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Zut, and Other Parisians

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Zut, and Other Parisians

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C. F. G

Mon cher ami:

En souvenir de maints beaux jours dont tu as partagé l'allégresse: en attendant d'autres à venir: de ceux-là encore dont tu as adouci la souffrance et l'ennui: par reconnaissance de conseils qu'on n'oublie jamais et de prévoyances dont on se souvient toujours: je te dédie les contes suivants. Tu y retrouveras beaucoup d'amis et peut-être autant d'inconnus: tu les acceuilleras assurément, les uns et les autres, avec cette belle hospitalité qui ne s'est jamais démentie, et qui m'a rendu et me rendra encore – espérons-le! – ton obligé et reconnaissant

G. W. C.

Zut

SIDE by side, on the avenue de la Grande Armée, stand the épicerie of Jean-Baptiste Caille and the salle de coiffure of Hippolyte Sergeot, and between these two there is a great gulf fixed, the which has come to be through the acerbity of Alexandrine Caille (according to Espérance Sergeot), through the duplicity of Espérance Sergeot (according to Alexandrine Caille). But the veritable root of all evil is Zut, and Zut sits smiling in Jean-Baptiste's doorway, and cares naught for anything in the world, save the sunlight and her midday meal.

When Hippolyte found himself in a position to purchase the salle de coiffure, he gave evidence of marked acumen by uniting himself in the holy – and civil – bonds of matrimony with the retiring patron's daughter, whose dot ran into the coveted five figures, and whose heart, said Hippolyte, was as good as her face was pretty, which, even by the unprejudiced, was acknowledged to be forcible commendation. The installation of the new establishment was a nine days' wonder in the quartier. It is a busy thoroughfare at its western end, is the avenue de la Grande Armée, crowded with bicyclists and with a multitude of creatures fearfully and wonderfully clad, who do incomprehensible things in connection with motor-carriages. Also there are big cafés in plenty, whose waiters must be smoothly shaven: and moreover, at the time when Hippolyte came into his own, the porte Maillot

station of the Métropolitain had already pushed its entrée and sortie up through the soil, not a hundred metres from his door, where they stood like atrocious yellow tulips, art nouveau, breathing people out and in by thousands. There was no lack of possible custom. The problem was to turn possible into probable, and probable into permanent; and here the seven wits and the ten thousand francs of Espérance came prominently to the fore. She it was who sounded the progressive note, which is half the secret of success.

"Pour attirer les gens," she said, with her arms akimbo, "il faut d'abord les épater."

In her creed all that was worth doing at all was worth doing gloriously. So, under her guidance, Hippolyte journeyed from shop to shop in the faubourg St. Antoine, and spent hours of impassioned argument with carpenters and decorators. In the end, the salle de coiffure was glorified by fresh paint without and within, and by the addition of a long mirror in a gilt frame, and a complicated apparatus of gleaming nickel-plate, which went by the imposing title of appareil antiseptique, and the acquisition of which was duly proclaimed by a special placard that swung at right angles to the door. The shop was rechristened, too, and the black and white sign across its front which formerly bore the simple inscription "Kilbert, Coiffeur," now blazoned abroad the vastly more impressive legend "Salon Malakoff." The window shelves fairly groaned beneath their burden of soaps, toilet waters, and perfumery, a string of bright yellow sponges

occupied each corner of the window, and, through the agency of white enamel letters on the pane itself, public attention was drawn to the apparently contradictory facts that English was spoken and "schampoing" given within. Then Hippolyte engaged two assistants, and clad them in white duck jackets, and his wife fabricated a new blouse of blue silk, and seated herself behind the desk with an engaging smile. The enterprise was fairly launched, and experience was not slow in proving the theories of Espérance to be well founded. The quartier was épaté from the start, and took with enthusiasm the bait held forth. The affairs of the Salon Malakoff prospered prodigiously.

But there is a serpent in every Eden, and in that of the Sergeot this rôle was assumed by Alexandrine Caille. The worthy épicier himself was of too torpid a temperament to fall a victim to the gnawing tooth of envy, but in the soul of his wife the launch, and, what was worse, the immediate prosperity of the Salon Malakoff, bred dire resentment. Her own establishment had grown grimy with the passage of time, and the annual profits displayed a constant and disturbing tendency toward complete evaporation, since the coming of the big cafés, and the resultant subversion of custom to the wholesale dealers. This persistent narrowing of the former appreciable gap between purchase and selling price rankled in Alexandrine's mind, but her misguided efforts to maintain the percentage of profit by recourse to inferior qualities only made bad worse, and, even as the Sergeot were steering the Salon Malakoff forth upon the waters of prosperity,

there were nightly conferences in the household next door, at which impending ruin presided, and exasperation sounded the keynote of every sentence. The resplendent façade of Hippolyte's establishment, the tide of custom which poured into and out of his door, the loudly expressed admiration of his ability and thrift, which greeted her ears on every side, and, finally, the sight of Espérance, fresh, smiling, and prosperous, behind her little counter, – all these were as gall and wormwood to Alexandrine, brooding over her accumulating debts and her decreasing earnings, among her dusty stacks of jars and boxes. Once she had called upon her neighbor, somewhat for courtesy's sake, but more for curiosity's, and since then the agreeable scent of violet and lilac perfumery dwelt always in her memory, and mirages of scrupulously polished nickel and glass hung always before her eyes. The air of her own shop was heavy with the pungent odors of raw vegetables, cheeses, and dried fish, and no brilliance redeemed the sardine and biscuit boxes which surrounded her. Life became a bitter thing to Alexandrine Caille, for if nothing is more gratifying than one's own success, surely nothing is less so than that of one's neighbor. Moreover, her visit had never been returned, and this again was fuel for her rage.

But the sharpest thorn in her flesh – and even in that of her phlegmatic husband – was the base desertion to the enemy's camp of Abel Flique. In the days when Madame Caille was unmarried, and when her ninety kilos were fifty still, Abel had been youngest commis in the very shop over which she now held

sway, and the most devoted suitor in all her train. Even after his prowess in the black days of '71 had won him the attention of the civil authorities, and a grateful municipality had transformed the grocer-soldier into a guardian of law and order, he still hung upon the favor of his heart's first love, and only gave up the struggle when Jean-Baptiste bore off the prize and enthroned her in state as presiding genius of his newly acquired épicerie. Later, an unwittingly kindly prefect had transferred Abel to the seventeenth arrondissement, and so the old friendship was picked up where it had been dropped, and the ruddy-faced agent found it both convenient and agreeable to drop in frequently at Madame Caille's on his way home, and exchange a few words of reminiscence or banter for a box of sardines or a minute package of tea. But, with the deterioration in his old friends' wares, and the almost simultaneous appearance of the Salon Malakoff, his loyalty wavered. Flique sampled the advantages of Hippolyte's establishment, and, being won over thereby, returned again and again. His hearty laugh came to be heard almost daily in the salle de coiffure, and because he was a brave homme and a good customer, who did not stand upon a question of a few sous, but allowed Hippolyte to work his will, and trim and curl and perfume him to his heart's content, there was always a welcome for him, and a smile from Madame Sergeot, and occasionally a little present of brillantine or perfumery, for friendship's sake, and because it is well to have the good-will of the all-powerful police.

From her window Madame Caille observed the comings and goings of Abel with a resentful eye. It was rarely now that he glanced into the épicerie as he passed, and still more rarely that he greeted his former flame with a stiff nod. Once she had hailed him from the doorway, sardines in hand, but he had replied that he was pressed for time, and had passed rapidly on. Then indeed did blackness descend upon the soul of Alexandrine, and in her deepest consciousness she vowed to have revenge. Neither the occasion nor the method was as yet clear to her, but she pursed her lips ominously, and bided her time.

In the existence of Madame Caille there was one emphatic consolation for all misfortunes, the which was none other than Zut, a white angora cat of surpassing beauty and prodigious size. She had come into Alexandrine's possession as a kitten, and, what with much eating and an inherent distaste for exercise, had attained her present proportions and her superb air of unconcern. It was from the latter that she derived her name, the which, in Parisian argot, at once means everything and nothing, but is chiefly taken to signify complete and magnificent indifference to all things mundane and material: and in the matter of indifference Zut was past-mistress. Even for Madame Caille herself, who fed her with the choicest morsels from her own plate, brushed her fine fur with excessive care, and addressed caressing remarks to her at minute intervals throughout the day, Zut manifested a lack of interest that amounted to contempt. As she basked in the warm sun at the shop door, the round face of her mistress beamed

upon her from the little desk, and the voice of her mistress sent fulsome flattery winging toward her on the heavy air. Was she beautiful, mon Dieu! In effect, all that one could dream of the most beautiful! And her eyes, of a blue like the heaven, were they not wise and calm? Mon Dieu, yes! It was a cat among thousands, a mimi almost divine.

Jean-Baptiste, appealed to for confirmation of these statements, replied that it was so. There was no denying that this was a magnificent beast. And of a chic. And caressing – (which was exaggeration). And of an affection – (which was doubtful). And courageous – (which was wholly untrue.) Mazette, yes! A cat of cats! And was the boy to be the whole afternoon in delivering a cheese, he demanded of her? And Madame Caille would challenge him to ask her that – but it was a good, great beast all the same! – and so bury herself again in her accounts, until her attention was once more drawn to Zut, and fresh flattery poured forth. For all of this Zut cared less than nothing. In the midst of her mistress's sweetest cajolery, she simply closed her sapphire eyes, with an inexpressibly eloquent air of weariness, or turned to the intricacies of her toilet, as who should say: "Continue. I am listening. But it is unimportant."

But long familiarity with her disdain had deprived it of any sting, so far as Alexandrine was concerned. Passive indifference she could suffer. It was only when Zut proceeded to an active manifestation of ingratitude that she inflicted an irremediable wound. Returning from her marketing one morning, Madame

Caille discovered her graceless favorite seated complacently in the doorway of the Salon Malakoff, and, in a paroxysm of indignation, bore down upon her, and snatched her to her breast.

"Unhappy one!" she cried, planting herself in full view of Espérance, and, while raining the letter of her reproach upon the truant, contriving to apply its spirit wholly to her neighbor. "What hast thou done? Is it that thou desertest me for strangers, who may destroy thee? Name of a name, hast thou no heart? They would steal thee from me – and above all, *now*! Well then, no! One shall see if such things are permitted! Vagabond!" And with this parting shot, which passed harmlessly over the head of the offender, and launched itself full at Madame Sergeot, the outraged épicière flounced back into her own domain, where, turning, she threatened the empty air with a passionate gesture.

"Vagabond!" she repeated. "Good-for-nothing! Is it not enough to have robbed me of my friends, that you must steal my child as well? We shall see!" – then, suddenly softening – "Thou art beautiful, and good, and wise. Mon Dieu, if I should lose thee, and above all, *now*!"

Now there existed a marked, if unvoiced, community of feeling between Espérance and her resentful neighbor, for the former's passion for cats was more consuming even than the latter's. She had long cherished the dream of possessing a white angora, and when, that morning, of her own accord, Zut stepped into the Salon Malakoff, she was received with demonstrations even warmer than those to which she had long

since become accustomed. And, whether it was the novelty of her surroundings, or merely some unwonted instinct which made her unusually susceptible, her habitual indifference then and there gave place to animation, and her satisfaction was vented in her long, appreciative purr, wherewith it was not once a year that she vouchsafed to gladden her owner's heart. Espérance hastened to prepare a saucer of milk, and, when this was exhausted, added a generous portion of fish, and Zut then made a tour of the shop, rubbing herself against the chair-legs, and receiving the homage of customers and duck-clad assistants alike. Flique, his ruddy face screwed into a mere knot of features, as Hippolyte worked violet hair-tonic into his brittle locks, was moved to satire by the apparition.

"Tiens! It is with the cat as with the clients. All the world forsakes the Caille."

Strangely enough, the wrathful words of Alexandrine, as she snatched her darling from the doorway, awoke in the mind of Espérance her first suspicion of this smouldering resentment. Absorbed in the launching of her husband's affairs, and constantly employed in the making of change and with the keeping of her simple accounts, she had had no time to bestow upon her neighbors, and, even had her attention been free, she could hardly have been expected to deduce the rancor of Madame Caille from the evidence at hand. But even if she had been able to ignore the significance of that furious outburst at her very door, its meaning had not been lost upon the others, and

her own half-formed conviction was speedily confirmed.

"What has she?" cried Hippolyte, pausing in the final stage of his operations upon the highly perfumed Flique.

"Do I know?" replied his wife with a shrug. "She thinks I stole her cat —*I!*"

"Quite simply, she hates you," put in Flique. "And why not? She is old, and fat, and her business is taking itself off, like that! You are young and" – with a bow, as he rose – "beautiful, and your affairs march to a marvel. She is jealous, c'est tout! It is a bad character, that."

"But, mon Dieu!" —

"But what does that say to you? Let her go her way, she and her cat. Au r'voir, 'sieurs, 'dame."

And, rattling a couple of sous into the little urn reserved for tips, the policeman took his departure, amid a chorus of "Merci, m'sieu', au r'voir, m'sieu'," from Hippolyte and his duck-clad aids.

But what he had said remained behind. All day Madame Sergeot pondered upon the incident of the morning and Abel Flique's comments thereupon, seeking out some more plausible reason for this hitherto unsuspected enmity than the mere contrast between her material conditions and those of Madame Caille seemed to her to afford. For, to a natural placidity of temperament, which manifested itself in a reluctance to incur the displeasure of any one, had been lately added in Espérance a shrewd commercial instinct, which told her that the fortunes of

the Salon Malakoff might readily be imperiled by an unfriendly tongue. In the quartier, gossip spread quickly and took deep root. It was quite imaginably within the power of Madame Caille to circulate such rumors of Sergeot dishonesty as should draw their lately won custom from them and leave but empty chairs and discontent where now all was prosperity and satisfaction.

Suddenly there came to her the memory of that visit which she had never returned. Mon Dieu! and was not that reason enough? She, the youngest patronne in the quartier, to ignore deliberately the friendly call of a neighbor! At least it was not too late to make amends. So, when business lagged a little in the late afternoon, Madame Sergeot slipped from her desk, and, after a furtive touch to her hair, went in next door to pour oil upon the troubled waters.

Madame Caille, throned at her counter, received her visitor with unexampled frigidity.

"Ah, it is you," she said. "You have come to make some purchases, no doubt."

"Eggs, madame," answered her visitor, disconcerted, but tactfully accepting the hint.

"The best quality – or – ?" demanded Alexandrine, with the suggestion of a sneer.

"The best, evidently, madame. Six, if you please. Spring weather at last, it would seem."

To this generality the other made no reply. Descending from her stool, she blew sharply into a small paper bag, thereby distending it into a miniature balloon, and began selecting the

eggs from a basket, holding each one to the light, and then dusting it with exaggerated care before placing it in the bag. While she was thus employed Zut advanced from a secluded corner, and, stretching her fore legs slowly to their utmost length, greeted her acquaintance of the morning with a yawn. Finding in the cat an outlet for her embarrassment, Espérance made another effort to give the interview a friendly turn.

"He is beautiful, madame, your matou," she said.

"It is a female," replied Madame Caille, turning abruptly from the basket, "and she does not care for strangers."

This second snub was not calculated to encourage neighborly overtures, but Madame Sergeot had felt herself to be in the wrong, and was not to be so readily repulsed.

"We do not see Monsieur Caille at the Salon Malakoff," she continued. "We should be enchanted" —

"My husband shaves himself," retorted Alexandrine, with renewed dignity.

"But his hair" – ventured Espérance.

"*I* cut it!" thundered her foe.

Here Madame Sergeot made a false move. She laughed. Then, in confusion, and striving, too late, to retrieve herself – "Pardon, madame," she added, "but it seems droll to me, that. After all, ten sous is a sum so small" —

"All the world, unfortunately," broke in Madame Caille, "has not the wherewithal to buy mirrors, and pay itself frescoes and appareils antiseptiques! The eggs are twenty-four sous – but we

do not pride ourselves upon our eggs. Perhaps you had better seek them elsewhere for the future!"

For sole reply Madame Sergeot had recourse to her expressive shrug, and then laying two francs upon the counter, and gathering up the sous which Alexandrine rather hurled at than handed her, she took her way toward the door with all the dignity at her command. But Madame Caille, feeling her snub to have been insufficient, could not let her go without a final thrust.

"Perhaps your husband will be so amiable as to shampoo my cat!" she shouted. "She seems to like your 'Salon'!"

But Espérance, while for concord's sake inclined to tolerate all rudeness to herself, was not prepared to hear Hippolyte insulted, and so, wheeling at the doorway, flung all her resentment into two words.

"Mal élevée!"

"Gueuse!" screamed Alexandrine from the desk. And so they parted.

Now, even at this stage, an armed truce might still have been preserved, had Zut been content with the evil she had wrought, and not thought it incumbent upon her further to embitter a quarrel that was a very pretty quarrel as it stood. But, whether it was that the milk and fish of the Salon Malakoff lay sweeter upon her memory than any of the familiar dainties of the épicerie Caille, or that, by her unknowable feline instinct, she was irresistibly drawn toward the scent of violet and lilac brillantine, her first visit to the Sergeot was soon repeated, and from this visit

other visits grew, until it was almost a daily occurrence for her to saunter slowly into the salle de coiffure, and there receive the food and homage which were rendered as her undisputed due. For, whatever was the bitterness of Espérance toward Madame Caille, no part thereof descended upon Zut. On the contrary, at each visit her heart was more drawn toward the sleek angora, and her desire but strengthened to possess her peer. But white angoras are a luxury, and an expensive one at that, and, however prosperous the Salon Malakoff might be, its proprietors were not as yet in a position to squander eighty francs upon a whim. So, until profits should mount higher, Madame Sergeot was forced to content herself with the voluntary visits of her neighbor's pet.

Madame Caille did not yield her rights of sovereignty without a struggle. On the occasion of Zut's third visit, she descended upon the Salon Malakoff, robed in wrath, and found the adored one contentedly feeding on fish in the very bosom of the family Sergeot. An appalling scene ensued.

"If," she stormed, crimson of countenance, and threatening Espérance with her fist, "if you *must* entice my cat from her home, at *least* I will thank you not to give her food. I provide all that is necessary; and, for the rest, how do I know what is in that saucer?"

And she surveyed the duck-clad assistants and the astounded customers with tremendous scorn.

"You others," she added, "I ask you, is it just? These people take my cat, and feed her —*feed* her – with I know not what! It

is overwhelming, unheard of – and, above all, *now*!"

But here the peaceful Hippolyte played trumps.

"It is the privilege of the vulgar," he cried, advancing, razor in hand, "when they are at home, to insult their neighbors, but here – no! My wife has told me of you and of your sayings. Beware! or I shall arrange your affair for you! Go! you and your cat!"

And, by way of emphasis, he fairly kicked Zut into her astonished owner's arms. He was magnificent, was Hippolyte!

This anecdote, duly elaborated, was poured into the ears of Abel Flique an hour later, and that evening he paid his first visit in many months to Madame Caille. She greeted him effusively, being willing to pardon all the past for the sake of regaining this powerful friend. But the glitter in the agent's eye would have cowed a fiercer spirit than hers.

"You amuse yourself," he said sternly, looking straight at her over the handful of raisins which she tendered him, "by wearying my friends. I counsel you to take care. One does not sell inferior eggs in Paris without hearing of it sooner or later. I know more than I have told, but not more than I *can* tell, if I choose."

"Our ancient friendship" – faltered Alexandrine, touched in a vulnerable spot.

" – preserves you thus far," added Flique, no less unmoved. "Beware how you abuse it!"

And so the calls of Zut were no longer disturbed.

But the rover spirit is progressive, and thus short visits became long visits, and finally the angora spent whole nights in the Salon

Malakoff, where a box and a bit of carpet were provided for her. And one fateful morning the meaning of Madame Caille's significant words "and above all, *now*!" was made clear.

The prosperity of Hippolyte's establishment had grown apace, so that, on the morning in question, the three chairs were occupied, and yet other customers awaited their turn. The air was laden with violet and lilac. A stout chauffeur, in a leather suit, thickly coated with dust, was undergoing a shampoo at the hands of one of the duck-clad, and, under the skillfully plied razor of the other, the virgin down slid from the lips and chin of a slim and somewhat startled youth, while from a vaporizer Hippolyte played a fine spray of perfumed water upon the ruddy countenance of Abel Flique. It was an eloquent moment, eminently fitted for some dramatic incident, and that dramatic incident Zut supplied. She advanced slowly and with an air of conscious dignity from the corner where was her carpeted box, and in her mouth was a limp something, which, when deposited in the immediate centre of the Salon Malakoff, resolved itself into an angora kitten, as white as snow!

"Epatant!" said Flique, mopping his perfumed chin. And so it was.

There was an immediate investigation of Zut's quarters, which revealed four other kittens, but each of these was marked with black or tan. It was the flower of the flock with which the proud mother had won her public.

"And they are all yours!" cried Flique, when the question

of ownership arose. "Mon Dieu, yes! There was such a case not a month ago, in the eighth arrondissement – a concierge of the avenue Hoche who made a contrary claim. But the courts decided against her. They are all yours, Madame Sergeot. My felicitations!"

Now, as we have said, Madame Sergeot was of a placid temperament which sought not strife. But the unprovoked insults of Madame Caille had struck deep, and, after all, she was but human.

So it was that, seated at her little desk, she composed the following masterpiece of satire:

> Chère Madame, – We send you back your cat, and the others – all but one. One kitten was of a pure white, more beautiful even than its mother. As we have long desired a white angora, we keep this one as a souvenir of you. We regret that we do not see the means of accepting the kind offer you were so amiable as to make us. We fear that we shall not find time to shampoo your cat, as we shall be so busy taking care of our own. Monsieur Flique will explain the rest.
>
> We pray you to accept, madame, the assurance of our distinguished consideration,
>
> *Hippolyte and Espérance Sergeot.*

It was Abel Flique who conveyed the above epistle, and Zut, and four of Zut's kittens, to Alexandrine Caille, and, when that wrathful person would have rent him with tooth and nail, it was Abel Flique who laid his finger on his lip, and said, —

"Concern yourself with the superior kitten, madame, and I concern myself with the inferior eggs!"

To which Alexandrine made no reply. After Flique had taken his departure, she remained speechless for five consecutive minutes for the first time in the whole of her waking existence, gazing at the spot at her feet where sprawled the white angora, surrounded by her mottled offspring. Even when the first shock of her defeat had passed, she simply heaved a deep sigh, and uttered two words, —

"Oh, *Zut*!"

The which, in Parisian argot, at once means everything and nothing.

Caffiard
DEUS EX MACHINA

THE studio was tucked away in the extreme upper northeast corner of 13 ter rue Visconti, higher even than that cinquième, dearly beloved of the impecunious, and of whoso, between stairs and street odors, chooses the lesser evil, and is more careful of lungs than legs. After the six long flights had been achieved, around a sharp corner and up a little winding stairway, was the door which bore the name of Pierre Vauquelin. Inside, after stumbling along a narrow hall, as black as Erebus, and floundering through a curtained doorway, one came abruptly into the studio, and, in all probability, fell headlong over a little rattan stool, or an easel, or a box of paints, and was picked up by the host, and dusted, and put to rights, and made much of, like a bumped child. Thus restored to equanimity one was better able to appreciate what Pierre called la Boîte.

The Box was a room eight metres in width by ten in length, with a skylight above, and a great, square window in the north wall, which latter sloped inward from floor to ceiling, by reason of the mansarde roof. Of what might be called furniture there was but little, a Norman cupboard of black wood, heavily carved, a long divan, contrived from various packing boxes and well-worn rugs, a large, square table, a half dozen chairs, three easels,

and a repulsive little stove with an interminable pipe, which, with its many twists and turns, gave one the impression of a thick, black snake, that had, a moment before, been swaying about in the room, and had suddenly found a hole in the roof through which to thrust its head.

But of minor things the Box was full to overflowing. The Norman cupboard was crammed with an assortment of crockery, much of it sadly nicked and cracked, the divan was strewn with boxes of broken pastels, paint-brushes, and palettes coated with dried colors, the table littered with papers, sketches, and books, and every chair had its own particular trap for the unwary, in the form of thumb-tacks or a glass half full of cloudy water: and in the midst of this chaos, late on a certain mid-May afternoon, stood the painter himself, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his corduroy trousers, and his back turned upon the portrait upon which he had been at work. It was evident that something untoward was in the air, because Pierre, who always smoked, was not smoking, and Pierre, who never scowled, was scowling.

In the Quartier – that Quartier which alone, of them all, is spelt with a capital Q – there was, in ordinary, no gayer, more happy-go-lucky type than this same Pierre. He lived, as did a thousand of his kind, on eighty sous a day (there were those who lived on less, pardi!), and breakfasted, and dined, at that, – yes, and paid himself an absinthe at the Deux Magots at six o'clock, and a package of green cigarettes, into the bargain. For

the rest of the time, he was understood to be working on a portrait in his studio, and, what is more surprising, often was. There was nothing remarkable about Pierre's portraits, except that occasionally he sold one, and for money – for *actual money*, the astonishing animal! But if any part of the modest proceeds of such a transaction remained, after the rent had been paid and a new canvas purchased, it was not the caisse d'épargne which saw it, be sure of that! For Pierre lived always for the next twenty-four hours, and let the rest of time and eternity look out for themselves.

Yet he took his work seriously. That was the trouble. Even admitting that, thus far, his orders had come only from the more prosperous tradesmen of the Quartier, did that mean, par exemple, that they would not come in time from the millionaires of the sixteenth arrondissement? By no means, whatever, said Pierre. To be sure, he had never had the Salon in the palm of his hand, so to speak, but what of that? Jean-Paul himself would tell you that it was all favoritism! So Pierre toiled away at his portrait painting, and made a little competency, but, if the truth were told, no appreciable progress from year's beginning to year's end.

For once, however, his luck had played him false. The fat restaurateur, whose wife's portrait he had finished that afternoon and carried at top speed, with the paint not yet dry, to the rue du Bac, was out of town on business, and would not return until the following evening; and that, so far as Pierre was concerned, was quite as bad as if he were not expected until the following year.

Pierre's total wealth amounted to one five-franc piece and three sous, and he had been relying upon the restaurateur's four louis, to enable him to fulfill his promise to Mimi. For the next day was her fête, and they were to have breakfasted in the country, and taken a boat upon the Seine, and returned to dine under the trees. Not at Suresnes or St. Cloud, ah, non! Something better than that – the true country, sapristi! at Poissy, twenty-eight kilometres from Paris. All of which meant at least a louis, and, no doubt, more! And where, demanded Pierre of the great north window, where was a louis to be found?

For there was a tacit understanding among the comrades in the Quartier that there must be no borrowing and lending of money. It was a clause of their creed, which had been adopted in the early days of their companionship, for what was, clearly, the greatest general good, the chances being that no one of them would ever possess sufficient surplus capital either to accommodate another or to repay an accommodation. For a moment, to be sure, the thought had crossed Pierre's mind, but he had rejected it instantly as impracticable. Aside from the unwritten compact, there was no one of them all who could have been of service, had he so willed. Even Jacques Courbet, who possessed a disposition which would have impelled him to chop off his right hand with the utmost cheerfulness, if thereby he could have gratified a friend, was worse than useless in this emergency. Had it been a matter of forty sous – but a louis! As well have asked him for the Vénus de Milo, and had done with it.

So it was that, with the premonition of Mimi's disappointed eyes cutting great gaps in his tender heart, Pierre had four times shrugged his shoulders, and quoted to himself this favorite scrap of his remarkable philosophy, – "Oh, lala! All this will arrange itself!" and four times had paused, in the act of lighting a cigarette, and plunged again into the depths of despondent reverie. As he was on the point of again repeating this entirely futile operation, a distant clock struck six, and Pierre, remembering that Mimi must even now be waiting for him at the west door of St. Germain-des-Prés, clapped on his cap, and sallied forth into the gathering twilight.

It was apéritif hour at the Café des Deux Magots, and the long, leather-covered benches against the windows, and the double row of little marble-topped tables in front were rapidly filling, as Pierre and Mimi took their places, and ordered two Turins à l'eau. A group of American Beaux Arts men at their right were chattering in their uncouth tongue, with occasional scraps of Quartier slang, by way of local color, and now and again hailing a newcomer with exclamations, apparently of satisfaction, which began with "Hello!" The boulevard St. Germain was alive with people, walking past with the admirable lack of haste which distinguishes the Parisian, or waiting, in patient, voluble groups, for a chance to enter the constantly arriving and departing trams and omnibuses; and an unending succession of open cabs filed slowly along the curb, their drivers scanning the terrasse of the café for a possible fare. The air was full of that mingled odor

of wet wood pavements and horse-chestnut blossoms, which is the outward, invisible sign of that most wonderful of inward and spiritual combinations – Paris and Spring! And, at the table directly behind Pierre and Mimi sat Caffiard.

There was nothing about Caffiard to suggest a *deus ex machina*, or anything else, for that matter, except a preposterously corpulent old gentleman with an amiable smile. But in nothing were appearances ever more deceitful than in Caffiard. For it was he, with his enormous double chin, and his general air of harmless fatuity, who edited the little colored sheet entitled La Blague, which sent half Paris into convulsions of merriment every Thursday morning, and he who knew every caricaturist in town, and was beloved of them all for the heartiness of his appreciation and the liberality of his payments. In the first regard he was but one of many Parisian editors: but in the second he stood without a peer. Caran d'Ache, Léandre, Willette, Forain, Hermann Paul, Abel Faivre – they rubbed their hands when they came out of Caffiard's private office, and if the day chanced to be Saturday, there was something in their hands worth rubbing. A fine example, Caffiard!

Mimi's black eyes sparkled like a squirrel's as she watched Pierre over the rim of her tumbler of vermouth. She was far from being blind, Mimi, and already, though they had been together but six minutes, she had noted that unusual little pucker between his eyebrows, that sad little droop at the corners of his merry mouth. She told herself that Pierre had been overworking

himself, that Pierre was tired, that Pierre needed cheering up. So Mimi, who was never tired, not even after ten hours in Madame Fraichel's millinery establishment, secretly declared war upon the unusual little pucker and the sad little droop.

"Voyons donc, my Pierrot!" she said. "It is not a funeral to which we go to-morrow, at least! Thou must be gay, for we have much to talk of, thou knowest. One dines at La Boîte?"

"The dinner is there, such as it is," replied Pierre gloomily.

"What it is now, is not the question," said Mimi, with confidence, "but what I make of it – pas? And then there is to-morrow! Oh, lala, lalala! What a pleasure it will be, if only the good God gives us beautiful weather. Dis, donc, great thunder-cloud, dost thou know it, this Poissy?"

Pierre had begun a caricature on the back of the wine-card, glancing now and again at his model, an old man selling newspapers on the curb. He shook his head without replying.

"Eh, b'en, my little one, thou mayest believe me that it is of all places the most beautiful! One eats at the Esturgeon, on the Seine, – but *on* the Seine, with the water quite near, like that chair. He names himself Jarry, the proprietor, and it is a good type – fat and handsome. I adore him! Art thou jealous, species of thinness of a hundred nails? B'en, afterwards, one takes a boat, and goes, softly, softly, down the little arm of the Seine, and creeps under the willows, and, perhaps, fishes. But no, for it is the closed season. But one sings, eh? What does one sing? Voyons!"

She bent forward, and, in a little voice, like an elf's, very thin

and sweet, hummed a snatch of a song they both knew.

"C'est votre ami Pierrot qui vient vous voir:
Bonsoir, madame la lune!"

"And then," she went on, as Pierre continued his sketch in silence, "and then, one disembarks at Villennes and has a Turin under the arbors of Bodin. Another handsome type, Bodin! Flut! *What* a man!"

Mimi paused suddenly, and searched his cloudy face with her earnest, tender little eyes.

"Pierrot," she said, softly, "what hast thou? Thou art not angry with thy gosseline?"

Pierre surveyed the outline of the newspaper vender thoughtfully, touched it, here and there, with his pencil-point, squinted, and then pushed the paper toward the girl.

"Not bad," he said, replacing his pencil in his pocket.

But Mimi had no eyes for the caricature, and merely flicked the wine-card to the ground.

"Pierrot" – she repeated.

Vauquelin plunged his hands in his pockets and looked at her.

"Well, then," he announced, almost brutally, "we do not go to-morrow."

"*Pierre!*"

It was going to be much worse than he had supposed, this little tragedy. Bon Dieu, how pretty she was, with her startled, hurt eyes, already filling with tears, and her parted lips, and her little white hand, that had flashed up to her cheek at his words! Oh,

much worse than he had supposed! But she must be told: there was nothing but that. So Pierre put his elbows on the table, and his chin in his hands, and brought his face close to hers.

"Voyons!" he explained, "thou dost not believe me angry! Mais non, mais non! But listen. It is I who am the next to the last of idiots, since I have never a sou in pocket, never! And the imbecile restaurateur, whose wife I have been painting, will not return until to-morrow, and so I am not paid. Voilà!"

He placed his five-franc piece upon the table, and shrugged his shoulders.

"One full moon!" he said, and piled the three sous upon it. "And three soldiers. As I sit here, that is all, until to-morrow night. We cannot go!"

Brave little Mimi! Already she was winking back her tears, and smiling.

"But that – that is nothing!" she answered. "I do not care to go. No – but truly! Look! We shall spend the day in the studio, and breakfast on the balcony, and pretend the rue Visconti is the Seine."

"I am an empty siphon!" said Pierre, yielding to desperation.

"*Non!*" said Mimi firmly.

"I am a pierced basket, a box of matches!"

"*Non! Non!*" said Mimi, with tremendous earnestness. "Thou art Pierrot, and I love thee! Let us say no more. I shall go back and prepare the dinner, and thou shalt remain and drink a Pernod. It will give thee heart. But follow quickly. Give me the key."

She laid her wide-spread hand on his, palm upward, like a little pink starfish.

"We go together, and I adore thee!" said Pierre, and kissed her in the sight of all men, and was not ashamed.

Caffiard leaned forward, picked up the fallen wine-card, pretended to consult it, and ponderously arose. As Pierre was turning the key in the door of the little apartment, they heard a sound of heavy breathing, and the *deus ex machina* came lumbering up the winding stair.

"Monsieur is seeking some one?" asked the painter politely.

There was no breath left in Caffiard. He was only able, by way of reply, to point at the top button of Pierre's coat, and nod helplessly: then, as Mimi ran ahead to light the gas, he labored along the corridor, staggered through the curtained doorway, stumbled over a rattan stool, was rescued by Pierre, and, finally, established upon the divan, very red and gasping.

For a time there was silence, Pierre and Mimi busying themselves in putting the studio to rights, with an instinctive courtesy which took no notice of their visitor's snorts and wheezes; and Caffiard taking note of his surroundings with his round, blinking eyes. Opposite him, against the wall, reposed the portrait of the restaurateur's wife, as dry and pasty as a stale cream cheese upon the point of crumbling, and on an easel was another – that of Monsieur Pantin, the rich shirt-maker of the boulevard St. Germain – on which Pierre was at work. A veritable atrocity this, with a green background which trespassed

upon Monsieur Pantin's hair, and a featureless face, gaunt and haggard with yellow and purple undertones. There was nothing in either picture to refute one's natural suspicion that soap had been the medium employed. Caffiard blinked harder still as his eyes rested upon the portraits, and he secretly consulted the crumpled wine-card in his hand. Then he seemed to recover his breath by means of a profound sigh.

"Monsieur makes caricatures?" he inquired.

"Ah, monsieur," said Pierre, "at times, and for amusement only. I am a portraitist." And he pointed proudly to the picture against the wall.

For they are all alike, these painters – proudest of what they do least well!

"Ah! Then," said Caffiard, with an air of resignation, "I must ask monsieur's pardon, and descend. I am not interested in portraits. When it comes to caricatures" —

"They are well enough in their way," put in Pierre, "but as a serious affair – to sell, for instance – well, monsieur comprehends that one does not debauch one's art!"

Oh, yes, they are all alike, these painters!

"What is serious, what is not serious?" answered Caffiard. "It is all a matter of opinion. One prefers to have his painting glued to the wall of the Salon, next the ceiling, another to have his drawing on the front page of La Blague."

"Oh, naturally La Blague," protested Pierre.

"I am its editor," said Caffiard superbly.

"*Eigh!*" exclaimed Pierre. For Mimi had cruelly pinched his arm. Before the sting had passed, she was seated at Caffiard's side, tugging at the strings of a great portfolio.

"Are they imbeciles, these painters, monsieur?" she was saying. "Now you shall see. This great baby is marvelous, but *marvelous*, with his caricatures. Not Léandre himself – it is I who assure you, monsieur! – and to hear him, one would think – but thou *tirest* me, Pierrot! – With his portraits! No, it is *too* much!"

She spread the portfolio wide, and began to shuffle through the drawings it contained.

Caffiard's eyes glistened as he saw them. Even in her enthusiasm, Mimi had not overshot the mark. They were marvelous indeed, these caricatures, mere outlines for the most part, with a dot, here and there, of red, or a little streak of green, which lent them a curious, unusual charm. The subjects were legion. Here was Loubet, with a great band of crimson across his shirt bosom, here Waldeck-Rousseau, with eyes as round and prominent as agate marbles, or Yvette, with a nose on which one might have hung an overcoat, or Chamberlain, all monocle, or Wilhelmina, growing out of a tulip's heart, and as pretty as an old print, with her tight-fitting Dutch cap and broidered bodice. And then a host of types – cochers, grisettes, flower women, camelots, Heaven knows what not! – the products of half a hundred idle hours, wherein great-hearted, foolish Pierre had builded better than he knew!

Caffiard selected five at random, and then, from a waistcoat

pocket that clung as closely to his round figure as if it had been glued thereto, produced a hundred-franc note.

"I must have these for La Blague, monsieur," he said. "Bring me two caricatures a week at my office in the rue St. Joseph, and you shall be paid at the same rate. It is not much, to be sure. But you will have ample time left for your – for your portrait-painting, monsieur!"

For a moment the words of Caffiard affected Pierre and Mimi as the stairs had affected Caffiard. They stared at him, opening and shutting their mouths and gasping, like fish newly landed. Then, suddenly, animated by a common impulse, they rushed into each other's arms, and set out, around the studio, in a mad waltz, which presently resolved itself into an impromptu can-can, with Mimi skipping like a fairy, and Pierre singing: "Hi! *Hi!!* Hi!!!" and snapping at her flying feet with a red-bordered handkerchief. After this Mimi kissed Caffiard twice: once on the top of his bald head, and once on the end of his stubby nose. It was like being brushed by the floating down of a dandelion. And, finally, nothing would do but that he must accompany them upon the morrow; and she explained to him in detail the plan which had so nearly fallen through, and the *deus ex machina* did not betray by so much as a wink that he had heard the entire story only half an hour before.

But, in the end, he protested. But she was insane, the little one, completely! Had he then the air of one who gave himself into those boats there, name of a pipe? But let us be

reasonable, voyons! He was not young like Pierre and Mimi – one comprehended that these holidays did not recommence when one was sixty. What should he do, he demanded of them, trailing along, as one might say, he and his odious fatness? Ah, *non*! For la belle jeunesse was la belle jeunesse, there was no means of denying it, and it was not for a species of dried sponge to be giving itself the airs of a fresh flower. "But no! But no!" said Caffiard, striving to rise from the divan. "In the morning I have my article to do for the Figaro, and I am going with Caran to Longchamp, en auto, for the races in the afternoon. But no! But no!"

It was plain that Caffiard had known Mimi no more than half an hour. One never said, "But no! But no!" to Mimi, unless it was for the express purpose of having one's mouth covered by the softest little pink palm to be found between the Seine and the Observatoire, – which, to do him justice, Caffiard was quite capable of scheming to bring about, if only he had known! He had accepted the little dandelion-down kisses in a spirit of philosophy, knowing well that they were given not for his sake, but for Pierre's. But now his protests came to an abrupt termination, for Mimi suddenly seated herself on his lap, and put one arm around his neck.

It was nothing short of an achievement, this. Even Caffiard himself had not imagined that such a thing as his lap was still extant. Yet here was Mimi, actually installed thereon, with her cheek pressed against his, and her breath, which was like clover,

stirring the ends of his moustache. But she was smiling at Pierre, the witch! Caffiard could see it out of the corner of his eye.

"Mais non!" he repeated, but more feebly.

"Mais non! Mais non! Mais non!" mocked Mimi. "Great farceur! Will you listen, at least? Eh b'en, voilà! Here is my opinion. As to insanity, if for any one to propose a day in the country is insanity, well then, yes, – I am insane! Soit! And, again, if you wish to appear serious, – in Paris, that is to say – soit, également! But when you speak of odious fatness, you are a type of monsieur extremely low of ceiling, do you know! Moreover, you are going. Voilà! It is finished. As for Caran, let him go his way and draw his caricatures – though they are not like Pierre's, all the world knows! – and, without doubt, his auto will refuse to move beyond the porte Dauphine, yes, and blow up, bon Dieu! when he is in the act of mending it. One knows these boxes of vapors, what they do. And as for the Figaro, b'en, flut! Evidently it will not cease to exist for lack of your article – eh, l'ami? And it is Mimi who asks you, – Mimi, do you understand, who invites you to her fête. And you would refuse her —*toi*!"

"But no! But no!" said Caffiard hurriedly. And meant it.

At this point Pierre wrapped five two-sou pieces in a bit of paper, and tossed them, out of a little window across the hallway, to a street-singer whimpering in the court below. Pierre said that they weighed down his pockets. They were in the way, the clumsy doublins, said wonderful, spendthrift Pierre!

For the wide sky of the Quartier is forever dotted with little

clouds, scudding, scudding, all day long. And when one of these passes across the sun, there is a sudden chill in the air, and one walks for a time in shadow, though the comrade over there, across the way, is still in the warm and golden glow. But when the sun has shouldered the little cloud aside again, ah, that is when life is good to live, and goes gayly, to the tinkle of glasses and the ripple of laughter, and the ring of silver bits. And when the street-singer in the court receives upon his head a little parcel of coppers that are too heavy for the pocket, and smiles to himself, who knows but what he understands?

For what is also true of the Quartier is this – that, in sunshine or shadow, one finds a soft little hand clasping his, firm, warm, encouraging and kindly, and hears a gay little voice that, in foul weather, chatters of the bright hours which it is so sweet to remember, and, in fair, says never a word of the storms which it is so easy to forget!

The veriest bat might have foreseen the end, when once Mimi had put her arm around the neck of Caffiard. Before the *deus ex machina* knew what he was about, he found his army of objections routed, horse, foot, and dragoons, and had promised to be at the gare St. Lazare at eleven the following morning.

And what a morning it was! Surely the bon Dieu must have loved Mimi an atom better than other mortals, for in the blue-black crucible of the night he fashioned a day as clear and glowing as a great jewel, and set it, blazing with warm light and vivid color, foremost in the diadem of the year. And it

was something to see Mimi at the carriage window, with Pierre at her side and her left hand in his, and in her right a huge bouquet – Caffiard's contribution – while the *deus ex machina* himself, breathing like a happy hippopotamus, beamed upon the pair from the opposite corner. So the train slipped past the fortifications, swung through a trim suburb, slid smoothly out into the open country. It was a Wednesday, and there was no holiday crowd to incommode them. They had the compartment to themselves; and the half hour flew like six minutes, said Mimi, when at last they came to a shuddering standstill, and two guards hastened along the platform in opposite directions, one droning "Poiss-y-y-y-y!" and the other shouting "Poiss'! Poiss'! Poiss'!" as if he had been sneezing. It was an undertaking to get Caffiard out of the carriage, just as it had been to get him in. But finally it was accomplished, a whistle trilled from somewhere as if it had been a bird, another wailed like a stepped-on kitten, the locomotive squealed triumphantly, and the next minute the trio were alone in their glory.

It was a day that Caffiard never forgot. They breakfasted at once, so as to have a longer afternoon. Mimi was guide and commander-in-chief, as having been to the Esturgeon before, so the table was set upon the terrasse overlooking the Seine, and there were radishes, and little individual omelettes, and a famous matelote, which Monsieur Jarry himself served with the air of a Lucullus, and, finally, a great dish of quatre saisons, and, for each of the party, a squat brown pot of fresh cream. And, moreover,

no ordinaire, but St. Emilion, if you please, with a tin-foil cap which had to be removed before one could draw the cork, and a bottle of Source Badoit as well. And Caffiard, who had dined with the Russian Ambassador on Monday and breakfasted with the Nuncio on Tuesday, and been egregiously displeased with the fare in both instances, consumed an unprecedented quantity of matelote, and went back to radishes after he had eaten his strawberries and cream: while, to cap the climax, Pierre paid the addition with a louis, – and gave *all* the change as a tip! But it was unheard-of!

Afterwards they engaged a boat, and, with much alarm on the part of Mimi, and satirical comment from Caffiard, and severe admonitions to prudence by Pierre, pushed out into the stream and headed for Villennes, to the enormous edification of three small boys, who hung precariously over the railing of the terrace above them, and called Caffiard a captive balloon.

They made the three kilometres at a snail's pace, allowing the boat to drift with the current for an hour at a time, and, now and again creeping in under the willows at the water's edge until they were wholly hidden from view, and the voice of Mimi singing was as that of some river nixie invisible to mortal eyes. She sang "Bonsoir, Madame la Lune," so sweetly and so sadly that Caffiard was moved to tears. It was her favorite song, because – oh, because it was about Pierrot! And her own Pierrot responded with a gay soldier ballad, a chanson de route which he had picked up at the Noctambules; and even Caffiard sang – a ridiculous

ditty it was, which scored the English and went to a rollicking air. They all shouted the refrain, convulsed with merriment at the drollery of the sound: —

"Qu'est ce qui quitte ses père et mère
Afin de s'en aller
S'faire taper dans le nez?
C'est le soldat d'Angleterre!
Dou-gle-di-gle-dum!
Avec les ba-a-a-alles dum-dum!"

Caffiard was to leave them at Villennes after they should have taken their apéritifs. They protested, stormed at him, scolded and cajoled by turns, and called him a score of fantastic names – for by this time they knew him intimately – as they sat in Monsieur Bodin's arbor and sipped amer-menthe, but all in vain. Pierre had Mimi's hand, as always, and he had kissed her a half-hundred times in the course of the afternoon. Mimi had a way of shaking her hair out of her eyes with a curious little backward jerk of her head when Pierre kissed her, and then looking at him seriously, seriously, but smiling when he caught her at it. Caffiard liked that. And Pierre had a trick of turning, as if to ask Mimi's opinion, or divine even her unspoken wishes whenever a question came up for decision – a choice of food or drink, or direction, or what-not. And Caffiard liked *that.*

He looked across the table at them now, dreamily, through his cigarette smoke.

"Pierrot," he said, after he had persuaded them to let him depart in peace when the train should be due, – "Pierrot. Yes, that is it. You, with your garret, and your painting, and your songs, and your black, black sadness at one moment, and your laughter the next, and, above all, your Pierrette, your bon-bon of a Pierrette: – you are Pierrot, the spirit of Paris in powder and white muslin! Eigho! my children, what a thing it is, la belle jeunesse! Tiens! you have given me a taste of it to-day, and I thank you. I thought I had forgotten. But no, one never forgets. It all comes back, – youth, and strength, and beauty, love, and music, and laughter, – but only like a breath upon a mirror, my children, only like a wind-ripple on a pool; for I am an old man."

He paused, looking up at the vine-leaves on the trellis-roof, and murmured a few words of Mimi's song: —

> "Pierrette en songe va venir me voir:
> Bonsoir, madame la lune!"

Then his eyes came back to her face.

"I must be off," he said. "Why, what hast thou, little one? There are tears in those two stars!"

"C'est vrai?" asked Mimi, smiling at him and then at Pierre, and brushing her hand across her eyes, "c'est vrai? Well then, they are gone as quickly as they came. Voilà! Without his tears Pierrot is not Pierrot, and without Pierrot" —

She turned to Pierre suddenly, and buried her face on his shoulder.

"*Je t'aime!*" she whispered. "*Je t'aime!*"

The Next Corner

ANTHONY CAZEBY was a man whom the felicitous combination of an adventurous disposition, sufficient ready money, and a magnificent constitution had introduced to many and various sensations, but he was conscious that, so far as intensity went, no one of them all had approached for a moment that with which he emerged from the doorway of the Automobile Club, and, winking at the sting of the keen winter air, looked out across the place de la Concorde, with its globes of light, swung, like huge pearls on invisible strings, across the haze of the January midnight. He paused for a moment, as if he would allow his faculties to obtain a full and final grasp of his situation, and motioned aside the trim little club chasseur who stood before him, with one cotton-gloved hand stretched out expectantly for a supposititious carriage-check.

"Va, mon petit, je vais à pied!"

Afoot! Cazeby smiled to himself at the tone of sudden caprice which rang in his voice, and, turning his fur collar high up about his ears, swung off rapidly toward the Cours la Reine. After all, the avenue d'Eylau was only an agreeable stroll's length distant. Why not go home afoot? But then, on the other hand, why go home at all? As this thought leaped suddenly at Cazeby's throat out of the void of the great unpremeditated, he caught his breath, stopped suddenly in the middle of the driveway, and then went

on more slowly, thinking hard.

It had been that *rarissima avis* of social life, even in Paris, a perfect dinner. Cazeby had found himself wondering, at more than one stage of its smooth and imposing progress, how the Flints could afford to do it. But on each recurrence of the thought he dismissed it with a little frown of vexation. If there was one thing more than another upon which Cazeby prided himself, it was originality of thought, word, and deed, and he was annoyed to find himself, even momentarily, on a mental level with the gossips of the American and English colonies, whose time is equally divided between wondering how the Choses can afford to do what they do, and why the Machins cannot afford to do what they leave undone.

People had said many things of Hartley Flint, and still more of his wife, but no one had ever had the ignorance or the perversity to accuse them of inefficiency in the matter of a dinner. Moreover, on this particular occasion, they were returning the hospitality of the Baroness Klemftt, who had, at the close of the Exposition, impressed into her service the chef of the Roumanian restaurant, and whose dinners were, in consequence, the wonder and despair of four foreign colonies. After her latest exploit Hartley Flint had remarked to his wife that it was "up to them to make good," which, being interpreted, was to say that it was at once his duty and his intention to repay the Baroness in her own sterling coin. The fact that the men of the party afterwards commended Hartley's choice of wines, and that the

women expressed the opinion that "Kate Flint looked *really* pretty!" would seem to be proof positive that the operation of "making good" had been an unqualified success.

Now, Cazeby was wondering whether he had actually enjoyed it all. Under the circumstances it seemed to him incredible, and yet he could not recall a qualm of uneasiness from the moment when the maître d'hôtel had thrown open the doors of the private dining room, until the Baroness had smiled at her hostess out of a cloud of old Valenciennes, and said, "Now there are *two* of us who give impeccable dinners, Madame Flint." Even now, even facing his last ditch, Cazeby was conscious of a little thrill of self-satisfaction. He had said the score of clever things which each of his many hostesses expected of him, and had told with great effect his story of the little German florist, which had grown, that season, under the persuasive encouragement of society's applause, from a brief anecdote into a veritable achievement of Teutonic dialect. Also, he had worn a forty franc orchid, and had left it in his coffee-cup because it had begun to wilt. In brief, he had been Anthony Cazeby at his extraordinary best, a mixture of brilliancy and eccentricity, without which, as Mrs. Flint was wont to say, no dinner was complete.

But the sublime and the ridiculous are not the only contrasting conditions that lie no further than a step apart, and Cazeby was painfully conscious of having, in the past five minutes, crossed the short interval which divides gay from grave. Reduced to its lowest terms, his situation lay in his words to the little chasseur.

With the odor of the rarest orchid to be found in Vaillant-Rozeau's whole establishment yet clinging to his lapel, Anthony Cazeby was going home on foot because the fare from the Concorde to the avenue d'Eylau was one franc fifty, and one franc fifty precisely ninety centimes more than he possessed in the world. For a moment he straightened himself, threw back his head, and looked up at the dull saffron of the low-hanging sky, in an attempt to realize this astounding fact, and then went back to his thinking.

Well, it was not surprising. The life of a popular young diplomat with extravagant tastes is not conducive to economy, and the forty thousand dollars which had come to Cazeby at the beginning of his twenty-eighth year had proved but a bad second best in the struggle with Parisian gayety. His bibelots, his servants, Auteuil, Longchamp, his baccarat at the Prince de Tréville's, a dancer at the Folies-Marigny, Monte Carlo, Aix, Trouville, – they had all had their share, and now the piper was waiting to be paid and the exchequer was empty. It was an old story. Other men of his acquaintance had done the same, but they had had some final resource. The trouble was, as Cazeby had already noted, that, in his case, the final resource was not, as in theirs, pecuniary. Quite on the contrary, it was a tidy little weapon, of Smith and Wesson make, which lay in the upper right hand drawer of his marqueterie desk. He had looked long at it that same afternoon, with all his worldly wealth, in the shape of forty-two francs sixty, spread out beside it. That was before he

had taken a fiacre to Vaillant-Rozeau's.

At the very moment when Cazeby was contemplating these doubtful assets, a grim old gentleman was seated at another desk, three thousand miles away, engaged upon a calculation of the monthly profits derived from a wholesale leather business. But Cazeby père was one of the hopeless persons who believe in economy. He was of the perverted opinion that money hardly come by should be thoughtfully spent, or, preferably, invested in government bonds, and he had violent prejudices against "industrials," games of chance, and young men who preferred the gayety of a foreign capital to the atmosphere of "the Swamp." Also he was very rich. But Anthony had long since ceased to regard his father as anything more than a chance relation. He could have told what would be the result of a frank confession of his extremity as accurately as if the avowal had been already made. There would have been some brief reference to the sowing of oats and their reaping, to the making of a metaphorical bed and the inevitable occupancy thereof, and to other proverbial illustrations which, in a financial sense, are more ornamental than useful, – and nothing more. The essential spark of sympathy had been lacking between these two since the moment when the most eminent physician in New York had said, "It is a boy, sir, – but – we cannot hope to save the mother." The fault may have lain on the one side, or the other, or on both, or on neither; but certain it is that to Anthony's imagination Cazeby senior had never appealed in the light of a final resource.

Somehow, in none of his calculations had the idea of invoking assistance ever played a part. Naturally, as a reasoning being, he had foreseen the present crisis for some months, but at the time when the inevitable catastrophe first became clear to him it was already too late to regain his balance, since the remainder of his inheritance was so pitifully small that any idea of retrieving his fortunes through its instrumentality was simply farcical. The swirl of the rapids, as he had then told himself, had already caught his boat. All that was left to do was to go straight on to the sheer of the fall, with his pennant flying and himself singing at the helm. Then, on the brink, a well-placed bullet – no bungling for Anthony Cazeby! – and the next day people would be talking of the shocking accident which had killed him in the act of cleaning his revolver, and saying the usual things about a young man with a brilliant future before him and everything in life for which to live.

And this plan he had carried out in every detail – save the last, to which he was now come; and his was the satisfying conviction that not one of the brilliant, careless men and women, among whom he lived, and moved, and had his being, suspected for a moment that the actual circumstances differed in the least from the outward appearances. He thought it all over carefully now, and there was no play in the entire game that he felt he would have liked to have changed.

Sentiment had no part in the makeup of Anthony Cazeby. Lacking from early childhood the common ties of home

affection, and by training and profession a diplomat, he added to a naturally undemonstrative nature the non-committal suavity of official poise. But that was not all. He had never been known to be ill at ease. This was something which gained him a reputation for studious self-control. As a matter of fact it was due to nothing of the sort. No one had ever come fairly at the root of his character except Cazeby père, who once said, in a fit of passion, "You don't care a brass cent, sir, whether you live and are made President of the United States, or die and are eternally damned!" And that was exactly the point.

Something of all this had passed through Cazeby's mind, when he was suddenly aroused to an appreciation of his whereabouts by the sound of a voice, to find that the curious instinct of direction which underlies advanced inebriety and profound preoccupation alike, had led him up the avenue du Trocadéro, and across the place, and that he had already advanced some little way along the avenue d'Eylau in the direction of his apartment. The street was dimly lighted, but, just behind him, the windows of a tiny wine-shop gave out a subdued glow, and from within came the sound of a violin. Then Cazeby's attention came around to the owner of the voice. This was a youngish man of medium stature, in the familiar street dress of a French laborer, jacket and waistcoat of dull blue velveteen, peg-top trousers of heavy corduroy, a crimson knot at his throat, and a dark tam o'shanter pulled low over one ear. As their eyes met, he apparently saw that Cazeby had not heard his first remark, and so repeated it.

"I have need of a drink!"

There was nothing of the beggar in his tone or manner. Both were threatening, rather; and, as soon as he had spoken, he thrust his lower jaw forward, in the fashion common to the thug of any and every nationality when the next move is like to be a blow. But, for once, these manifestations of hostility failed signally of effect. Cazeby was the last person in the world to select as the object of sudden attack, with the idea that panic would make him easy prey. In his present state of mind he went further than preserving his equanimity: he was even faintly amused. It was not that he did not comprehend the other's purpose, but, to his way of thinking, there was something distinctly humorous in the idea of holding up a man with only sixty centimes to his name, and menacing him with injury, when he himself was on his way to the upper right hand drawer of the marqueterie desk.

"I have need of a drink," repeated the other, coming a step nearer. "Thou art not deaf, at least?"

"No," said Cazeby, pleasantly, "no, I am not deaf, and I, too, have need of a drink. Shall we take it together?" And, without waiting for a reply, he turned and stepped through the doorway of the little wineshop. The Frenchman hesitated, shrugged his shoulders with an air of complete bewilderment, and, after an instant also entered the shop and placed himself at the small table where Cazeby was already seated.

"A vitriol for me," he said.

Cazeby had not passed three years in Paris for nothing. He

received this remarkable request with the unconcern of one to whom the slang of the exterior boulevards is sufficiently familiar, and, as the proprietor leaned across the nickled slab of his narrow counter with an air of interrogation, duplicated his companion's order.

"Deux vitriols!"

The proprietor, vouchsafing the phrase a grin of appreciation, lumbered heavily around to the table, filled two small glasses from a bottle of cheap cognac, and stood awaiting payment, hands on hips.

"Di-ze sous," he said.

There was no need to search for the exact amount. Cazeby spun his fifty-centime piece upon the marble, added his remaining two sous by way of pourboire, and disposed of the brandy at a gulp.

"Have you also need of a cigarette?" he inquired, politely, tendering the other his case.

For some minutes, as they smoked, the diplomat and the vagabond took stock of each other in silence. In many ways they were singularly alike. There was in both the same irony of lip line, the same fair chiseling of chin and nostril and brow, the same weariness of eye. The difference was one of dress and bearing alone, and, in those first moments of mutual analysis, Cazeby realized that there was about this street-lounger a vague air of the gentleman, a subtle suggestion of good birth and breeding, which even his slouching manner and coarse speech were not wholly

able to conceal: and his guest was conscious that in Cazeby he had to deal with no mere society puppet, but with one in whom the limitations of position had never wholly subdued the devil-may-care instincts of the vagabond. The one was a finished model of a man of the world, the other a caricature, but the clay was the same.

"I am also hungry," said the latter suddenly.

"In that respect," responded Cazeby, in the same tone of even politeness, "I am, unfortunately, unable to assist you, unless you will accept the hospitality of my apartment. It is but a step, and I am rather an expert on bacon and eggs. Also," he added, falling into the idiom of the faubourgs, "there is a means there of remedying the dryness of the sponge in one's throat. My name is Antoine."

"I am Bibi-la-Raie," said the other shortly. Then he continued, with instinctive suspicion, "It is a strange fashion thou hast of introducing a type to these gentlemen."

"As a matter of fact," said Cazeby, "I do not live over a poste. But whether or not you will come is something for you to decide. It is less trouble to cook eggs for one than for two."

Bibi-la-Raie reflected briefly. Finally he had recourse to his characteristic shrug.

"After all, what difference?" he said. "As well now as another time. I follow thee!"

The strangely assorted companions entered Cazeby's apartment as the clock was striking one, and pressure of an

electric button, flooding the salon with light, revealed a little tea-table furnished with cigarettes and cigars, decanters of Scotch whiskey and liqueurs, and Venetian goblets of oddly tinted glass. Cazeby shot a swift glance at his guest as this array sprang into view, and was curiously content to observe that he manifested no surprise. Bibi-la-Raie had flung himself into a great leather chair with an air of being entirely at ease.

"Not bad, thy little box," he observed. "Is it permitted?"

He indicated the table with a nod.

"Assuredly," said Cazeby. "Do as if you were at home. I shall be but a moment with the supper."

When he returned from the kitchen, bearing a smoking dish of bacon and eggs, butter, rye bread, and Swiss cheese, Bibi-la-Raie was standing in rapt contemplation before an etching of the "Last Judgment."

"What a genius, this animal of a Michel Ange!" he said.

"Rather deft at times," replied Cazeby, arranging the dishes on the larger table.

"Je te crois!" said Bibi, enthusiastically. "Without him – what? Evidently, it was not Léon Treize who built Saint Pierre!"

The eggs had been peculiarly obstinate, as it happened, and a growing irritability had taken possession of Anthony. As they ate in silence, the full force of his tragic position returned to him. Even the unwontedness of his chance encounter with Bibi-la-Raie had not wholly dispelled the cloud that had been gradually settling around him since he emerged from the Automobile Club,

and, as they finished the little repast, he turned suddenly upon his guest, in a burst of irritation.

"Who are you?" he said. "And what does all this mean? Was I mistaken, when you first spoke to me, in thinking you a mere voyou? Surely not! You meant to rob me. You speak the argot of the fortifications. Yet here I find you discoursing on Michel Angelo as though you were the conservateur of the Uffizzi! What am I to think?"

Bibi-la-Raie lit another cigarette, blew forth the smoke in a thin, gray wisp, and thrust his thumbs into the arm-holes of his velveteen waistcoat.

"And *you*," he said, slowly, abandoning the familiar address he had been using, "who are *you*? No, you were not mistaken in thinking I meant to rob you. Such is my profession. But does a gentleman reply, in ordinary, to the summons of a thief by paying that thief a drink? Does he invite him to his apartment and cook a supper for him? What am *I* to think?"

There was a brief pause, and then he faced his host squarely.

"Are you absolutely resolved to put an end to it all to-night?" he demanded.

Cazeby made a small sign of bewilderment.

"Ah, mon vieux," continued the other. "That, you know, is of no use with me. You ask me who I am. For one thing, I am one who has lived too long in touch with desperate men not to know the look in the eyes when the end has come. You think you are going to blow out your brains to-night."

"Your wits are wandering; that's all," said Cazeby, compassionately.

"Oh, far from it!" said Bibi-la-Raie, with a short laugh. "But one does not fondle one's revolver in the daytime without a good reason, nor does one leave it *on top* of letters postmarked this morning unless one has been fondling it – quoi?"

Cazeby was at the marqueterie desk in two strides, tugging at the upper right hand drawer. It was locked. He turned about slowly, and, half seating himself on the edge of the desk, surveyed his guest coolly.

"The revolver is in your pocket," he said.

"No," answered Bibi, with an air of cheerfulness. "I have one of my own. But the key is."

"Why?" said Cazeby.

Bibi helped himself to yellow chartreuse, and appeared to reflect.

"I am not sure that I know why, myself," he said finally. "Perhaps, because you have done me a kindness and I would not like to have you burn your fingers in a moment of absent-mindedness. Perhaps, because we might disagree, and I should not care to take the chance of your shooting first!"

He squinted at the liqueur, swallowed it slowly and with extreme appreciation, smacked his lips, and then, cocking his feet up on Cazeby's brass club fender, began to smoke again, staring into the dwindling fire. His host watched him in silence, until he should be ready to speak, which he presently began to

do, with his cigarette drooping from the corner of his month and moving in time to his words. He had suddenly and curiously become a man of the world – of the grand monde – and his speech had shaken off all trace of slang, and was tinged instead with the faint club sarcasm which one hears in the glass card-room of the Volney or over coffee on the roof of the Automobile. Moreover, it was beautiful French. Not Mounet himself could have done better.

"The only man to whom one should confide personal secrets," said Bibi-la-Raie, "is he whom one has never seen before and will, as is probable, never see again. I could tell you many things, Monsieur Cazeby, since that is your name, – I have seen your morning's mail, you know! – but, for the moment, let it suffice to say that the voyou who accosted you this evening is of birth as good as yours – pardon, but probably better! *Wein, weib, und gesang*– you know the saying. Add cards and the race-course, and you have, complete, the short ladder of five rungs down which I have been successful in climbing. I shall presume to the extent of supposing that you have just accomplished the same descent. One learns much thereby, but more after one has reached the ground. In many ways I am afraid experience has made me cynical, but in one it has taught me optimism. I have found, and I think I shall continue to find, that there is always something worth looking into around the next corner of even the darkest street. The rue des Sablons, for instance. It was very dark to-night, very damp, and very cold. Assuredly, as I turned into

the avenue d'Eylau I had no reason to foresee a supper, Russian cigarettes, and chartreuse jaune. And yet, me voilà! Now what most of us lack – what you, in particular, seem to lack, Monsieur Cazeby – is the tenacity needful if one is to get to that next turning."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.