The Count, who, even in his cups, retained his characteristic air of diplomatic gravity, made some highly spiced comparisons on the subject of the end of the winter season at the Pole and the joy of ice-bound mariners at sight of an opening to the south.

Loiseau, now in full swing, rose, and lifting high his glass of champagne, "To our deliverance!" he cried. Everybody started to their feet with acclamation. Even the two Sisters of Mercy, yielding to the solicitations of the ladies, consented to take a sip of the effervescing wine which they had never tasted before. They pronounced it to be very like lemonade, though, on the whole, more refined.

"What a pity there is no piano," said Loiseau as a crowning point to the situation, "we might have finished up with a little hop."

Cornudet had not uttered a word, nor made a sign of joining in the general hilarity; he was apparently plunged in the gravest abstractions, only pulling viciously at his great beard from time to time as if to draw it out longer than before. At last, about midnight, when the company was preparing to separate, Loiseau came hiccoughing over to him, and digging him in the ribs: "You seem rather down in the mouth this evening, citizen – haven't said a word."

Cornudet threw up his head angrily, and sweeping the company with a flashing and terrible look: "I tell you all that what you have done to-day is an infamy!"

He rose, made his way to the door, exclaimed once again, "An infamy!" and vanished.

This somewhat dashed their spirits for the moment. Loiseau, nonplussed at first, soon regained his aplomb and burst into a roar of laughter. "Sour grapes, old man – sour grapes!"

The others not understanding the allusion, he proceeded to relate the "mysteries of the corridor." This was followed by an uproarious revival of gayety. The ladies were in a frenzy of delight, the Count and Monsieur Carré-Lamadon laughed till they cried. They could not believe it.

"Do you mean to say he wanted – "

"I tell you I saw it with my own eyes."

"And she refused?"

"Because the Prussian was in the next room."

"It is incredible."

"As true as I stand here!"

The Count nearly choked; the manufacturer held both his sides.

"And you can understand that he does not quite see the joke of the thing this evening – oh, no – not at all!"

And they all three went off again, breathless, choking, sick with laughter.

After that they parted for the night. But Madame Loiseau remarked to her husband when they were alone that that little cat of a Carré-Lamadon had laughed on the wrong side of her mouth all the evening. "You know how it is with these women – they dote upon a uniform, and whether it is French or Prussian matters precious little to them. But, Lord – it seems to me a poor way of looking at things."

Apparently nobody got much sleep that night, for it was long before the lights ceased to shine under the doors. Champagne, they say, often has that disturbing effect; it makes one restless and wakeful.

Next morning a brilliant winter sun shone on the dazzling snow. The diligence was by this time ready and waiting before the door, while a flock of white pigeons, muffled in their thick plumage, strutted solemnly in and out among the feet of the six horses, seeking what they might devour.

The driver, enveloped in his sheepskin, sat on the box smoking his pipe, and the radiant travelers were busily laying in provisions for the rest of the journey.

They were only waiting now for Boule de Suif. She appeared.

She looked agitated and downcast as she advanced timidly towards her fellow travelers, who all, with one movement, turned away their heads as if they had not seen her. The Count, with a dignified movement, took his wife by the arm and drew her away from this contaminating contact.

The poor thing stopped short, bewildered; then gathering up her courage she accosted the wife of the manufacturer with a humble "Good morning, Madame." The other merely replied with an impertinent little nod, accompanied by a stare of outraged virtue. Everybody seemed suddenly extremely busy, and they avoided her as if she had brought the plague in her skirts. They then precipitated themselves into the vehicle, where she arrived the last and by herself, and resumed in silence the seat she had occupied during the first part of the journey.

They affected not to see her, not to recognize her; only Madame Loiseau, glancing round at her with scorn and indignation, said half audibly to her husband, "It's a good thing that I am not sitting beside her!"

The heavy conveyance jolted off, and the journey recommenced.

No one spoke for the first little while. Boule de Suif did not venture to raise her eyes. She felt incensed at her companions, and at the same time deeply humiliated at having yielded to their persuasions, and let herself be sullied by the kisses of this Prussian into whose arms they had hypocritically thrust her.

The Countess was the first to break the uncomfortable silence. Turning to Madame Carré-Lamadon, she said, "You know Madame d'Étrelles, I think?"

"Oh, yes; she is a great friend of mine."

"What a charming woman!"

"Fascinating! So truly refined; very cultivated, too, and an artist to the tips of her fingers – she sings delightfully, and draws to perfection."

The manufacturer was talking to the Count, and through the rattle of the crazy windowpanes one caught a word here and there; shares – dividends – premium – settling day – and the like. Loiseau, who had appropriated an old pack of cards from the inn, thick with the grease of the five years' rubbing on dirty tables, started a game of bezique with his wife. The two Sisters pulled up the long rosaries hanging at their waists, made the sign of the cross, and suddenly began moving their lips rapidly, faster and faster, hurrying their vague babble as if for a wager; kissing a medal from time to time, crossing themselves again, and then resuming their rapid and monotonous murmur.

Cornudet sat motionless – thinking.

At the end of the three hours' steady traveling Loiseau gathered up his cards and remarked facetiously, "It's turning hungry."

His wife then produced a parcel, which she untied, and brought out a piece of cold veal. This she cut up into thin, firm slices, and both began to eat.

"Supposing we do the same?" said the Countess, and proceeded to unpack the provisions prepared for both couples. In one of those oblong dishes with a china hare upon the cover to indicate that a roast hare lies beneath, was a succulent selection of cold viands – brown slices of juicy venison mingled with other meats. A delicious square of gruyere cheese wrapped in newspaper still bore imprinted on its dewy surface the words "General News."

The two Sisters brought out a sausage smelling of garlic, and Cornudet, plunging his hands into the vast pockets of his loose greatcoat, drew up four hard-boiled eggs from one and a big crust of bread from the other. He peeled off the shells and threw them into the straw under his feet, and proceeded to bite into the egg, dropping pieces of the yolk into his long beard, from whence they shone out like stars.

In the hurry and confusion of the morning Boule de Suif had omitted to take thought for the future, and she looked on, furious, choking with mortification, at these people all munching away so placidly. A storm of rage convulsed her, and she opened her mouth to hurl at them the torrent of abuse that rose to her lips, but she could not speak, suffocated by her indignation.

Nobody looked at her, nobody thought of her. She felt herself drowning in the flood of contempt shown towards her by these honest scoundrels who had first sacrificed her and then cast her off like some useless and unclean thing. Then her thoughts reverted to her great basket full of good things which they had so greedily devoured – the two fowls in their glittering coat of jelly, her patties, her pears, her four bottles of claret; and her fury suddenly subsided like the breaking of an overstrung chord and she felt that she was on the verge of tears. She made the most strenuous efforts to overcome it – straightened herself up and choked back her sobs as children do, but the tears would rise. They glittered for a moment on her lashes, and presently two big drops rolled slowly over her cheeks. Others gathered in quick succession like water dripping from a rock and splashed onto the ample curve of her bosom. She sat up very straight, her eyes fixed, her face pale and rigid, hoping that nobody would notice.

But the Countess saw her and nudged her husband. He shrugged his shoulders as much as to say, "What can you expect? It is not my fault." Madame Loiseau gave a silent chuckle of triumph and murmured, "She is crying for shame." The two Sisters had resumed their devotions after carefully wrapping up the remnants of their sausages.

Then Cornudet, while digesting his eggs, stretched his long legs under the opposite seat, leaned back, smiled like a man who has just thought of a capital joke, and began to softly whistle the Marseillaise.

The faces clouded; the popular air seemed displeasing to his neighbors; they became nervous – irritable – looking as if they were ready to throw back their heads and howl like dogs at the sound of a barrel organ. He was perfectly aware of this, but did not stop. From time to time he hummed a few of the words: "Liberty, cherished liberty, Fight thou on the side of thy defenders."

They drove at a much quicker pace to-day, the snow being harder; and all the way to Dieppe, during the long, dull hours of the journey, through all the jolting and rattling of the conveyance, in the falling shades of evening and later in the profound darkness, he continued with unabated persistency his vengeful and monotonous whistling; forcing his wearied and exasperated fellow travelers to follow the song from end to end and to remember every word that corresponded to each note.

And Boule de Suif wept on, and at times a sob which she could not repress broke out between two couplets in the darkness.

MISS HARRIET

There were seven of us in a break, four women and three men, one of which latter was on the box seat beside the coachman, and we were following, at a foot pace, the broad highway which serpentines along the coast.

Setting out from Etretat at break of day, in order to visit the ruins of Tancarville, we were still asleep, benumbed by the fresh air of the morning. The women, especially, who were little accustomed to these early excursions, let their eyelids fall and rise every moment, nodding their heads or yawning, quite insensible to the emotion of the breaking of day.

It was autumn. On both sides of the road, the bare fields stretched out, yellowed by the corn and wheat stubble which covered the soil, like a beard that had been badly shaved. The spongy earth seemed to smoke. The larks were singing, high up in the air, while other birds piped in the bushes.

The sun rose at length in front of us, a bright red on the plane of the horizon; and in proportion as it ascended, growing clearer from minute to minute, the country seemed to awake, to smile, to shake itself, stretch itself, like a young girl who is leaving her bed, in her white vapor chemise. The Count of Etraille, who was seated on the box, cried:

"Look! look! a hare!" and he extended his arm towards the left, pointing to a piece of hedge. The animal threaded its way along, almost concealed by the field, raising only its large ears. Then it swerved across a deep rut, stopped, pursued again its easy course, changed its direction, stopped anew, disturbed, spying out every danger, undecided as to the route it should take; when suddenly it began to run with great bounds of the hind legs, disappearing finally, in a large patch of beet-root. All the men had woken up to watch the course of the beast.

René Lemanoir then exclaimed:

"We are not at all gallant this morning," and regarding his neighbor, the little Baroness of Serennes, who struggled against sleep, he said to her in a subdued voice: "You are thinking of your husband, Baroness. Reassure yourself; he will not return before Saturday, so you have still four days."

She responded to him with a sleepy smile: "How rude you are." Then, shaking off her torpor, she added: "Now, let somebody say something that will make us all laugh. You, Monsieur Chenal, who have the reputation of possessing a larger fortune than the Duke of Richelieu, tell us a love story in which you have been mixed up, anything you like."

Léon Chenal, an old painter, who had once been very handsome, very strong, very proud of his physique, and very amiable, took his long white beard in his hand and smiled, then, after a few moments' reflection, he became suddenly grave.

"Ladies, it will not be an amusing tale; for I am going to relate to you the most lamentable love affair of my life, and I sincerely hope that none of my friends have ever passed through a similar experience."

I

I was at the time twenty-five years of age, and I was making daubs along the coast of Normandy. I call "making daubs" that wandering about, with a bag on one's back, from mountain to mountain, under the pretext of studying and of sketching nature. I know nothing more enjoyable than that happy-go-lucky wandering life, in which one is perfectly free, without shackles of any kind, without care, without preoccupation, without thinking even of to-morrow. One goes in any direction one pleases, without any guide, save his fancy, without any counselor save his eyes. One pulls up, because a running brook seduces one, because one is attracted, in front of an inn, by the smell of potatoes frying. Sometimes it is the perfume of clematis which decides one in his choice, or the naïve glance of the servant at an inn. Do not despise me for my affection for these rustics. These girls have a soul as well as feeling, not to mention firm cheeks and fresh lips; while their hearty and willing kisses have the flavor of wild fruit. Love always has its price, come whence it may. A heart that beats when you make your appearance, an eye that weeps when you go away, are things so rare, so sweet, so precious, that they must never be despised.

I have had rendezvous in ditches in which cattle repose, and in barns among the straw, still steaming from the heat of the day. I have recollections of canvas being spread on rude and elastic benches, and of hearty and fresh, free kisses, more delicate and unaffectedly sincere than the subtle attractions of charming and distinguished women.

But what one loves most amidst all these varied adventures is the country, the woods, the risings of the sun, the twilight, the light of the moon. These are, for the painter, honeymoon trips with nature. One is alone with her in that long and tranquil rendezvous. You go to bed in the fields, amidst marguerites and wild poppies, and, with eyes wide open, you watch the going down of the sun, and descry in the distance the little village, with its pointed clock tower, which sounds the hour of midnight.

You sit down by the side of a spring which gushes out from the foot of an oak, amidst a covering of fragile herbs, upright and redolent of life. You go down on your knees, bend forward, you drink that cold and pellucid water which wets your moustache and nose, you drink it with a physical pleasure, as though you kissed the spring, lip to lip. Sometimes, when you encounter a deep hole, along the course of these tiny brooks, you plunge into it, quite naked, and you feel on your skin, from head to foot, like an icy and delicious caress, the lovely and gentle quivering of the current.

You are gay on the hills, melancholy on the verge of pools, exalted when the sun is crowned in an ocean of blood-red shadows, and when it casts on the rivers its red reflection. And, at night, under the moon, which passes across the vault of heaven, you think of things, and singular things, which would never have occurred to your mind under the brilliant light of day.

So, in wandering through the same country where we are this year, I came to the little village of Benouville, on the Falaise, between Yport and Etretat. I came from Fécamp, following the coast, a high coast, and as perpendicular as a wall, with its projecting and rugged rocks falling perpendicularly into the sea. I had walked since the morning on the shaven grass, as smooth and as yielding as a carpet. And singing lustily, I walked with long strides, looking sometimes at the slow and ambling flight of a gull, with its short, white wings, sailing in the blue heavens, sometimes on the green sea, at the brown sails of a fishing bark. In short, I had passed a happy day, a day of listlessness and of liberty.

I was shown a little farm house, where travelers were put up, a kind of inn, kept by a peasant, which stood in the center of a Norman court, which was surrounded by a double row of beeches.

Quitting the Falaise, I gained the hamlet, which was hemmed in by great trees, and I presented myself at the house of Mother Lecacheur.

She was an old, wrinkled and austere rustic, who seemed always to succumb to the pressure of new customs with a kind of contempt.

It was the month of May: the spreading apple-trees covered the court with a whirling shower of blossoms which rained unceasingly both upon people and upon the grass.

I said:

"Well, Madame Lecacheur, have you a room for me?"

Astonished to find that I knew her name, she answered:

"That depends; everything is let; but, all the same, there will be no harm in looking."

In five minutes we were in perfect accord, and I deposited my bag upon the bare floor of a rustic room, furnished with a bed, two chairs, a table, and a wash-stand. The room looked into the large and smoky kitchen, where the lodgers took their meals with the people of the farm and the farmer, who was a widower.

I washed my hands, after which I went out. The old woman fricasseed a chicken for dinner in a large fireplace, in which hung the stew pot, black with smoke.

"You have travelers, then, at the present time?" I said to her.

She answered, in an offended tone of voice:

"I have a lady, an English lady, who has attained to years of maturity. She is going to occupy my other room."

I obtained, by means of an extra five sous a day, the privilege of dining out in the court when the weather was fine.

My cover was then placed in front of the door, and I commenced to gnaw with my teeth the lean members of the Normandy chicken, to drink the clear cider, and to munch the hunk of white bread, which was four days old, though excellent.

Suddenly, the wooden barrier which gave into the highway, was opened, and a strange person directed her steps towards the house. She was very slender, very tall, enveloped in a Scotch shawl with red borders, and one might have believed that she had no arms, if one had not seen a long hand appear just above the haunches, holding a white tourist umbrella. The face of a mummy, surrounded with sausage rolls of plaited, gray hair, which bounded at every step she took, made me think, I know not why, of a sour herring adorned with curling papers. Lowering her eyes, she passed quickly in front of me, and entered the house.

That singular apparition made me yearn. She undoubtedly was my neighbor, the aged English lady of whom our hostess had spoken.

I did not see her again that day. The next day, when I had installed myself to commence painting, at the end of that beautiful valley, which you know, and which extends as far as Etretat, I perceived, in lifting my eyes suddenly, something singularly attired, standing on the crest of the declivity; one might indeed say, a pole decked out with flags. It was she. On seeing me, she suddenly disappeared. I re-entered the house at midday for lunch, and took my seat at the common table, so as to make the acquaintance of this old original. But she did not respond to my polite advances, was insensible even to my little attentions. I poured water out for her with great alacrity; I passed her the dishes with great eagerness. A slight, almost imperceptible movement of the head, and an English word, murmured so low that I did not understand it, were her only acknowledgments.

I ceased occupying myself with her, although she had disturbed my thoughts.

At the end of three days, I knew as much about her as did Madame Lecacheur herself.

She was called Miss Harriet. Seeking out a secluded village in which to pass the summer, she had been attracted to Benouville, some six months before, and did not seem disposed to quit it. She never spoke at table, ate rapidly, reading all the while a small book, treating of some protestant propaganda. She gave a copy of it to everybody. The curé himself had received no less than four copies, conveyed by an urchin to whom she had paid two sous' commission. She said sometimes to our hostess, abruptly, without preparing her in the least for the declaration:

"I love the Savior more than all; I admire him in all creation; I adore him in all nature, I carry him always in my heart."

And she would immediately present the old woman with one of her brochures which were destined to convert the universe.

In the village she was not liked. In fact, the schoolmaster had declared that she was an atheist, and that a kind of reprobation weighed down on her. The curé, who had been consulted by Madame Lecacheur, responded:

"She is a heretic, but God does not wish the death of the sinner, and I believe her to be a person of pure morals."

These words, "Atheist," "Heretic," words which no one can precisely define, threw doubts into some minds. It was asserted, however, that this English woman was rich, and that she had passed her life in traveling through every country in the world, because her family had thrown her off. Why had her family thrown her off. Because of her natural impiety?

She was, in fact, one of those people of exalted principles, one of those opinionated puritans, of which England produces so many, one of those good and insupportable old women who haunt the table d'hôtes of every hotel in Europe, who spoil Italy, impoison Switzerland, render the charming cities of the Mediterranean uninhabitable, carry everywhere their fantastic manias, their petrified vestal manners, their indescribable toilettes and a certain odor of India rubber, which makes one believe that at night they slip themselves into a case of that material.

When I encounter one of these people some fine day in a hotel, I act like the birds, who see a manakin in a field.

This woman, however, appeared so singular that she did not displease me.

Madame Lecacheur, hostile by instinct to everything that was not rustic, felt in her narrow soul a kind of hatred for the ecstatic extravagances of the old girl. She had found a phrase by which to describe her, a phrase assuredly contemptible, which she had got, I know not whence, upon her lips, invented by I know not what confused and mysterious travail of soul. She said: "That woman is a demoniac." This phrase, culled by that austere and sentimental creature, seemed to me irresistibly comic. I myself, never called her now anything else, but "the demoniac," exercising a singular pleasure in pronouncing aloud this word on perceiving her.

I would ask Mother Lecacheur: "Well, what is our demoniac about to-day?"

To which my rustic friend responded, with an air of having been scandalized:

"What do you think, sir, she has picked up a toad which has had its paw battered, and carried it to her room, and has put it in her wash-stand, and dressed it up like a man. If that is not profanation, I should like to know what is!"

On another occasion, when walking along the Falaise, she had bought a large fish which had just been caught, simply to throw it back into the sea again. The sailor, from whom she had bought it, though paid handsomely, was greatly provoked at this act, more exasperated, indeed, than if she had put her hand into his pocket and taken his money. For a whole month he could not speak of the circumstance without getting into a fury and denouncing it as an outrage. Oh yes! She was indeed a demoniac, this Miss Harriet, and Mother Lecacheur must have had an inspiration of genius in thus christening her.

The stable-boy, who was called Sapeur, because he had served in Africa in his youth, entertained other aversions. He said, with a roguish air: "She is an old hag who has lived her days."

If the poor woman had but known!

The little, kind-hearted Céleste, did not wait upon her willingly, but I was never able to understand why. Probably, her only reason was that she was a stranger, of another race, of a different tongue, and of another religion. She was, in good truth, a demoniac!

She passed her time wandering about the country, adoring and searching for God in nature. I found her one evening on her knees in a cluster of bushes. Having discovered something red through the leaves, I brushed aside the branches and Miss Harriet at once rose to her feet, confused at having been found thus, fixed on me eyes as terrible as those of a wild cat, surprised in open day.

Sometimes, when I was working among the rocks, I would suddenly descry her on the banks of the Falaise like a semaphore signal. She passionately gazed at the vast sea, glittering in the sunlight, and the boundless sky empurpled with fire. Sometimes I would distinguish her at the bottom of a valley, walking quickly, with an English, elastic step; and I would go towards her, attracted I know not by what, simply to see her illuminated visage, her dried-up, ineffable features, which seemed to glow with interior and profound happiness.

I would often encounter her also in the corner of a field sitting on the grass, under the shadow of an apple tree, with her little Bible lying open on her knee, which she looked at meditatively at the distance.

I could no longer tear myself away from that quiet country neighborhood, being bound to it by a thousand links of love for its sweeping and soft landscapes. At this farm I was unknown to the world, far removed from everything, but in close proximity to the soil, the good, healthy, beautiful and green soil. And, must I avow it; there was something besides curiosity which retained me at the residence of Mother Lecacheur. I wished to become acquainted a little with this strange Miss Harriet, and to know what passed in the solitary souls of those wandering old, English dames.

II

We became acquainted in a rather singular manner. I had just finished a study, which appeared to me to display play brain power; and so it must, as it was sold for ten thousand francs, fifteen years later. It was as simple, however, as that two and two make four, and had nothing to do with academic rules. The whole of the right side of my canvas represented a rock, an enormous rock, covered with sea-wrack, brown, yellow, and red, across which the sun poured like a stream of oil. The light, without which one could see the stars concealed in the back ground, fell upon the stone, and gilded it as if by fire. That was all. A first stupid attempt at dealing with light, burning rays, the sublime.

On the left was the sea, not the blue sea, the slate-colored sea, but a jade of a sea, as greenish, milky and thick as the overcast sky.

I was so pleased with my work that I danced from sheer delight as I carried it back to the inn. I had wished that the whole world could have seen it at one and the same moment. I can remember that I showed it to a cow, which was browsing by the wayside, exclaiming at the same time: "Look at that, my old beauty, you shall not often see its like again."

When I had reached the front of the house, I immediately called out to Mother Lecacheur, shouting with all my might:

"Ohè! Ohè! my mistress, come here and look at this."

The rustic advanced and regarded my work with her stupid eyes which distinguished nothing, and which did not even recognize whether the picture was the representation of an ox or a house.

Miss Harriet returned to the house, and she passed in rear of me just at the moment when, holding out my canvas at arm's length, I was exhibiting it to the female innkeeper. The demoniac could not help but see it, for I took care to exhibit the thing in such a way that it could not escape her notice. She stopped abruptly and stood motionless, stupefied. It was her rock which was depicted, the one which she climbed to dream away her time undisturbed.

She uttered a British "Aoh," which was at once so accentuated and so flattering, that I turned round to her, smiling, and said:

"This is my last work, Mademoiselle."

She murmured ecstatically, comically and tenderly:

"Oh! Monsieur, you must understand what it is to have a palpitation."

I colored up, of course, and was more excited by that compliment than if it had come from a queen. I was seduced, conquered, vanquished. I could have embraced her; upon my honor.

I took a seat at the table beside her, as I had always done. For the first time, she spoke, drawling out in a loud voice:

"Oh! I love nature so much."

I offered her some bread, some water, some wine. She now accepted these with the vacant smile of a mummy. I then began to converse with her about the scenery.

After the meal, we rose from the table together and we walked leisurely across the court; then, being attracted by the fiery glow which the setting sun cast over the surface of the sea, I opened the outside gate which opened in the direction of the Falaise, and we walked on side by side, as satisfied as any two persons could be, who have just learned to understand and penetrate each other's motives and feelings.

It was a muggy, relaxing evening, one of those enjoyable evenings, which impart happiness to mind and body alike. All is joy, all is charm. The luscious and balmy air, loaded with the perfumes of herbs, the perfumes of grass-wrack, which caresses the odor of the wild flowers, caresses the potato with its marine flavor, caresses the soul with a penetrating sweetness. We were going to the brink of the abyss, which overlooked the vast sea, and which rolled past us at the distance of less than a hundred meters.

And we drank with open mouth and expanded chest that fresh breath which came from the ocean and which glided slowly over the skin, salted by its long contact with the waves.

Wrapped up in her square shawl, inspired by the balmy air and with teeth firmly set, the English woman gazed fixedly at the great sun ball, as it descended towards the sea. Soon its rim touched the waters, just in rear of a ship which appeared on the horizon, until, by degrees, it was swallowed up by the ocean. It was seen to plunge, diminish, and finally to disappear.

Miss Harriet contemplated with a passionate regard the last glimmer of the flaming orb of day.

She muttered: "Aoh! I loved ... I loved ..." I saw a tear start in her eye. She continued: "I wish I were a little bird, so that I could mount up into the firmament."

She remained standing as I had often before seen her, perched on the river's banks, her face as red as her purple shawl. I should have liked to have sketched her in my album. It would have been an ecstatic caricature.

I turned my face away from her so as to be able to laugh.

I then spoke to her of painting, as I would have done to a fellow artist, using the technical terms common among the devotees of the profession. She listened attentively to me, eagerly seeking to define the sense of the obscure words, so as to penetrate my thoughts. From time to time, she would exclaim: "Oh! I understand, I understand. This has been very interesting."

We returned home.

The next day, on seeing me, she approached me eagerly, holding out her hand; and we became firm friends immediately.

She was a brave creature who had a kind of elastic soul, which became enthusiastic at a bound. She lacked equilibrium, like all women who are spinsters at the age of fifty. She seemed to be pickled in vinegar innocence, though her heart still retained something of youth and of girlish effervescence. She loved both nature and animals with a fervent ardor, a love like old wine, fermented through age, with a sensual love that she had never bestowed on men.

One thing is certain, that a bitch in pup, a mare roaming in a meadow with a foal at its side, a bird's nest full of young ones, squeaking, with their open mouths and enormous heads, made her quiver with the most violent emotion.

Poor solitary beings! Tristias and wanderers from table d'hôte to table d'hôte, poor beings, ridiculous and lamentable. I love you ever since I became acquainted with Miss Harriet!

I soon discovered that she had something she would like to tell me, but she dare not, and I was amused at her timidity. When I started out in the morning with my box on my back, she accompanied me as far as the end of the village, silent, but evidently struggling inwardly to find words with which to begin a conversation. Then she left me abruptly, and, with a jaunty step, walked away quickly.

One day, however, she plucked up courage:

"I would like to see how you paint pictures? Will you? I have been very curious."³

And she colored up as though she had given utterance to words extremely audacious.

I conducted her to the bottom of the Petit-Val, where I had commenced a large picture.

She remained standing near me, following all my gestures with concentrated attention. Then, suddenly, fearing, perhaps, that she was disturbing me she said to me: "Thank you," and walked away.

But in a short time she became more familiar, and accompanied me every day, her countenance exhibiting visible pleasure. She carried her folding stool under her arm, and would not consent to my carrying it, and she sat always by my side. She would remain there for hours, immovable and mute, following with her eye the point of my brush, in its every movement. When I would obtain, by a large splash of color spread on with a knife, a striking and unexpected effect, she would, in spite of herself, give vent to a half-suppressed "Ah!" of astonishment, of joy, of admiration. She had the most tender respect for my canvases, an almost religious respect for that human reproduction of a part of nature's

³ *Jevôdre voir vô comment vô faites le peinture? Velé vô? Je été très curieux.*

work divine. My studies appeared to her as a kind of pictures of sanctity, and sometimes she spoke to me of God, with the idea of converting me.

Oh! He was a queer good-natured being, this God of hers. He was a sort of village philosopher without any great resources, and without great power; for she always figured him to herself as a being quivering over injustices committed under his eyes, and as though he was helpless to prevent them.

She was, however, on excellent terms with him, affecting even to be the confidant of his secrets and of his contrarities. She said:

"God wills, or God does not will," just like a sergeant announcing to a recruit: "The colonel has commanded."

At the bottom of her heart, she deplored my ignorance of the intentions of the Eternal, which she strove, and felt herself compelled to impart to me.

Almost every day, I found in my pockets, in my hat when I lifted it from the ground, in my box of colors, in my polished shoes, standing in the mornings in front of my door, those little pious brochures, which she, no doubt, received directly from Paradise.

I treated her as one would an old friend, with unaffected cordiality. But I soon perceived that she had changed somewhat in her manner; but, for a while, I paid little attention to it.

When I walked about, whether to the bottom of the valley, or through some country lanes, I would see her suddenly appear, as though she were returning from a rapid walk. She would then sit down abruptly, out of breath, as though she had been running, or overcome by some profound emotion. Her face would be red, that English red which is denied to the people of all other countries; then, without any reason, she would grow pale, become the color of the ground and seem ready to faint away. Gradually, however, I would see her regain her ordinary color, whereupon she would begin to speak.

Then, without warning, she would break off in the middle of a sentence, spring up from her seat, and march off so rapidly and so strangely, that it would, sometimes, put me to my wits ends to try and discover whether I had done or said anything to displease or offend her.

I finally came to the conclusion that this arose from her early habits and training, somewhat modified, no doubt, in honor of me, since the first days of our acquaintanceship.

When she returned to the farm, after walking for hours on the wind-beaten coast, her long curled hair would be shaken out and hanging loose, as though it had broken away from its bearings. It was seldom that this gave her any concern; looking sometimes as though she had just returned from dining *sans cérémonie*; her locks having become dishevelled by the breezes.

She would then go up to her room in order to adjust what I called her glass lamps; and when I would say to her, in the familiar gallantry, which, however, always offended her:

"You are as beautiful as a planet to-day, Miss Harriet," a little blood would immediately mount into her cheeks, the blood of a young maiden, the blood of sweet fifteen.

Then she would become abruptly savage and cease coming to watch me paint. I thought thus: "This is only a fit of temper she is passing through."

But it did not always pass away. When I spoke to her sometimes, she would answer me, either with an air of affected indifference, or in sullen anger; and became by turns rude, impatient, and nervous. For a time I never saw her except at meals, and we spoke but little. I concluded, at length, that I must have offended her in something: and, accordingly, I said to her one evening:

"Miss Harriet, why is it that you do not act towards me as formerly? What have I done to displease you? You are causing me much pain!"

She responded, in an angry tone, in a manner altogether *sui generis*:

"I be always with you the same as formerly.⁴ It is not true, not true," and she ran upstairs and shut herself up in her room.

⁴ *J'êtê toujours avec vô la même qu'autre fois.*

At times she would look upon me with strange eyes. Since that time I have often said to myself that those who are condemned to death must look thus when they are informed that their last day has come. In her eye there lurked a species of folly, a folly at once mysterious and violent; and even more; a fever, an exasperated desire, impatient, and at once incapable of being realized and unrealizable!

Nay, it seemed to me that there was also going on within her a combat, in which her heart struggled against an unknown force that she wished to overcome, and even, perhaps, something else. But what could I know? What could I know?

III

This was indeed a singular revelation.

For some time I had commenced to work, as soon as daylight appeared, on a picture, the subject of which was as follows:

A deep ravine, steep banks, dominated by two declivities, lined with brambles and long rows of trees, hidden, drowned in that milky vapor, clad in that musty robe which sometimes floats over valleys, at break of day. And at the extreme end of that thick and transparent fog, you see coming or, rather already come, a human couple, a stripling and a maiden, embraced, inter-laced, she, with head leaning on him, he, inclined towards her, and lips to lips.

A first ray of the sun glistening through the branches, has traversed that fog of the dawn, has illuminated it with a rosy reflection, just behind the rustic lovers, on which can be seen their vague shadows in a clear silver. It was well done, yes, indeed, well done.

I was working on the declivity which led to the Val d'Etretat. This particular morning, I had, by chance, the sort of floating vapor, which was necessary for my purpose. Suddenly, an object appeared in front of me, a kind of phantom; it was Miss Harriet. On seeing me, she took to flight. But I called after her saying: "Come here, come here, Mademoiselle, I have a nice little picture for you."

She came forward, though with seeming reluctance. I handed her my sketch. She said nothing, but stood for a long time, motionless, regarding it; and, suddenly, she burst into tears. She wept spasmodically, like men who have been struggling hard against shedding tears, but who can do so no longer, and abandon themselves to grief, though still resisting. I got up, trembling, moved myself by the sight of a sorrow I did not comprehend, and I took her by the hand with an impulse of brusque affection, a true French impulse which impels one quicker than one thinks.

She let her hands rest in mine for a few seconds, and I felt them quiver as if her whole nervous system was twisting and turning. Then she withdrew her hands abruptly, or, rather tore them out of mine.

I recognized that shiver, as soon as I had felt it; I was deceived in nothing. Ah! the live shiver of a woman, whether she is fifteen or fifty years of age, whether she is one of the people or one of the *monde*, goes so straight to my heart that I never had any compunctions in understanding it!

Her whole frail being trembled, vibrated, swooned. I knew it. She walked away before I had time to say a word, leaving me as surprised as if I had witnessed a miracle, and as troubled as if I had committed a crime.

I did not go in to breakfast. I went to make a tour on the banks of the Falaise, feeling that I would just as lieve weep as laugh, looking on the adventure as both comic and deplorable, and my position as ridiculous, fain to believe that I had lost my head.

I asked myself what I ought to do. I debated with myself whether I ought to take my leave of the place and almost immediately my resolution was formed.

Somewhat sad and perplexed, I wandered about until dinner time, and I entered the farm house just when the soup had been served up.

I sat down at the table, as usual. Miss Harriet was there, munching away solemnly, without speaking to anyone, without even lifting eyes. She wore, however, her usual expression, both of countenance and manner.

I waited, patiently, till the meal had been finished, when, turning towards the landlady I said: "See here, Madame Lecacheur, it will not be long now before I shall have to take my leave of you."

The good woman, at once surprised and troubled, replied in a quivering voice: "My dear sir, what is it I have just heard you say? you are going to leave us, after I have become so much accustomed to you?"

I regarded Miss Harriet from the corner of my eye. Her countenance did not change in the least; but the under-servant came towards me with eyes wide open. She was a fat girl, of about eighteen years of age, rosy, fresh, as strong as a horse, yet possessing the rare attribute in one in her position – she was very neat and clean. I had embraced her at odd times, in out of the way corners, in the manner of a mountain guide, nothing more.

The dinner being at length over, I went to smoke my pipe under the apple trees, walking up and down at my ease, from one end of the court to the other. All the reflections which I had made during the day, the strange discovery of the morning, that grotesque love and passionate attachment for me, the recollections which that revelation had suddenly called up, recollections at once charming and perplexing, perhaps, also, that look which the servant had cast on me at the announcement of my departure – all these things, mixed up and combined, put me now in a jolly humor of body, recalling the tickling sensation of kisses on the lips, and in the veins, something which urged me on to commit some folly.

Night having come on, casting its dark shadows under the trees, I descried Céleste, who had gone to shut the hen coops, at the other end of the enclosure. I darted towards her, running so noiselessly that she heard nothing, and as she got up from closing the small traps by which the chickens got in and out, I clasped her in my arms and rained on her coarse, fat face a shower of kisses. She made a struggle, laughing all the same, as she was accustomed to do in such circumstances. Wherefore did I suddenly loose my grip of her? Why did I at once experience a shock? What was it that I heard behind me?

It was Miss Harriet who had come upon us, who had seen us, and who stood in front of us, as motionless as a specter. Then she disappeared in the darkness.

I was ashamed, embarrassed, more desperate at having been surprised by her than if she had caught me committing some criminal act.

I slept badly that night; I was completely enervated and haunted by sad thoughts. I seemed to hear loud weeping; but in this I was no doubt deceived. Moreover, I thought several times that I heard some one walking up and down in the house, and who had opened my door from the outside.

Towards morning, I was overcome by fatigue and sleep seized on me. I got up late and did not go downstairs until breakfast time, being still in a bewildered state, not knowing what kind of face to put on.

No one had seen Miss Harriet. We waited for her at table, but she did not appear. At length Mother Lecacheur went to her room. The English woman had gone out. She must have set out at break of day, as she was wont to do, in order to see the sun rise.

Nobody seemed astonished at this and we began to eat in silence.

The weather was hot, very hot, one of those still, boiling days, when not a leaf stirs. The table had been placed out of doors, under an apple tree; and from time to time Sapeur had gone to the cellar to draw a jug of cider, everybody was so thirsty. Céleste brought the dishes from the kitchen, a ragout of mutton with potatoes, a cold rabbit and a salad. Afterwards she placed before us a dish of strawberries, the first of the season.

As I wanted to wash and refresh these, I begged the servant to go and bring a pitcher of cold water.

In about five minutes she returned, declaring that the well was dry. She had lowered the pitcher to the full extent of the cord, and had touched the bottom, but on drawing the pitcher up again, it was empty. Mother Lecacheur, anxious to examine the thing for herself, went and looked down the hole. She returned announcing that one could see clearly something in the well, something altogether unusual. But this, no doubt, was pottles of straw, which, out of spite, had been cast down it by a neighbor.

I wished also to look down the well, hoping I would be able to clear up the mystery, and perched myself close to its brink. I perceived, indistinctly, a white object. What could it be? I then conceived

the idea of lowering a lantern at the end of a cord. When I did so, the yellow flame danced on the layers of stone and gradually became clearer. All the four of us were leaning over the opening, Sapeur and Céleste having now joined us. The lantern rested on a black and white, indistinct mass, singular, incomprehensible. Sapeur exclaimed:

"It is a horse. I see the hoofs. It must have escaped from the meadow, during the night, and fallen in headlong."

But, suddenly, a cold shiver attacked my spine, I first recognized a foot, then a clothed limb; the body was entire, but the other limb had disappeared under the water.

I groaned and trembled so violently that the light of the lamp danced hither and thither over the object, discovering a slipper.

"It is a woman! who ... who ... can it be? It is Miss Harriet."

Sapeur alone did not manifest horror. He had witnessed many such scenes in Africa.

Mother Lecacheur and Céleste began to scream and to shriek, and ran away.

But it was necessary to recover the corpse of the dead. I attached the valet securely by the loins to the end of the pulley-rope, and I lowered him slowly, and watched him disappear in the darkness. In the one hand he had a lantern, and held on by the rope with the other. Soon I recognized his voice, which seemed to come from the center of the earth, crying:

"Stop."

I then saw him fish something out of the water. It was the other limb. He then bound the two feet together, and shouted anew:

"Haul up."

I commenced to wind him up, but I felt my arms crack, my muscles twitch, and I was in terror lest I should let the man fall to the bottom. When his head appeared at the brink, I asked:

"Well, what is it?" as though I only expected that he would inform me of what he had discovered at the bottom.

We both got on to the stone slab at the edge of the well, and, face to face, we hoisted the body.

Mother Lecacheur and Céleste watched us from a distance, concealed from view behind the wall of the house. When they saw, issuing from the hole, the black slippers and the white stockings of the drowned person, they disappeared.

Sapeur seized the ankles of the poor chaste woman, and we drew it up, sloping, as it was, in the most immodest posture. The head was shocking to look at, being bruised and black; and the long, gray hair, hanging down tangled and disordered.

"In the name of all that is holy, how lean she is!" exclaimed Sapeur, in a contemptuous tone.

We carried her into the room, and as the women did not put in an appearance, I, with the assistance of the stable lad, dressed the corpse for burial.

I washed her disfigured face. To the touch of my hand, an eye was slightly opened, which regarded me with that pale regard, with that cold look, with that terrible look that corpses have, which seemed to come from beyond life. I plaited up, as well as I could, her disheveled hair, and I adjusted on her forehead, a novel and singularly formed lock. Then I took off her dripping wet garments, baring, not without a feeling of shame, as though I had been guilty of some profanation, her shoulders and her chest, and her long arms, as slim as the twigs of branches.

I next went to fetch some flowers, corn poppies, blue beetles, marguerites, and fresh and perfumed herbs, with which to strew her funeral couch.

I being the only person near her, it was necessary for me to perform the usual ceremonies. In a letter found in her pocket, written at the last moment, it was ordered that her body was to be buried in the village in which she had passed the last days of her life. A frightful thought then pressed on my heart. Was it not on my account that she wished to be laid to rest in this place?

Towards the evening, all the female gossips of the locality came to view the remains of the defunct; but I would not allow a single person to enter; I wanted to be alone; and I watched by the corpse the whole night.

I looked at the corpse by the flickering lights of the candles, this miserable woman, wholly unknown, who had died lamentably and so far away from home. Had she left no friends, no relations behind her? What had her infancy been? What had been her life? Whence had she hailed thither thus, all alone, wanderer, lost like a dog driven from its home? What secrets of sufferings and despair were sealed up in that disagreeable body, in that spent, tarnished body – tarnished during the whole of its existence, that impenetrable envelope which had driven her far away from all affection, from all love?

How many unhappy beings there are! I felt that there weighed upon that human creature the eternal injustice of implacable nature! It was all over with her, without her ever having experienced, perhaps, that which sustains the greatest outcasts – to wit, the hope of being loved for once! Otherwise, why should she thus have concealed herself, fled from the face of the others? Why did she love everything so tenderly and so passionately, everything living that was not a man?

I recognized, also, that she believed in a God, and that she hoped to receive compensation from the latter for all the miseries she had endured. She had begun now to decompose, and to become, in turn, a plant. She who had blossomed in the sun, was now to be eaten up by the cattle, carried away in seeds, and flesh of beasts, would become again human flesh. But that which is called the soul, had been extinguished at the bottom of the dark well. She suffered no longer. She had changed her life for that of others yet to be born.

Hours passed away in this silent and sinister communion with the dead. A pale light at length announced the dawn of a new day, when a bright ray glistened on the bed, shed a dash of fire on the bed clothes and on her hands. This was the hour she had so much loved, when the awakened birds began to sing in the trees.

I opened the window to its fullest extent, I drew back the curtains, so that the whole heavens might look in upon us, and bending towards the glassy corpse, I took in my hands the mutilated head; then, slowly, without terror or disgust, I imprinted a kiss, a long kiss, upon those lips, which had never before received any.

Léon Chenal remained silent. The women wept. We heard on the box seat the Count d'Etraille, who blows his nose, from time to time. The coachman alone had gone to sleep. The horses, which felt no longer the sting of the whip, had slowed their pace and dragged along softly, and the brake, hardly advancing at all, became suddenly torpid, as if it had been charged with sorrow.

FRANCESCA AND CARLOTTA RONDOLI

I

No (said my friend Charles Jouvent), I do not know Italy; I started to see it thoroughly twice, and each time I was stopped at the frontier and could not manage to get any further. And yet my two attempts gave me a charming idea of the manners of that beautiful country. I must, however, some time or other visit its cities, as well as the museums and works of art with which it abounds. I will also make another attempt to penetrate into the interior, which I have not yet succeeded in doing.

You don't understand me, so I will explain myself: In the spring of 1874 I was seized with an irresistible desire to see Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples. I am, as you know, not a great traveler; it appears to me a useless and fatiguing business. Nights spent in a train, the disturbed slumbers of the railway carriage, with the attendant headache, and stiffness in every limb, the sudden waking in that rolling box, the unwashed feeling with your eyes and hair full of dust, the smell of the coal on which one's lungs feed, those bad dinners in the draughty refreshment rooms are, according to my ideas, a horrible way of beginning a pleasure trip.

After this introduction by the express, we have the miseries of the hotel; of some great hotel full of people, and yet so empty; the strange room, and the dubious bed! I am most particular about my bed; it is the sanctuary of life. We intrust our almost naked and fatigued bodies to it so that they may be reanimated by reposing between soft sheets and feathers.

There we find the most delightful hours of our existence, the hours of love and of sleep. The bed is sacred, and should be respected, venerated, and loved by us as the best and most delightful of our earthly possessions.

I cannot lift up the sheets of an hotel bed without a shiver of disgust. What have its occupants been doing in it the night before? Perhaps dirty, revolting people have slept in it. I begin, then, to think of all the horrible people with whom one rubs shoulders every day, people with suspicious-looking skin which makes one think of the feet and all the rest! I call to mind those who carry about with them the sickening smell of garlic or of humanity. I think of those who are deformed and purulent, of the perspiration emanating from the sick, and of everything that is ugly and filthy in man.

And all this, perhaps, in the bed in which I am going to sleep! The mere idea of it makes me feel ill as I get in.

And then the hotel dinners – those dreary *table d'hôte* dinners in the midst of all sorts of extraordinary people, or else those terrible solitary dinners at a small table in a restaurant, feebly lighted up by a wretched composite candle under a shade.

Again, those terribly dull evenings in some unknown town! Do you know anything more wretched than when it is getting dark on such an occasion? One goes about as if almost in a dream, looking at faces which one has never seen before and will never see again; listening to people talking about matters which are quite indifferent to you in a language that perhaps you do not understand. You have a terrible feeling, almost as if you were lost, and you continue to walk on so as not to be obliged to return to the hotel, where you would feel more lost still because you are *at home*, in a home which belongs to anyone who can pay for it, and at last you fall into a chair of some well-lit café, whose gilding and lights overwhelm you a thousand times more than the shadows in the streets. Then you feel so abominably lonely sitting in front of the glass of flat *bock*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.