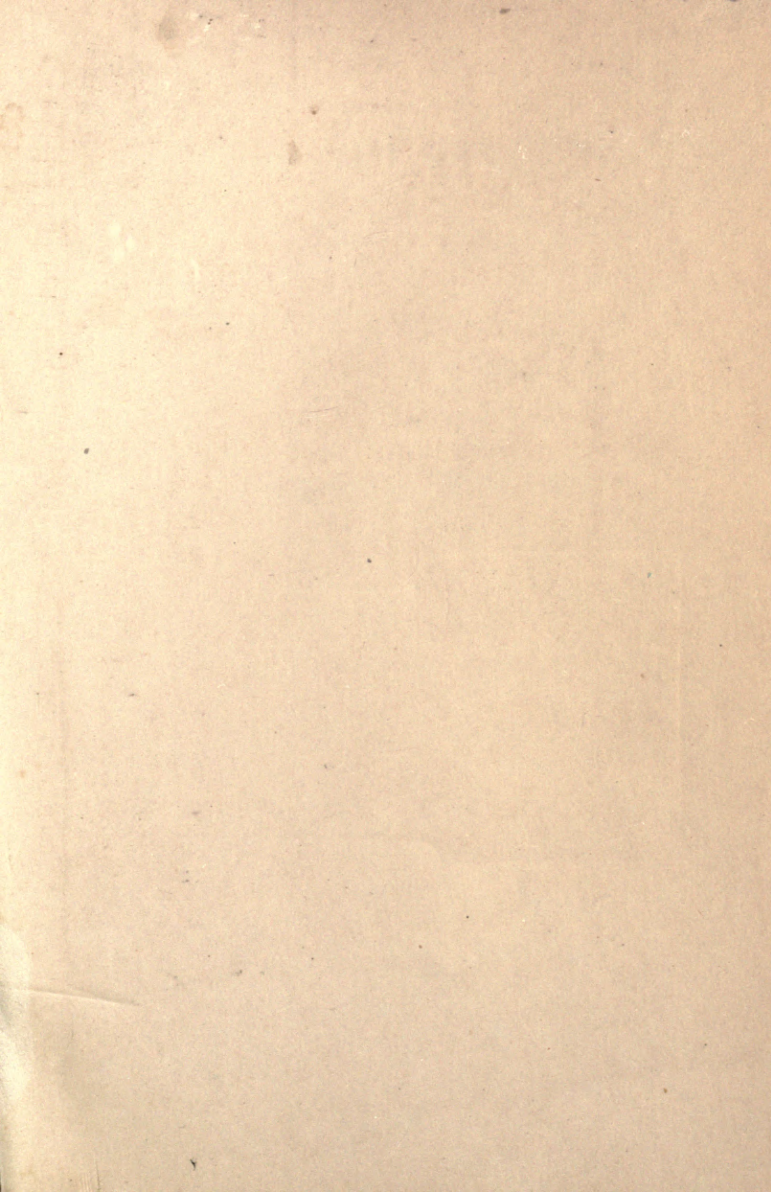


# REDEMPTION

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RENÉ BAZIN









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REDEMPTION

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# REDEMPTION

("DE TOUTE SON ÂME")

BY  
RENÉ BAZIN

TRANSLATED BY  
DR. A. S. RAPPOPORT

NEW YORK  
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1908





# REDEMPTION.

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## CHAPTER I.

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IT was closing time at Ville-en-Bois; men and women were trooping out of the factories and workshops, their hands and faces discoloured with smoke, and with clinging particles of iron, brass, tan, and the dust that swirled continuously around the pulleys in motion. The more dilatory clocks had not yet sounded the last stroke of seven. The month of May was drawing to its close, and a warm softness filled the evening air. Work was over: the roar of the machinery was gradually subsiding; the spiral clouds of coal dust above the brick chimneys were growing less; voices began to be heard between the walls of the Rue de la Hautière, and those of the old road to Couéron, as well as in the higher quarter of Nantes where the town adjoined Chantenay.

There was something impressive in this hour of the day, when toil let loose her army of workers on the streets. Recruits, veterans, women married and unmarried, and dwarfed figures whom one would have thought ten years old at most, if the tone of their voices, and the precocious per-

versity of their language, had not revealed their manhood—these once outside the factory doors went their several ways, uphill or downhill, and along side cuts, to the home or lodging where shelter and soup awaited them. The crowd separated by degrees into groups. Wives rejoined their husbands, brothers, or lovers, and fellow-lodgers leisurely sought each other out, evincing no particular sign of pleasure when at last they met. Something sad and weary dulled the brightness of their glance, even among the younger workers; the burden of the day weighed heavily on all alike, and hunger was uppermost in each. An occasional dull coarse remark, a spiritless joke, or a hasty good-night, was all that passed between them. Yet still among them could be seen, here and there, the rosy cheeks of a young girl, or the beardless and characterless face of a Breton youth from Auray or Quimper who had so far escaped the contamination of the workshop; the uplifted eyes of one who passed along, as in a dream; aged men, rugged as old soldiers, walking in silence, leading little children by the hand, in a mute and weary happiness. The wind from the distant sea was blowing across the waters of the Loire; over the tops of the walls, bunches of lilac hung down at intervals above the heads of the dun-coloured procession of workers.

The married members of this population of workers, and those who lived with their families, leaving the others to distribute themselves about the lower quarters of the town, took the road which led upward to the hills of Chantenay,

whence similar groups were descending toward Nantes. In the midst of these cross currents of blouses, jackets, and badly fitting cotton bodices on the top of shabby skirts, a man, evidently of a better class, had drawn up his dog-cart where the road of la Hautière began to descend. He was tall, his face, though young, was already beginning to fill out, a pointed black beard adding somewhat to its length. He was dressed in a well-cut suit of ordinary cloth; this and his manner of handling the reins, together with the good taste displayed in the harness and the sober panelling of the cart, betokened a family which had been well-to-do for fifteen or twenty years at least. What could have brought this young man among a crowd of factory hands whom those of his class, as a rule, were only too glad if possible to avoid, although they might have found it difficult to explain the reason for their dislike? He could easily have taken one of the quieter side roads; but no, there he sat, leaning forward a little on the blue cloth cushion with gloved hands, the whip laid across the slackened reins, looking fixedly ahead down the steep narrow street. The men and women stared at him as they passed, some with surly looks, others with indifference; only now and then a hat was raised with a show of reluctance, while the women, with their uncovered heads, pointed their fingers at him and then bent forward and laughed in malicious envy of the shining buckles and glittering harness which attracted their gaze. But the object of these attentions watched the passing stream of figures

with the impassive countenance of the master who has grown familiar with crowds. Only a quick eye could have detected the slight shade of pity and of sadness that flitted across the calm, unmoved face, when some of those who passed close to his carriage wheels, pointedly abstained from saluting him, or turned to those behind, saying, "It's Lemarié's son!" The news ran like an electric shock along the road that was dark with moving figures; it was passed from one to another, and then back again, and whispered in every variety of tone of astonishment, of indifference, or of smothered anger. "Lemarié's son! Lemarié's son!"

The man himself was evidently looking for some one. Suddenly the hand which held the whip went up and made a sign. A young man about twenty years old, walking up the hill, arm in arm with two others of his own age, turned his head toward him. His companions, with a barely intentional insolence, playfully tried to hold him back, but he escaped from their grasp, and going up to the side of the dog-cart, touched his old felt hat. His keen gray eyes, with their shifting colour, had caught those of his master's son as the latter signed to him to approach, and he now stood waiting and looking up with his weasel-like face, barred on either side with short, straight whiskers, a face full of eager alertness, on which was reflected the agitation of an ever-surging passion, of which the billows seemed continually to be rising and falling within the depths of his eyes.

"Is your uncle any better, Antoine?" asked M. Lemarié, in a quiet voice.



"No, he is not getting on at all."

"His hand is as bad as ever? Has he tried the remedies my mother sent him?"

"He cries out at times during the night. And then the trembling fits disturb him."

"Poor man!"

"Yes, indeed! Remedies—of what use are they to a man, when his hand has been crushed to pieces? No one believes that he will ever have the use of it again. It's a farce to talk of remedies. He ought to have his pension, Monsieur Lemarié."

A troubled expression came into the latter's face, and he continued to look before him down the road, as he answered:

"What would you have? He had better try again, but let him go himself! And mind, above all, no letter, no foolish threats! That sort of thing does not answer with my father, as you know well enough, Antoine."

"He will go, you may be sure of that," replied the young man, as his lips straightened in a bitter laugh. "He will go, and be hustled out of the house as I was. And yet he has worked in the factory for thirty years. You owe him a good share of your horses and carriages."

Victor Lemarié, seeing that Antoine's friends were listening, lifted his gloved hand and made a sign to him to go on.

"You forget," he said, coldly, "that for thirty years my father has provided him with the means of living. I only wished to ask after Madiot; as regards other matters, I am not the master."

The man walked on a step or two and then

returned, this time half lifting his hat. "And what if you were that master, Monsieur Lemarié?"

Victor Lemarié pretended not to hear, and again looked down at the road up which some scattered groups of men and women might still be seen climbing. Clouds of dust were now rising above the trampled highway, turning to golden haze as the rays of the sun, which had sunk to the level of the house-tops, shot through them.

The man waited a second to see if his master's son would answer him, or if he would whip up his horse, then he turned on his heel and was soon lost again among the mass of his companions who had already gone on ahead, and who were being continually pressed forward by others coming up from below.

By this time the weary line of figures was beginning to look grayer and more mournful even than at first, in the declining light of day. Victor Lemarié was no longer on the lookout for any one in particular; he sat gazing abstractedly at the passing throng of men and women, all strangers to him, all alike, who followed one another at regular intervals, like the links of a chain. He was not a bad-hearted man, and both his feelings and his self-love were wounded by the conscious sense of the proximity of so much unmerited ill-feeling toward him. It seemed to enfold him, to hold him in a grip of pain. He still sat upright and immovable, apparently wrapped in contemplation of some distant scene, so that many seeing him turned to look back toward the lower road, where the factory stood; but it was on no par-

ticular figure or object that his gaze was fixed; the multitude of human beings that passed before him formed but a single image to his eyes: that of a gray mass with one face and one name—the factory worker—who brushed past him, and went on, conscious of two feelings alone, the weariness of toil and hatred of the rich.

“What have I done to them?” he thought; “why should they extend their enmity to me, who am not their employer, and who have nothing to do with my father’s work-people? One of the things that has reconciled me to taking no part in the active life of the factory, was the false belief that I should thus escape their distrust. And instead they treat me as if I was their born enemy. What a hideous conflict it is that thus separates us into two camps, with no wish on our side that it should be so! There must have been sin indeed on the part of those who went before us to have brought matters to such a pass! And what a bitter fate it is to be hated in this way here, there, and everywhere, just because I wear this coat and drive this horse!”

And still the workers came climbing up the hill. Their ranks, however, were growing thinner, and a few old women, dragging their tired limbs, betokened that the rearguard was filing past. All below was now plunged in darkness; only the top branches of the trees, the points of the gables, and the chimneys caught some remains of light from the tawny globe of the sun that was sinking into the green bed of the fields behind Chantenay; and hidden by the nearer houses, there were no

doubt brigs and schooners sailing up the Loire, with their sails, just tipped with white, swelling before the refreshing breeze. The little that could be seen of the town between the factory roofs at the lower end of the road was now veiled in a mist that had not lost the transparency of the blue waters of the river from which it rose. Far off a window sparkled as it caught the low rays of the sun. Victor noticed also that the high factory chimneys had ceased to vomit their smoke, and that from the smaller ones around him it was rising in small gray plumes, that curled, and spread and vanished in the air, a sure sign that the worker had returned home, that the family were together again, that for one short sweet waking hour the mother had all her children round her. The day's work was over. And as he realised this restored harmony, and remembered for how short a time it lasted, and then thought of that further harmony, equally necessary, which had been destroyed perhaps forever, he was conscious of a feeling of sadness, mingled with anger, against those who had gone before. He belonged to a generation that had to suffer for the rancour accumulated by others. Moreover, he was aware that his pity was greater than his courage, and this added to his gloom and humiliation.

He little guessed that a few paces off from him an aged priest, well known in the parish of Saint Anne, was walking in the shelter of some bushes and a cedar tree which formed his garden, gazing toward the same horizon, and thinking the same thoughts. Outside this quarter of the town he was



as little known as the poor people whom he succoured. Every evening, as the army of factory workers came toiling up the hill, this old and unwearying friend, in return for no human recompense, went out to the bare mound under his cedar tree, between the branches of which he could get a glimpse of the town, and there stood listening to that tramp of poverty which he knew so well, passing along on the farther side of the wall. He had heard it now for twelve years, always with the same emotion, and to-night as usual he uttered the prayer that he had himself composed in the simplicity of his heart.

“Lord bless the earth that now hides itself in darkness, bless the town and its outskirts, the rich down there that they may have pity, the poor here that they may love one another: above all, the poor, my God, and let the father as he returns home be met by the children with the angel that makes them smile. Keep husbands and wives from quarrelling; let brothers live together in peace; make happy for all the only hour when they are together, young and old, so that not one among them may curse Thee, but rather that they may love Thee, Lord! I pray to Thee for all those who will not pray to Thee to-night, I love Thee for all those who love Thee not, I give my life to Thee that theirs may be better and less hard. Take it, if it please Thee. Amen.”

God did not take him. He knew that he was of use.

## CHAPTER II.

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THE road was now in darkness and almost deserted. Victor Lemarié gathered up the reins, and began driving at a foot pace down toward the town. He turned off shortly along a street which led through the outskirts to the Avenue de Launay, whence by a short cut he reached the boulevard Delorme, where he lived. The gas was already lighted in the dim streets; few passers-by were to be seen, for it was already the dinner hour. Victor Lemarié was now going at a good pace; just as he turned the corner of one of the streets a young girl, who was in the act of crossing, drew back with a start and stepped again on to the pavement. She looked up and bowed slightly as he took off his hat to her. In his salute there was the alacrity natural to a young man finding himself face to face with a young and good-looking woman, and also some surprise, which might be translated: "Can this charming girl really be the sister of the workman who was speaking to me up there?"

In the quick, hardly perceptible bow of Henriette Madiot there was no trace of coquetry or of surprise, or even of any particular interest in him. She was one of the slender, lithe, young working girls, whom one meets hurrying along every morning at eight o'clock, two or three at a time,

making their way to the workrooms of some dress-maker or milliner. They look well dressed in any scrap of clothing, for they are young—what becomes of the old women of that class?—but this scrap has been delightfully made up, for they have the fingers of artistes and twenty models to copy from. They lend a charm to the street which it misses when they pass on. Among them are girls who cough and laugh. They are of the people,—occasionally by their gestures, and always by their pricked fingers, by the feverish excitement and strenuousness of their life; but not by their trade, nor by the dreams awakened in them by their contact with a world with which they grow familiar in spirit. Poor girls! whose tasks are refined, and whose imaginations are quickened by the fashions they serve; who, in order to become good workwomen, must have a taste for luxury, and are thereby rendered less capable of resisting its temptation; for whom men lie in wait, as they leave their workrooms, and look upon as an easy prey, on account of their graceful poverty and enforced liberty; who hear everything, who see the evil among the lower classes and divine that of the upper; who return home at night to face afresh the poverty of their condition, and who, whether they will or no, are continually comparing the world they clothe with the world to which they belong. The trial is hard, almost too hard, for they are young, delicate, affectionate, and more sensitive than most to the caress of soft words. Those who resist soon acquire a dignity of their own, and put on an air

of studied indifference, which is a protection to them, as is also their quick manner of walking. Henriette Madiot was one of these. She had been the object of considerable homage, and had grown mistrustful of it.

Her bow was therefore but a slight one. She was in a hurry. They were working late that evening at the work rooms of Madame Clémence. She drew the folds of her dress more tightly round her with her gray-gloved hand, and with her eyes directed somewhat above the heads of the other foot-passengers she lightly crossed the road.

On entering the drawing-room of his father's house in the boulevard Delorme, Victor Lamarié found a small company assembled. Besides his mother, there were two old business men, M. Tomaire and M. Mourieux, and an unmarried woman of thirty, Estelle Pirmil, who had won the second prize at the Conservatoire, gave lessons, knew everybody in the town, and passed for an original character.

His mother kissed him as he was making excuses for his late return.

"Are we not a nice family party? Mourieux and Tomaire are both cousins of a kind; is it not so, Mourieux?"

"I am honoured to think so," replied the stout man, with a bow.

"You are forgetting that I am here," said Mademoiselle Pirmil.

"I do not count you, my dear, you are at home, as you know."

Fortunately M. Lemarié had not yet appeared.



He was a great stickler for punctuality. A moment later he entered the room, a small, thin man, with bristly white hair, and a long tuft of beard under his short moustaches. Accustomed evidently on entering any place to sum up at a glance the number of people who happened to be present, he counted the guests, saw that no one was missing, and then stepped forward with extended hand. M. Lemarié never lost his self-control, and he talked well. He had the peculiar rigidity of mind and body which distinguishes the man who has fought his way up, and is still obliged to fight to maintain his position. As he shook his son's hand, he remarked, speaking with his lips only:

“Had a nice drive to-day? Was the air pleasant?”

“Only tolerably so.”

“That was a pity. I have been in a rush all day myself.”

Dinner being over, and the evening fine, they went into the garden—large, square-shaped, damp, and surrounded by high walls, its neglected condition contrasting with the comfort of the well-kept house. The path which led round the lawn was overgrown with moss, the branches of the trees, planted along three sides of the enclosure, straggled in unpruned disorder over the clumps of withered geraniums.

The conversation, which had been kept up pretty briskly until this moment, seemed suddenly to receive a check. The men grouped themselves on one of the seats at the bottom of

the garden under the acacia trees, and the two women on another close beside it. The lawn, funereal in colour, lay in front of them, and beyond it, far away, as it seemed, could be seen the three steps, yellow with age, leading to the dining-room, and just now brilliantly illumined by the lamps and candles which were still alight. Silhouetted against this luminous background, which attracted and fatigued the eye, could be seen at intervals the dark figure of a servant, passing across it like a puff of smoke. Far overhead, visible between the leaves of the trees, so far that no one gave them a thought, the stars, shining with a pale, blue light, lay sleeping.

A long sharp whistle broke the silence.

"Moll's workpeople only just going off," said M. Lemarié. "They have been working late for the last month, owing to the large orders that have come in for the Chilian Navy."

"It's hard upon them," remarked Victor.

"You pity them?"

"Most sincerely."

The four men—M. Lamarié, M. Tomaire, M. Mourieux, and Victor—were sitting in a row on the garden-seat, watching the smoke that curled up from their cigars and formed a little cloud on a level with their eyes. M. Lemarié remained silent for a moment or two, and drew a few strong whiffs from his cigar. His features stiffened into an expression of stubborn determination at the first word of contradiction. The lines round his mouth and between his eyes grew deeper. It was again the face of the factory owner, prompt and

dictatorial in the defence of his own interests. This diversity of opinion between him and his son, due to the difference in their education, the age in which they were born, and their surroundings, was displeasing to him. Any allusion to the sufferings of the working class he took as a personal injury, since his conscience as an employer was without reproach, for had he not always been just, always shown respect to the law, and always been unpopular? He replied, in a combative tone and with a touch of irony:

“The Eight-hours’ Day—that’s it, I suppose.”

“No.”

“Well, it will be all the same to me if it’s ten. Look at me, I work fourteen hours a day, and I do not complain. If you think the position of an employer is an enviable one nowadays, it’s because you are not one yourself. We make very little profit, we risk everything; we are always liable to absurd claims being made upon us by those who have no knowledge at all of the business, to say nothing of those put forward by the workpeople, who understand too much. Is it not so, Tomaire? Is it not so, Mourieux?”

“It’s true enough,” said Tomaire.

“Not entirely true,” said Mourieux.

“Oh, I know you have a tender heart, Mourieux, and it’s proved by the manner in which you treat your hands. You find them places, you help them in every way, you would give up your own house to them to live in. But one is not obliged to do all this. And do they ever give you anything in return? You are not simple

enough to believe they do. They only laugh at you."

"Some of them," replied Mourieux, quietly.

"I am not fond of people laughing at me. I would not put up with it in my work rooms. Nor will I have anything to do with journalists and theorists, who have never even had a single person under them, or with those who are always weeping over other people's poverty,—and there has been a plague of them for the last ten years,—who want to come and interfere with the employer and sympathize with the working people. If Victor sees a man in a blouse, he is overcome with emotion at once."

"Not because of the blouse."

"He would like him to have an income of his own. If they knew how to economize, they could get an income in time from what we pay them; but they are always wanting more money and more leisure, and to have retiring pensions, so that they may be spared the trouble of saving. Do you tell me——?"

"I am not prepared to dispute with you. These things are a matter of feeling with me. All I know is that there is a growing feeling of unrest, and that a new need has arisen."

"Not at all, my dear boy; there has always been the same talk about everything, and about this question of living, more or less acute according to the age. Nothing is new."

"Yes, there is something new."

"And what is that?"

"The absence of love, of fraternity, if you pre-



fer it. Nearly all the existing evil arises from that, and everything would soon be set right if we only loved one another. I have just been watching some thousands of these working people file past; they all appeared to look upon me as their enemy. My birth alone makes them suspicious of me. They do not know me, and yet they hate me. They never come inside my house and I do not go inside theirs."

"They come inside my house, assuredly."

"Pardon me, not inside your house. Inside your factory, if you like, but that is a very different thing. From one year's end to the other those men see only two representatives of their master: his money and his foremen. They are not likely to find much to affect them in those. In the case of a dismissal the employer, it is true, does the business himself! But where is there any bond, any pleasure in common, any daily, or even occasional mark of friendship, or good-will, to counteract the jealousy springing up afresh at every turn, and the continual clashing of interests? Can you see a sign of these anywhere?—I cannot. As to others of our class, like myself, who manufacture nothing and sell nothing, they seldom enter the poorer districts, since it is understood now that the rich and the poor have their separate quarters in the towns. They are born, and spend their lives, laugh or cry, within a stone's throw of one another. And yet the two classes never show the slightest sign of any relationship with, or consideration for, one another. I tell you that this sort of thing gives rise at times to suffer-

ing, and that I myself suffer from it. The hatred they bear us is born of this indifference far more than from any positive grievances."

"Bravo!" cried Mademoiselle Estelle Pirmil, wishing to bring about a diversion. "You know how to preach well, Victor; you missed your vocation."

The young man, who as he spoke had become animated in a way which was unusual with him, and who was now scraping the gravel with the toes of his boots, answered with some temper:

"I dare say."

"I must confess," added the little woman, who had caught nothing of the conversation except the word "love," "I do not understand you, Victor. No love? The poor people do not appear to me to deprive themselves of that. You have only to count the children swarming in the suburbs: why, my baker's wife has seven!"

She laughed as she finished speaking, and her shrill voice was, for a moment, the only sound that rose above the deep silence of the night.

"People like that ought not to have more than one or two children. That would be a reasonable number. What do you say?"

Madame Lemarié, the mother, whose heavy, ordinary face rarely betrayed any emotion, moved her lips without speaking, while she put out her hand and touched the arm of the second prize-winner of the Conservatoire in order to stop her. The latter did not understand the hint, but left off speaking.

This empty-headed chatter provoked no reply,

and the silence that followed was rendered the more painful from the consciousness of those present that the discussion between the father and son, although carried on with apparent courtesy, hid a deeper misunderstanding.

M. Lemarié, continuing to lean back in his seat, threw away his cigar, which lay shining like a glowworm upon the grass. Everybody began looking toward this luminous spot in the midst of the dark circle of lawn. And so they continued sitting and gazing. Neither Mourieux nor M. Lemarié's other friend had any wish to begin a quarrel—the first, because he knew that quarrels were of no avail; the second, for hygienic reasons, and for fear of disturbing his feelings. But their very presence and their silence were in themselves aggravating.

M. Lemarié took up the conversation:

"It is charming to hear you talking of the love of the people. But it would be well to add an example of it. Can you do so?"

"Not one," replied Victor, raising his head. "I am perfectly useless, and I know it. What is more, I shall probably remain so."

"And then?"

"I might have had a different life altogether. I asked you to let me come into the factory, and you refused."

"I should think so! I have too much trouble as it is to keep the factory going in these days of competition. And I do it for the sake of my workpeople, whatever you may think. You, my dear son, would let it go to ruin."

"Thank you."

"I am so sure of it, that, when my time is over, the factory doors will be closed. It is my wish that it should be so, and I shall take care that my wish is carried out."

"As for that, you need have no fear. My desires on that score are over; I have lost the habit of work by this time."

Conscious of the awkwardness of this scene in the presence of visitors, and at the same time not wishing to appear to give in, Victor tried to turn the conversation:

"I saw Madiot's son this evening."

"A bad lot!"

"Yes. I also met his sister."

"Indeed!"

M. Lemarié turned his head, which was resting against the back of the seat, in the direction of his son, whom he could only just distinguish in the shadow, and shot a queer, sharp, inquisitive glance toward him.

"Did you speak to her?"

"No. A quiet, lady-like girl, such a contrast to her brother. You think well of her, do you not, M. Mourieux?"

The old man addressed, not expecting to be drawn into the conversation, made a face, hesitated, and answered with the evident wish not to commit himself:

"Yes, like a good many others of her trade, she is not bad. They all come to my house."

Then raising his voice, so as to be heard by the two ladies, who had started talking to one another again:



“Do you not find it a little chilly, Mesdames?”

The men themselves agreed that the evening was fresh, although there was neither dew, nor wind, nor fog; and so they all rose and returned to the house.

Madame Lemarié drew Mourieux back as they were entering, and said in a slow voice:

“It is sad, is it not, Mourieux? But Victor, I think, is in the right.”

“Yes, Madame,” replied the good man, “but those are things which you can never teach, and which do not bear discussing.”

“My Victor has a good heart.”

“Indeed he has,” said Mourieux, timidly.

She had taken some gold out of her pocket, and she now slipped the money into Mourieux’s hand.

“Take it—for your apprentices, for the library.”

“She is the only really good person in this house,” thought Mourieux. “Her heart is sound to the core. It stands her instead of brains—and it is worth more.”

### CHAPTER III.

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HENRIETTE MADIOT, crossing the road after Victor Lemarié had driven past, went quickly on toward the Rue Crébillon. At seven o'clock, the usual hour for closing, Madame Clémence, the head of the establishment, had opened the door of the work room, and uttered the familiar formula: "Mesdemoiselles, there will be overtime to-night." Whereupon the apprentice had run off to purchase ham and bread, and the girls had eaten a hasty supper off the corners of the tables. It was during this interval that Henriette Madiot, not being hungry, had gone out to buy a few indispensable articles of millinery.

She reëntered the work room, carrying a small parcel done up in tissue paper—feathers, flowers, and reels of brass wire, which she had bought at Mourieux's place of business. She made haste to repair lost time. The evening being so fine, she had taken a turn round two or three blocks of houses, so as to enjoy a little fresh air and relaxation after sitting for so many hours without moving. It did not take long for her youth and freshness to reassert themselves; the colour came into her cheeks; her step grew light, her mouth, which was a little wide, relaxed, the parted lips showing her white teeth. As her friends had often remarked, she recovered her vivacity and light-

heartedness more quickly than the others. She was strong and well-made. At first sight, one might have taken her for an English girl, with her fair, wavy hair, that rose in light curls above her forehead, and was gathered into a knot of shining coils at the back, like a thick wisp of fresh straw that sparkles as it is twisted, and her pale green, sea-coloured eyes, that left on those who saw her the impression of depth and clearness, and her delicate complexion, her straight figure, the air of calm self-possession. But the intelligent smile that came so readily to her lips and was so loath to leave them, the hands, and, above all, the perfect taste of her simple toilette, which bespoke the well-to-do working girl, made it impossible to mistake her French origin.

M. Mourieux, who had known her since she was a child, was in the habit of declaring that there was no other girl her equal, either in skill or in natural distinction of manner. He wished her well although unable to do much for her, for Mademoiselle Henriette was not one to ask often for advice, even from M. Mourieux. He was pleased, however, when he heard her young friends, not overindulgent as a rule, acknowledge that Henriette Madiot's conduct was unimpeachable, and that she would undoubtedly one day rise to be forewoman under Madame Clémence, when Mademoiselle Augustine's time was up.

Half-way down the Rue Crébillon she came to the entrance of a passage, on the wall of which was written in gold letters, on a black marble slab, "Madame Clémence, Modes, first floor."

With her figure thrown slightly back, and her head a little to the left, she paused a moment to examine, with the eye of a connoisseur, the contents of a window dressed out with laces: then, after a parting glance toward the street, as if in farewell to the fresh outside air, she turned into the passage and went upstairs.

At the head of the second flight of stairs was a door on which was repeated the announcement quoted above. Henriette turned the small brass handle, gave a little nod to the cashier, who sat dreaming in front of her account books, and passed along the corridor, which was covered with a thick, gray pile carpet. No milliner in Nantes had such luxurious rooms as Madame Clémence. The corridor—lighted to the right by a screen of ornamental ground glass, behind which lay concealed rooms, shops, and beyond them the work room—opened on the left into two adjoining rooms decorated with a skill and taste that were quite intoxicating. The first of these, of which one caught a glimpse between the half-drawn *portières* on first entering the corridor, was devoted to the regular display of hats of all shapes and colours. Models from Paris, and others created on the spot, trimmed with ribbons, feathers, or flowers, perched on stands of black wood of varying heights, and arranged in groups with a consummate understanding of the effects of light and the happy mingling of colours. To the room beyond, where the trying-on took place, Madame Clémence owed half her fortune. Walls, arm-chairs, and sofa were covered with pale-blue



plush, which rolled in soft luxuriance around four tall mirrors, over which, rising from pots hidden in the corners behind the curtains, hung delicate hot-house creepers, that were gently stirred by every passing sweep of a skirt. There was no woman to whom it was not a pleasure to enter that room. The atmosphere of ease and elegance that clung about it, the velvety softness of its hangings, the subdued brilliance of the mirrors, in which they saw their reflected images surrounded by a frame of neutral tints, a few particularly choice models here and there, placed so that they caught every angle of reflection, tempted even the wisest of her customers to extravagance and routed the economy of the most prudent. Madame Clémence was quite aware of all this. They bought what she wished, the mute counsel of the little plush-covered room determining their choice.

Henriette Madiot went along the corridor, past the models and the trying-on room, and on arriving quite at the farther end opened the door of the work room.

"It's you, is it, Mademoiselle Henriette?" said the forewoman, in an ill-tempered voice. "You have taken your time about it! We finished supper more than ten minutes ago."

"Do you think so, Mademoiselle," replied Henriette, composedly.

"I am sure of it, Mademoiselle."

Louise, the little red-haired apprentice, with fat cheeks, put in: "And if you had but tasted how salt the ham was!"

All the girls present began to laugh, delighted

to have an excuse for doing so, for there was a refreshment to them in laughter. The youngest among them gave full vent to their merriment, voice, eyes, lips, the whole face joining in, while the other ones gave a quiet smile, not lifting their eyes, the smile of those of superior age to whom the fun of the children affords a passing amusement; then some of them, still plying the needle, looked up for a moment to watch Henriette Madiot. The latter, accustomed to the forewoman's remarks, pushed her stool toward the table, near the door. She lifted her dress, seated herself, and said, as she drew toward her a half-trimmed hat, which already boasted of three bows of cream-coloured ribbon:

“The air out of doors is so delicious that it puts one in quite a good temper.”

Mademoiselle Augustine pretended not to hear, and began undoing the packet that Henriette had brought in. The apprentice turned her eyes toward the upper part of the window, which was not, like the lower panes, filled with fluted glass, and through which could be seen the top of a tree, waving against the sky. There was something to her as beautiful as Paradise in that square of blue, and she sighed. All the girls' heads were now bending over their work, and the only sound was that of the scissors, cutting the threads of the hat shapes as they slipped over the workers' nails, of the creaking of an old stool with loose joints, or words hardly above a whisper: “Pass me the wire, Mademoiselle Irma.” “Do you know where my cream tulle is, Mademoiselle Lucie?” “How

I wish I could go out this evening, my eyes are hurting me." Every now and then there was a stifled gape. There was a more nervous gesture about the hands now than in the morning. At intervals, one of the workers would spread her fingers out flat on the green cloth, and after looking at them a moment, without speaking, close them again over the needle.

Madame Clémence employed twelve young women during the season; some of these were working at two tables which ran parallel with each other from the door to the window, allowing a narrow passage between them, and the remainder at two others placed against the walls, upon which was hung a gray paper with blue flowers. A stove near the window to the left, a large brown cupboard for clothes on the other side, and some strongly made stools with straw seats, constituted the permanent furniture of the room. The remainder was taken from the drawers in the morning, and put back into them again at night; it consisted of the smaller necessaries and instruments of the trade; reels of white and black cotton, of brass wire, skeins of silk, long lengths of ribbon, and feathers given out by the manager in the adjoining room. The girls were seated at one side only of each of the tables, the cutter-out next to the trimmer, and Mademoiselle Augustine was the only one who, besides the cutter-out, had a "little hand" to wait upon her. The apprentice did not belong to any one of the workers in particular, and her apprenticeship chiefly consisted in running the errands of the house.

The night had been slowly climbing up the sky, and now the last rose-coloured cloud had disappeared. The twelve women still sat industriously working, but it was only necessary to look at their faces to see how the prolonged strain was telling on brain and hand. There were dark marks round their eyes, and now and then one of them would pass her hand across her lids to keep away sleep. In the heavy atmosphere which they had been inhaling all day, and which was growing hotter now that the lamps had been lighted, the breathing grew quicker, as the young lungs gasped for life in the air which was becoming every moment more exhausted. Mademoiselle Irma gave a little hard cough. Facing one another at opposite ends of the tables, Mademoiselle Augustine and Henriette Madiot were both busy trimming a hat. The former was trying to adjust a bunch of red poppies on a turned-up shape, but she could not get it to set as elegantly as she wished. She was growing nervous. The face was thin, and already worn, and now the lips kept parting with a quick, painful movement. Henriette Madiot, her arms slightly rounded, and her fingers meeting as she folded a broad, cream-coloured ribbon into the shape of a fan, was smiling from the depths of her pale eyes, as she saw that this evening she was able at the first attempt to give her work just that turn which is the delight, the care, and the livelihood of all young milliners, that finishing touch of art, into which they put their youth, their feminine imagination, the dream which their twenty years would so gladly see realized for



themselves, and which they resign to the rich, indefinitely, for as long as their heads can invent and their fingers carry out an idea.

Outside, the reluctant stars, struggling with a remnant of light, still refused to shine, but the deep spaces of the sky were filled with them, as with an impalpable powder, of which no single grain is distinguishable. It was the hour when the grass drinks the dew and is revived; when the horses in the fields fall asleep on three legs under the dwarf willows; through the window, had it been opened, would have come the timid cry of some bird of the marshes flying home. The women sat on, stitching, cutting and shaping.

“Half-past eight,” murmured Mademoiselle Lucie, a stout blonde, who always wore her cuffs turned back, and who could not aspire to the position of a trimmer on account of the perspiration which broke out in beads on her wrists. “Another half-hour and we shall be off, and to-morrow is Sunday!”

She made a movement with her arm as if throwing a cap up into the air. Some of the others smiled. The greater number, fevered with work, heard and saw nothing. Certain pressing orders had to be finished. Their anxiety to get through the work made them serious, as also the thought, always uppermost on pay day, of home, where the wages of the week were anxiously looked for and often spent in advance. The same vision was present under dark hair and fair, as the light from the lamps fell on the stooping heads; the aged mother, whom nearly all of them had to support,

the brothers, the sisters, the inherited debts, which they were paying off. Even those who lived with their lovers were seldom without some near relative who claimed their help, and they had a feeling in common with the best and purest in this sense of generous responsibility, which lent a saving strength to their benumbed fingers, and to the tired mind striving to concentrate itself on some bow of ribbon that had to be made up or tastefully arranged.

The girls did not again lift their heads, and the white necks, softly encircled with the mingled light and shade, remained bent over their work.

A ring came at the outer door, and a moment later the cashier appeared:

"Mademoiselle Augustine, a girl has called and asks to see some one."

"At this hour!"

"She wishes to know if there is work to be had."

"Madame Clémence is at dinner, and cannot be disturbed. Besides, you know there is no work, the dead season is just coming on."

Then, on second thoughts, as the cashier shut the door behind her:

"Just go and see, Mademoiselle Henriette. I cannot leave my work. The flowers you brought in will not sit properly. There is nothing chic about them."

Henriette rose, and went to the end of the corridor. Waiting near the door was a young girl, whose figure and dress were completely hidden by a long black cloak, more fitted for winter wear than summer. Instinctively she glanced down at

the boots—that tell-tale article of dress—and saw that they were in a pitiable condition, trodden to the ground and white with age at the tips. Then she looked at the face, half-shadowed by the brim of the hat, a face looking full at her, with hard features, and dark, bright, deep-set eyes. That which struck her most, however, was its tragic, almost fierce, expression. She had surely met with many rebuffs before coming here. There was no effort on her part to appear agreeable, or to plead her cause; to see her was to know that the heart within her was as dark as death, and that this wild-looking wayfarer of the streets, who was asking almost haughtily for work, was only waiting for her answer to solve a terrible problem, of no account to others, and which was known only to herself. She had her hand on the door of the staircase, ready to turn and descend.

And so the girls stood for some moments face to face with one another. A look of compassion came into Henriette Madiot's face:

“You wish to speak to Madame Clémence? She cannot see you just now.”

“You mean there is no work?” replied the girl, in a low, toneless voice.

“I am afraid not—the season is ending, you see.”

“I understand,” said the girl, speaking in the same, dull, lifeless manner.

And with these words she turned and hurried downstairs, going quickly, very quickly. She was in haste, for her will alone enabled her to bear up against her luckless fate. The sound of

her feet, first on the carpet, and then on the oak of the stairway, gradually grew less and less. She was no longer visible. Henriette Madiot stood for a minute or two, thinking to herself that Misery had come knocking at the door, and was being turned away. She recalled the hard expression on the face; she heard again that sound in the voice, as of one who had lost her soul, or whose soul was too dejected to show itself. A feeling of pity took possession of her, and, urged by a sudden impulse, she ran to the bottom of the stairs. She almost knocked against the girl at the end of the passage near the street. The latter looked over her shoulder without stopping.

“Mademoiselle!”

The girl stopped, recognized Henriette, and timidly stepped back on to the worn stone that formed the threshold of the house; there she stood motionless, her dark eyes fixed on Henriette, who lowered her own, not knowing what to say, or how to give expression to the pity that had hold of her.

“Listen, it is true that the season is just at an end, and that there is no work; but, perhaps, if I spoke to Madame Clémence. You look so miserable!”

The other drew herself up, and said in an offended voice:

“You are mistaken. I am not miserable. All I ask for is work.”

Henriette, fearing that she had hurt her feelings, replied gently:

“Forgive me. What is your name?”



"Marie Schwarz."

"You know how to work?"

"If I did, I should have found something. You understand!"

"Could you do the cutting out?"

"I have had no apprenticeship. I come from Paris. I was a showroom model at a dressmaker's; look——"

She opened her cloak as she spoke, and showed a tall, elegant figure.

"Well, then, if you can do nothing."

A sudden look of sadness had fallen over Henriette's face. She could hold out no hope, she could see no way of helping this unhappy girl. She looked at her as we look at those whom we shall never see again, who are waiting to plunge into the darkness and disappear, and whom yet we would hold back if we could, unknown shadows who bear some mark of fraternity, we hardly know what, upon their foreheads. She opened her lips to say good-by, when a sudden idea struck her which brought a blush of pleasure to her cheeks. She stretched out her arm quickly, and lifted the large felt hat. "Have you much hair?" she asked.

A mass of hair, dark, untidy and tangled, but rich and heavy, fell half down on Marie's shoulder.

"Yes, yes, I see you have a quantity. With a little curling, you might do for a trier-on."

Marie Schwarz turned paler. Her eyes grew softer and longer, and within them shone the mingled gleam of tears and a faint ray of happiness. She put her hand out hesitatingly:

"I am in such need," she said.

Henriette took the hand in its old black glove, the fingers almost gone, and pressed it affectionately:

"I must go. They will scold me. I will talk to Madame Clémence to-night. Come to me to-morrow morning, Rue l'Ermitage, near the court des Herves at the corner, as you turn up. Ask for Mademoiselle Henriette. I am well known. Everybody knows me."

The girl stood still, looking after Henriette, who disappeared up the dark staircase, feeling like one raised from the dead. For three days she had been roaming about on her sad quest, and this was the first word of sympathy, the first glimpse of hope that had been vouchsafed her. It was such balm to her that she listened in distrust and fear lest some one should return and say: "We find there is no place for you. The vacancies are filled. The season is drawing to a close." But no one came.

Henriette on her way back to the workroom had to pass Madame Clémence's rooms; the latter, wondering at all the running to and fro, opened her door and said severely:

"What is the matter?"

Then, recognizing her best hand, she continued in quite a different tone of voice:

"What is the matter, Mademoiselle Henriette?"

Madame Clémence had a natural tact which stood her in lieu of education. Although hardly forty years of age, her hair was quite gray, though her complexion retained its freshness and she was always severely clad in a dress of black silk, with

a mauve or brown bodice according to the season. This simplicity of attire was as grateful to the customers as the rich fittings of the showrooms, for they felt that everything was done to please them. Her hair powdered, and turned off her face over a high fan-shaped puff, which made her look like a marquise in one of the fashion plates, also suited their taste. She spoke little and in a correct tone of voice. But the real secret of her success was the unmistakable intelligence she displayed, and the infallibility of her judgment, which was not delivered without a certain condescension. Her verdict once passed, "This is exactly the hat to suit you, Madame la Baronne, this and no other," there was no further resistance possible, and one's own will and preference gave in without a struggle. She looked like an art critic, pronouncing on the merits of a portrait. And she was in a secondary sense an artist, with a perfect knowledge of combining flattery with persuasive authority. The woman was not without kindness of heart, nor without remembrance of her own early condition, for she had been only a simple milliner's hand when she married her husband, a rich commercial traveller, whom nobody ever saw, and she was ready, in words at least, to take a maternal interest in those under her. She understood the shades of feeling that were of so much moment in the management of these young girls, half ladies themselves, who were poor, nervous, extremely excitable, and in whom any individual fancy was to be encouraged as a precious gift. She smiled, therefore, as she

recognized Henriette, who immediately resumed her self-contained manner, and answered:

"It was some one who came after work."

"You told her there was none?"

"I told her that the season was far advanced and that there was very little chance."

"No chance, you should have said."

"She has such splendid hair, Madame. She would make more than a presentable model for trying-on."

"I had no thought, as you know, of replacing Mademoiselle Dorothee, when she left me after the races."

"Any hat would look well on such a head as that."

Madame Clémence laughed.

"But the trouble is that there will be no hats to try on. In five or six months, if there was need. . . ."

"In five or six months she will be dead," said Henriette, gravely, looking down at the toes of her boots.

"Oh, dead!"

"Yes, Madame. She is without food, that is certain, since she has hardly a boot to her foot. She is a stranger to me. I only saw her for a minute, but she is just the sort of girl to go and kill herself, of that I am sure."

"You think so, really? She seemed an interesting girl, then?"

"Yes, Madame, very interesting; I should be so glad if you could——"

"Could what?"



“Just take her on trial, for two or three weeks.”

The employer reflected a moment. She must have been in an extra good humour, for she answered:

“What a little artiste you are! I have noticed before now that you had your protégés among the poor. What is the name of this one?”

“Marie Schwarz.”

“Very well, then, let Mademoiselle Marie come. I have really no need of her, but I will take her in to please you. Bring her to me on Monday.” To herself she added: “I am anxious to keep friends with such a good worker as I have in you, whom I intend one day to make my forewoman.”

Henriette looked up and smiled; her eyes were almost blue when she was pleased.

“Oh, thank you!” she said, with emotion. “I am glad. I will explain things to her. She shall sit beside me, and you will see what I shall make of her.” And with the faintest of bows, she left Madame Clémence and returned to the work-room. She found most of her fellow-workers preparing to depart, taking down their coats and searching for ties and umbrellas in the cupboard; two or three, however, with flushed faces, were still seated, struggling over their last stitches.

A few minutes later they were all hurrying out past the cashier's deserted box. The ravages of fatigue on these poor young faces of eighteen and twenty were not visible in the dim light that fell from the lowered gas jet, and already the eyes were beginning to brighten with a sense of relief. A fresh current of air met them as they descended

the stairs; the sudden change of atmosphere seemed almost to take the breath away from some of them. Mademoiselle Augustine was obliged to pause a moment and take hold of the side-rail. The apprentice leaped down the stairs. She was the only one whose petticoats were not long enough to require lifting. Those in front waited when they reached the street to say good-night to the others: this simple leave-taking was no particular mark of affection, or of politeness, but one of the established customs among this fraternity of girl workers. "Good-night, Mademoiselle Augustine," "good-night, Irma," "good-night, Mathilde," "good-night, Mademoiselle Lucie"; and these prettily murmured farewells over, they all quickly dispersed. Four of the girls turned to the left, toward the Place Bretagne, the others in the direction of Ville-en-Bois, or the quays, or, like Henriette, toward the steep street known as de l'Ermitage or de Miséri. The little group of milliners hastening home through the thin mist that rose from the Loire were soon scattered among the different quarters of the town, calling out a last quick good-night, as one by one they separated from the others at the cross-ways. Work was no longer their chief thought. They were tired, and longing for home, for bed, for the night that brought sleep—and they hurried on their way. Having reached the quays, Henriette Madiot turned along the pathway that ran beside the railway line, fearing to meet any of the sailors who frequented the cafés on the other side.

To the left, darkly outlined against the stars,

rose the masts of ships, rocking, as they lay side by side, in measured motion, the last rhythm of the sea which came there to die. Those lofty masts of brigs and schooners were voyaging still. Henriette looked at them, and felt herself already at home. The old street she lived in ran uphill from a spot just beyond the harbour station, and had houses on one side only, as far as it reached to the top of the slope. It was deserted at this hour, and even the small boys were no longer swinging on the iron cross-bars of the railings. Half-way up the road curved back a little, and the houses which projected at this point were standing out in the full light of the moon, which shone with especial brilliance on one narrow tenement, situated just at the spot where the road turned, and so tightly squeezed between its neighbours that it looked as if it had only been able to grow in height. How its white walls glistened in the moonlight! It might have been taken for the house of a harbour-master, or for one of the old square lighthouses, or for a church-tower that had been whitewashed so as to serve as a beacon to sailors. It had an air of importance, of beauty, almost of youth, the more so that at its feet lay the long shadows of the acacia trees planted in the rock on the other side of the way for the sake of the poorer people of the suburb. Henriette smiled as she caught sight of it. She had loved it ever since she lived in it, and she had lived in it now for many years. With her artistic sense, the smile was brought more quickly to her face by things than by persons. Looking toward the



house she saw that there was no light at the window of her own room, but that the oleander in the balcony under the roof glistened like a bush of silver.

She paused in the road before going in. The air was unusually mild, and the whole valley of the Loire lay filled with mist and perfume, carried thither by the west wind that blew softly and steadily, without bringing a ripple to the surface of the sluggish water that cradled the sleeping moonbeams. With it was mingled the scent from the ripe hay-fields. "We shall have a lovely day to-morrow!" Not a cloud was to be seen. A smack, with a red light at its prow, was slowly approaching from the further side of the river. Henriette turned, walked up to the door, and went in.



## CHAPTER IV.

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SHE had grown fond of the neighbourhood and of the house and street. Her best memories were bounded by them. She had spent her earliest youth at Chantenay, the district adjoining the plateau of Miséri. She remembered a road, black with coal, in which shoes sank to the ankle in dust or mud; a low dwelling with no upper story; a sweet-faced woman, her mother, very fair and very silent, who sat in the same window-seat from morning till night, making coarse linen shirts for the sailors—a figure of suffering and resignation, whose distant, almost forgotten features she recalled with difficulty. Henriette remembered no walks in woods or fields, no Sunday holiday when parents and children walked hand in hand; nothing but the walk from home to the school kept by the Sisters, and the walk back with her little basket emptied of bread and apples, in which the ball of wool for her cosy-work rolled about. She wondered sometimes when she thought of the past. She was very young when she lost her mother. She would say to herself: “I must have her hair and complexion, and a little of her reserve. I keep my troubles to myself, and do not show my heart even to those I love. I have often heard that my mother was pretty when she was twenty, but she was very worn when I knew her.

What I remember best is her smile; it always seemed to be saying good-by."

She seldom thought of her father, who died some months later, and reproached herself for it as ungrateful; but she had known still less of him. Prosper Madiot was one of the countless multitude of men incapable of skilled labour. He was a navvy hired by the day or month, a simple labourer with a rough voice and a vague and sluggish mind, sometimes shaken by violent awakenings. They made an ill-assorted couple, he and his delicate, dreamy wife, who always obeyed him with a kind of deep and sad humility, so that the children, as they grew up, suffered at the memory of such submission. Every night he would come in, call for his soup, eat it, and go out again to the "Society," where he drank a little and smoked while he watched others play. In the morning he was out before Henriette was up.

For Henriette, gayety, liberty, and life dated from one winter evening, when she, a dishevelled child of ten, worn out with crying, but already consoled by strange sights and faces, left the house at Chantenay with her Uncle Eloi. He led by the hand her little brother a pale boy of seven, who let himself be dragged along. She walked on the other side, and whenever she raised her eyes she could see her uncle's thick gray moustache miles above her. They would have gone anywhere with him. Their mother and father were dead, and the children followed their uncle, the only relation they had left. They followed trustingly, for he had said, "Come with me, children!

Better not sleep here." Henriette was wrapped in a white woollen shawl which covered her head like a hood; Antoine was lost in an overcoat much too big for him, which his uncle had bought for him second-hand. The wind blew down the Loire, freezing the mist upon the ships' cables and masts, and on the beard of the old soldier, as he said, "I have only one bed for both of you, but there will be two to-morrow." Pedestrians passed like black shadows about this remainder of a family—two little children and an old uncle. "You shall see what fine pictures there are on the walls," he went on, hoping to amuse the little orphans he was taking with him, "the Emperor, and Maréchal Bugeaud, and the Taking of Algiers . . . but you mustn't touch them, children; I value my pictures as much as my discharge. Then there is a shell in which the sea rolls and never gets tired." They both looked with vague admiration at Uncle Madiot, who walked rather fast, very tall, with his chest well out, as if used to carrying his knapsack, and his moustache, that looked as if it were cut in stone against his clean-shaven cheek. In the silence of the sleeping port their humble destinies drifted toward the unknown shelter. The children smiled, still shaken now and then by an unconscious sob. The Hermitage showed clear against the sky, its pale front higher than the masts of the schooners, perched upon the peaked summit of the bare cliff and seeming to lean over the abyss. "There is the nest," said Uncle Eloi; and the children thought, "Here is bedtime coming and a white

pillow, and the end of the walk in the cold wind," and they hurried along, crushing the bits of coal on the quays with their ill-shod feet.

There Henriette had grown up, spoiled by her uncle, adopted by the whole neighbourhood, and growing so familiar with the people and their surroundings that she sometimes fancied she had been born among them.

It was a vast and densely-populated world, bounded on one side by the rue de l'Ermitage and on the other by the narrow street of King Baco. The first row of houses, almost regular, hid a second row of narrow courts and huts built upon the side of the cliff, surrounded by tiny fenced gardens, where reigned an everlasting odour of washing. Old people were not wanting, and children swarmed. There was an ancient and aristocratic population which had dwelt there for half a century or more, and wandering colonies, game which the bailiff hunts from place to place like a bloodhound in the field of misery, a pitiful band without friends, or the time to make any, or to deplore the want of them. Henriette had gone among them at an early age, and, poor as she was, found others poorer than herself. They had helped her to feel happy by comparison.

Oh, the lesson of such districts! and the yearning pity they teach the heart for ever! Little Henriette had seen suffering around her, and her naturally tender heart opened to compassion. Almost before she could understand, she had the tender smile which is like a distant caress. The little boys lying along the balustrades, as they



watched her on her way to school, rather tall, in her short dress, and caught the maternal glance she cast upon them, would call out, "Good-morning, Mademoiselle." She did not stop nor speak to them. They loved her at sight, and old men did the same.

At her uncle's wish she had continued to attend the school kept by the Dames de la Sagesse on Miséri hill for four years, while the boy went to the municipal school of the district. The old soldier followed a good impulse when he said to Henriette, "Keep on with your schooling, little one, and train your mind. You will have time enough to use your needle afterward." As a soldier who had spent a third of his life herding with other men, and listening to their conversations, and who had lived in fancy through all the light, infamous, or merely silly stories that go the round of military cafés, he knew that it was best not to throw too soon an impressionable child like Henriette into the corruption of the workrooms. Thanks to him, Henriette lived a comparatively sheltered life during the four years between ten and fourteen, when the intelligence expands and takes possession of a character already formed. She remained very innocent, and therefore merry, but with an underlying seriousness, and she had cultivated her mind as much as is possible for a girl of her station and surroundings. "The child loves reading," said the Sister Superior in answer to Madiot's inquiries. "She has a taste for learning." And these humble women had taught her all they knew of arithmetic, geography, and history, and

a great deal in the way of needlework, darning, and even embroidery.

As she grew up a mysterious power developed itself in her. The power of virginity, which is like another soul, the influence of which is felt in everything; in smiles and glance, in words, and in the gesture of the proffered hand; the influence of that which is gentle, but awe-inspiring, that knows no evil but guesses at its pitfalls; of virginity which dies at a thought, against which all the luxury of the world is arrayed, but which passes unscathed through all, signed with the sign of God. Yes, Henriette had this virginal charm which all little schoolgirls have not, so that the boys called her "Mademoiselle" though she was as poor as the rest, and her uncle, when she raised her clear eyes to his, saying, "I knew my lessons well," felt an emotion he had never felt before, and said to himself, "I must take good care of her!"

He would put on a ferocious air if he saw a sailor or passer-by glance at her with evident admiration when they were out together. He would hurry away from Lemarié's factory at the end of the day, so as to get back to his child, and would never accept an invitation to spend the evening with friends. Sometimes he would preach her a little sermon, short and enigmatic, as befits an old soldier. "You are my glory," he would say, "and you see, Henriette, glory is like the barrel of a rifle, there must be nothing to say against it, absolutely nothing." But all this was not of much account—the girl's best safeguard was his love for her.

On this score he was beyond reproach. For her sake he almost became sober, he economized, and he broke off with old comrades, who were all very well for himself, but who might have shocked the child; he was even weak enough to learn a little cooking. Was it not almost necessary? Henriette had just been apprenticed. She was rather tall for her age, and so tired when she came back from the workroom at almost eight o'clock at night! He was free himself at half-past six, and he thought: "If I make haste out of the factory at Gloriette Island, even if I linger to walk home with a friend, I am home three-quarters of an hour before the child. Why shouldn't I cook her supper? It would be much nicer than for each of us to get supper separately at the tea-shop. A little spoiling does one good at that age." And he did spoil her. He took lessons from Mother Logeret, their neighbour on the first floor, who had been cook at a château, and his regimental experiences helped him as well. So it happened that every night when Henriette opened the door of her uncle's flat, she found the table laid, two earthenware plates keeping warm on the stove, and the old man waiting in his chair with the invariable greeting, "How late you are, child!"

The care which won him the affection of Henriette had at first been lavished upon Antoine as well. He had tried to keep the balance equal between the brother and sister. But Antoine had such a strange character, he was so unaffectionate, so unreliable! He was remarkably intelligent and skilful, but his pride brooked neither

correction nor reprimand. At first he accepted the authority of Uncle Madiot, but even at an age when children generally understand the reasons for their dependence, his submission was still purely physical. It was impossible to win the confidence of the inquisitive-looking boy, who knew every one and everything that went on in the neighbourhood. It was his ambition to escape from all authority.

At an early age he also went to work at the Lemarié factory. Then, all of a sudden, when he was fifteen, he left the factory, and the house in the rue de l'Ermitage, rented a garret in the town, and apprenticed himself to an engine-fitter. Ever since, the tie between him and Henriette and the old man had been nearly broken. Not only did he cease to take part in their family life, but he never climbed the staircase of the house where his sister and uncle lived. When he met them in the street he would talk to them for a few moments, excuse himself on the score of business, and escape.

This sudden, inexplicable departure and attitude of silent hostility, which Henriette's advances, entreaties, and tender reproaches could not overcome, were the young girl's greatest grief. Luckily she was ignorant of their motive, for that motive was herself.

Antoine had heard the history of his own family by chance one day when he was drinking in the public-house with an overseer of the factory, a man whom wine made talkative. The story was more than twenty years old; it resembled many



others, alas, unknown or vaguely suspected, which threaten shame and danger to the poor alone. Her mother at that time was a pretty, little, pink and white work-girl. She had come from Quimperlé, where they are rather flighty, with her grandmother, Madame Melier, to earn a livelihood in the celebrated city of Nantes. As it was then the end of spring she soon found a place among the four hundred women employed to shell peas for M. Lemarié's preserve factory. They were a queer crowd, assembled in a hurry. They thought nothing of laughing at the easy morals of the master, who often passed through their midst; rather a good-looking man, young enough still, and so rich, so rich! They named as those who had been his mistresses, several of the prettiest. Jacqueline Melier was almost flattered when it was her turn to attract his attention.

A sheller of peas, a poor girl, an unprotected stranger, and rather vain; she was a very easy conquest. He won her like the rest—at the cost of a few compliments and gilt brooches, and a little money.

But almost directly the adventure turned out badly. Only a few weeks had elapsed when Jacqueline Melier found that she was *enceinte*. All would be known, her dishonour would be made public, her shame ineffaceable. She sought her seducer, and fell at his feet imploring him to save her. He gave her two thousand francs. For that sum a poor workman, who had come down from the hills of Brest in search of bread, was found willing to marry the girl. The child

was born six months after the marriage; she was Henriette Madiot.

Her mother never consoled herself for her sin, she died of it slowly, consumed by the sight of the growing child, whom she adored. No human being more carefully educated or of a more complex nature could have been wiser in the art of self-torture. She had no other thought for ten years. The humble, gentle, resigned woman who sat sewing all day in the corner of the window seat, had her remorse always in sight, and thought of nothing else.

All her life and strength were spent in trying to get others to forget what she could never forget herself. Directly after her marriage she said to her brother-in-law, Eloi Madiot:

“I beseech you to stay at Lemarié’s factory. If you stay on, you, the old soldier, who, as everyone knows, values his honour, evil gossip will die out. Promise me to stay. Never let the child know! Nor the others if there should be any!”

He promised her, and kept his place as a packer in the factory. Later on, wishing to lull suspicion, Eloi Madiot put Antoine to work with him in the factory. And perhaps because of the attitude of Madiot, who was feared, and his repeated denials, dishonour was avoided and gossip was soon silenced.

At present, in this world of the poor, every one had forgotten the story. The parents were dead, the former workmen dispersed; the children had grown up elsewhere, in their uncle’s house; Henriette belonged to a higher class of workers; she

was nearly twenty-four years old, and her brother was twenty-one.

Unfortunately Antoine knew of this sad past. It bred in him a lively and almost universal hatred. Against Henriette, in the first place, the intruder, whose beauty, distinction and happy life excited his jealousy; he resented the place she had usurped in the Madiot household, and the caresses which he now remembered had been lavished upon her. He often passed her in the streets of Nantes. Generally he would greet her with a mocking bow, or point her out to a comrade, saying: "Look at that princess! isn't she smart? Would any one think we had been brought up together?" Sometimes, when he was alone, he would stop her, always to ask for money. He earned good wages, but he spent all he earned and more with women, or with his comrades at public balls. And when he was short of money, he demanded it without shame of Henriette. "She owes it to me," he thought, "she had more than her share at home." The young girl gave it to him, even depriving herself to do so, because she hoped to win him back.

He had a grudge against his Uncle Eloi, for being under the influence of Henriette, for having put him to work at the Lemarié factory, and for having stayed on there himself. The secret lay between them, and each one kept it to himself, because their meetings were rare and casual; because Eloi Madiot never thought it possible that Antoine could have heard of these remote events, and would never have been so

imprudent as to question him; and because, in spite of all his faults, in spite of his ill-regulated mind and disorderly life, in spite of what he had heard, Antoine, who had no affection for any living being, had remained faithful to the mother who bore him. To spare her, he was capable of holding his tongue. He said nothing, but his anger turned against the master, his son, and his family, against all masters in general, his own and those of others, all implicated to his mind in the sin of one. Speeches heard at public meetings, conversation, and reading had all contributed to that end. Antoine was enrolled in the army of hatred and revolt, among the obscure who play no part. Like many another he had not been driven to it by any doctrine, but by hidden personal resentment. The words fell upon his wound, reopened and poisoned it like the dust of iron filings. All his ideas were but vague words concealing a well-defined grudge.

Henriette knew nothing of all this. She led an almost easy life; she was fond of her work, of her home, and of her own room, which was like a chapel in its silence. To-night in going upstairs she felt more keenly than usual the pleasant sense that shelter gives to those who are familiar with bad weather. How often had she gone up and down the wooden stairs so worn at the edges, so pointed and narrow at the side of the corkscrew banisters! There were red tiles on the first landing, a door-mat and a copper bell-handle, Madame Logeret's flat. Another flight of stairs, another door-mat and a hare's foot at the end of a cord;



Henriette pushed open the door and went in. A loud hoarse voice called out:

"Overtime again to-night! They are trying to kill you."

"Oh, no, uncle! The daughter of the Marquise du Muel is going to be married; her hats must be finished," she answered, laughing.

"The Marquise, oh, dear me, yes!"

Eloi Madiot often repeated the words of his interlocutors. It was just an old soldier's trick and generally meant nothing. But this time Madiot had an idea, as the girl kissed him and passed into the next room, her own pretty room, to put away her hat, gloves, and sunshade; in repeating the word "marquise" he meant to imply: "I only know one, and that's you, my little girl, whom I have brought up. You are worth the lot of them in grace and beauty; I am glad to see you again." He kept his eyes fixed upon the door through which Henriette had just passed.

He was seated beside the little stove which had been fixed in the fire-place. On the high mantel-piece above it burned a small petroleum lamp, which threw down a cone of crude light taking in the chair on which Madiot was seated, the table on which Henriette's supper was laid, and a few of the cracked tiles. The old man had white hair, a brick-red face, and a thick chapped nose. Under his white hair and eyebrows, and between the hairs of his moustache, the red colouring showed here and there, like the strokes of a paint-brush. Madiot was like one of those old shepherds whose

bodies have been hardened and chapped all over by the mountain wind. Before he left the regiment, he had an air of lassitude and passivity. He was the man who has always obeyed. His thoughts waked slowly, but often his eyes would grow moist at a word, showing that this man of untrained mind had tenderness and even delicacy of heart.

At this moment he was moved by Henriette's arrival. He had not risen to kiss her as usual, because of his wounded left hand, which had been nearly crushed five weeks before, by the fall of a pile of full packing cases. He wore his arm in a sling, supported by a red cotton handkerchief pinned to his coat. But the girl's arrival had been sufficient to banish all thought of the long day spent alone with his pain. Bending forward he listened to the sound of Henriette's steps on the boards (for there was a wooden flooring to her room), to the sound of a hat-pin falling into a glass jar, and the rustle of a silk lining thrown over the back of a chair.

"How are you to-night, uncle?"

"A little better, my dear, now you are here!"

His solitary suffering was at an end.

Close to Madiot the line cast by the light of the lamp shone upon the tiled floor, and beyond that little corner of warmth and light the room showed almost bare, furnished only on the right by a wooden bedstead with red curtains, decorated with a pair of woollen epaulettes, a lithograph representing Napoleon I, Napoleon III, and the Prince Imperial in the same crown of laurels; an-

other lithograph of Maréchal Bugeaud; and another whose chief feature was the smoke round some ships bombarding a town; this represented the Taking of Algiers. Further on was a framed certificate, his discharge from military service; fourteen years of good conduct, without a report. The light faded gradually from the walls. At the other end of the room a square of dark blue flecked with gold, where the open window showed the sky.

The girl reappeared, setting with her fingers the stray locks of golden hair loosened by her walk. The charming gesture made a singular contrast with the humble room and the old soldier.

“I have seen Antoine,” said her uncle.

“Ah! Did he come here?”

“No, you know—I went down to the harbour to get some fresh air, and I met him.”

“What did he say? Reasons, as usual?”

“He told me that he had met young Lemarié; and that I must go again and demand my pension, Monday, without fail.”

“If I were you, uncle, I would leave that pension alone, since they refuse it! Aren’t we happy enough together? If you cannot work any more, I will work for both.”

“I know, I know, my dear—but he was dreadfully angry.”

Madiot would not admit that he was afraid of his nephew. He dreaded to cross the bad-tempered, quarrelsome workman, whom he esteemed so little.

Henriette sat down. She knew all about this

question of demanding a pension, she had heard it over and over again. But she loved Uncle Madiot. Before tasting her soup she smiled at the old man, out of charity, and also out of gratitude. She even assumed an air of interest.

“Come, tell me all about it,” she said, gayly.



## CHAPTER V.

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IT was a beautiful day. Life abounded in the pure air, deep draughts of it were drawn in with every breath, and the body at its contact thrilled with joy. Every winged creature had emerged from nest and hole and nightly shelter. The sailors on the banks called aloud to each other, and the echoes were louder than usual. Scented gusts of air came in at Henriette's window, peals of laughter, chance words of passers-by, the twitter of martins hunting prey, all the gayety of the outdoor world, calling "Come out! Come out!" The girl was aware of it; she was ready, parasol in hand, her veil tied over her hat with the two white pigeon wings that suited her so well. Her uncle had been gone since the morning for one of his "walks round the harbour" that lasted the whole of Sunday. She waited, passing impatiently from room to room, sometimes looking out of the open window and thinking: "What beautiful sunshine! What a pity to miss any of it."

Where should she go? Her plan had been made long ago. She would go and see the Loutrels, on the banks of the Loire. She had promised Madame Loutrel, the wife of the best eel-fisher known from Thouaré to Bass-Indre. How nice the walk would be, how merry the arrival, and how sweet

the journey back in the warmth and the languid light of the endless summer evening.

Toward half-past nine she heard the voice of the lodger on the first floor saying to some one on the stairs:

“Higher up, Mademoiselle, pull the hare’s foot.”

The bell rang timidly, announcing some poor visitor. Henriette opened the door, and the same impression of pity which she had felt the night before overcame every other sentiment. Marie Schwarz still wore the hopeless expression which had become habitual to her, the same hardened look and eyes which seemed to ask nothing but the date of some new misfortune.

“I have come,” she said, simply. “There is no place for me, is there?”

Henriette had drawn her into the middle of her uncle’s room, opposite the window. She held her hand and looked with her clear eyes into the sombre eyes that no light could brighten.

“Oh, yes, there is. I have got you one. It was hard work!”

Marie’s face did not change; she answered like a hungry person who is vaguely promised food:

“When shall I have it?”

“To-morrow; you are to come with me to-morrow, Monday.”

Then Henriette felt the heavy moist hand she held tremble in her own, she saw a sudden light in the deep, troubled eyes.

“Oh, thank you, Mademoiselle, how I thank you!”

Marie Schwarz made a movement as if to kiss Henriette; then she drew back quickly, and, overcome by the sudden strong emotion, slowly closed her eyes as if she were about to faint. Henriette was struck by the largeness of her closed eyes, and the expression of gentleness her face took on as soon as they were hidden. She had an impression of the poor girl as dead and carved in white stone. But she shook it off at once, like the brave girl she was, and said gayly:

“Well, Mademoiselle, I give you good news and you begin to cry.”

“No; you see I am not crying.”

Marie tried to smile, but two tears brimmed over and fell.

“Do you know what’s the matter with you,” said Henriette, “you have too many nerves.”

She drew a chair forward, made Marie sit down, and sitting down beside her, said:

“See what a fine day it is! When the sun shines I soon forget my troubles.”

“Ah! your troubles are not heavy.”

“Do you think not? I assure you every one has their troubles, and every one thinks their own heavy. Now they go and now they come.”

The clear morning light was creeping along the wall on the right.

Henriette watched it for a moment in silence, thinking what it would be best to say; then she continued, without moving:

“Have you suffered very much, then, Mademoiselle Marie?”

“Very much.”

"It is so hard at the beginning, in every trade. Is your mother alive?"

"Yes."

"You left her in Paris? Why did you come alone? Did she tell you that you would find work here?"

"Oh, no."

"Who did, then?"

"No one, it was my own idea."

Marie hesitated, but as Madame Clémence's beautiful workwoman still kept her eyes upon the wall with the air of a sympathetic elder sister who knows all about it, she ventured to speak. Her voice, which had been quavering till then, grew firm, it was a voice full of passion, ringing like a trumpet call, filling the room with music.

"I understand that you would like to know all about me and that is quite natural: when you find a girl a place you ought to know where she comes from. I will tell you. My mother is a *concierge*, not at all aristocratic, out at Clignancourt. She never looked after me because she never had time. She does housework until five o'clock. We used to meet at bedtime. Oh! don't think she is bad, she is not. She used to let me keep nearly all the money I earned. That's not bad, for a mother, is it? I had about enough for food and clothes. See this dress and jacket I have on. I bought them out of my savings the spring before last. Only she was cross with me because I am not clever at work, and she is so quick and handy."

"What did you do?"



“Miserable work, Mademoiselle, the sort of jobs that girls do who have no trade. Just fancy! I have made workmen’s coats that took half a day to make, at eight sous apiece, and men’s shirts at five sous each, and supplied the cotton, and I have made beaded trimmings at three sous for two yards! I tired my eyes out at it, always bending over it. Then, through influence of course, I managed to get a berth as showroom model at Noblet’s. I was getting on all right. Then Mama got ill at the beginning of winter, we ran up heavy debts.” Here her voice sank again and grew hard. “When she got better we could not pay our debts. She said I was old enough to manage for myself, she could not lodge me any longer. One must live, mustn’t one? So—there, don’t let’s talk about it. I could not stay at home any longer, that’s all. So I went away.”

Henriette did not flinch. She had heard such stories before. She had seen such things and wept over them many times. It was the people of the street who came to her in their complete destitution. Her eyes, which were fixed upon the window, shrank for a moment as from a piteous object. Then they grew soft and wide, and fixed themselves upon the poor child, who felt herself loved already.

“Have you nothing to do to-day, Mademoiselle Marie?”

“No, Mademoiselle.”

“Then you must come with me. I am going to the Loutrels, they are very old friends of mine, fishermen of the Loire. I will tell them you are

one of Madame Clémence's workgirls; that is a passport. They are such dear people! Will you come?"

Marie mentally compared her shabby black jacket and last year's hat, which looked like an old bird's nest, with Henriette's pretty hat, with the two white wings, and fresh light gray dress.

"How can I come, dressed like this?"

A peal of laughter was the only answer. The sunshine crept further along the tiled floor.

"Ah! you are vain! Is that what prevents you? Wait a moment."

Henriette ran into the next room, and returned with a lace tie, a black feather, and a little gray cloth cape with brown trimmings.

"Now you will see how smart I can make you!"

Then, with pretty movements of her deft fingers, she took off the jacket, threw the little cape over her friend's shoulders, tied the lace scarf in a butterfly bow, pinched up with three easy touches the old hat that seemed to remember its long-lost shape, stuck the black feather like an aigrette in the middle of the limp bow, and then drew back to admire her handiwork.

"Quite charming," she cried.

Marie's face brightened, the natural young girl awoke in her; she gently stroked the cloth that hung in ample pleats about her shoulders; her eyebrows lost their frown and smoothed themselves into two dark arches above her eyes; her thick red lips took an air of decision.

"Now, I should like to go," she said.

They went down together. The street door closed behind them, and they mingled with the moving crowd of peasants and townsfolk that thronged upon the quays.

## CHAPTER VI.

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THEY kept step together, one tall and fair, the other dark and of middle height. They held their heads rather high, talking quietly without gestures, and looking straight ahead. They might have been taken for two sisters, used to walking together, who know their way and pursue it lightly and wisely among the loiterers of the town. The tramways rolled by full of humble folks bound for a day in the country, some with fishing poles that showed above the roof of the conveyance. But the washing-boats were all empty and rocked in silence, on the rigging and yards of the large boats anchored by the quay the shirts and trousers of the crew hung drying in the wind. It was Sunday. Henriette and Marie followed beside the railway fence along the Nantes quays, between the river and the rows of sailors' taverns and shops of sailmakers and agents ranged in sight of the Loire.

"How yellow the water is, Mademoiselle Henriette, and how fast it flows."

"The river must be rising—I hope it will not spoil the day."

"Are they mowing now?"

"Oh, yes, because of the rising water which threatens the low fields. I think they will even go on mowing to-day."



They passed the Bourse station. Henriette had already greeted several friends, escaped for the day from their workrooms, like herself. One of them walked arm-in-arm with a young man. They laughed because they loved each other, and their love was quite new. They crossed the bridge, and Marie followed them for a long time with her sombre, ardent eye.

As they reached the end of the Bouffay quay, a gust of wind almost blew away their hats.

"How lovely to feel the wind," said Henriette, "I have to do without it all the week, in the workroom at least, for at home we are so high up that no feather could keep in curl."

"I think it is a nuisance, it makes one untidy," said Marie, pinning up her heavy locks, which were always coming down.

By this time the breath of the Loire, with its fragrance of poplar, had begun to blow around the two girls. It passed in fresh gusts, seeking the sails and mills, and wandering over the country like bees in search of clover. Between each gust the atmosphere seemed dead; it promised to be a very hot day. Henriette and Marie followed the Saint-Felix canal, and so gained the banks of the real Loire, no longer pressed upon by houses, or broken by islands, but flowing wide and slow in an unbroken stream, between meadows lightly set with trees. Toward the east, on the far horizon, these trees were grouped and drawn together, by the effect of distance, so that the river seemed to flow from a blue forest, and then they showed more widely scattered, waving above the grass in

lines of pale foliage through which the light filtered. The stream flowed in the middle, gradually widening the yellow ripples of its waters. The rising water covered the sandbanks. The ripe grass bent over the banks and plunged into the current. A single pleasure boat, hidden beneath its sails, glided along the opposite bank.

Henriette had waited to reach this point, meaning to say:

“See how pretty it is! The Loutrels’ cottage is still a long way off—over there.” But when she glanced at Marie, she saw her looking so pale, that it changed the current of her thoughts, and she felt only an invincible desire to console that human suffering.

They were walking along the towing-path through the grass, Marie lagging behind a little.

“Take my arm, Mademoiselle Marie, you are tired.”

“Yes, I am; the air makes me giddy. I am strong, I assure you, quite strong, only I soon get giddy.”

“It is only because you have been miserable, you will soon pick up in Nantes. When you have a room of your own, furnished to suit your own taste—that is really restful.”

“Yes; it must be nice to have a room of one’s own, with one’s own furniture—I should like mine to be blue.”

“Blue let it be!” said Henriette. “I will help you. When you have saved a little I will take you to a woman who sells second-hand chintzes, ever so cheap.”

"I would rather have new stuff, you know," said Marie, smiling at the thought, "even if it were not so good I should like it better."

"Why, you are like me! Nothing is too new or too white to please me. I think if I were rich I should have the most beautiful linen."

"I would rather have jewels. When I pass the shops and see necklaces and rings, they seem to hold me back. But I shall never be rich."

"How do you know?" If you get married?"

A real laugh rang out and floated away on the wind. Marie's face was turned toward the distance beyond the Loire. The sun tinged her pale cheeks with gold; her teeth shone white, her eyes flashed with a tawny-brown light. She was beautiful at that moment in spite of her heavy features, beautiful as all passionate beings, with the beauty of feeling. Henriette recognized that splendid laugh of life, she had sometimes heard it before, among her companions, and she felt afraid. She knew the danger of such laughter. It was soon over, however; Marie's eyes darkened, she hung her head, and said:

"Girls like me, Mademoiselle Henriette, are married to misery, and the marriage is not easily dissolved."

She had the same tragic air as she had worn the day before, as of one abandoned by all and dogged by misfortune.

The two girls walked on in silence for a time; then Henriette, who knew that some wounds must not be touched, even to heal them, said simply:

“Look at the daisies. What a lot there are in the Mauves field!”

The earth lay before her all in flower. The meadow wore its garment of ripe grass, its green broken here and there by patches of daisies, buttercups, or purple clover. Every step broke down the interlacing grasses. The wind upon the harvest field made shimmering lights like the flashing of a steel blade. It blew away the pollen of myriads of flowers like a mist of foam. All the creatures that dwell in the earth had come out of their holes with joyous cries. It was the height of summer, the drunken season, when life flows day and night beneath the stars, for man to drink.

“See, isn’t it beautiful? Don’t you feel as if we breathed in happiness?”

Henriette’s free and open nature, used to the country from her childhood, loved to walk thus in the light and fragrance of noon, beside the sunlit Loire.

She could not have expressed her feelings. She felt the caress of the warm air to the very depths of her being; she was conscious of her youth of soul and body; a voice seemed to whisper: “You are strong, you are pretty. You will get on in the world. Life is long, life is radiant.” She tried in vain to put the thought aside, to distract herself from it by looking about, the voice came from within speaking in secret. Marie, being surprised and rather tired, heard no such voice, but fatigue at least helped her to forget.

Every now and then they crossed ditches that were like baskets of aquatic plants in flower, where



fumitory, poppies, mint, and beaded sorrel flourished in the dry ooze. But at the bottom, among the roots and low grasses, a slender stream of muddy water was beginning to flow. On the surface of the river the ripples were spreading wider than usual; they opened out like the jaws of well-fed beasts gasping with heat. The Loire was rising. Twelve strokes rang out from some church steeple, and floated over the fields, like a file of birds calling one to the other.

Another hundred yards. Then a child called, two others came out, and all three rushed to meet the travellers.

"They are a large family of boys," said Henriette, "there are seven of them, all jolly. Good-morning, Gervais! Good-morning, Henri! Good-morning, Baptiste."

They were twelve, ten, and seven years old. They rushed forward, bareheaded and barefooted, dressed in nothing but a pair of men's trousers and a shirt, with braces a hand's-breadth in width. The last flung himself against Henriette's skirts. They all kissed her, and eyed Marie like young watch-dogs, suspicious of a stranger.

"They are expecting you, Mademoiselle Henriette," said Gervais, who was tawny as a lion cub. "Mother has scaled the roaches. Etienne had a job to catch them."

"Really?"

"Of course, because of the rising! If they had not been for you, he would never have taken so much trouble."

"How good of Etienne! We are such old

friends," said Henriette, blushing a little. She took the two youngest Loutrels by the hand, with a motherly smile, and went into the cottage.

It was built of strong tarred planks, and stood upon a mound in the fields, high enough to protect the inmates from ordinary risings of the river. Between the front of the cottage and the adjacent river bank, on a sloping square of ground, three-parts bare of grass, nets hung on stakes to dry, and wicker creels pointed upward. People passing in the distance might suppose that this wooden shelter whose only garden consisted of garlands of drag-nets, was a fisherman's hut, inhabited in summer only. But this was not so; the Loutrels had lived in it all the year round for many years. The door opened on a large room, which took up nearly the whole of the cottage, and served as a kitchen, a workshop and the parents' bedroom. A cast-iron stove for cooking, a cherry-wood bedstead, a table its legs mildewed with damp, a coffer and a bin, formed the whole of the furniture; these were set close together and ranged in exact order as if on board a ship. On the other side of the partition wall was the sons' bedroom. Above both rooms, instead of a ceiling, fishing implements and provisions lay among the beams and rafters, packets of line, skeins of hemp and flax, boxes pierced with holes for keeping fish, strings of threaded cork, sweep-nets, wicker creels, sacks of onions, oars, tholes, rudders, rolls of sailcloth, rope ends, a thousand things, useful and useless, old and new, such as accumulate in garrets.

The fisherman and his wife were both types of the lean determined race, pale-eyed and clear-headed, which the Loire, in the course of time, has made in its own image. Children of shad and eel fishers, hard-working, but capricious, tender of heart and short of temper, impenitent and convicted poachers, they understood fishing, and hunting, the wind and waters, sands and boats, and beyond these things they knew nothing, but how to weep when they must and laugh on Sundays over a glass of muscadet. A fine race, perhaps Gallic, but certainly French.

Their seven sons resembled their parents. Two of the eldest sailed the seas for the State and one was in the merchant service.

Henriette and Marie went into the cottage preceded by the little Loutrels shouting:

“Here they are! Here they are!”

The fisherman and his wife were standing by the stove at the end of the room; he held in his hand the battered straw hat which he had just removed; and both her hands were busy with the frying-pan in which the fish was cooking. They had the same bony faces, bronzed complexions, long, clear-cut features, and keen, deep-set eyes. The woman wore the peasant bonnet of Nantes, with goffered wings.

“We are rather late,” said Henriette. “I have a friend from Paris with me, and she cannot walk as fast as I can.”

“She is welcome, my dear. Good-morning, Mademoiselle! Is every one quite well in Paris?”

Marie, rather taken aback by the Southern sim-

plicity of this polite question, answered: "Very well, thank you, Madame," while Henriette kissed Madame Loutrel on both cheeks.

"What smacking kisses!" said the old man. "Kisses of youth! Ohé, Etienne!"

A strong arm pushed open the door between the two rooms, and Etienne, twenty-five years old, came in, smiling. His long legs, upturned moustaches, and his air of energy, made him look like one of those gallant cavaliers that painters love to depict heading a charge. He had on his working clothes—a brown coat without buttons, and trousers and waistcoat of coarse linen. Had not he and Henriette been friends from childhood? He looked straight at her, and in his eyes, clear as water, the eyes of a watcher and hunter, there appeared a tenderness for the girl who stood before him, smiling also, flushed with her walk, a pretty picture in her gray dress and hat with the two wings.

"It seems you have been working to give me a surprise, Etienne! It is very kind, and my friend and I are terribly hungry."

Not daring to call her "Henriette" now that she was one of the most elegant workgirls in Nantes, he answered gladly:

"Oh! Mademoiselle Henriette, I do not get a chance of pleasing you often enough!"

The laughter of a young heart caressed by a word of love rang through the cottage.

"Hark at that, Etienne!" she said.

Apparently to escape him, but really from a little bit of vanity, knowing that all eyes were



upon her, she bent forward in the streak of sunlight that entered by the low door. The Loire lay before her, a plain expanse of troubled water, stretching wide to the willows on the opposite bank. The river was a friend also. "How kindly they receive me," thought Henriette; but all she said was:

"How high the river is."

The whole family replied, for young and old were interested in the extraordinary rise. Then they sat down to table. Marie was next to Etienne and opposite Henriette. Astonished at first by the novelty of their ways, and rather isolated in this conversation of old friends and country ideas, she soon began to feel at home, and grew animated. Henriette was watching her. Above the conversation and the clatter of knives and forks, she heard Marie's sonorous voice, fit to raise the battle-cries of misery in the midst of a riot, saying: "Thank you, Monsieur," to Etienne as he filled her glass. The tact she had acquired in a fashionable shop, which made her as refined as a princess, made her aware each moment of some vulgarity in Marie's intonation, words, or gestures. She remarked, at the same time, the beauty of her fine eyes, which grew softer and more gentle; they grew almost too beautiful. She thought them so when they rested on Etienne. Her precocious experience taught her that they were a danger to Marie, like the laugh she had noticed in the Mauves field, the laugh of abandonment that scattered too much soul by the wayside. Marie had won her heart, and she was anxious for her.

Henriette was one of those whose friendship immediately becomes solicitude.

Heat seemed to pour through the wooden roof. Every one felt the sting of the invisible sun on face, neck, and arms. The shade was full of flickering rays. Sometimes one of the boys would look at the Loire and say:

“The mowers in the big field will not be in time, it is rising too quickly.”

Sometimes a leaf, wisp of straw, or a feather carried down by the stream and blown about by the wind, fluttered in, and the father said laughingly:

“It is funny that there should be any breeze left, it blew so often when I was young! Come, Etienne, pour out a glass of muscadet to the health of the pretty girls of Nantes!”

## CHAPTER VII.

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THE afternoon was growing late. When dinner, over which they had lingered long, was finished, M. Loutrel went down the river to take in some creels, which he feared the rising waters would carry away. Henriette, Marie, Etienne and Gervais, who began to seek the society of his elders, had gone in the opposite direction up the bank, and had been seated for more than an hour a few hundred yards from the cottage, under a group of three poplar trees, whose roots were in the water. A shadow, shot with sunlight, quivered beneath the trees.

Etienne and Gervais were stretched at full length in the high grass; Henriette and Marie sat with their feet gathered up under their skirts. They were all watching the field which the mowers were hastily despoiling, exchanging a few words at long intervals.

The peasants, in a slanting line, mowed with an even movement, each one cutting a piece like the steps in a staircase, from the mass of ripe grass that diminished before them. They swung their ten scythes all together, their bodies bent all together, with one circular movement they drew the blades from beneath the gray piles they left behind, and the gleam of steel flashed simultaneously at ten points along the line. They had not stopped for

a week. Their knees never left the crests of flowers and seeds. Women raked up the harvest almost as soon as it fell, and piled it on the carts. But however strenuous their labour, it grew more and more probable that they would not have time to finish getting in the hay. For they had only mowed half the immense field which stretched far out to the hills, seamed with hedges, and they were approaching the lower ground, which would soon be invaded by the water. In the ditches among the water-weeds and sedges the cruel Loire advanced and lay in wait.

"There is trouble in all trades," said Etienne, sententiously. "The women, especially, are tired out."

"How can you tell?" asked Marie.

"They are not talking, and they keep looking our way. They would like us to come and help."

"Indeed! Do they come and help you get in your nets?"

They all laughed—Henriette quietly, and the rest loudly. Their voices carried to the workers, and two or three of the men paused for a moment.

"I will go presently, if it is necessary," said Etienne, growing serious. "It is quite true that we, too, have had hard days. The fish go away. The river grows dead. We can get eels well enough, but as to carp, tench, and perch, oh! you have to be cunning to get a living out of them. So do you know what I do, Mademoiselle Henriette? When I have taken in the lines and eel-baskets, every morning, I fill my boat with vegetables and take them to Nantes, with my fish."



From under her parasol, that made her complexion still fairer, the milliner answered, with her eyes half shut from the heat:

“Where do you take them?”

“I fill my boat at Saint-Sebastien, at Gibraye, you know, and come down to the Trentemoult harbour, right opposite your house, but you are never at home.”

Henriette’s eyes smiled beneath their lashes.

“How do you know?”

“Why, I look, of course.”

“Then you don’t look carefully, my dear Etienne. Before I go out I open my window, and dream a little, while I get some fresh air. I never fail, when it is fine.”

The mowers in the distance were growing anxious. Those who raised their scythes to sharpen them on the stone glanced a moment at the dip in the field, the bottom of the huge shell in which they were working so desperately; then they bent and mowed more vigorously than ever, as though the minutes were counted. It was no longer the daily task, but tragic rage and hatred of the elements stronger than man. Riches were about to perish. The faces, brown with dust, dimly visible in the distance, the hurried movements, the farmer’s curt orders, and the oaths of the carters carrying away the green grass, contrasted with the serenity of the declining day.

“But you are not idle either, Mademoiselle Henriette,” said Etienne. “Do you sew from morning to night?”

“No, I trim hats. The shapes are ready for me.

I arrange the ribbons, laces, and feathers. I have to get an idea and carry it out. It is not easy!"

"I should think not!" said the fisherman, casting an admiring glance upon her, as if she had been a goddess who had come down upon the Mauves fields. "And no one says to you, 'Do this,' or 'Do that'?"

"No."

She beamed, flattered by Etienne's simple compliment, and the humble tenderness she guessed at.

"Oh, no, my dear Etienne. In our place if one copies, one is done for. Something new is always wanted; one must have invention, and a little style that every one's fingers cannot manage."

Etienne, like soldiers, and like the people of the Loire to whom he belonged who do not like to be at a loss, had a set of vague phrases to express his feelings upon matters beyond his comprehension. They simply meant that he did not quite understand, but was too polite not to keep up the conversation, so, taking a piece of grass he was chewing out of his mouth, he answered:

"What a business! It must take a lot of thought!"

"I can't think how you manage," said Marie. "In time I might learn to copy, but I should never be able to invent."

Henriette, who always brightened up when the conversation turned upon such subjects, twirled her parasol, and said:

"Bah! you can try. An idea comes, you don't know how. It hooks itself on to us like a fish on

Etienne's lines. There are good days when you get ten at a time, and days when you can think of nothing. Good humour goes a long way. When I am not worried everything comes easily to me. A wedding, a party coming home from the races, a fashion paper, an exhibition of pictures sets our minds working. But it is youth, you know, that does the rest. Nothing can replace it. Freshness of imagination is necessary. Then there is another thing, a certain style; you understand, Mademoiselle Marie? For example, at Madame Louise's they rather go in for outline. At Madame Clémence's we are colourists."

Etienne was not following the conversation. His eyes had the drowsy look which tension of thought produces in a peasant; he had turned them away from Henriette, and was gazing into the forest of grass. He was watching with inward anger the last act of the duel between the mowers and the river, for he knew its dangerous treachery. Suddenly he raised his head and shoulders, his hands still pressed against the ground, and said:

"Look there! It has come!"

Through the ditches and imperceptible slopes the Loire had gained the middle of the field. He stretched out his arm:

"There in front. The river is laughing in the grass. It will be a marsh in half an hour. It is rising quicker than it did three years ago. Isn't it, Gervais?"

The red-haired boy, who was already rolling up his trousers, answered gravely:

"I think the water is rising faster."

At this moment a woman's cry rose at the edge of the ripe grass, floated on the air, and died away in the green and silent immensity.

The flood! They were calling for help to save the last cart-loads. The two Loutrels made off with the long swinging stride of watermen. They turned aside, and mingled with the men and women assembled in the narrow space where the mowed grass still lay upon the ground. The scythes were still. Every rake and every pitchfork was in motion.

From the place where they sat, Marie and Henriette saw the end of this drama of the harvest.

The victorious Loire crushed the high grass, laying it quicker and better than the steel blades, twisting the tufts of seed, which left their live dust upon the waters. None could say whence came the invading sheet of water. It made itself a bed like a beast, turning round and round. At first it was a yellow pool, round which the banks of grass crumbled away. Left and right other pools of gold soon glittered in the hollows of the field, and the grass rolled into them to die, and from one to the other, like a line of flame, channels of communication widened out. Soon the mound on which the Loutrels' cottage stood was cut off from the dry land, and a current running parallel with the river covered the whole of the green expanse to the horizon, toward Nantes, and pressed with all the weight of its waters upon the ruined harvest.

Beyond it, the workers gathered together en-



deavouring to wrest from the Loire the last cart-load stuck in the shallows. They stamped in the mud, hanging to the shafts, axles and spokes of the wheels. Now and then a clamour arose, they bent all together in a united effort, the bells of the four horses tinkled, the mass of grass overflowing the wooden sides dragged on the ground, quivered and let detached wisps fall from its enormous back; but the cart never moved. And all around was the tranquillity of the calm air, the infinite peace and sweetness of the evening before the stars appear. It enveloped the workers with useless consolation, a vain tenderness of the heavens. But how many others breathed it and rejoiced: mothers tired by the children's noise, old men drinking after vespers under the inn arbour, workmen in their Sunday best taking the air in public gardens, lovers whose conversation languished on the journey home.

Half an hour later, Etienne and Gervais returned over the flooded meadow, where the cart, stuck fast in the mud, made an island, while the workers, diminished by the distance, straggled home through the trees with the unharnessed horses. Etienne found the two girls ready to start.

"Do you know, you can't get back to Nantes now the fields are cut off by the flood," he said, jokingly.

"Do you think I would stay here?" said Marie. "Oh, dear, no! I begin work to-morrow. I would rather tuck up my skirts and cross the fields as you have just done!"

But Etienne went on, taking no notice of Marie:

“Don’t be afraid, I will take you both back in my boat—that is, if Mademoiselle Henriette likes.”

He questioned Henriette with respect in his face and voice as she stood poking at a bunch of white clover with the point of her parasol. She hesitated a moment, inwardly flattered by his deference; then she looked up and said:

“Yes, please, Etienne.”

Then the broad-shouldered young giant, beaming with pleasure, went off toward the cleft in the bank, where the Loutrels tied their flat boats. Gervais ran before, shouting with joy, like a sea-gull taking to the water.

When they brought the best and newest of the three boats down toward the cottage, where Henriette and Marie were waiting, they had spread a piece of clean sail over the seat in the prow, so that “the young ladies” might sit down without soiling their dresses. A few leaves and flowers of the wisp of green broom with which Gervais had wiped the planks lay scattered about the boat. Henriette kissed Madame Loutrel.

Etienne, attending seriously to the management of his oars, gained the current with a few strokes, and the boat glided away over the flooded meadows, toward the town lying in the sunset. The two girls sat together in the prow, side by side. Sometimes they looked toward Nantes, where the sun was setting, while the houses, the arches of the bridges, the church spires, and factory chimneys, clustered together

in the twilight, showed up in blue outlines against the background of light. Sometimes they looked back toward the receding Mauves field, and their eyes rested upon Etienne, busy with his oars, but not so absorbed in them but that his eyes could sometimes meet those of Henriette, with a smile, as if by chance. The sky of molten gold was reflected in the stream. But shadows were gathering on the grass, and the willows gleamed no more. The breeze was dying down. A languor hung about the close of day, and promised an exquisite night. Snatches of song and peals of laughter sounded over the waters, growing louder and louder. As the travellers approached the town their joy grew troubled as divine joy will when it fears its death in our hearts. Etienne mused: "Will she ever love me? Oh! what can a poor boatman do to win the love of this work-girl who is as unapproachable as a lady, so that I am too shy to speak before her?" Henriette regretted that her day of liberty was drawing to a close, and though she would not give way to the thought too much, she yielded to the impulse to look back at the low willows of the Loire, in the distance, which were just on a level with Etienne's eyes. Marie felt ill at ease, like a stranger between two people who love or are about to love each other. She withdrew into herself and her own misery. Her thick, white hand hung over the side of the boat, dabbling in the water, and, thinking of the cool depths beneath her, she was assailed by the thought of plunging in, and being annihilated, and lying down to rest. Gervais,

curled up at the bottom of the boat, was trying to sleep. They drifted smoothly along.

The outline of the town was now deep purple against the pale sky. When they had passed the Vendée bridge the town looked enormous between the golden river and the golden sky, casting from one to the other the reflection of its huge cascade of masonry clustered in the shadow. Sounds arose from this landscape of stone, which grew vaster and higher as the boat advanced, indistinct voices, the movement of human beings, and the noise of traffic. Nearer to them, along the banks, couples of poor folk returning with a flower in their dress or button-hole, turned their merry faces to the river, and called out: "Take us in, I am tired!"

Before the taverns—the "Beau Soleil," the "Mon Plaisir," and the "Robinson"—under the flowery arbours of glycina, the drinkers raised their glasses and held them out toward the boat, where sat the fisherman and the two girls of the people.

Thus strangers saluted you, poor passers-by! And they did well! They raised their glasses; their shouts, or their silent envy, celebrated the country from whence you were returning, the glory of the stream down which you floated, the beauty of the evening, the dream they guessed between you; for they were workers like yourselves, who have but one good day, and they knew how sweet it is, when youth returns from the open country, saddened to see the dying day close on its mirth. What mysterious sign is it



that marks those that love, so that the heart is thus moved and recognizes them from afar, though they be unknown, obscure, pass rapidly and are gone?

Etienne, slanting his oar, which lightly ruffled the surface of the stream, turned the boat to the right, by the branch of the Loire that traverses the centre of the town and passes at the foot of Bouffay Castle. Houses, the station, and factories, lined the banks of the canal. The dust of the day rose in a warm cloud, turning to rose colour where it met the sun, above the roofs and hills. The boatman stood up paddling, and dreaming no more, save deep down in his heart. He sought a landing-place, for the quays were dark and the currents strong. He had to fling himself into the prow, and catch hold of an iron ring to which he quickly fastened his rope. The movement made the boat dip, and Henriette gave a little cry; but before she could lose her balance, Etienne's arm was round her and she was lifted on to the stone step, against which the water lapped like boiling oil. She drew back a little, and gave her hand to Marie, who was stepping ashore. Etienne devoured her with his eyes, saying in tones of entreaty:

"I should like to take you down to the sea, Mademoiselle Henriette, the journey here is too short."

For answer, she held out her hand, and he pressed it hard.

"Thank you, Etienne," she said.

"Thank you, Monsieur," said Marie.

Before they had taken a dozen steps along the quay, they saw the boat in the middle of the stream again, and Etienne and Gervais side by side, rowing hard to reach Mauves again before it was quite dark.

Etienne's joy was gone, for the crowd, the dust, night and forgetfulness already lay between them. The charm was broken, the weight of the dying day lay upon the fisherman's heart as he rowed up the stream. But the girls walked lightly on, mixing with the Sunday crowd. Marie recovered her gayety in that crowd, of which she felt herself a unit. Henriette was calmer, thinking of the pleasant day they had spent.

"Your friends the Loutrels are quite peasants," said Marie.

"Yes, but they are such dear people, that is all I care about."

The deep, dark eyes looked questioningly at Henriette, who walked along with her face raised to the first star which had just risen above the hills. Marie feared she had offended her. She caught hold of her arm and squeezed it:

"You are not angry, are you?"

"Angry!" said Henriette, absently, "why?"

"Because we are not a bit alike. But I love you all the same. I should like to be your friend," she continued, almost violently. "I am not worth much; I shall be sure to grieve you, but I love you. Will you be my friend?"

Henriette, roused from her dreams, answered in a low voice:

"Yes, Marie, I will."

"I will tell you everything; you may scold me when I do wrong; and I will try to be better."

Their eyes met, and though very different by nature, both were glad to hear, and to exchange with lips and glances, the words which secretly delighted both: "Love me!"

At this moment a young man came out of one of the blind alleys that run down to the quays; he recognized Henriette and exclaimed:

"Is it you? The last person I expected to meet!"

It was Antoine Madiot; in spite of his dark-brown suit and round hat of the same colour, his hands grimed with steel dust, his red tie and the watchful anxiety of his expression showed him to be no more than a working man. His ferret head, wasted cheeks and narrow chest betrayed his dissipated life. He might have gone on his way as usual, after throwing these few idle words at his sister, if he had not noticed the other girl in the gray cape, with the large eyes still soft with the loving words just spoken.

"You are taking a walk with some one? It is unusual to meet you without Uncle Madiot at this hour!"

"This is one of my work-room comrades," said Henriette; "we are coming back from Mauves."

"I will walk a little way with two such pretty girls, if the other lady is agreeable?" he added, while Marie shrugged her shoulders, much flattered, but too shy to speak.

He walked on the left of Henriette, and began to tell them drolly, with the gestures of one sure

of his own wit, about a discussion he had had the day before with his master over some piece of work which had gone wrong, and how he had managed to make him lose his temper and put himself in the wrong.

“You should have seen the old hands chuckling inwardly and saying to themselves: ‘Go ahead, youngster, you’re in the right.’ You should have seen their eyes shine. And the other looked a fine fool; he had a strike last year for much less. When it struck seven, they all crowded round and congratulated me. If I had chosen to say the word, the thing would have been done.”

Marie was listening eagerly, and sometimes he leant forward to look past Henriette, who was contemptuously used to his boasting, at the other girl, who was quite of his own class. He knew instinctively how ready she was to drink in hatred, though her eyes were fixed on the masts of the ships, which lay still at the side of the canal.

They had entered the denser shadow cast by the hills, long after sunset. They were nearing the end of the quays. The crowd was growing less dense. The shopkeepers advanced their chairs further on the pavement. Antoine went on talking, addressing himself to Henriette alone, and trying through her to excite old Madiot to demand the pension due to him from M. Lemarié. In his opinion, if Victor Lemarié had stopped his carriage at the top of their road to ask news of the invalid, and if they had sent him medicines, it was because the master was frightened and hoped to gain time.



“Young Lemarié saw quite well that I was not taken in by his soft speeches! He sat there looking foolish before us all. I hope Uncle Madiot will go to-morrow. Tell him what I say. He is not much use, unfortunately—he has nothing to say for himself.”

Antoine bent forward in the gloom to catch the expression of his sister's face. He had a meaning look, and a tone of mocking hatred which he often assumed toward Henriette.

“Ah! if you were to ask!” he said in a low, insinuating voice.

“Antoine!”

“The thing would be done; we should get the pension right enough, and at once.”

“You must be mad! I have nothing to do with it at all.”

She moved away from him, hurt by his tone and words. He burst out laughing.

“Of course! I knew it; I only said what I did to make sure! My lady has nothing to do with such things. What does she care about other people? She is ashamed of an uncle and brother who are only workmen.”

Then he added after a short pause:

“I am sure I do not bother you for favours.”

“Why not, if I can grant them.”

“Even when I haven't a sous, like to-day. I won't complain.”

“Here is the proof, Antoine,” she said, gently. “Here are my last two francs; you may have them. I have had to get a great deal of medicine for uncle.”

Antoine took the piece of silver and shrugged his shoulders.

"It's disgusting the way you can earn money. You've always got some, but we poor men—" With a parting gesture, half of thanks and half farewell, he turned away and went up the Avenue de Launay, which they were just passing.

"Would you believe, Marie, that when he was a little fellow I was his best friend? He would not go to sleep until I had kissed him."

She walked a few steps further, then stopped and said:

"You see there are troubles in every one's life."

These words of sorrow threw them into each other's arms. Henriette pressed her sister in misfortune to her heart and felt her warm lips upon her cheek by way of thanks.

"Good-by till to-morrow," they said to each other as they separated, and the shades of night fell between them as each one turned toward her home.

Henriette raised her eyes again to the star that shone above Miséri Hill. There are certain hours that are as balm to sorrow, and gentle airs that move the heart. She felt them as soon as she was alone, and thrilled with the intimate consolation of created things. She murmured half aloud:

"Why is my heart so troubled to-night?"

She was no poet. She was only a poor girl, who longed for love and had found none. It was love that spoke to her; love that takes possession of the heart before it finds an object or a name, that

calls to us unceasingly in changing tones, saying, "I am beauty, I am rest, I wipe away all tears."

She thrilled as she leant her arms upon the window-sill of her room in the twilight, as if her heart opened itself to the night. The leaves of the rose laurel were scarcely stirred by the breeze.

"Happy are they who are loved!" she thought, "and those who have a friend." The faces of her companions in the workroom passed before her, and she smiled at the thought of those who had befriended her in the days of her apprenticeship. She remembered the gestures, words, or looks which had touched her proud nature. They had all worn the same moved look as they whispered in the workroom, "Let us be friends, shall we?" Ah! how sweet was the quick look of thanks, the furtive hand-squeeze as they left their work, and the promise to tell each other everything! Above all she remembered at the beginning of her life in the workroom a certain pale Mademoiselle Valentine, the forewoman, whom she had worshipped for her large eyes and a kind word spoken on her behalf: "Don't tease the new apprentice, she will get on; the child has clever fingers and plenty of sense." What goodness on one side and what love on the other! The older woman had never guessed at the dumb worship of the little apprentice. Henriette remembered pricking her finger till it bled simply to win a little notice and pity from Mademoiselle Valentine. She remembered how one morning she had longed to die at her door and to say with her dying breath, "It is for you! I have prayed to die, so that you may be

happy." Souls of young girls, thirsting for love! It was the best and purest that deceived themselves thus. Henriette remembered them all. Alas! all were scattered—some married, some dead, some drifted away and forgotten. Then she thought of Marie, who must have got back by then to Rue Saint-Similieu, a city of the poor, sleeping over yonder, beyond an immense valley of houses and factories, nearly all the town, stretching away behind the hill.

"How soon I have grown fond of her," she thought; "there must be days when love comes easily."

The Loire gleamed among the islands and the prows of the great schooners, lying in shadow. Gusts of hot air rose from the neighbouring streets, laden with heavy odours, indefinitely depressing, as if the vitiated atmosphere, in touching the mysterious principle of life, had become charged with the fatigue of human breasts, the trouble of human hearts, and the moral distress of the whole city; and the intermittent breeze, blowing in from the open country, brought fresh provisions of love, perfume, and energy, driving away the heavy vapours of the day.

"Poor Marie! She will not get off easily. She is common, and she comes of a bad stock. Temptations are plentiful in our trade. But I will do my best; I will adopt her. I will answer for her to Madame Clémence."

Henriette smiled like an honest girl, who is not ignorant of evil; then the smile faded and she grew sad. Was a new friend enough to fill her



heart? She was twenty-four, and very lonely. Uncle Eloi loved her dearly, but he saw everything with the eyes of an old soldier; as a guide and confidant he was quite useless. Antoine hated her; all her prayers and efforts had not sufficed to win him back to their former intimacy. She had no family circle, and so her heart sometimes grew heavy on evenings like this when she had time to think of herself.

She felt very depressed. She fixed her eyes on a point of the valley, beyond the Loire, dark as the future. She thought that Etienne, at least, was fond of her. He had found many touching and humble ways of showing the pleasure he had felt in bringing her home. How he followed her with admiring eyes.

“Oh! he likes me, there is no doubt of that,” she said to herself; “he shows it plainly enough. He is like many others who think me pretty, but he is more at his ease with me because we are such old friends. But he cannot love me as I want to be loved; he is nearly the same age as myself. He knows that a Loire fisherman and a milliner would be an ill-matched couple. And what about myself—shall I ever love him? Do I love him now?”

She listened to her own heart in the deep silence, and there came no answer.

Henriette smiled to herself in the delicious night air. No! the beloved was still nameless, and yet he existed. He had grown up with her in the secret places of her heart ever since she was fifteen. He who was to be all tenderness, he who would

hide her against his shoulder, who would know all her secrets, who would defend her from insult in the streets, who would treat her with as much respect as though she were a great lady, and would take upon himself half the sorrows of life. How she would love him! She seemed to see him in the distant shadows, on which her eyes dwelt full of tenderness.

With an involuntary movement she pressed her arms against her breast, then dropped them, blushing at herself. "Yet it is true! I would love him well," she said to herself. "I should be capable of anything for the man I loved! There is no sacrifice I would not make for him. It is sweet even to think of him."

Her uncle's cracked cuckoo-clock struck the half-hour. The cry of a beaten child rose from a neighbouring yard; then came a sound of uncertain steps upon the staircase outside. "There are the old Plemeurs coming home tipsy, as usual," thought Henriette.

The last gleam had faded from the horizon. The earth was wrapped in blue shadows. A strong wind, fresh as the breeze over the downs, leaving a savour of salt on the lips of the last passers-by, blew over the valley, making the shrouded masts creak with longing.

"Why is my heart so troubled to-night?" thought Henriette.

## CHAPTER VIII.

---

ELOI MADIOT had on the silk hat and frock coat which he wore on Sundays, and when he was invited, under penalty of a fine, to attend the funeral of a fellow-member of the Mutual Aid Society. He had taken longer than usual to brush them, not out of vanity, but embarrassment as to what he should say to the awe-inspiring M. Lemarié, his master.

Henriette had run in joyously after the mid-day dinner: "I am so glad, uncle," she said; "Marie came to work this morning, and all the girls were nice to her." Then she had walked with him as far as the hotel on the Boulevard Delorme and left him before the door of varnished oak with its two rings of burnished copper. The old man, after contemplating the front of the hotel which held so much uncertainty for him, vainly endeavoured to press the electric bell with his free hand. A passer-by laughed at the fumbling of his clumsy fingers on the ivory button, when suddenly the doors flew open, and a landau drawn by two horses came out with a clatter of harness and a rolling echo of wheels, and stood waiting by the roadside.

"I want to see the master," said Madiot.

The footman, who was just closing the door, replied:

“Can’t you see he is just going out. Go to the office to-morrow. He does not see workmen here.”

But Madiot pushed past him and gained the middle of the porch, standing at the foot of the staircase with its stucco ornament, its immaculate stone steps, and strip of crimson, leading up out of sight into the silence above.

Eloi stood bewildered at this luxury, and the footman passed behind him grumbling.

“I will tell the master about this, you will be lucky if you aren’t put out.”

The workman’s broad shoulders prevented him from taking stronger measures. Eloi stood motionless at the foot of the stairs, flooded with red, white and yellow light, deliciously blended. It made him think of the flower market and the gladiolas that Henriette bought sometimes toward the end of spring. How well these rich people knew how to make their houses bright; they always had plenty of light! A muffled footstep was heard on the staircase, where the least sound echoed loudly. It was followed by a second, slower footstep and a rustling of silk. M. Lemarié appeared dressed in a frock coat with a gray dust-coat on his arm. He was putting on his gloves; his appearance betrayed his discontented and arbitrary nature, even though his eyes were hidden as he bent over his task. Down he came, tall and slight, his patent-leather boots stepping methodically in the centre of the red carpet. Whatever he did he always looked like a man engaged in some mental calculation; anger,



smiles, attention, or even argument could scarcely dispel his air of absorbed gravity. As he turned the corner of the staircase, M. Lemarié caught sight of Eloi Madiot standing quite still several yards below him, but he calmly continued his descent, betraying neither surprise nor anger. He carefully smoothed his little finger, which was not properly fitted into his glove. On the last step he stopped, buttoning his gloves, and his preoccupied eyes rested on the workman with a glance of imperative question.

"I have come about the pension," said Madiot.

His sound hand held his hat like a shield against his breast; but as he answered, with an instinctive movement he uncovered the wounded hand trembling in its red cotton sling, and the master's eyes rested for a moment on the strange pulsation of the injured limb, no longer under control of the will but quivering against its owner's heart. M. Lemarié made no movement of anger, as Madiot expected. He had turned Antoine out on a former occasion when he came to make the same demand, but Antoine was a bad workman, and a disturber of the established order. But in the present case discipline was not disturbed nor the master's authority questioned; he had only to make an unfortunate but worthy man, who was claiming more than his due, listen to reason. M. Lemarié sighed like a man overweighted with business and to whom another weight is added. Then he spoke slowly and distinctly, that he might be better understood by the ignorant listener.

"Madiot, I sent you an answer in the first place

through my cashier. Then I was obliged to turn out your nephew, who came and insolently renewed this demand for a pension. I cannot keep on indefinitely returning to the same subject, my good man. You know me; I never give in when I have once said no."

"But, really, M. Lemarié, you are unreasonable."

"Excuse me, if you were in my place you would do just the same. That is a thing you people never seem to grasp. You have hurt yourself; I am sincerely sorry for it. I sent you my own doctor; I paid you your salary for the first month you were laid up; I can do no more, Madiot, because if I gave in to you, to-morrow I should have to pension all my workmen who managed like you to get hurt by their own negligence."

"After thirty years in your service, M. Lemarié, one of your oldest workmen."

"I do not deny it. You are a worthy man. But that does not make it my duty to provide you with an income. The law is quite clear. You were employed in easy work, not in the least dangerous; you are the victim of your own clumsiness; how can I help it?"

A woman in mourning was coming downstairs, but Madiot, in his emotion, never noticed her. He crossed the marble hall to the step where M. Lemarié stood. He felt his chance slipping away; the veins of his neck swelled up. He looked the smart gentleman up and down, from head to foot, thinking that he would probably never stand face to face with him again, and the words he had hid-

den in his heart for more than twenty years rose involuntarily to his lips in a gust of anger:

“And yet, M. Lemarié,” he exclaimed, “the girl I have brought up, Henriette——”

He was suddenly aware of a black shadow on the staircase, and stopped short.

There was dead silence for a moment, so that the buzzing of a blue-bottle against the window was distinctly audible.

“Make haste and pass, Louise,” said M. Lemarié, calmly; “you are never in time, and you give these idiots a chance to make scenes.”

Madame Lemarié continued her descent, looking like a tower surmounted by a tuft of feathers. A thick veil covered her face. She passed between the two men, the master effacing himself against the wall, and the workman drawing back against the ball of cut glass on the banisters. Not a word fell from her lips, her eyes looked straight before her; she bowed slightly to Madiot, as was her charitable habit toward her inferiors. With a rustle of silk and a jingling of jet she turned into the porch and crossed the threshold of the hotel. When Madiot, whom respect had held silent, advanced toward the master to hear his answer, he saw M. Lemarié’s imperious hand pressing a button like that on the front door. The footman reappeared; a stream of white light from an adjoining room flooded the hall and fell upon Madiot. M. Lemarié, leaning carelessly against the banisters, fixed his eyes and his raised finger upon the old packer:

“Maxime, I am going out with Madame, if this

man does not follow me out, telephone for the police.”

Half an hour later the landau with the pair of bays was rolling along the road upon the bank of the Erdre, taking M. Lemarié and his wife to call on some friends in the country. The carriage was only open in front; Madame Lemarié sat on the back seat with her veil raised on her forehead, her face flushed and tear-stained, and her eyes obstinately fixed on the horizon, seeing nothing.

No one but herself knew what she had suffered since the day M. Lemarié married her for her fortune, and he least of all. She was the victim of her husband's pretended superiority; no one pitied her, neither silence, humility, nor anything else could save her from the mockery of the world, because she occupied a place of which she was thought unworthy. She had chosen to suffer in silence. She had forgiven her husband's unfaithfulness, the contempt of others, and innumerable slights. She had effaced herself until she had no voice in her own house. She had reserved only one right—the wife of a business man upon whom many were dependent—she was in the habit of protesting, once for all, against any injustice done to any other than herself, after which she never alluded to it again. She had overheard Eloi Madiot's violent words, and remembered the claim already put forward by the old workman, and she had said to her husband: “Why do you not give that man something; I think you are wrong.” Then he lost his temper, or rather he turned his anger on her as Madiot was not there.



Leaning against the side of the carriage he continued speaking, stopping between each sentence to observe one of the bays which had gone a little lame:

“I repeat that neither you nor your son understand anything about these matters. You, at least, are capable of charity, though your judgment is not sound; but as to him, mark my words, Louise, it is nothing but talk, talk, talk. I know this generation of phrase-mongers.”

Madame Louise sighed. “Let Victor alone,” she said, trying to shield her spoilt son, “he has nothing to do with it. It is I who say you ought to give in. Madiot is one of your oldest workmen, if not the oldest. If you are afraid of establishing a precedent and incurring undue responsibility, give him a retiring pension. It would not bind you to much, after thirty years of service.”

“No, Madame, I do not give retiring pensions. I shall have none but what I earn; let my workmen do the same.”

They both relapsed into silence. The splendour of summer spread its millions of flowers in vain for these rich people as they passed. The renewed youth of the earth enveloped them, and they felt it not. Sometimes a fan-shaped ravine opened out between two hills, a double slope of coppice or of corn, terminating at the edge of the cool river with its overhanging trees. But sorrow and anger are blind.

“You spoke of charity just now,” she said, presently. “Well! give some help, or let me——”

Her husband interrupted her with a peremptory gesture:

“No, Madame, no, I have allowed your charity to upset my decisions or my rules too often. This time I won’t have it; we have done quite enough. I forbid you to see these Madiots, to give them anything, or take any notice of them whatever.”

His wife turned upon him brusquely, contrary to her usual habit of submission, wounded and exasperated by this restriction of the only liberty she had:

“But why, what reason can you have?”

He stared at her for a moment in surprise, noticing the heavy faded features, the lips with their sorrowful droop, the high cheek-bones, the frightened eyes, and the tight silk bodice.

“I have my reasons,” he said, coldly; “please remember that you are out calling with me. Here we are at Brasemont. You are hideously dressed.”

The sand of the Loire rose round the wheels in fine golden dust, and sank again behind the carriage. Trees brushed the coachman’s shoulders with their branches.

The horses, scenting the stable of the château, strained at their collars and made for the borders of the avenue.

Several women, keeping cows in the fields behind the hedges, stood on tiptoe and cast curious glances at the rich lady.

At dusk the same evening Eloi Madiot sat listening to Henriette, who was trying to reason with him. He came home in a state of fury just as she

returned from her work; she found him armed with violent abuse against the rich, doubtless gathered from a talk with his nephew Antoine, though he would not own it. Thinking it rather a serious case, she said amiably:

“Uncle, we must sit up to-night. I have some waists to finish—they have been waiting ever so long! We will spend the evening in my room, and we will have tea just as if Monsieur Lemarié had given you the pension. Shall we?”

The old man looked upon Henriette's room as a sacred spot, not to be entered without permission. To sit up in Henriette's room was always a treat to him. It was the lightest and largest in the flat. It was furnished with a wooden bedstead with white cotton curtains, always neatly draped, trimmed with ball-fringe, a gilt mirror, an ebony wardrobe with a long glass, and a round table to match, both presents from a little work-room friend, who had made rather a good match. The table was covered with a crochet tablecloth, and on it stood a china vase of artificial roses, between two piles of fashion papers. A bookcase with glass doors, and several cheap water-colour prints, views of Norway, Switzerland or Italy, hung on the walls. A statue of the Virgin stood on an ornamental wooden bracket in the corner. A rosary of large beads hung round her; she had a face of penetrating sweetness. She was blessing, raising three fingers in remembrance of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

It was a charming room, and its chief charm was the soul of the young girl which seemed to

animate it, even in her absence. The arrangement of the furniture showed personal taste. Sometimes an article of dress, of no great value, but prettily chosen, lay forgotten on a chair; a white muslin scarf, a waist-belt with a fancy buckle, a parasol, a dress-front trimmed with three-point lace, or a pair of gloves still keeping the shape of the slender hand, always a little bent even when still, from the constant habit of needlework. Sometimes when old Eloi was dull during the solitary hours of the day, for Henriette took her mid-day meal at the work room, he would open the door of her room and look in without crossing the threshold, delighting his eyes with the sight of these things which reminded him of two deep-blue eyes, and the face of a beautiful young woman; then he would go for a walk in the town, refreshed by the thought of his little girl and his pride in her.

This evening, hoping to console her uncle, Henriette had cunningly drawn up the only arm-chair, covered in tapestry, which no one ever sat in; she sat by the table, near the lamp, covered by the best lamp-shade, busy with her sewing. Her deft fingers were arranging a piece of cheap lace trimming on the neck and sleeves of a waist. Sometimes she put down her work to take up the scissors or the lace rolled on a piece of blue tissue paper. Then her eyes would rest on Uncle Madiot in the arm-chair, or on the open window through which sudden gusts of wind kept blowing in. When the wind was strong they could hear the branches of the rose laurel brushing against the wall or balcony. Sometimes the sound of oars



rose from the Loire, and Henriette listened with a smile. She felt happy because Marie had been so well received at Madame Clémence's, and because to-night she was filling her favourite rôle of consoler to her uncle.

"You should not make yourself miserable because of Monsieur Lemarié's refusal, uncle," she said. "You have done your best, and you have failed; what is the use of getting angry, and talking about law-suits? Poor people like us are feeble enemies."

"He has stolen my pension!"

"We have always managed to live—I admit that we have not always been rich," she said, casting a satisfied glance at her wardrobe and water-colours, "but the years of misery are past; Antoine is earning his living, and so am I. Do you know what Madame Clémence said to me last Saturday? She said: 'You little artist!' with a look that meant a good deal, if I am not mistaken. Wouldn't you be glad, uncle, if your niece was made forewoman? Forewoman to the leading milliner in Nantes! Well! it may happen any day. Mademoiselle Augustine is going downhill fast." She gave a fresh young laugh as she held her needle like a lance between her fingers. "With us, in fashionable shops, it is woe to the old!"

"It is the same with us," said Madiot, "woe to the old!"

Henriette realized that her laughter was cruel; she bit her lip, which had so thoughtlessly insulted a companion's misfortune.

"You may be quite sure, uncle, that I would

never try to get her place. But you see it is my turn to rise now."

They looked at each other for a moment. Henriette, in the involuntary exaltation of youth, he broken down, listening to what she said almost against his will when the sound of her voice broke in upon his sadness, to which he reverted as soon as she was silent. Why could she not cheer him? Why did he sit sunk in the tapestry arm-chair, with never a movement but the quivering of his eyelids? She could not understand why the failure of his errand in the afternoon, which they had fully expected, should have upset him so much, and she attributed his unappeasable anger to something which Antoine must have said to him.

Presently she spoke again, driving her needle through her work:

"What ages it seems since the first day of my apprenticeship! Do you remember, how you left me at the door of Mademoiselle Laure's work room; she used to make country bonnets? And do you remember how you were nearly frozen waiting for me outside for an hour? I was only a little thing then, but we loved each other dearly even then, you and I!"

In vain she recalled the past and appealed to her uncle's unfailing devotion to herself. The old man was overcome with remorse and shame.

"I nearly let everything out," he thought to himself, "I, a man, and an old soldier! A moment more and I should have forced him to pay me by dishonouring her before the master's wife! After keeping the secret in my heart for more

than twenty-four years. How could I? Don't I love her? Am I a coward?"

As he looked at her he knew it was not so, and that he loved her above all things. But the shame remained, and with it the remembrance of the lamentable past filled his mind so that he could not shake it off as usual.

"Uncle, if I am made forewoman, I shall get higher wages; we shall be quite rich. I shall take you for a little trip, with my savings. Right up to the mouth of the Loire. Etienne has promised to take me in his boat."

She laughed, hoping to make him happy. She was used to seeing his humour change at an affectionate word from her. But this time tears rose in her uncle's eyes.

"When I think that I nearly betrayed her! Oh! to think of it!"

Henriette put down her work. She leaned forward and stroked the thick wrinkled hand tightly clenched on the arm of the chair.

"What is the matter with you, uncle?"

He bent his head, lest she should read the truth in his eyes.

The rose laurel quivered in the wind, and tossed its branches in at the window. A voice which seemed to come from the street, muffled and deadened by the wind, was heard calling:

"Hello there! up at Madiot's."

The old man listened. "Who could be calling at this hour?"

"Hello there! come and look!"

Eloi Madiot got up from his chair; Henriette

was on her feet already. Groping their way across the dark room, they climbed out upon the balcony, for the window was only raised a few inches from the floor. The girl, stretching her head under the branches of the laurel, saw half a human shape, surmounted by a cap, waving an arm from the window of the next story, toward some spot in the distance.

"It is Madame Logeret," she said, in a whisper; "what can it be?"

At the same moment the voice called for the third time, hoarse and muffled, like a cry for help:

"Where are you, Monsieur Madiot? Look out, over there! There's a fire!"

The old man's deep bass replied:

"All right, I'm here, be quiet!"

Silence fell again on the narrow house, which commanded a view of the whole town. The three inhabitants were anxiously trying to ascertain the exact spot where the fire had broken out, in the thick darkness.

A fire was smouldering beyond the first branch of the Loire. At what distance, in which corner of the factory districts, or even on which of the islands it was impossible to guess. The darkness hid every landmark. Nothing was visible on the left bank of the murky waters but the ships huddled together, and the irregular lines of lamp-posts, against the immense field of darkness formed by the earth and sky. There were islands of light that seemed to rise above the horizon like stars: clustered groups of lamps, dark spaces, and long curved lines of single lamps. The lighted



spaces were but small in comparison with the darkness, and the lamps threw no light upon surrounding objects; they looked quite different from the same view by day and seemed all of one size. All accurate notion of distance was lost. But two lines of red light stood out against the night, one above the other, probably from two rows of windows which reflected the glow of the invisible flames.

Their light varied every moment as the fire gained ground to the left or right. A shower of sparks rose from the first line and shot up into the darkness higher than a cathedral spire, then a tongue of vivid flame followed, licking the outside wall, and died down again.

“The house is done for,” said Madiot, “the outside walls are catching fire.”

Henriette shivered as she stood beside him.

“Poor things!” she cried; and they were silent once more.

The colour of the two red lines grew more and more vivid, flames burst out here and there, ending in volumes of smoke, the first dancing wreaths of which showed pink against the darkness. Then cries of terror rose upon the wind, sounding like holiday acclamations, for the voice of a distant crowd has but one note. Then suddenly the roof fell in, and the whole building became a fiery furnace, vomiting flame, smoke, and ashes, which rose and fell with the wind. The clouds above glowed brick-red. A light mixed with burning dust illumined a quarter of the town, showing streets, squares, chimneys, and slate roofs covered

by moving shadows. Old Madiot fell back overcome with emotion and leant against the wall. His face showed deadly white in the light of the conflagration.

“Henriette! Henriette!” he gasped.

She laid her hand on his wounded arm.

“What is it? Where is it?”

“Henriette! It is Lemarié’s factory,” he cried, in a voice of horror.

“Are you sure?”

“I know my own workshop. It is reaching the warehouse. Let me go!”

“You can’t—at your age—with only one arm; no, I won’t let you!”

He pushed past her, groped his way across the kitchen, seized his hat, and slammed the door behind him, crying:

“I must! I must! Our place is on fire!”

## CHAPTER IX.

---

ELOI MADIOT did not come home till three o'clock in the morning. He was tired out, his clothes were soaking wet and blackened by the smoke, and he fell asleep. As he had related before going to bed, all the Lemarié factory was burned down: work shops, storage-room, stock, offices, foreman's house—all, in fact. After fifty years of existence the whole machinery, created by two generations, had suddenly sunk to ruin, and the earth lay bare and desolate again, and ready for new buildings, while here and there useless fragments of the ruins lay around, telling no tale of the enormous amount of life, toil, and bold enterprise that had been at work there.

Near the river, wrapped in the mist of dawn, Henriette, on opening her window, saw the smoke arise, white with the vapour from the water and blackened with clouds of soot from the only partly extinguished wreckage. The death-struggle even of inanimate things is sad to watch. Henriette had remained under the impression of this sight and of the fright of yesterday, when the roofs of the factory fell down into the flames. She went to her room, passed to and fro, and did her household work as usual. She remembered her meeting with Victor Lemarié two days before at the

corner of Rue Voltaire, the bow with which he greeted her, and the fine fit of the horse's harness, which she had noticed in passing. She also remembered—dear me, how heavy the mattress seemed this morning as she turned it, and how storm-laden was the air that entered the window—she remembered having once seen Victor Lemarié's father, the manufacturer. It was a long time, five or six years ago now. He had presided at a festival of the Gymnastic Society, and delivered a speech from a platform draped with the tricolour and filled with fine folk. He gesticulated above the heads of the gymnasts, who were crowding at the foot of the tent and applauding. The ladies, officers, and common people, who were sitting on one side, did not listen. From her place Henriette heard nothing. She only saw a hard face which tried to smile, a white beard that was moving, and rapid motion of arms that did not bend or exaggerate. Some one beside her remarked: "Talk away, old boy, go it. That's why you are so hated." The remembrance of this fête, the outline of the man and his words came back to her. And now, what feverish excitement there must be in the employer's house, and among the workmen, too, who were all at once discharged by the fire. The young girl finished smoothing and arranging the sheets on her bed, and straightened the folds by running her hand all along the mattress. Then she arranged the curtains and drew them close together, leaving but a shadowy slit between them.

Outside the newsboys were already at work.



“Great fire! Factory destroyed! Latest news!” they cried.

At eight o'clock, half an hour earlier than usual, she was outside. The news was known and discussed everywhere. It filled the town. The custom-house officials talked about it with the lightermen, the milkmen with their customers, and the proprietors of cafés with the people who came in to have an early drink and wiped their lips with the backs of their hands as they went out. Everybody had seen the drama either close to or from a distance, every one knew some fresh unpublished fact which was promptly added to the gloomy account that varied but little. The popular imagination was hard at work upon the fearful theme: the night, the raging gale, the firemen on the roofs reddened by the flames, the total destruction of human property. From the rue de l'Ermitage to the tobacco factory there was not a house possessed of a window, a door or a sky-light, from which some woman did not look out, if only for a moment, to feel for and meditate upon the white smoke that was still rising from the ruins.

At Madame Clémence's the work-room girls were in a great state of excitement. When Henriette entered at half-past eight the first comers were already talking at the tops of their voices between the two tables. Their sunshades were still in their hands, their hats were on their heads, and they paid no attention to the remonstrances of Mademoiselle Augustine, who had sat down in a protesting manner and was repeating sharply:

"Go on, girls, if you like, but I shall tell Madame Clémence all about it." They did not listen. They were excited and in a hurry to tell what they knew.

"I was going to bed. I had been reading a book," said one.

"I was asleep. The noise of the fire-engine woke me. I ran to the window in my nightdress. It was so cold. A man shouted, 'It's in the Ile Gloriette quarter.' So I went back to bed. It was far away."

"It was the reflection on the windows that frightened me. It might have been in my room. I watched, and I could only see a pillar of flame in the dark. And I could hear nothing. Are there two men hurt?"

"No, three were injured by the beams. They have been taken to the hospital. I read it in the paper coming here. Here you are, here is the article—a million loss."

The enormity of the sum produced silence. The pretty young heads were bending over the paper which Mademoiselle Irma held. Marie Schwarz, standing at the back in her poor shabby dress, ventured to approach Henriette, who, with raised arms and chest out, was carefully freeing her hair that had got entangled in the straw of her hat. Her black eyes smiled.

The door opened. The apprentice Louise entered, shaking her head with its red hair and chubby cheeks, and saying:

"Well, there's something else happened."

She had an important air about her, like a child that knows a secret.

“And something important too.”

“Well, what is it?”

“Girls, you may not believe me, but Monsieur Lemarié is dead.”

They all looked up. Mademoiselle Augustine stopped working, and said sharply:

“My dear, you are telling stories to amuse the young ladies. Isn't that it? Go to your seat.”

To show the truth of her statement the apprentice dropped her arms down on to her dress, and her poor shoes, that were letting in the water everywhere, became visible.

“Not at all, Mademoiselle. To prove to you that I'm right, I may say that our neighbour is a joiner who works up at the big house. He heard it just now. The master went to look at the fire about eleven o'clock last night. It shocked him so, to see all his property burnt, that he dropped down. They took him home, and he died before he could be told that the fire was out. It's the truth I'm telling you. Even the priest arrived ten minutes too late. So you see——”

“It's really too much all at once,” said some one.

There was no reply. Death the inevitable had been mentioned, and as the stones shiver all along a street when a wagon is passing, so their souls quivered as they heard the name of Death. The stools were brought nearer to the tables, hats and coats were put into the cupboard, and the noise of cotton reels and scissors laid on the smooth silk stuffs showed that the work was beginning as on every other morning. Henriette, enervated and distracted by the storm and the bad night, picked

up her skirts to sit down, and looked round with clear eyes on the gathering of girls. The teeth of laughing Mademoiselle Cécile, the dimples of Mademoiselle Anne, a Normandy lass with a milky-white complexion who was Henriette's assistant, and the morning glint in all their eyes, were no longer visible. They were all quiet now, some devoid of all expression, some serious and even grave, busy in preparing their work. Mademoiselle Reine, who was sitting nearest to the forewoman, and who had a face like a saint in a stained-glass window, was sitting with downcast eyes, while her lips were slightly moving.

Within the next quarter of an hour two or three other young girls came in, with a certain excitement clinging to the very folds of their dresses. They confirmed the news brought by the apprentice. M. Lemarié had died of congestion of the brain without having recovered consciousness. The windows of his house were shut, it was reported. The factory would not be rebuilt, at least not by the manufacturer's family. A rumour was also afloat that a claim for the relief of the workmen would be placed before the Municipal Council.

Gradually the great interest, the prospects, the expectation that centred round the death dispersed the gloomy impression. Silk roses, velvet bands, bunches of marguerites or corn-flowers began to take their places on the shapes. With a slight pricking sound the needles pierced the materials and the straw. The milliners placed their prospective masterpieces on their clenched



fists, held them at arm's length, turned them round in order to take stock of them, and brought them close again.

"I am sure I shall have an order from Madame Lemarié," said Mademoiselle Augustine, who took the long silence as a personal compliment. "I have been working for her for more than ten years now."

Mademoiselle Irma, who had the largest and most restless eyes of all the girls, and was a bit of an artist and hated the first hand, answered from the other end of the same table:

"I don't envy you, Mademoiselle; a mourning hat!"

"One can make them more or less elegant."

"Never: a bit of crape, a band, a veil the whole length of the dress; you can't do anything with that."

"I beg your pardon."

"I beg yours. Such hats are horrors."

"No, Mademoiselle, not my hats."

"After all, you would not put them on your own head, nor would I."

Mademoiselle Augustine was vexed, but tried to laugh. Three wrinkles puckered up her pimpled face, and she retorted:

"There is no reason for it. I am not a widow."

Stifled laughter was heard all round. Mademoiselle Lucie, the apprentice, who sat two seats away from Henriette, and always had moist, clammy hands, bent over her frame and murmured:

"Dear me, I should think not."

Henriette, who was sitting opposite Mademoiselle Augustine, and did not want to laugh, said:

“They say that Madame Lemarié is very good.”

This brought out various comments from every part of the room.

“She’s better than her husband. He did not like the workmen. He was a bad wealthy man.”

“There isn’t such a thing as a good wealthy man.”

“Look at Mourieux. He isn’t rich. He earns his living like the rest of us, perhaps a bit better.”

“He sells his flowers rather dear, but I like him for all that. When he smiles you feel you can trust him; but Lemarié—you could never get a word out of him if you asked him for anything. It was all orders, orders, nothing but orders.”

“My mother told me that the day he set his two machines for shelling peas going, two hundred women were thrown out of work. They were all his workers, and they were mothers too. My mother was one of them. They went to his office to ask for respite or assistance. He replied: ‘Every one for himself. A shelling machine saves me the cost of four hundred women. I bought the machines and discharged the women. I am well within my rights.’ Do you think that’s fair?”

“He was right. He could not afford to lose through us.”

“And the prices he paid! You could just earn your bread at his place and no more. While he was making millions!”

“And insulted all the pretty girls.”

The young girl who had spoken blushed on seeing several heads slowly raised from their work. She at once added:

“I know that’s the case, because I’ve been told so.”

Irma was too smart for an employee who earned her fifty francs a month. She was pale and her eyes were black-ringed. She was very artistic and capricious, and there was a note of passion in her voice and in her whole being that made people listen to her when she spoke. She continued:

“And yet that man seized the wealth of the poor. Have you ever read ‘Looking Backward,’ Mademoiselle Jeanne?”

“No; who wrote it?”

“An American, Bellamy by name. I have read it three times. He shows what society will be like at the end of the twentieth century. We shan’t be alive then, I am sorry to say, for life will be more worth living then.”

“What do you know about it? Are you a socialist? Do you like socialists?”

The young girl answered very seriously, never leaving off work and still twining a wreath of convolvulus round a white straw shape with perfect taste:

“Yes, I do. I have been to several of their meetings. I do not understand all their theories, but at least they admit that we do suffer and ought to complain. Life is so dull.”

“I have read some novels by Eliot,” remarked Mademoiselle Reine. “They worried me, and

yet I have a feeling that all those fine phrases are nothing more than a written dream."

"Is it a dream to ask for justice?"

Reine, who was nervous, too, raised her slender neck, which was of the colour of old ivory.

"I do not trust them," she replied. "What reason have they for loving others so much? I should understand it if they believed in God."

"There's a pious girl for you."

"Well, it's true."

"It is just because they expect nothing from an after-life that they claim their rights in this. Not every one can believe in God and give themselves up to piety as you do. There are some who suffer, without having done anything to deserve it, and they rebel. I do so."

Answers came in quick undertones, for it was a question that went home to them all.

"I do, too—I don't—I do sometimes—there, now, I've broken my needle."

Henriette had for the past few moments been engrossed in attentively comparing three pieces of ribbon which had to be matched with some mauve flowers of the newest fashion. She unfolded them, gathered them up, and compared the patterns with half-closed eyes, so as to better gauge the shading.

On hearing the ideas of these young girls of sixteen or eighteen, she, the elder, could not keep from nodding her approval. Mademoiselle Irma noticed it, and said:

"Oh, and what about you, Mademoiselle Henriette?"



"Why? What about me?"

"Your ideas are well known. You have no need to speak about them. You are virtue, wisdom, and reason personified, a young lady who cannot fall."

"Luckily; one hurts oneself when one does," she replied, with a laugh.

The young girl to whom she had been speaking looked at her severely and said nothing. The talk went on amid the scissors, pins, and thimbles. Each mind was taking its own course into a region where no soul may follow any other soul, into the land of dreams, which is a trackless land. It was getting hotter. The air that came in through the half-opened window was laden with electricity which had a choking effect, and was quickly rejected by the lungs like poison. Drops of perspiration stood on their bare necks. From time to time an impatient tapping of a shoe heel on the floor, or the drumming of five fingers on the table, might be heard. New ideas were slower in coming; they were getting tired and inclined to dream.

The death of M. Lemarié had been forgotten.

"It is time the season was over," said fat Lucie, who was almost choking. "I would rather not have a sou in the house than work in such heat."

The remark had apparently no effect upon the young girls. But it had stirred them, just as an oar-thrust stirs the waters. There is never a ripple on the surface; the reeds have never moved, the very flies are still sipping the wild honey in the

heart of the yellow water-lilies. But a current of air has passed through. It has stirred even the roots and the buds that lie hidden in the grass. How would it be to leave the work shop? Of course the slack season was coming on, and with it days of freedom and distress; days when it would be hard to get bread on credit, when it would be doubtful whether one could come back to the same employer, besieged as she was by new hands; days when thoughts of death flit through the mind in the interval between two pleasure outings or two long spells of forced idleness. Enforced holidays, servile toil, mothers who understood them not, temptations that come when one is twenty and that no work can overcome, sad stories of the past, the misery of living alone. That was all coming. It was close at hand.

A white shaft of light flooded the ceiling at right angles; it was the reflection from a conservatory which they were accustomed to see at eleven o'clock in summer.

The girls looked up at it.

At the same moment one of the young girls began to sob. She cried, burying her hands in her hair and pressing her heaving breast against the table. Her companions did not seem surprised, but went on all the more eagerly bending their heads over their work, so that the one who was crying need not feel ashamed. They always did that for each other. Hardly a week passed but one of these children lost heart and gave way to tears, overcome by a grief that was often unknown to the others.

This time it was Irma of the great eyes, Irma the socialist. They let her calm down, dry her tears and rearrange her hair.

Every one knew that two days ago her lover had left her.

Madame Clémence came in. She did not seem to notice anything. She smiled from under her frizzed and powdered wig. She held a hand mirror in two fingers and stopped a moment behind each worker, while to judge from her face and speech she might have been visiting a collection of curios in some pleasure-house.

It was her principle to encourage the workers.

“Very good—a charming idea.—Mauve and violet, Mademoiselle Jeanne, would be better still.—Mademoiselle Mathilde, just raise that brim; two bunches of violette in the fold of the straw—two or three leaves there, just quite naturally, you know! Light shades, don’t you think? Our client is fair, you know.—Mademoiselle Henriette, you get better every day. It is you who have earned me the thanks of the little Countess Zaniska and Madame de Streville. Give a little softer curve to your plumes, Mademoiselle Reine. See, make them come so, and you have a masterpiece. Stretch your shape a little more, Mademoiselle Reine, you don’t frame it enough. But the model is good. You must have it copied, Mademoiselle Augustine. By the way, the two straw hats trimmed with roses for the general’s daughters will be done by this evening, I suppose. They are leaving for the country, and the hats have been promised.”

“Mademoiselle Irma is doing them,” replied the first hand.

Madame Clémence glanced at the weeping girl, and took care to say nothing. She next noticed Marie Schwarz:

“And what are you doing?”

“I am putting in the lining; it drags.”

The chief was just going to leave, as her visit was over, when she remembered that she had to give an order. She let go the copper door-handle which she had already grasped, took two steps back, and bending over Henriette, who was seated at the end of one of the tables, said to her rather quietly:

“Mademoiselle Henriette, will you please go round to Madame Lemarié directly after dinner. She wants you.”

Subdued as were the tones in which Madame Clémence had spoken, several of the workers had nevertheless overheard her words and were astonished. Mademoiselle Augustine assumed her offended air, and sat stiffly on her stool. The chief saw the necessity of commenting on her order, to prevent bad feeling between two of her best workers.

“I have just this moment heard from Madame Lemarié. She wants you personally. You will take three of our models, with white *bandeaux*, of course, for a widow. Take Mademoiselle Schwarz with you. She will begin her duties as a fitter.”

“Very well, Madame.”

When the door was shut there was a significant interchange of whispers among the girls: “Well,



my dear, there's another event! The first hand is furious. No wonder. She's served the lady for ten years. She was counting on the order. I must say Mademoiselle Henriette Madiot is lucky. She looks pleased too. And the other, old monkey face. What a face she has got."

The old "monkey face" was a worker of about forty years of age. She could see that disgrace would come upon her soon, and that she would lose her daily bread. She assumed an attitude which she considered dignified, in order to hide the despair that was gnawing her soul. The others laughed and failed to understand her because her sufferings were not sorrows of love.

The clock struck. It was a small shrill sound deadened by tapestry coverings, walls and cupboards, and it seemed to come from below ground. It gave the signal for lunch time. All needles were stuck into the shapes. Slowly the young girls rose, and some, with the pose of princesses, drew off the silken sleeves they put on for work. Some stood still for a moment, motionless, stupefied by the long mental strain. Then the passage filled with noise, with footsteps, the sound of which was deadened by the carpet, with rustling skirts and half-suppressed youthful laughter, and Madame Clémence's work-girls, having washed their hands in an ante-room near the cashier's office, trooped into the long, badly lit dining-room, where the chief herself presided over the morning meal. The young girls sat down where they pleased, with the exception of the first hand and the housekeeper, who sat one on the right and the

other on the left of Madame Clémence. Generally Henriette sat next to Mademoiselle Augustine. But this time Mademoiselle Augustine took care to put Mademoiselle Reine between herself and her rival. This was an open rupture.

Henriette did not care. She was thinking of her visit to Madame Lemarié.

## CHAPTER X.

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THE seven front windows on the first, second and third floors of the Lemarié mansion were closed. At the door there was a continual stream of common people, clerks and footmen ringing the bell. They pressed the electric button very slightly—out of respect for the dead; the door scarcely opened—out of respect for the dead. They touched their hats with their hands, presented a visiting card and withdrew.

The silver salver placed at the foot of the great staircase was hidden up to the handles under a mass of cards. Every quarter of an hour wreaths of natural or artificial flowers were brought in.

In the yellow drawing-room on the first floor Madame Lemarié, seated on a silk ottoman, which was completely covered by her black dress, was looking at the door, through which a moment ago M. Lecanu, the family solicitor, had gone out.

There was very little light in the room. It only came in on one side through the chinks in the shutters, and on the other through the half-open door where lay the body of M. Lemarié, with his hands clasping a crucifix, drawn and imperious still. Two nuns, between two wax tapers, were watching at the foot of the bed. They could scarcely be seen. A streak of unbroken light glistened on the polished floor and united the two

rooms. The room might have been empty, but for the clicking of a rosary, the piling of one wreath on another, and a sound of judiciously muffled footsteps.

Madame Lemarié was reflecting.

Some one came in. She recognized the fat man who was feeling his way through the room for fear of knocking up against the furniture.

“Is it you, Mourieux? Have you made the declaration?”

“Yes, Madame. I await your orders to join Victor in doing what remains to be done. Does the will make any arrangements with regard to the funeral?”

“No, none.”

The old lady said nothing, folded her arms in her lap, and looked at her hands, which she spread wide, palms outward, with a gesture of resignation that evidently corresponded with a thought in her primitive mind. Then looking straight at Mourieux she said:

“You see me doubly sad. It is just as I thought: we are very rich.”

Mourieux grunted: “It’s better than being poor.”

She resumed in the same penetrating tones: “Not always, Mourieux. Moreover, Monsieur Lecanu tells me that my husband has left me all that the law allowed him to dispose of in my favour.”

“Is it possible? To you?”

The bushy brows of the draper rose in astonishment. He added: “Really, Madame, I am surprised, absolutely surprised, and very pleased.”



"I was not surprised myself, Mourieux. Monsieur Lemarié wished to guard against the spendthrift nature of his son, who has no trade. He did not love me, but he esteemed me."

"No doubt."

"Perhaps he thought it was a kind of compensation. The roughest men are sometimes kind at heart. In short, the will is definite. I inherit an enormous fortune."

Mourieux expressed his agreement by a gesture.

She sighed and said: "It is ill-gotten wealth."

"Oh, Madame."

"I know what I am saying, Mourieux, and I say that it is ill-gotten."

"But excuse me, it was gained by steady toil requiring a good deal of intelligence and brain work. Monsieur Lemarié has gained his wealth by honourable means."

"It may be so, my friend, according to the light current code of honour. But I am a witness to his life, and, as you know, that is the only witness that speaks true. I saw the money that is now mine before it came, and it pained me to make use of it. I suffered cruelly, believe me. At the end of the Empire we took stock of 200,000 francs' worth of tinned goods, ninth-rate in quality, and made for the consumption of foreign sailors. The agents declared them to be excellent because—well, you understand, don't you? And at the same time, and later on and always, when you were not there, the workmen would come to the office in a deputation from their comrades; and here in this very house, underneath us, how often

have I heard those scenes? They complained of their wages being notoriously inadequate, but they did not change, because we were in possession of what almost amounted to a monopoly. You did not hear the brutal answers, nor the dismissals for the simple reason that somebody had claimed some compensation, nor the speeches made to the so-called employees who were pleading for their comrades who had been injured in the work shops, to prove to these unfortunates that the master was not liable. These savings represent our income. And the moral misery that one has caused and permitted, to say nothing of what one has never known. Ah! those cursed factory walls, how often I have wept as I looked at them! Only last night, when I heard that they were burning, my first thought was: All the better."

After a pause, during which her panting breath grew calm, Madame Lemarié resumed with her air of customary placidness:

"It is useless for me to insist on the proof. Will you let me off?"

"Yes," said Mourieux, naïvely. "I have known Lemarié well, you understand, and without approving of everything."

"I do not say this for the pleasure of accusing him, my good friend, but to acquaint you with a resolution. I hate this wealth. I accept it, so that it may be well spent. I shall give away as much as possible of it, that's all."

Instinctively the man turned his head toward the other room, as if the dead man might possibly

hear the words. The noise of an artificial wreath being moved fell upon the silence of the drawing-room, bearing witness that the present hour belonged to the woman who had just been speaking. Seized by a sudden feeling that he could not but translate into action, Mourieux rose, stretched out his hand, and said:

“Honour me by giving me your hand, Madame Lemarié. What you say may perhaps be exaggerated, but it’s fine all the same.”

“And you will help me, my dear Mourieux. All alone I should not know how to make use of this money. It is so difficult; I shall have need of your advice.”

He remained standing beside her, full of admiration for the woman who had revealed herself to him.

“Has Victor been informed?”

“About the will? Yes, he was there when it was read.”

“And about the rest?”

“I shall speak to him at the first opportunity. I shall do it discreetly, as one can do to a son. I am sure he is capable of understanding. And you, do you remember what he said before his father in the garden?”

“Yes, I remember what he said, but——”

“You doubt his word? He is so fond of you.”

“Madame,” said the man, evading the question, “I am too old to undertake anything. There is a great deal of misery everywhere in the dress-making and millinery trade too. I am well acquainted with it, but you ought to have some

one to help and inform you, perhaps one of our young girls, such as one finds, a girl who is intelligent and refined and knows the ins and outs of her trade."

"You spoke to me some time ago about Mademoiselle Madiot?"

"Yes, that's true. There's a case in point, if she is willing."

"She will be here in a moment," said Madame Lemarié, quietly.

And as Mourieux made a movement showing his surprise that, on such a day, she should first of all have thought of that, she said:

"Do not misunderstand me. I have not the slightest intention of mentioning these subjects to Mademoiselle Madiot. No, it's quite another matter."

The energetic expression of revolt against a long and degrading past reappeared in her face:

"It is a question of an injustice that was done to the Madiot family. It must be made good immediately, for they are poor. This justice was refused to me the other day. And I am in a hurry to make them forget what was too hard in the past."

The door opened and a footman announced:

"Madame Clémence has sent to try on the bonnets."

"Very well. Ask them upstairs."

When the servant had gone she added: "I am unhappier than others, my dear Mourieux, because I was born for a middle-class position, and here I am, having to face duties that are very hard to know and to fulfil. Give me your arm."



She rose and Mourieux led her to the end of the corridor to the head of the stairs. There he took his leave. She saw her old friend going down with his bent back and his head even more on one side than usual, while at the same time she saw two slender forms coming up, standing out against the shadows of the hall and mirrored in rose-pink light. They were Henriette and Marie. Marie walked last and carried three round boxes. Madame Lemarié tried to guess which of the two was Henriette Madiot. Was it the one who was picking up her skirts in her right hand almost to her knees, and who was walking, seemingly without effort, up into the light? Their faces were hidden by the brims of their hats.

Henriette entered the house as a stranger. On coming in her only thoughts had been: "How beautiful it is here!" As far as Madame Lemarié was concerned, she felt and could not but feel a sympathetic interest in the face of this working girl whose grace, refinement, and intelligence had been so highly praised. Nevertheless Madame Lemarié's sympathy grew stronger when she saw Henriette's face gradually appear. First the chin, then the white neck of a fair girl, the dainty mouth, the small straight nose, and at last the eyes, those starry eyes that looked up and saw her. The old lady thought: "How pretty she is!" More especially she observed her with an intensity of feeling that life had often called forth; for she had the frail and wondrous charm of a young girl whom happy mothers would be proud to call their own.

This thought made her turn away sharply, without saying a word.

"How ugly she is," whispered Marie. "Is this the woman who is so rich?"

Following Madame Lemarié, they entered a blue room that looked out upon the court.

The windows were not closed.

"Here are the bonnets you have ordered, Madame," said Henriette to Madame Lemarié, who was standing facing the window. "Do you wish the young lady to try them on before you first?"

On receiving the scarcely audible answer "Yes," Henriette lifted her veil and bent over the cardboard boxes that her friend had put on the ground. Then, as she found it difficult to undo the string, she knelt down.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "the string is in a knot."

"There is no hurry, Mademoiselle. Take your own time. I am not a great lady."

"We have brought three models, Madame, which only differ in the thickness of the ruching. This is the simplest of them. Please stand in the light, Mademoiselle Marie, and smooth your hair down."

With an easy movement the girl rose, holding between two fingers a black crape bonnet lined with a bandeau of white crape. She placed it on the head of the fitter with perfect ease, not too much in front nor too far back, drew a few of the girl's black locks down on to the forehead in imitation of an old lady's way of doing her hair,

fastened the whole with a hat pin, and then asked:

“Is that to your taste?”

She observed that Madame Lemarié was not paying the least attention to the bonnet, but on the other hand did not once take her eyes off Madame Clémence’s milliner, who was usually ignored by most customers on a similar occasion. Henriette was surprised. She was being taken notice of. She was receiving a kind of admiration that made her smile. And in that smile there was all the gratitude of youth that has been approved. But she quickly repressed this show of personal feeling, which was out of place.

“Do you wish us to try on a second model?” she inquired.

“You are quite young, Mademoiselle. How old are you?”

“I am twenty-four, Madame.”

“Have you been at work long?”

“Certainly, Madame, ever since I was a child.”

“And you are fond of your trade, I am sure? You seem to be very skilful. And I suppose the shop for which you work gives you employment all the year round? There is no slack season?”

Henriette, like all the other young women in millinery work, had a kind of professional pride, which prevented her from complaining. Moreover, the idea of her own working class was so deeply ingrained in her, that she was instinctively on her guard against the pity and curiosity of another class. She replied coldly:

“No, Madame, not for me. I want for nothing.”

The lines that furrowed Madame Lemarié's cheeks seemed to deepen. With a look of heart-felt kindness which required a very strong feeling to make it change, she looked at the two young girls. The one was upright, elegant, almost haughty in her manner, the other evidently indifferent, and forming such a strange figure in her crape bonnet. Then without being angry, she said:

"Mademoiselle, I am glad that you want for nothing. I want for many things, and the chief of them is this: There was some difficulty between your uncle and Monsieur Lemarié. Is that not the case?"

"Yes, Madame; but it has all been settled, I believe."

"Yes, but not according to my wishes. Will you please tell your uncle that, as a very old worker of the firm, he will receive a pension of five hundred francs a year?"

Henriette was taken aback for a moment. She grew scarlet, and the tears rose to her eyes.

"Ah, Madame, how happy he will be. How I thank you on his behalf. He no longer reckoned on it. I do not know how to tell you."

She hesitated before taking the outstretched hand of Madame Lemarié, for she was not accustomed to such familiarities on the part of the customers whom she visited, and she felt all at once confused, happy and yet embarrassed, when just at this moment a shadow lengthened on the parquet flooring at her feet. It was Victor Lemarié coming in at the door that opened on to the corridor. In his hand he held a packet of



funeral invitation cards in black-bordered envelopes.

"I beg your pardon," he said, seeing Henriette and Marie.

"Oh, is it you, my child," said Madame Lemarié, who had heard without seeing him come. "I shall be ready in a moment. I have just chosen a bonnet."

She went up to Marie: "Let me have this one. It will do quite well enough."

In a moment and with a gesture of deliverance, Marie removed the bonnet and placed it on the marble top of a chest of drawers. Then she hastened to collect her two boxes that were still full. Henriette bowed, gazing steadfastly at the old lady with a softened glance which said: Thank you, for him and for me.

The two young girls left the room. When Henriette passed through the corridor quite near the door, Victor Lemarié, who was standing close up against the wall, bent his pointed beard and said:

"Good-day, Mademoiselle Madiot."

The voice rang out, clear, youthful, unanswered, in strange contrast to the muffled sound of prayer from the nuns in the room below.

"I came to write some addresses," said Victor on entering his mother's room. "You are not too tired, are you?"

With a sign she answered in the negative, and pointed to the little table at which both could write side by side.

## CHAPTER XI.

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THE invitation cards were printed on thick paper with a Cross above. What had the Cross to do with the life that was no more? They bore the words: "He died fortified with all the rites of the Church." It was a lie, for the deceased had never troubled about them. They bore the words: "Of your charity say a *De profundis* for his soul." Who would there be to say it?

Madame Lemarié sighed, and put back in the envelope the first of the cards which she had unfolded. With her studied, neat, and angular writing she penned one address, then another, then a third, in silence. Victor was doing the same. They were studying an open note-book that lay between them.

"Of course we will only send them to people who live at a distance. The undertakers see after the rest. Mourieux has told them about it. He said all the town was to be invited."

"Yes."

"Baron d'Espelette, Commander of the Sixteenth Division. Are you sure that there is not an 's' at the end of his name? No? All right. The General may be of use to me when I become an officer of the Reserve next January."

This half question produced no answer but the

scratching of the other pen, which was writing:  
"M. Le Mansart, *Conseiller General.*"

"Are you going to ask Le Mansart?"

"It looks like it."

"He was opposed to my father. My father hated him."

She looked at her son reproachfully, and said as she resumed her writing:

"My poor child, I wish I were able to ask all your father's enemies, and obtain their forgiveness at so small a cost. Human life touches so many other lives, especially the life of an industrial magnate. Sometimes one does wrong without wishing it, one tramples others under foot."

"At that rate, Mother, you would have to ask the discharged workmen, all who were dismissed when the machines came in, all the widows who have not been pensioned."

Madame Lemarié put her pen on the side of the glass inkstand, and said, looking straight in front of her:

"If all those widows would only recite a single 'Ave' for your father."

"Ah! well, they don't know any better."

"I would gladly give part of my fortune to obtain it. The souls of the departed are so clogged and weighted down if they are not winged by prayer. Victor, I am at least happy in knowing that you do not differ from me as regards our workers. You see, I look upon them—I have had this idea all my life—somehow as partners in the business, though they have no contracts. Your

father did not see it in this light, and he has left both of us a pile of charity debts to pay off. . . .”

She paused for a moment, and, as there was no answer forthcoming, she continued:

“I shall have no greater pleasure than the discharging of those debts. And what about you? I am sure you have thought about it, you who have so much heart. ‘To give.’ What a beautiful word it is!”

“Dear me, no, I have not.”

“But you will not refuse to help me, will you, in the good that I wish to do?”

“Of course not, if you do it reasonably.”

Lovingly, and in a voice of half-fulfilled entreaty the mother asked:

“Come, Victor, just tell me what you mean by ‘reasonably.’”

“Well—” and he reflected for a moment. “Well, take the Madiot family as an instance. I admit that in view of the uncle’s long services he might be awarded a small pension.”

“Very good, my dear, that has already been done.”

“How so?”

“If you had only seen the surprise and delight of the young girl just now! Really her gratitude was greater than the gift. It was naïve, it was—”

“Pardon, but how much did you give?”

“Five hundred francs per annum.”

“There, that is how you go on! That is not reasonable, to begin with.”

The mother answered gently, in order not to hurt his feelings:



“Thirty years of service, Victor, think of it. I was blaming myself for not having been sufficiently generous. You must understand that these are necessary charities, almost amounting to obligatory debts. With a fortune like ours, do you know what my cherished dream is?”

The young man knitted his brows, twisted his pen between his fingers, and gazed fixedly at the inkstand.

“My dream would be to endow one or two great charities intended to help factory workers and artisans. I have not yet thought out which they are to be, although I have some ideas in the matter. We will think about it together, together we will plan and scheme, and give a great reputation to the name of Lemarié, which has been cursed by many. In short, I wish to see us less wealthy and more beloved, my child. Do you understand?”

Without taking his eyes off the inkstand, he answered with the air of superiority which men so easily assume in questions of money:

“Mother, I propose that we go on with the addresses. It is three o'clock already, and the post will not wait.”

She felt a pang of grief. But she did not give way. There was the future, all the future to safeguard. She said sadly:

“Then, why did you speak to your father like that? My dear, I fail to understand.”

He raised his hands with an aggrieved gesture:

“But I do think just the same all the time. Only we should be fools, really, to ruin ourselves

in order to change matters which are the result of a certain social state. Education ought to be altered, minds should be altered—everything else.”

This time his words fell unanswered. Madame Lemarié had begun to write again, and was bending over the black-bordered envelopes. She had formed her opinion of her son: he was much more like his father than she had believed. With him, too, she would have to be silent. Victor saw her wipe away a tear more than once during the silent hour they spent together.

Wreaths were continually being carried up the back stairs.

. . . . .

As for old Madiot, he was jubilant that evening. Five hundred francs seemed to him a fortune. He never stopped thanking Henriette, though she disclaimed all merit, and kept on saying: “And now that’s done, dearie, don’t go too often into the houses of the rich.”

“But what am I to do if I am sent there?”

He found no answer, at least no good one. But was beside himself with joy. He was so pleased that his niece allowed him—for it was she who gave permission now—to go round to three or four of his old friends, men who had Mexican or Crimean medals, and whom he only remembered on very great occasions.

## CHAPTER XII.

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THE following morning, when she was doing her hair, Henriette realized that she was pretty.

She went out into the sunshine all alone.

The lilac is in bloom, oh, well beloved. Do you not breathe its perfume? No, not the lilac, its season is over, its perfume will not return. Then it must be the rock roses with their golden clusters hanging bellwise in the traceried belfry of the leaves. But the perfume of the rock roses rises to the head like wine and breeds troublous thoughts. What is the matter? In your dreams you saw three sprigs of gorse, and you say: It is not that. The grass is cut. The wind is lulled to rest. Oh, well beloved, the perfume of your hair is like a field of marguerites. They are in flower. A perfume rises from you. Go forth, breathe, smile, drink of life to the full. You will turn men's heads. Your lovers will tell you so.

The pretty girl went to the work shop. She made hats that her employer sold. The day did not belong to her any more than it belonged to any of the others. Still, when she was in the street she felt like a little queen.

## CHAPTER XIII.

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Two days later, early in the morning, when the mists were rising from the waters like clouds of fine white shavings, a flat boat left the field at Mauves and crossed the Loire. A man was punting it across; his moustache was wet with mist, and the joy of life shone in his eyes. His two hands pressed upon the pole, the iron point of which stirred the sand at the bottom of the river. Supple of limb and shivering beneath his blue jersey, he steered the boat slantwise toward the farther shore, where are two small islands. They are called Heron and Pinette, and are separated from each other and from the mainland by narrow branches of the river.

A wondrous silence surrounded him. There was hardly even the cry of the snipe on the wing or beginning to feed on the wet grass. The flood was over. The blue water, streaked darker here and there, did not yet shine clearly, except perhaps near the sandbanks, where it grew into a slender stream that curved like the blade of a scythe.

The boatman was thinking: "I love her too much, I must tell her so." And the boat glided on. And the daylight round him grew more and more radiant.

He entered a narrow channel where the current



was almost still. In the shelter of the islands, in the swamp, reeds grew, tall and green or broken and resting their yellow blades upon the waters of the Loire. Nets were stretched across the water in the direction of the current. For half an hour Etienne worked steadily, lifting with his iron hook the wicker traps in which the eels were caught, pulling out the bunches of grass that were caught with them, emptying the fish into the forepart of the boat that was reserved for them and throwing the trap overboard again. The fishing was good this morning. Etienne also went all along the bank of the Isle of Heron and then, turning into the Pirmil branch of the river, which is an ampler and quivering sheet of water, with the mainland on the left and farms and the town of St. Sebastien hidden in the mist that was slowly giving way, he stood up, allowed his pole to drag along in the water, raised his head and shouted with all his might like a trumpeter.

“Ohé, de la Gibraye, ohé.”

A similar but muffled cry answered him from the bank. The Gibraye folk had heard him. They knew that the fisherman from Mauves was passing by. In a moment the whole forepart of the boat was filled with baskets. Cabbages, leeks and turnips were overflowing on either side and hanging down into the river. Bunches of carrots towered above, as well as lettuces and sorrel, and three bundles of cress which Etienne piled up to form the pinnacle of his green castle. He was up to the eyes in green now. Seated at the back he pushed off with three strokes of his pole, took to

the open stream and let himself drift with the current.

The river Loire was awakening. Salmon fishing boats passed to and fro and the surface of the river gleamed beneath them, one mass of pale gold. The vast outline of the town was piercing the quivering and brooding mists in twenty places at once.

And Etienne, with beating heart and lips that trembled to say words he would never dare to utter, waited for the moment when he would be clear of the mists, masts, and poplar tops of the Isle of Saint Anne and at the entrance to the Grand Loire a little house would appear, high and white like a light-house.

At the window of her room Henriette was just fastening her every-day dress. She wanted to see him, and yet she did not wish to count on it. At what time would the boat pass? Etienne had not said. The young girl was thinking: "I have only such a short time to wait here for him."

Her eyes passed all along the landscape from the Prairie au Duc as far as Trentemoult. And all at once in the full current of the Loire and turning the point of Saint Anne's Isle, she saw the boat, the three bundles of cress, the green baskets, and the big Etienne, who was standing up.

He was no longer punting. He had let the pole drop, and was slowly drifting along the still deserted river with his head turned toward the white house. Henriette was standing right at the open window. He saw her. He got up on to the back

seat and threw two kisses across to her with both his hands.

Henriette blushed.

“Well, how daring Etienne is getting.”

She drew back. But she came back a moment later. With a thrust of his pole Etienne had turned his boat, and it was already lost among the pleasure yachts and canoes of the little harbour of Trentemoult.

The young girl finished putting her room straight.

She laughed as she thought of Etienne, and made up her mind to scold him. A slight blush still remained on her cheeks.

When she passed through the kitchen to go to work, old Madiot remarked: “What’s up with you this morning, youngster? You look as wide awake as a whitebait.”

In truth she found it hard to assume her everyday expression of cold, calm contempt for passing glances in the street. She went down the stairs, closed the door after her, and straight in front of her, leaning against one of the acacia trees that had been planted in the strong soil, she saw big Etienne.

Her heart beat violently. She was pleased and vexed at the same time. Etienne came toward her with a half-smiling and half-worried expression on his face.

He had put a black vest over his jersey, and his Sunday felt hat covered his great fair-haired head.

“I was hoping you would come,” he said.

Henriette gave him her hand almost timidly.

The houses on the Ermitage Hill lined the slope all the way down. Each house had a crowd of children playing on the doorstep and a woman at its window.

"Is there a chance for a talk?" asked Etienne.

"If you care to go with me as far as the Fosse," Henriette replied, "we can talk on the way."

But they both kept silent for several minutes. He was looking at the shipyards with their mass of shipping, behind which the sun was rising. She was looking at the familiar sequence of low doors, stairs and windows, from which came: "Good-morning, Mademoiselle Henriette." "Good-morning, Madame Vivien," replied Henriette. "Good-morning, Madame Esnault. Good-morning, Marcelle."

But the Miséri Hill ended at the beginning of the quay. They were soon surrounded by groups of workers and harbour loiterers, unknown passers-by, a nameless crowd that gave the two young people an impression of solitude. Etienne grew bolder by degrees, and began to take a stealthy glance at the rosy face of the young girl who was trotting along by his side. By mutual though unspoken agreement they avoided a group of lightermen who were unloading a cargo of corn, and went on along the Loire, until at last they found a great pile of sacks of plaster all piled up, which seemed to them a favourable spot. They stopped. And there, in the half-awakened city, two lovers stood very close together, and spoke very softly without gestures, so that they should not attract attention.



"I could not go on like this any longer," said Etienne.

"Then what did you want to tell me?" asked Henriette.

He waited suspiciously until a custom-house official had passed on.

"Mademoiselle Henriette, this cannot go on forever. I cannot go on caring for you without telling you of it."

He saw the young girl draw back slightly, while she grew pale with the sudden shock, and supported herself against the pile of sacks.

"Don't go away. Listen. My father thinks I have undertaken to carry vegetables to Trentemoult in order to earn more money. No doubt: but most of all because I wanted to see you. Every day that God has given for the last three months I have been looking for you."

He wanted to add something, but he could not go on. A sob of youthful anguish—for youth is as prone to despair as it is to love—was choking him. But he bore up against it. He had nothing more to say, and in his feeling of shame he hung his head.

Then he felt two small gloved hands take his own, and he heard a voice, that was troubled too, say:

"Is it really serious then, my poor Etienne. You see I am upset about it. I had no idea of what you were going to say to me. No, I knew quite well that we were friends—good friends, since we were children. And I was pleased. And when you paid me little attentions I thought:

'It's all right, let him do it. He is a grown-up friend now.' But now, I should like to cry. Oh, you ought not to have told me. I liked you so much as you were."

Etienne raised his head. His pride hardened his face and voice.

"So you won't have me, Mademoiselle Henriette? I am not a good enough catch for you?"

She, in turn, looked at him, while tears of absolute sincerity shone in her eyes.

"No, it is not that. Do not add to my sorrow, I entreat you. I am speaking to you from my heart. Look at me. I do not despise you. I love no one as much as I do you, Etienne, but I cannot answer you. I have not thought it over. The thought is too strange to me. Give me time."

"How long?"

"I don't know. My brother is leaving for his regiment, and I must earn money for him. If he has nothing, you understand, he won't get accustomed to it. And then, I shall know my fate before the end of the year—whether I shall be first hand or not in our millinery business. All my future is in that. Wait till I know, so that I can come to my decision knowing what I am about."

She tried to smile at him.

"We shall meet again, Etienne. Don't be wretched about it. It is half-past eight. I am late."

She turned away quickly and went off, a fair vision of the early morn. But in Etienne's eyes

she left the image of her own, which were like those of a very kind and tender sister. For a long time he stood motionless, looking first at the quay and then at the street where the slender black form of the young girl diminished and disappeared, and still Henriette's eyes, which he could no longer see, were in his heart.

In the evening, after a day during which the events of the morning, and others as well which affected her, had been continually in her mind, Henriette came home. She was tired out, indifferent to the extreme sweetness of the June evening, which was drawing even the sick out into its light and beauty. Even young mothers who were too weak to get up, might be seen raising their trowselled heads from off their pillows to a level with the window-sill here and there in the poorer quarters. She could not think any more. She forgot to listen to the children's voices that gave her greeting. And the little ones, who vaguely guess at grown-up states of mind when familiar faces do not turn to them and smile at them any more, were silent and a second later resumed their play. Henriette even forgot to lift her dress, and the hem of her skirt was white with the dust from the slope.

But as she passed the entrance to the court where the Hervés lived, she saw a child of ten beside the staircase, a crippled child stretched on a little white wood cart with solid wheels. For the last three years Marcelle had never risen. She lived almost motionless, with her head facing the

sky, obliged to make an effort with her weak eyes if she wished to observe anything even on a level with the road. She was wheeled from one shady place to another, following the shifting shadows of the gables or acacia trees. She possessed the calm of those who have no firm hold on life. As Henriette was passing, absorbed in thought, she heard a beseeching voice from below, saying:

“Mademoiselle!”

Just below her on the right she saw the little cart with its tattered mattress, and the white face framed by hair that had no strength to grow. She bent down to stroke Marcelle’s little face with her hand as she often did. But the child’s cheek was quite wet with tears, and there was so much sadness in her gaze that Henriette asked:

“What is the matter, Marcelle? Are you in pain?”

She shook her head slowly.

“Has some one hurt you?”

The sick child murmured: “Come quite close, and let me tell you.”

And when the young girl, bending over the bed of suffering, seemed to form a single though indistinct group with the sufferer, while the matrons with their knitting looked on from afar, the tiny voice resumed:

“Mademoiselle Henriette, please don’t get married. Don’t go away from these parts, or I shan’t see you again.”

“My poor darling, where have you got that idea from?” said Henriette, straightening herself and stroking the child’s pale face. “You are fool-



ish. I am not going to get married, so don't worry."

She went away even more upset. She remembered that in the morning when she passed down the slope with Etienne the cart had been already outside, sheltered by an angle of the court.

What a day of varying emotions. Sleep would be a long time coming to her that night. She never touched the supper that Uncle Madiot had prepared, and, pretending to have a headache, retired to her room and opened the gray-bound note-book which she had left unused for months, but in which she had written down her vague girlish thoughts, which come at a time when the soul is awakening, and one seems to have too few friends to be able to tell them all, although there is nothing to be said except that one longs to love.

She wrote as follows:

"I have no one to whom I can confide my trouble, no one to calm me or advise me. It is a strange thing that people come to me as if I were strong. The other day Irma said: 'Oh, you don't know what it's like,' just as if I belonged to a different race. Alas, it is not so. I belong to the race of those who love, who get attached to a thousand things and many people round about them, until they gather up their love and bestow it on him who is worthy of it. It makes me suffer, and yet it protects me. My weakness is everywhere evident, alas; in the ease with which my tears flow, in my anxiety about a severed tie of friendship, in my very thoughts. But as I am an

honest girl, my companions think that I have the secret of protecting others. How mistaken they are.

“This very morning after my meeting with Etienne, which upset me, I ran to the work shop. Irma, seeing that my cheeks were red, said to me: ‘So it’s your turn now?’ I had to keep back my tears, and to keep back my heart that was weeping within me, and to keep back my thoughts from these young girls whom very soon I may be at the head of. I was ashamed of myself; those who are in the habit of giving way to their woes were pleased to look at me. Luckily Madame Clémence did not come in. I felt no inclination or taste for my trade. When we rose at ten o’clock to go to Mademoiselle du Muel’s wedding, Mademoiselle Augustine, Irma, Mathilde and I, poor Marie Schwarz, whom I had obtained permission to take with me, came up to me on the stairs and asked: ‘Are you suffering too? Is it because of me? Do they want to send me away?’ I reassured her. She has suffered so much that she is ready to believe that she is the cause of all the misery in the world.

“Half an hour afterward we were at the Church of Sainte-Croix, right at the end of the nave, where the crowd does not behave very well, and the maids of honour do not collect for the poor.

“I recognized Madame Louise’s workgirls, and the employees of a certain draper’s shop which has opened a millinery department. The church was splendid: carpets, flowers, velvet seats, and

then a procession of real ladies and gentlemen, not only rich people, but people who know how to carry off a dress or to take a woman's arm. I enjoyed it in spite of myself. Ever since I left the convent school my mind has been given to the elegancies of fashion; my fingers are at work on them every day. I remember the form of a knot of ribbon, or the colour of a cluster of flowers, as others remember a fine expression they have read. Mademoiselle du Muel walked up the centre aisle on her father's arm. We were standing, some of us on chairs. We felt curious and moved at the sight, and slightly envious because we are women. Then Marie, who was close beside me, stopped watching the procession. I noticed that while the rest of us were turning our heads with the same movement, as the groups of guests passed on in turn, she was bending slowly backward, as if to listen to some one. The cape of her black coat, which she always wears, poor girl, was touching the back of the chairs, although we were standing on the seat. I looked back. What a bad and painful thought struck me. It was my brother Antoine who was speaking to her.

"I said nothing to Marie. I asked Antoine, 'What are you doing here? Why haven't you spoken to me?' He replied that he was waiting for me to be less absorbed in watching. He grumbled about the slackness in his work shop, assuring me that he no longer worked more than three days a week. Finally, to get rid of him I gave him five francs, and he went off. Marie, who was listening to the great organ playing a march, did

not turn round at this moment, did not make any sign to him, and, in fact, probably did not see him. She has very beautiful dark eyes, such as I love. And yet I remained ill at ease. I know Antoine so well, and Marie Schwarz still so little. I did not know how to warn her. But still I could not leave her exposed to my brother's schemings without a word of warning, for I am sure he will follow her. I felt it as if I were the sister or mother of the unfortunate girl. And then I could not see them fall without suffering too. I think it is the care my mother took of me when I was little that gives me these ideas.

"We got back. I tried to make Marie tell me on the way about the hats that she had seen. Mathilde also tried to question her. I am afraid that my recruit will never be really interested in fashions. She had only remembered the types of people, and imitated them for our amusement.

"I felt sad. At five o'clock Madame Clémence came into the work room and allowed us, with the exception of Mademoiselle Augustine, Reine, and the apprentice, to go home. Several of them shuddered when they heard mention made of discharge. That indicates the slack season, and means that they will have to leave soon. I said to Marie, 'Let us go home to your place; I want to see your room.' And there we were, like old friends, all alone, going up the rue Saint-Similieu.

"I thought of my own pretty room when I entered hers. It is in a court on the right-hand side of the street, toward the middle. One sees the cathedral through the porch. For eight francs



Marie had found a furnished room there, though I trembled to think of the kind of people who had lived there before, and still haunted the neighbourhood. There are about two hundred poor people in the two wings and front of the old house. One goes up five steps made of slate and patched up with bricks. Marie opened the door and said in a peculiar way:

“‘There, that is Paradise. I’ll go in first.’

“Four plain white walls, which had been white-washed some ten years ago, a bed, two chairs and a table, with a mirror smaller than my hand, nailed up close by the window.

“First I joked in order to keep from crying. Fortunately Marie had two chairs. I said, ‘Suppose we have supper?’ She showed me the black, empty grate without a saucepan even. ‘They have forgotten to do it, you see.’ Then I went and got a few more provisions and a little more bread, and we had supper off the white wooden table. We were both quite cheerful, like trees whose dead branches are covered with snow: it is not worth much but it glitters. I blessed the will power that had brought me there. Marie is very open; she was grateful to me and allowed me to advise her, as one can a comrade, to beware of Antoine. Only I was alarmed at her moral ignorance. She said to me:

“‘Until now I have had nothing to do with him or any other man. I think men are cowards. I don’t think they love us as we love them. They desert us, and I think those who live their lives are more unhappy than those who do not. But

I know myself. I do not wish to deceive you. If ever I fall, it will be the fault of my evil counsellor.'

“‘Who is he?’

“‘It’s always the same one. I pay eight francs a month here and I earn fifteen. And I must have supper and clothes and firing, and I must wash my two waists and my three handkerchiefs. I am already more than fifteen francs in debt. How do you expect me to live? One day when I am hungry I shall let myself be led astray.’

“‘It cut me to the quick. I did not know any longer what I said.

“‘Then we both cried in each other’s arms in front of the supper table because we could not help it. She has no faith. She has forgotten the few prayers she used to know. In spite of that she has such a tender and impulsive nature. Unfortunately, her impulses tend toward the seamy side of things, toward evil and death. I seemed to be caressing a suffering sister. We suffered together, and I feel bound to her by all the fears I feel on her behalf and by the confidence she placed in me. Afterward we talked. I tried to cheer her up. I planned a budget for her that made us both laugh in the end, it was so complicated. I promised to do my best for her at Madame Clémence’s, and to try and get supper for her, or a little better pay.

“‘She clasped me closely when I left her. The stars were shining brightly in the sky, but I did not see them until I reached home. I was thinking only of her. I was free from all thought of

myself. Good God! how I longed to protect her. And I had nothing of all that is needed to do so. I, whom they call so good, have nothing but a vague desire to do right. I feel guilty and even weak.

“Yes, this evening, in the silence of my room, whose shelter is so sweet, I realize that I have wronged Etienne Loutrel. Just like the rest, I require love. I allowed him to pay me attentions, so that I might enjoy the pleasure of being wrapped round with tenderness. I never thought that Etienne would so soon think he had a right to my love. All our past friendship seemed to be an excuse for my familiarity, and particularly for his. I allowed that friendship to account for the light in his eyes, for his compliments and for his attentions. I wanted to deceive myself. To keep the joy of his first confessions of love, I listened to them, and I refused to understand them.

“Now that he has openly declared himself it would be cowardly for me to see him again, or to give him an opportunity to tell me, ‘You are pretty, I like you ever so much; you are my chosen one,’ in fact, all the words we dream of from the time we are girls. Poor Etienne touches my heart, because he is so good and straight and because he loves me, and I begin to feel that I am in the wrong as far as he is concerned. But, I saw it quite clearly the other day, he understands nothing about my trade, which up till now has been the chief concern of my life. Would it not be a serious matter if we were to marry? Could I become again, even if I loved him, what I was

just ten years ago now, the little girl who had left the convent school and had read nothing, and dreamt of nothing beyond marrying and keeping house for a working man?

“I have handled too much velvet, silk and lace; I have dabbled too much in fine stuffs, and have made too many pretty things for others. There is in me a sense of art and elegance in which he would have no part. Even if I were to give up my trade, even if I were to forsake Uncle Eloi, who is growing old, to go to Mauves, should I be really happy, and could I become so, as the wife of Etienne? When I meet young men who belong to the really fashionable world, I am well aware of the fact that they cannot marry me, and several of them have taken good care not to leave me in doubt on the subject. But there is something in their words and manners that pleases me, and I should like to find a lover among them.

“Fool that I am. I believe that an impossible element has entered into my life with my education in fashion. I have old friends of my childhood, but they have not followed on my track. They have married, they have their husbands and their two-roomed houses in the rue de Chantenay or d’Indret. When I pass I see them with a child in their arms, and I envy them. And yet when the very same happiness that they enjoy is offered to me I am quite upset, and I am no longer like them.

“Who will tell me what to do? Who will help me? And I am supposed to be the adviser, the



adviser of others. How they would pity me if they but knew."

It was very late when Henriette fell asleep. The chill of midnight had covered the window panes with moisture. No sound of steps could be heard on the quays, only the usual vague sounds of the quarter, the croaking of frogs and the regular creaking of the chains that held some large boat fast to its moorings on the marsh.

Henriette's soul was full of words and images of love, and she dreamed that she had been married in a white brocade-silk dress to a man whose face was like Etienne's, though otherwise he was most elegant and very rich, and he bent down to her to whisper: "My darling, your troubles are over. I love you."

That same night, in her wretched room in rue Saint-Similieu, Marie dreamed that she had curtains to her bed, and mirrors in which she could see the whole of herself, and which shone in all the colours of the rainbow. She dreamed that it was winter, and that she was giving tea in flowered china cups to her mother, who had come back from Paris, and that her mother was reconciled and affectionate as she had formerly been, and that she was content to warm her weary hands at the fire which burned as brightly at her daughter's house as in the houses of the rich.

Far from there, in a street in the Saint-Felix quarter, which extends along the Erdre, little Louise, the apprentice, with tired and swollen ankles, thought of the time when she would be a

full-blown worker—a trimmer or a fitter—when she would no longer run errands about town, and when her companions would say to her: “Mademoiselle Louise, would you be kind enough to do so and so?” And the half-open lips of the child smiled in the darkness at this simple thought of better days to come.

For several of them night was bringing respite from the hardness of the day, for at night souls flit away and dwell far from the sleeping bodies to which they belong.

## CHAPTER XIV.

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It was the end of June. Henriette had not seen Etienne again. But once her Uncle Eloi had remarked: "He's a good fellow, is Etienne Loutrel. I like him for his decided manner. He will fight like a man, and be a good husband. What do you think of it, Henriette?" From this she had concluded that the fisherman of Mauves had had some kind of interview with the old soldier, and that they had entered into a league, one to tell his secrets and the other to listen to them. She felt even more convinced of it as she watched her uncle's humour. He no longer complained of his hand; he was even cheerful, and was making plans like a man who had a new life before him. Was not all Henriette's life before him, which was the counterpart of his own?

At Madame Clémence's work was growing scarcer from day to day. One Saturday evening Mademoiselle Reine, who had been sent to match some material at Mourieux's, took Henriette aside at the work-room door, and said to her:

"M. Mourieux wants you to go to him tomorrow morning. Perhaps he wants to marry you, who knows?"

"He? I have not had an hour's talk with him in the whole of my life. 'M. Mourieux, would

you kindly let me have ten yards of gold braid?' 'Yes, Mademoiselle.' And that's all."

"Oh, but he thinks a great deal of you."

Reine, who was looking at the houses as she walked quickly along by Henriette's side, had half raised her tiny oval face to hers, and her eyes, like those of a saint in a stained-glass window, light eyes like two coffee-beans that have not yet been roasted, looked up at her, as she added:

"So he is just like every one else, then."

Henriette went to M. Mourieux as the town clocks were striking ten. He lived in the busiest trade quarter of the town of Nantes, in a little street leading to the Place Royale. The shops were almost all closed. His was only half-shut, for the shutters hid the ordinary show of trimmings, artificial flowers, feathers, and shapes from view, while the door was open, and formed a black hole in the side of the street. Inside the shop was hatchet-shaped. Narrow in front, with cases of goods ranged all along the walls, it widened out at the back, showing a desk, a cupboard, and a great sheet of cardboard hanging on the wall, on to which slips of paper were fastened by means of green string loops. They bore the words: "Situations vacant and wanted for young ladies in the millinery."

For many years Mourieux had hardly left his shop, or rather the back part of it, which was but dimly lit by a window looking out on to a neighbouring court. He was always there, and always the same; stout and thick-set, bushy eyebrows, with short thick moustache and blackish-gray



hair parted on one side and brought smoothly down over the left ear. He was vulgar and common-looking. His deep-sunk eyes were very bright, and always looked straight at you, and seemed to pierce the very brain of the person speaking to him. At first he might be taken for a clever clown, quite absorbed with his own affairs, and quite capable of looking after his three salesmen and cashier. But the young girls in the millinery had found out that under the apparent guise of a retired policeman, there was the tenderest as well as the biggest and humblest of hearts. People smiled when they saw him constantly surrounded by these pretty girls, who were talking to him in a low voice at the back of the shop, while an assistant was measuring the ribbon and tying up the parcels. But these girls, who were good judges and quickly learned the open secret of a man's attentions, knew by experience and by the tradition of their elders that he rendered services for the sole pleasure of obliging them, from a kind of natural impulse, which was now a habit of thirty years' standing. They worshipped him. He kept a register of employment for them, found them places, recommended them to employers who applied to him, and often, without wishing to do so, was made to share the more or less tellable mysteries of their lives. He never joked with them, and that form of respect touched them all.

Henriette knew him but slightly. She entered the shop, and at the back, near the open cupboard filled with rows of old books which he used

to lend his clients, she saw the shopkeeper sitting in his cane arm-chair, while Louise the apprentice was standing in front of the library. The girl's arms hung down by her side, and her large dishevelled head was facing the book shelves and scanning the titles of the books.

"Well, now, which book do you want?" asked Mourieux.

"I don't know, Monsieur, it's for my Sunday off."

"Do you want a book of history, or travels, or stories?"

She stood on her right leg, the left being more swollen and more painful.

She stretched out both her hands with a naïve, childlike gesture, and said:

"I don't know: give me a book to make me cry."

Mourieux rose, and bending over one of the shelves of the cupboard, took a volume and handed it to Louise, who went off half-limping in the semi-darkness, and greeted Henriette in the passage with an expression of sudden joy in her eyes.

"Good-day, Mademoiselle Henriette," said Mourieux. "Pardon me for having sent for you. It is hard for me to get out on Sundays, you see."

"It is your own doing," said Henriette, sitting down beside the book cupboard opposite Mourieux, who dropped heavily into his arm-chair. "You turn librarian for love of your clients. That's a luxury."

"She's a good little girl, that apprentice of

yours. And miserably out of sorts, too. How do you expect me to get out? If I were not there to choose her books, she would go into the public libraries, where they give them everything. Mademoiselle Henriette, Madame Lemarié wants me to speak to you."

The name of Lemarié changed Henriette's frame of mind. It destroyed her first impression.

"Again?" she said. "Surely she does not want another hat?"

"No."

He was buried in his arm-chair with his head bent forward as usual, and as he spoke he followed, in that obstinate way of his, the track that words make in the hearts of listeners.

"Mademoiselle Henriette, you do not seem to me to do her justice. I have known her ever since her marriage. Unhappiness has saved her from selfishness; she is generous; she is admirable, and she is now free to do good. She has thought of you."

"Thank you, we are not rich, but we are able to live, especially now, with my uncle's pension."

"You have not let me finish. She thought you might be able to assist her in her charities. She knows that you have a number of friends among the poor in your part of the town; people are not afraid of you; you know what misery means. Oh, yes, don't be shy, I know who you are. Won't you tell her what poor people, real poor people, to help in your quarter? She will refuse you nothing."

"But that is a mission."

“Which does you credit, Mademoiselle, and remember it will enable you to help sick comrades, or those who are out of work. And you will be able to do it gently and without speaking of it. There is suffering even in the millinery trade during the slack season.”

“Yes,” replied Henriette, “but why am I to do it?”

“I will tell you who has pointed you out to Madame Lemarié. You will not have far to seek: it is I. I don't want to offend you, but I have been thinking for a long time that you are very good and kind-hearted.”

Henriette laughed nervously.

“I, indeed? You must explain to me, M. Mourieux. Come now.”

And even as she laughed, she was somewhat anxiously observing the person who had formulated the idea, and had passed a judgment on her, which had already often troubled her. Did not others speak to her continually as to a chosen being, who was devoting herself to some mission of mercy? She felt inclined to get up and go away and escape, in her girlish pride and fear of all control. She was distrustful of this mission of sacrifice and exception which was to be thrust upon her, but her straightforward nature prevailed. Henriette did not get up. She bent down, and felt as if Fate itself were speaking to her. She stretched her dainty neck and her eyes still glistened.

Mourieux did not answer at once, so she resumed:



"What do you all want with me? For after all I am like all the rest."

The old shopkeeper rubbed his hands on his knees, because Henriette rather frightened him, and he replied, for he had no other guide than his own heart:

"Pardon me, I may be mistaken, but still I do not think so. I only wanted you to give a little help to those who are thinking about other people. They are rare, Mademoiselle. I am old; I can't do much myself; but you, with your youth and beauty, and the words that you alone can find, how you could comfort the poor; and it is pleasanter than you think."

He shook his large head.

"You will say," he continued, "that I am meddling with what does not concern me. But Madame Lemarié asked me to speak to you. She did not venture to do so, as she knew you even less than I do."

Henriette drew herself up, with a serious look in her face that still expressed the very thoughts that he had uttered, as happens in the case of those who have been listening with full concentration of mind.

"Thank you, M. Mourieux, I thank you. I am only afraid that you think too well of me. And then I am twenty-four, I am——"

She remained with her lips half-open without pronouncing the words: "Some one loves me." In fact Etienne's image was appearing to her this very moment, as if to prevent her from yielding. She seemed to see him again as he had been in the

morning stillness by the Loire, standing in the boat with folded arms. She felt as if something at the bottom of her heart were bursting into tears. Yet what was being asked of her was not a barrier to anything in ordinary life or in marriage. She was nervous.

Slowly she rose, looked at the crystal handle of her sunshade, and said:

"I did not want anything of this kind. But I might be wronging others if I refused. If you really think I ought to go to Madame Lemarié——"

"I wish you would."

"Well, then, I will go."

A moment later Mourieux, bending across the threshold of his shop, watched the girl walk away straight down the middle of the street. She walked well, and with her left hand she was lifting the folds of her black skirt.

He looked pleased.

"If she only would," he thought. "Why the poor would adore the very sight of her. Yet there are fools who think that they can all be bought—the millinery hands. They don't know them. Of course they are not all saints. But there are some fine characters among them, brave and straightforward souls capable of untold devotion.

## CHAPTER XV.

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SHE threaded her way haphazardly, passing some blocks of houses, and then coming back to the point from which she started, enjoying in turn sun and shade and the noise of the street as if they were so many amusements that put off the hour of the visit. Should she go? What need was there for her to take up new duties and busy herself with others' cares? She was surprised that old Mourieux was so intelligent. In the millinery they had always looked upon him as a good-natured sort of fellow, who liked to do people kindnesses, though after all it was to his own advantage, because his customers would remain true to him. "I did not think he was so good," she thought. His words came back to her again: "You, with your youth and beauty, how you could comfort them."

She finished up by ringing at Madame Lemarié's house.

A footman introduced her into the blue room. But this time Henriette pressed the hand that Madame Lemarié stretched out toward her.

"It is my turn to thank you to-day, Mademoiselle. Then you have seen Mourieux?"

But they talked about all sorts of things before approaching the subject that had brought them together. They spoke about Uncle Madiot, about

the work shop and the Rue de l'Ermitage, and Henriette's companions at work. Madame Lemarié was slowly studying the girl, and gradually the latter was won over by the humble kindness of the woman. After more than a quarter of an hour, Madame Lemarié felt that she could speak freely.

"I am going to trust you with a secret," she said, "and one of my most precious ones. My good old Mourieux is going off fast. He has done a great deal for me in the past, by passing on assistance that would not have been accepted if it had been known to come from me. When one of our workmen was discharged without a real reason, or even sometimes for reasons that seemed but too well founded, I could not offer to help him, could I? Mourieux was my agent. I also helped him a little in the assistance he gave—not to full-blown workers like you, but to the younger hands in the millinery, who were not yet earning, or who were sick and weak, or out of work. To-day, when I can give more and better than I used to do, good old Mourieux is growing old. I wanted some one—some one from your own world, some one whom no one fears, whom people would trust more naturally than they would me—who would say to me: "See yonder, there is suffering that wants easing. For the world is so divided, Mademoiselle, we want a permit before we may be allowed to show pity. Do you think I can find such a person?"

Henriette stretched out her gloved hand, and said in her clear voice:

"I will try, Madame."



“You will not even need to come to me. At least I will not ask you to do so, for you have so little spare time. Write to me. Keep me informed of the sufferings you encounter, great and small, and even the charities you think it would be useful to support. I will keep it all secret, and you will do the same for me, as far as you are able.”

Henriette had gained so much confidence that she ventured to speak of Marie. They took counsel together. Madame Lemarié ended by saying:

“Buy her a little stock of furniture, and let her think that you are paying for it. Otherwise she would sell it.”

Even when they had spoken about Marie, Henriette did not leave at once. She stayed on, held spellbound by a delicious sensation. She felt that she was pleasant to look upon and listen to. In the old lady's face she read the words that children and young and beloved women hear everywhere around them: “Do not go yet. You are a reflection of joyous life in the tarnished mirror of our gaze.”

At the same time Madame Lemarié was thinking: “How quickly she has understood.” And unconsciously, guided by the mysterious force that compels our actions in the greatest issues, she offered to this child the most unexpected and most unheeded of rewards—the blessing of the poor—and confided the distribution of alms to hands that would carry healing with them as they gave.

## CHAPTER XVI.

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WAS it a new life that was opening up before her? No one can say what portion of a past that is far remote plays a part in what we call the new life. But the two months which followed were the happiest that Henriette had ever spent. She made discreet use of the power that was given to her. She did not like asking even to give to others. But her instinct of pity had received an impulse, and there is no feeling that gains greater ground in life when once a little liberty is granted it, when it is allowed to say: "You are in want? Well then, take."

After supper in the evenings—those long summer evenings that lengthen into clear nights—Henriette liked to go down the Ermitage Hill, and among the crowded blocks of workmen's dwellings, some of which were lower and some higher than the level of the new street, some showing the rough stones of their foundations and fitted with railed flights of stairs, she met groups of people who were drinking in the air. A crowd of folk they were, who breathe bad air by day in the work shops and by night in their crowded rooms, and who stay out of doors of an evening until the mist moistens the tips of their hair or their moustaches. She would say: "How are your little ones?" or "Has work begun again

in the Moulin work shop?" "Are you no longer out of work?" or "Is your sister confined, Madame Vivien? Is it a boy or a girl?" The real alms she gave consisted of her well-dressed youth and charm. She was regarded without suspicion, because she belonged to the people and the quarter; they enjoyed her presence because she knew how to speak, smile, and dress like a lady. They opened up to her. They called her "Mademoiselle Henriette." They had forgotten her family name in order to remember only her Christian name, which was a sign of friendliness. Almost everywhere with the quiet fear of a wise virgin she was able to sound the depths of sorrow and evil. Anger and domestic strife, rivalry, adultery, the ingratitude of children who refused to assist the old, the contempt for the rich and the terrible envy of wealth, feuds fostered between father and son, despair too long endured in the hard struggle for bread, hearts that flagged and bodies that failed, she beheld them all. She made the universal suffering her own.

The world appeared to her in all its aspects of pain. She had no other remedy to offer than her pity, her outstretched hands, and the words she had not yet learned to say fluently: "Hope, forget, cheer up, to-morrow will be better, and to-day I feel with and for you." Yet even at so little cost she was surprised to find great sufferings eased and tears stop falling, and something like a truce to ills ensue. Those who listened to her thought: "Is it really true that we may hope?" And this simple possibility cheered them a little. Some-

times it seemed to Henriette as if she were throwing out planks to shipwrecked folk. In those days she went home quite late at night, but so light-hearted that she said to herself: "Am I then growing younger? I feel like singing." Her uncle scolded her: "What a late hour to go to bed. If I did not know you better, I should say you had got a love affair on." Henriette reassured him, but did not deny it.

On Sundays she went out for walks, sometimes with her uncle, and sometimes with Marie. But when the setting sun threw shadows on a level with the wall she never missed crossing the Avenue of Saint Anne, which crowns the hill near the church. There, in the shelter of the low houses or the almost leafless trees that grow on the stony soil, she met nearly all her friends of the quarter, crowded together like a covey of partridges. The children were playing all together. The mothers were chatting in little groups, separated one from the other, each with a shadow of its own. The gathering dust crested the hill, and formed a spiral in the breeze that rose from the Loire.

At the same time the slack season was dispersing the workgirls at Madame Clémence's. Several of them, at a few days' notice, were obliged to take forced holidays until the end of September: Mathilde, Jeanne, Lucie and others were among them. When the day was over, one of them would be called in to see the chief. She would return a few moments later with red eyes. With all her courage and all her pride baffled, she would still



keep sufficient composure to say: "Good-by, girls. It's my turn this evening. I am given a holiday." Her own friends kissed her, and the others shook hands with her. No one appeared to doubt their meeting again in October. And yet experience had taught them that the caprice of fashion extends even as far as their engagements, and that those who leave with a promise of re-engagement do not always return. They put on their ties, they went down the stairs a little before the others, and that evening, for the first time in the year, they did not wait for their work-room companions, to repeat on the threshold of the door: "Good-by, Irma; good-by, Reine; good-by, Henriette." Sorrow drove them away quickly, far from the favoured folk who would go on working without them at the green tables. The apprentice would put the unused stool into the recess for clothes. The next morning one of the incomers would look round for the absent one, would remember, sigh, and be silent.

Fortunately Marie Schwarz stayed on, thanks to Henriette, who had become sufficiently influential to obtain for her protégée a slight advance in salary. "I am doing it solely on your account," Madame Clémence said, "and it is almost unfair." Such favours naturally gained Henriette the affection of the girls, which the fear of Mademoiselle Augustine, the first hand, had hitherto kept back. One afternoon Reine at one end of the table bent over to her and said: "Mademoiselle Henriette, I want to tell you a secret. I believe I am going to be married in the autumn. I

shall be poor, but dearly loved. He is on the railway. Will you come on Sunday? I shall be so pleased if you like him. We have been speaking about you." Irma had said the same thing to her one day when Henriette asked her: "Are you tired? Have you got a cough?"—"I? Oh, I am done for; I have known that for a long time. When I am quite ill, not as I am now, I shall send for you to comfort me. But that isn't a very pleasing prospect for you. In the meantime would you like to read one of Daudet's stories? I have one that is so pretty that I have copied it all out, because I could not keep the book. I will bring you my exercise book. Shall I?"

Marie remained the same, a bold creature, and only a fair worker, without inner life of any kind, but absolutely frank and affectionate. She said once laughingly, on one of the Sunday walks: "Do you know, I don't think your brother Antoine would mind making love to me, but I don't want him to, you see. You would not like it." They called each other "thou" ever since Marie had had her higher salary from Madame Clémence. Henriette made no attempt at useless talk. But by an inspiration of her girlish and artistic mind she had hastened to beautify the home of the poor girl. She knew that ugly walls have a bad effect on one, and in time, and with the discreet aid of Madame Lemarié as well as marvelous economy, she had been able to give to Marie's room almost an air of coquettish charm. Everything had been re-whitewashed. There were curtains at the windows, and a new table with a table-

cloth, and on the walls two pictures, landscapes, to which Henriette was much attached, but which she had lent to her friend. "You can give them back to me when you are rich, Marie."

An awakened soul becomes creative at once. She thought of new models of such good taste that Madame Clémence herself remarked, as she placed them on the high black stands in the show-room: "I know what has happened: she is in full flower now. They all have a time when they are like fairies. It lasts for three or six months and never comes again."

That year the young women and girls, who wore wondrous confections designed by Henriette, were all complimented on their good taste. Their toilettes were a success at the casinos, on the plage, at the races, and at the first meets of the hunt.

Oh! you rich of the earth, did you but know of the sad hours linked with the charming creations that you wear.

Nearly every morning Etienne passed up the Loire in his boat to reach Trentemoult. Henriette leaned over her balcony, and, very pale, she watched the boatman of the Loire, who also was disinclined to break the silence. Twice only, when the light was so clear and free from mist that they were able to distinguish each other's features, he took a bunch of flowers from the top of his basket and threw it up. A little coloured ball rose in the air toward the rocks of Saint Anne, fell into the water, and was swept down the Loire.

## CHAPTER XVII.

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THE acacias of the Rue de l'Ermitage lost every vestige of green with the first September rains; their leaves hung down as yellow as dates. The employees discussed who would return at the end of the month. Morning and evening were cold, last year's mantles and jackets began to reappear at Madame Clémence's, disguised with new collars and trimmings, but the storms so frequent in the valley of the Loire brought with them suffocating heat during the day. One afternoon, worn out by the trying summer, Henriette felt almost exhausted. Through the windows of the work shop heavy gray clouds fringed with gold could be seen spreading like a pall over the sky. The usually active and inventive Henriette let her eyes roam from the sky to the discoloured walls, leaning back in her chair, her hands lying idly on the table. Her hair felt as heavy as though made of solid gold. She fell asleep.

Madame Clémence, entering on tiptoe, said drily, "Mademoiselle Henriette, come here, please, I wish to speak to you."

The forewoman, Mademoiselle Augustine, who hated Henriette, and was madly jealous of her, began to laugh, hiding her face in her hands, leaving visible only the top of her forehead and the lower part of her coarse, red cheeks.



Henriette, covered with confusion, followed her employer into the next room without a word.

"My child," said Madame Clémence, her tone changing instantly, "I am going to give you a piece of news which will please you. You are going to be forewoman from to-morrow; you have talent, the young ladies are fond of you, and I have full confidence in you."

Henriette grew pale with emotion; her eyelids were lowered, but she raised them slowly and murmured her thanks. Almost at once, however, she recovered herself: "What is to become of Mademoiselle Augustine?" she asked.

"She leaves me, of course."

"Does she know?"

"She has her suspicions. What can you expect, Mademoiselle Henriette? She is worn out; I cannot help it," continued Madame Clémence, seeing that her new forewoman was painfully affected by the dismissal of the old one, in spite of the little sympathy between them. "As for yourself, I have a confidential errand for you. You are to take the train for Paris the day after to-morrow to buy the models for my winter season. We will talk about it to-morrow morning."

Madame Clémence paused an instant to rearrange with a coquettish gesture the folds of her elaborate head-dress.

"I think," she continued, with the smile usually reserved for rich clients, "that you are a little overcome. Go into the showroom and rest. There is no one there. Take a shape with you, and if you have an idea, create another masterpiece."

She was in reality anxious that Henriette should be spared a meeting, and possibly a painful scene.

The young girl understood. Alone and noiselessly she entered the blue plush showroom, her feet sinking into the heavy carpet, and immediately four happy reflections of herself flashed from the mirrors framed in foliage. She was indeed pretty in this first hour of her sovereignty. Her happiness appeared to her as a thing apart, as some rich diamond with which she had adorned herself. It shone in her look, it glittered from her crown of fair hair, it was visible on her lips, which possessed the Florentine gift of smiling though in repose; it was visible, too, in the carriage of her head, no longer heavy with fatigue. She had sat down in a recess.

Light streamed through the glass roof, gilding and caressing the whole room. Moved by the silence and her rich surroundings, Henriette felt her surprise and joy increase, and as girls of her class are not given to idle dreams, her dream soon began to take shape. She seized four silk roses, an aigrette, two pearl clasps, four green and red leaves, and began to twist and arrange stalks and flowers, and to pleat the tulle she held. Inspiration had returned to her. In less than an hour her work was nearly finished.

"How pleased Madame Clémence will be," she thought; "how easy things are, when one is happy."

She looked up at the sound of a footstep. A few yards from the door stood Mademoiselle

Augustine; she, too, was reflected in the four mirrors. She carried her jacket on her arm, and a handbag. She looked half distracted.

She was leaving, worn out, having given her youth to fashion, with no profession and at an age when one cannot learn anything new. In a few seconds she would disappear, to grapple with the unknown. She caught sight of Henriette. Her eyes, fierce as those of an animal at bay, met those of Henriette alight with happy dreams.

“Excuse me—I came to see,—for the last time——”

Henriette advanced toward the door, holding out her hands, which bore the marks of her profession. The movement, though one of comradeship, was meant, too, to justify and explain her position. “We have worked so hard,” the expressive hands, transparent in the light, seemed to say. “See the blood in our veins is impoverished, we are wounded, and already worn.”

The eyes from under the white lids spoke eloquently also.

“Do you bear me malice if I am happy?” they said; “one must live. I have not injured you. I could not love you, but I grieve for you, you who are going out into the dark night.”

The other hesitated. The madness of misery haunted her already. Throwing back her head with what she believed to be a proud gesture, the poor thing cast a look of contempt on Henriette, directed chiefly at youth, talent, success—all that she herself had lost. Then the reddened eyelids became moist, and Mademoiselle Augustine put

out her hand as little as need be. They shook hands in silence.

It was seven o'clock. Henriette came home earlier than usual. Old Madiot, leaning over the stove stirring awkwardly a stew that he was cooking, heard the rickety stairs creak.

He listened smiling. "There comes my little girl," he thought. "I wonder what has happened that she is coming up so quickly."

The stairs creaked more furiously than before, the door was thrown open, and Henriette came running in. Before the old man could turn, her arms were round his neck, and he was enveloped in silk, lace, and tulle.

"Uncle, I am forewoman," she cried, kissing him three times.

"Good heavens! you should have given warning, and I would have shaved. Forewoman of what?"

"At Madame Clémence's. Forewoman in the place of Mademoiselle Augustine. I am to have one hundred francs per month; we are rich. Oh, Uncle, I am so happy."

She drew back to see the effect of her surprise. He was the only one to rejoice with her, the sole relative with whom to share the great news.

Ideas filtered slowly into Madiot's brain. "I am not surprised that you should win promotion," he said quietly.

He began to lay the table, putting two plates opposite each other, while Henriette went into the next room.



Gradually he commenced to show signs of joy, as drooping flowers show slow signs of life when placed in water. Quick words passed from room to room.

"I, too, should have won promotion had my father given me an education. But, there, I did not know my alphabet, whereas you— What rank in the army would forewoman correspond to—sergeant, perhaps?"

"Oh, better than that," replied a laughing voice.

"Adjutant? What a fine rank, you lord it in the barracks?"

"Just so!"

"And only pretty girls, too. What luck! And so young; the last forewoman was forty, wasn't she?"

"Rather more."

"What a position, but you do not look half pleased enough."

"*You don't, Uncle.*"

"I did not grasp it; come and kiss me, little forewoman."

There was more talking than eating during dinner, and then Madiot suggested a walk through the town. He was eager to show off his niece to the whole world on such a day.

"Dress yourself well, and wear your hat with the white wings."

"Where are we going?"

"To hear the band and see my friends."

They sauntered through the rich parts of the town in their Sunday best. Madiot gave his arm

to his niece; he might have been leading her to the altar, his manner was so serious; it was worthy of the old-fashioned silk hat and curled moustache.

Sometimes he bowed to people standing at their shop doors, or tried to catch the whispers of the passers-by.

“Pretty well dressed, quite young . . . where are they off to?”

Where indeed but to Cambronne, where the regimental band was playing marches and lively mazurkas under the elms. They mingled with the crowds who were strolling about, or sat down among the groups who were drinking music and dust for two sous.

He was convinced that everybody was staring at her, and whispering that this was Mademoiselle Henriette Madiot, the new forewoman at Clémence’s.

He stopped once or twice to speak to some old retired army or navy comrade, and after the customary cordial greeting which he never forgot, he hastened to introduce his niece with the words: “Here is my little girl; she has had a stroke of luck; she has been made forewoman.”

If the friend did not understand, he added quickly: “Forewoman is what might be called an adjutant of fashion, do you understand?”

And if his friends did not, it was of little consequence, so that he might speak of this great happiness.

“I have an idea,” he said, on their return home, “we ought to have a little feast on your

return from Paris, in honour of your promotion. It is a pity we cannot invite Etienne to dinner."

"Why not invite Antoine, Uncle? He will have to join his regiment soon."

The old soldier hesitated: "It is more than five years since he dined with us, but perhaps you are right. We will invite him."

Two days later Henriette went to Paris, and Antoine received his invitation.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

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ANTOINE had been courting Marie Schwarz since May. He had the easy gallantry of the work shop, he enjoyed following the girls coming from work, to joke with them all, and to show his preference for any one in particular by catching her laughingly round the waist, while the rest scattered screaming, inwardly jealous.

He was an assiduous attendant at fairs, village assemblies in Nantes, or balls where dancing went on under the trees to the music of a clarinet or a cornet. He frittered away the profits of his skilled labour in one evening; generous, and a fine speaker, he had great success among the poorer classes where gayety is rare. When his falsetto solo ceased, cries of approval came from the listening groups. In contrast to his love of pleasure the foolish fellow had a melancholy and haunting desire for better things, like the home sickness of an emigrant, who knows that he cannot return to his country. He was the last of a race of Plougastel peasants, transplanted and deteriorated hewers of stone and cultivators of strawberries on the wind-swept downs by the sea. Easily led away and easily corrupted he could not forget the sad airs of his infancy. No Breton is ever completely gay. When Antoine, escorting Marie down the Rue Saint Similieu, said: "People



think I am madly happy because I laugh, but I have sorrow enough and to spare, Mademoiselle Marie, like yourself," he did not lie. The mother who bore him had never consoled herself for her fault. Throbbing with all the hatreds of the working-classes, he, too, inwardly weeping, cherished a vague regret for the only good thing his ancestors had possessed—a family. His own he had broken with, and it was classed with his hatreds. In this way he felt inferior to his race, and to many of his equals; an outcast from a common joy. In vain did he chaff the village lads and tillers of the soil; he was one of them but ill and perverted. If he had been born fifty years earlier, or if his grandfather had not sworn, once when dazed with drink, to leave Plougastel, Antoine would have been a peasant shouldering his spade at the close of a day's work, gazing over the sea between beach and field with his heart already at home where his wife was preparing the evening meal.

Breton of the hard soil, his stubbornness, an untutored form of fidelity, proved him to be still, as did also the sudden disgust which would seize him in the middle of an orgie, and plunge him into a fit of black melancholy, which lasted for several days. He would leave his companions then and wander alone along the quays, his slight figure mingling with the porters, his eyes madly staring at things and men. It was, however, neither remorse nor madness, it was just dreams of an ancient people, dreams of a race rocked by the waves, which can never be completely imprisoned by city walls.

He knew when to laugh and when to say, "I

suffer," and thus he gained control over the soul of the desolate girl, whom Fate had thrown in his path. As she had confessed to Henriette the two first occasions that he walked home with her, he had chaffed her. The second time Marie refused his escort, and he never volunteered again, but he met her.

"I am like you," he said, "one whom his family has rejected; we resemble each other in sadness." Then she listened to him.

Gradually it became a habit for them to meet in the evening at the corner of a street. As Marie passed, Antoine would step from a doorway, where he had been waiting, and they talked for a few minutes, hidden in the shadow of a wall. He would pull his hat over his eyes, and Marie would lift a corner of her old mantle, to hide themselves from the chance passers. Often they merely made a few remarks about the day's work. Sometimes he would add: "What beautiful hair you have, Marie." But his look caressed her, and it was the passion that it expressed that made them linger together, and which haunted Marie when the words they had spoken were forgotten.

One August evening, the last late night at Clémence's, Marie Schwarz, exhausted with hunger and fatigue, was hurrying home to her room in Rue Saint Similieu. She was hardly thinking of Antoine, because of the lateness of the hour, and when he came out of the dark doorway where he had been waiting, she was beyond measure distressed. He should not have waited, it was too much. She felt herself drawn toward the wall.

"I have waited here two hours, waited, because I love you, Marie."

It was one of his hours of bitter sadness. He seized her hands, and his lips brushed back the thick, black hair, which had become partially uncoiled.

"Marie, Marie, I love you so, that if it were possible you should be my wife."

"Don't say that, leave me, don't say another word."

"Marie, I have to join my regiment. Perhaps I may never return. I have only two months more to live. Come with me."

"Leave me, Antoine."

She struggled, but in spirit she was lost. Had he not said, "If it were possible, you should be my wife?"

She freed herself and moved away, with a look of horror.

"No, no, I will not. It would be the ruin of both. Never come again, never."

But he did; he met her again. The night he received Madiot's invitation to supper he met Marie at their usual meeting-place.

She was already conquered and that evening her last support had failed. She had not seen Henriette since the day before, she would not see her on the morrow or on the following days.

She fell weeping on Antoine's shoulder, and let herself be led away.

## CHAPTER XIX.

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So Marie, in her soul's distress, thought of Henriette, and cried out to her.

Other thoughts followed the traveller that night—the regret of old Madiot and of some of the neighbours deprived of their evening visit, the anxious thoughts of little Reine, who secretly loved the forewoman; of Louise, and, above all, of Etienne. More prayers were sent up to heaven, more souls yearned toward this working girl leaving her people, and looked for her return, than for many a rich person setting out from home. Unknown tender thoughts crossing in space.

Seated on a bench, which they had brought out from the hut, Etienne and his mother sat watching. They were waiting for Etienne's father, who was spreading his nets. The children slept. The oxen were moving in the moon-lit meadows, gray, indistinct shapes in the fog, their feet making black patches on the grass, white with dew. The Loire flowed slowly by against the incoming tide, shimmering in the moonlight. The awakening owls hooted in the poplar trees.

“What else can you expect, poor boy,” said Mother Loutrel, her hands sheltered under her apron from the chill night air, her eyes fixed, like Etienne's, on the river; “what more can you do?”



Girls like her are not to be had for the asking. She told you to have patience."

"If only there was some hope, Mother, I would be patient enough, but I always feel that she will not have me."

The woman bent toward him, and to pacify him adopted the voice with which she was wont to comfort him in his infancy.

"Dear Etienne, don't imagine things; I believe that if she waits, it is a good sign, she wants to try you."

Silence fell upon them, a silence intensified by the peaceful night.

There was a strong resemblance between the mother and son, both came of a fiery race and with their eyes fixed on the river which gave them a living, the expression of their regular features was almost identical. But there was something besides grief in the man's face; energy and strong will were painted there. The mother's face expressed pity; she had been very beautiful, this fisherman's wife, and she knew the grief that unrequited love can cause.

"When you pass before her house in the morning, does she look out?" she asked.

"Yes," said Etienne, "not always, but she was there again yesterday."

"Can you see her eyes? Don't they tell tales?"

Etienne shook his head.

"No, Mother, I don't see her eyes; she is not near enough. I can only see a white figure in the window, and her hands when she leans out, and I can recognize her hair."

“Does she make any sign?”

“Neither when she comes nor when she goes,” he said, again shaking his head; “she is like a statue. But I promised not to persecute her, and I turn my boat round as though I expected nothing.”

Silence again fell upon them; the young owls came near, invisible in the darkness, hooting as they pursued their prey.

Etienne was the first to speak, his voice serious, but trembling with youthful eagerness:

“I will wait for her; but after Christmas, as true as I am born, I will go to her, Mother, I will say to her: ‘You must tell me all to-day, all; this must end,’ and if she will not have me——”

He extended his arm slowly over the moonlit river. “You know what I shall do then,” he said, “I have sworn it.”

Their mingled sighs troubled the night air. The mother knew her son’s secrets, but to hear him renew his threat, which she knew he would keep if Henriette refused him, grieved her deeply. She pictured to herself the loneliness of the hut when Etienne had left, and of her anguish when the wind freshened over the river thinking of her four sons exposed to the peril of the sea.

“If only it were not she,” she said almost harshly.

These words silenced them both for more than half an hour.

The meadows had become so brilliant that they seemed to be covered with snow, and in the surrounding whiteness the Loire stood out like a

black path, with one ray of moonlight thrown across it. On the opposite bank, coming into the light, Etienne made out a moving black patch.

"Father's boat," he said, rising.

The mother and son moved down to the bank, two tall figures bending over the river watching the approaching boat.

"Only speak of his fish, Etienne," the mother murmured as the boat neared the bank, "he has enough trouble. To know trouble in advance is the mother's part."

The little owls, still invisible, screamed madly, hunting for field mice.

## CHAPTER XX.

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HENRIETTE returned after six days' absence. Eloi waited for her at the station, and got into the cab amid a stack of parcels and cardboard boxes. They drove straight to Madame Clémence's.

"Be quick, little girl," begged Eloi as they reached the door, "dinner is cooking at Mère Logeret's. Antoine promised to come at seven. We shall be three, we have only been two for so long."

He was nervous over the meeting, yet was confident that all would be well.

"Antoine was only too pleased," he thought, "he agreed almost at once. He is getting to be a man, he will shortly join his regiment, and the Service soon makes a change in a young fellow. I remember that I could think of nothing else, two months before joining."

Madame Logeret had prepared a stew made of chicken, in accordance with recipes of which she jealously kept the secret. She brought it in smoking in an earthenware saucepan. When Henriette reached home at half-past six with a bunch of flowers, the staircase still smelt of rosemary, cloves, and fried butter.

"I was passing Madame Eglot's shop," she said, "and really I felt that I must have some flowers for my dinner party. Aren't they pretty?"

She took up a china basket and arranged her



autumn flowers, among ferns still moist from the woods. She placed the basket on the table close to the standing lamp, with its fine cream-coloured shade, which lent a festive air to Madiot's room. In her own room she dusted and arranged on a round table the blue-flowered tea service, which was never made use of.

Antoine arrived, not in the least embarrassed apparently, with his little vague laugh and shifty look, which always avoided other people's eyes.

"Well, your room is not in the least changed, Uncle Madiot. You are not in the swim, I see, not even an advertisement. With us the poorest has his coloured picture."

Henriette came out of her room and he took the hand she offered, but did not press it. The white hand stretched out with a sister's greeting fell coldly by her side.

"Well, Henriette, so you are forewoman. Congratulations! I'll bet your room is better furnished than Uncle Madiot's."

He stepped forward and put his head round the door.

"I thought so. What luxury, vases, pictures, laces, an arm-chair! I remember a time when a little apprentice groped her way to bed in the dark to save candle ends."

"And I, I remember a brother who loved me once," she murmured softly, so that he alone should hear.

"Don't talk of that," he replied, curtly.

He turned away instantly toward his uncle, who invited him to be seated.

Henriette followed: "Will it be always the same," she thought, "what on earth can we talk about now, not to anger him."

Conversation began nevertheless, and was continued almost with ease and gayety. Madiot, though not a model of diplomacy, avoided any subject which could recall the past. Round that table where for the first time for so long the family was grouped, the mother's name was never mentioned, the years of childhood were willingly forgotten. They discussed newspaper and town gossip, politics in general and recent strikes. Old Eloi laughed, the wine had made him jovial, but his nephew sat observant, joked but did not smile nor drink.

At last Uncle Madiot filled up the three glasses and lifted his own.

"Your health, Antoine. In six weeks you will be in barracks."

The young workman instantly lost his look of indifference, and bit his lips.

"Yes, unfortunately, I shall have to go," he said, gravely.

"What a look," cried Henriette, who was clearing the table, "what are you afraid of?"

She tried to laugh.

"Afraid of wanting money?" she added, "I am sure you must know, however, that I will not forget our soldier, especially now that I am forewoman."

He had come chiefly for fear that his refusal might mean a cessation of this last source of income, and also because he was haunted by a

vague terror, instinctive as were the superstitious fears of his ancestors.

"No doubt," he said, prompted by the same terror, "but it is a big misfortune, as one never knows if one will return."

"What an idea," laughed the old soldier, "what should happen in less than two years, why do you torment yourself with these ideas?"

Antoine was silent.

"Look at me," continued his uncle, "fourteen years of service," and he threw back his shoulders and twisted his long untidy moustache.

The young man looked at him, but with contempt.

"You were a simple fellow, Uncle Madiot," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Why?" cried the old man, his face becoming stern.

"They trotted you about from one end of France to the other, and then off to the Crimea, just as they liked. And not having had enough you signed for another seven years."

"Quite so, nor do I regret it, and I'll swear that it was fine, all our campaigns—Inkerman, the siege, the English joining us, Palestro, Magenta."

"I know, but what did you get from it," threw in the young fellow insolently.

"Get from it, get from it——"

"One sou a day, eh?"

"I was fed, I had tobacco, I had——" seeing from Antoine's mocking laugh that he was getting the worst of the battle, the old man lost his temper.

"I do not argue like you, blockhead. I served

with my comrades, not for money, but for honour, for pleasure."

"Be grateful, if it so pleases you, Uncle, they took the best of your life, prevented you from being your own master, from having a profession, from having a family, from having even a purse with something in it. Thank them, it's your own business, but the men of to-day are made of different stuff."

"So I see, cowards."

"Cry out, if you like, you will not change it. The men of to-day will not be led about like you. I warn you, soon it will have to be abolished."

"What?"

"The army."

Eloi Madiot drew himself up. He threw his body before the door with a movement suddenly come back to him from his old profession, as though he feared some one would enter, as though he heard the footsteps of the adjutant for the week coming to avenge such blasphemy. Then his eyes, terrible as those of a soldier going into action, turned on his nephew, who had denounced the army. He did not speak, but his eyes spoke for him. Between him and the miserable youth, the fourteen years of his life in war and barracks rolled in confusion. There passed before him visions of his comrades, drawn up in ranks, shouldering their arms; of the officers he had loved; music sounding through cathedral domes; flying flags; bayonet charges; drinking bouts after victories; garrison towns; the mess; all the glory, all the careless joy of the service. Visions of it



all rushed through his troubled brain. For the moment the old soldier became the incarnation of the old army, of a by-gone indignant people; a whole past of humble courage rose under the insult.

"Silence," he cried, "silence, or I'll strike you," and he brought down his undamaged fist with a thud on the table.

Antoine, pale but master of himself, leaned back in his chair and raised his pointed chin in the air.

"And then?" he questioned.

His uncle seemed about to fall upon him, when Henriette ran forward and seized his hand.

"Antoine is joking, Uncle," she said, "don't you see, let him alone."

She watched them eagerly, standing trembling between the two men who defied each other. Antoine neither changed expression nor lowered his eyes, but the old man who felt the girl's hand tremble endeavoured to regain command of himself, and to obey her request.

"You're right, Henriette," he said, his voice still shaking with anger, "he will get over it; when he wears the uniform, he will be compelled to obey—he, Antoine!"

"You don't know your nephew, Uncle," the latter sniggered; "if our officers are pleasant, perhaps I may, but if they are not—" he snapped his fingers, "Heavens, I'll teach them!"

Eloi Madiot was secretly alarmed by the strange expression on his nephew's face, he had seen the insolent look in others, in troopers, who had ended in the African battalions. He made no answer.

“Look here, Antoine, I did not mean to tell you, but since you defy your officers, I can assure you there will be one at least, who will be anxious to protect you,” threw in Henriette.

“Who?”

“He is only a Reserve officer, but in January he is to be transferred to your regiment. I will make his mother speak to him; she is sure to do so; you guess whom I mean?”

“No.”

“Monsieur Victor Lemarié.”

Antoine sprang up. “Do you mean to do that, Henriette?”

“Yes, to please you. What’s the matter?” She stepped back alarmed at his face, which was livid with rage.

“You would, would you. Well, tell him then that he had better not meddle with me, nor give me orders, nor come too near me, or there will be a tragedy. Tell him, tell him— Good God——”

He seized his hat and rushed wildly from the room.

Madiot and Henriette shrinking together against the wall were silent for a time. Henriette was dazed and grief-stricken, but her uncle had a different cause for distress, the explosion of fury had suddenly brought home to him the fact that Antoine knew something of the past.

He was terrified to think that such a secret was shared, and by whom? He saw his Henriette exposed to danger, to the vengeance of a wretch like Antoine, who could torture and break her; who might also obtain a mastery over her by holding

out the perpetual threat of dragging up the old shame and making a scandal. Every other thought was effaced by the anguish of this; he forgot personal insults, abuse of the army, everything but the one tormenting thought. Henriette in danger, a danger that he could not avert, and from which he must save her. His brain was on fire. "Must I run after him?" he thought. "Will it happen to-morrow or when? I must discover how much he guesses, and forbid him to speak—forbid him, Antoine Madiot!"

His face buried in his hands he brooded over his sorrow.

"Can you explain to me what was the matter with him?" said Henriette interrupting his dream. "Why was he so angry? Was it against me or Monsieur Lemarié?"

Her uncle seemed to awake from a nightmare. He made an effort to hide his anxiety, so as to give some colour of truth to what he was about to say.

"Don't be so alarmed, little girl," he began, "I ought to have remembered that it is impossible to talk sense to Antoine; you see he is still furious with the Lemariés, because of the question of my pension."

"Now that the matter is settled it would be folly. Now there is something else, that we do not know of, something more serious."

Her eyes followed him as he went over to the window and leaned upon the ledge. He dared not move for fear of being compelled again to lie.

Henriette, however, did not speak again. She

put on an apron and began to wash up the dinner things. This task was to her the most distasteful of all housework, but to-night she never gave a thought to it. Her mind was far away trying to solve an impossible riddle.

When she had put away the china in the sideboard, she went into her room to brush her hair, to wash and scent her hands to become once more a fashionable lady. Then she cleared away the blue-flowered tea service, and replaced the chairs that she had arranged near the round table, and which were no longer needed.

In the other room Madiot, crouching near the window, mad with his secret sorrow, kept repeating: "Supposing he should betray her"; and Henriette, not suspecting the danger, asked herself: "What is the matter? Why was Antoine so infuriated, and why has my uncle forgotten me this evening?"



## CHAPTER XXI.

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IMMEDIATELY on entering the work shop next day, Henriette looked round for Marie, whom she had not seen since her departure. All the girls, with the exception of Marie, crowded round her for news.

“Good-morning, Mademoiselle Henriette, you look tired. Did you have a pleasant journey? Tell us about your visit to Reboux, and to Esther Meyer’s. Are the models pretty this year?”

After answering them all Henriette went up to Marie, who, seated at the end of the table near the light, seemed to concentrate her mind on each stitch.

“Well, Marie, don’t you mean to say good-morning?”

Marie lifted her eyes which gave no sign of pleasure, and instantly lowered them again.

“Good-morning,” she said; “are you well?”

“There,” said Henriette, gently, “I did well to come home. Here is my friend Marie unable to get along without me, and plunged in melancholy.”

Marie made no answer.

“Will you come to Reine’s with me on Sunday?”

“No, I cannot,” answered Marie, continuing to sew.

“You are engaged?”

“Yes.”

"You shall tell me about it," answered Henriette, moving away.

Her friend's depression, however, had awakened her suspicions. Many times during the day she looked toward Marie, but without succeeding in meeting her eyes, with the exception of once or twice when it seemed to her that they were as sad and as expressive of inward tragedy as on the first day when the unknown girl had come up the staircase with the question: "There is no vacancy, is there?"

She could not speak to her in the evening because Madame Clémence detained her as the employees were leaving.

"To-morrow," she thought, "I will find time to walk home with her and discover what is wrong."

But on the morrow Marie did not come, and no one had been given a message from her.

"Was she ill; did she complain of anything these last few days?" asked Henriette of Reine, who was more intimate with Marie than the rest.

Reine answered no, but her pale cheeks reddened as she spoke, and Henriette was alarmed. She was more anxious still the next day, when she reached the shop and found that Marie, usually the first, had not yet come. The room was deserted as Henriette opened her drawer and slowly took out her things. The weather was appalling. "Perhaps she is detained by the dreadful weather," thought Henriette; "she lives far away."

The apprentice entered, then Mathilde, Lucie, Jeanne, Reine, Irma, all but Marie. Nine o'clock struck. The noise of the opening door, the foot-

steps on the boards, the murmurs of: "What dreadful weather," the stools being pulled up to the table, all the different noises of the morning arrivals ceased. Whisperings and work commenced, but Marie's place was empty.

Madame Clémence's employees also remarked Marie's absence. Some knew the reason—what don't they know—but they confined themselves to saying: "Twice again this week, but perhaps she has sent an excuse." Meaning looks passed between some of them, but they knew the forewoman's friendship for the girl too well to talk. Rain lashed the windows, and the wind howled furiously down the chimney.

Henriette was sick with anxiety and could not touch her dinner. She longed for the end of the day's work, to be able to run to Marie's lodging, to knock at the door, calling her name.

But as the autumn season had brought many orders, work was continued until past half-past seven. Henriette left her friends at the shop door, and on account of the squall went up the street instead of along the quays.

The rain soaked her skirts, the wind lashed the puddles into foam. The streets were deserted but for the drivers crouching on their boxes, who stared after her, the rain streaming from their hats. Henriette walked at breathless speed, and plunged into the poor quarter of the town. She hurried through the Place Bretagne and on to the Place Marchix, which was changed into a lake with old houses on its banks. The street lamps were all but extinguished by the tempest. An-

toine lived at the farther end of the place on the right. "Is it possible that it is he, my brother, who has ruined her?" thought Henriette, who guessed the truth. Brooding over the matter she remembered that, when at dinner the other night, she had mentioned Marie's name Antoine looked embarrassed. This sign, added to others of the past, almost convinced her of his guilt. "And it was through me that she met him!" she thought. Presently she stopped short and looked up at a window under the roof in which a small light twinkled. The light gave some hope, he was there, he had not gone out. Henriette retraced her steps, hurried in the pouring rain to the Rue Saint-Similieu, and dived into a doorway, where the wind howled like the siren of a steamer. She groped her way up the staircase, suddenly seized with fear at being alone, frightened, too, at being so near to the secret she sought to discover. There was no sound but that made by her fingers against the wall as she vainly tried to find the door. At last she drew herself together and called "Marie."

Her voice was drowned by the wind.

"Marie."

She heard footsteps on the other side of the door, a shaft of light fell on the staircase, the door opened, Henriette caught sight of Marie and went forward, her sodden garments clinging about her. The other recoiled, extending her hand, as though to ward off her approach.

"You ought not to have come. Do not touch me, do not come near me."



Henriette stopped, dazed. Her friend was leaning on the table which held the lamp they had bought together one happy day. She was dressed in new clothes, ready to go out. She looked almost elegant, with a large black hat trimmed with bright red feathers, an embroidered collar, high-heeled shoes, and silk umbrella. She stood upright, pale and resolute.

"I ran here, Marie, as soon as my work was done. I did not believe——"

"That it was true? Well it is."

Henriette mastered her grief. She advanced a little to the other side of the table.

"Marie," she said gently, as though speaking to a younger sister, "tell me that it is just a moment's folly. We are friends; take off your mantle; let me sit down and talk."

But Marie recoiled. Her sombre eyes shone like cold steel: passion had chased all tenderness from them.

"No," she said, coldly, "I am no longer worthy of you. Go away."

"Listen to me, and then I will leave; and I will never come back unless you want me."

"No, nothing you can say will be of use."

She crossed her arms, and leaned forward a little. The light from the lamp accentuated the angry smile on her lips.

"It is over, do you understand? I have had enough of misery, and enough of your virtues. I believe in nothing. I have not long to live, and I will enjoy life. I am an unfortunate. He or another, what odds?"

She hesitated, and then added: "I must go, he is waiting."

Henriette threw out her hands as though to stop her.

"But don't you know him?"

"Better than you, who hate him."

"He has deceived you; he has to join his regiment."

"I know."

"He promised to marry you, and you believed him?"

"No."

"Not even that! Not even that!"

Henriette covered her face with her hands, and began to sob, but Marie drew herself up, her arms crossed, and defying life, death, and the neighbours, who might hear: "I love him!" she cried.

Sobs were her answer; then Henriette dropped her hands, drew back, and gazed at Marie. She moved away slowly, the lamplight shone on her pale tear-stained face, on the golden tresses that the wind had blown across her face. For one minute she leaned against the doorway, she was pity personified lingering to the end. She vanished into the dark night, it was as though remorse had vanished with her.

"Nine o'clock at night."

"I did not think I could suffer so through her," wrote Henriette in her gray-covered diary, "or that I could so love her. We are separated, she has fallen, and has driven me away. I, who had hoped to make of her an honest woman. I, who

in my dreams, would be fitting on her her white wedding dress. Poor lost sister! Even now I feel that had I known you, when quite small, you would not have pushed aside my hand. I was not strong enough, and she has been too miserable. Worn with hard work, having nothing to live on, when one is tempted—and there is no restraining force—there comes a day when one remembers that one is a woman, and farewell to all the rest.”

Henriette stopped writing. She was alone in her room, exhausted with fatigue, listening to the rain lashing the windows. An inexplicable uneasiness took hold of her. One cannot without danger come in contact with unrepentant sin. For three days she had brooded too much over this bad dream, and in spite of herself all the temptations of her hard life flashed upon her. She felt the stinging of all the glances fixed on her since she was of an age to be insulted, that is to say, since she started as an apprentice years ago, her basket on her arm and linen bonnet on her head. The covetous eyes of youth, mature men, and of old men who follow children, embraced her. She heard again the whispered remarks thrown at her in the streets, the dishonest proposals of employers and shopkeepers. She re-read the letters offering to buy her workshops and showrooms. She was obsessed as these pitfalls multiplied around her, and that she usually avoided without a thought, obsessed by the indefatigable persecution which never tires, and is never discouraged. The world appeared to her in all its brutal ugliness, seeking the ruin of the weak, the poor, those

whose youth should at least protect them, and who should not have to defend themselves, when already they had so much to suffer. She felt that misgiving of one's self, which helps one to pardon others.

"Oh, my God," she cried, "grant that I may not fall myself."

She was afraid; she tried to escape from the evil thoughts which surround a knowledge of sin.

What shelter could she find? Who would defend her from these ideas which suddenly haunted her?

She took refuge in a dream of past years, when her mother lived, and kept her close to her side, sheltering her frailty. She made an effort to keep before her eyes the faces of young girls now happily married, whose example would help her to combat these nightmare visions. Then rising from the table she opened the glass doors of her little bookcase, and took from it a prayer-book given her by the Sisters at school. A yellow piece of paper marked a favourite passage of her youth, and which she had not read for a long time. These were praises addressed to virgins, canticles which portrayed the triumph of the spirit over the flesh. She read on remembering the phrases, experiencing again the emotion they had awakened, at an age when she barely understood their meaning. Once more the same joy in exceeding purity that she felt as a child, the same uplifting of the soul. But it was no longer the same silent flight of thought. As she rose she held out a hand to Marie. "I will raise you, my friend," she thought,



"I shall see you in every little girl in my parish, and love her for you; if you had only had my jealously guarded childhood, had you learned the lessons I was taught, had you but had my mother," she said, closing the book that was a relic of her childhood.

## CHAPTER XXII.

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THE separation had left a cruel wound. Henriette had become profoundly attached to Marie during the months of their friendship. She felt, since the rupture with her, as though all her friends were lost. In vain were Reine's attentions, in vain the good humour with which her comrades accepted the rule of the new forewoman; Henriette felt a void which they could not fill. She could not get accustomed to the new girl, whom Madame Clémence had engaged in the place of Marie, discharged after three days' absence. She reproached herself for the severity with which she treated the young girl, who would sometimes look at her in wonder, as though to say: "Why do you, who are so kind, treat me differently from others?"

A slow and deep transformation was taking place in Henriette. The last incident in her life had made her vividly conscious of human misery. The heart was more open to pity. Instead of seeking consolation in Etienne's love, she sought it in self-forgetfulness. Instinctively she threw herself among the multitude of poor and sufferers around her, as though not made for the love of one, but for the love of the nameless, the unloved, the obscure outcast in the crowd. Already, almost before aware of it, and long before she knew

Etienne's, she had received the love of those whom no one loves. They had protected her from the life that engulfs others; they had procured for her the joy of the feeling of use, of being charitable, of being paid with gratitude's tears. Now she felt drawn powerfully toward them, though perhaps the attraction was neither undivided nor permanent.

On Sundays, when she did not go out with Uncle Eloi, she spent an hour or two among her parish friends, under the trees of the avenue of Saint Anne, where the autumn sun had brought many women and children. They no longer feared, they had adopted her. Or otherwise she went to see, on their account, the old priest, whose garden gave on to the Rue de la Hautière, to speak of their common clients.

Sometimes, however, a remembrance or a meeting threw her impetuously into other dreams. One morning, during her walk from home to the shop, she was following behind an affectionate couple, humble people like herself, whose unique possession was their youth. Merely from seeing them Henriette became troubled with dreams of love, such as are born in spring, of the caressing breeze or the perfume of budding May trees.

"I will say 'yes' to Etienne," she then thought, "and we will wander like them down the paths of joy, envied by the passers-by." These impulses of youth faded, and it was enough for Henriette to find herself with the infirm Marcelle Esnault, or Vivien, or any of the poor wretches it was her task to console, and to see them smile. "I can

never leave you; you are my life," she would say, deep down in her soul.

Eloi Madiot had need of her comfort more than all others, of her consolation in his sorrow. It seemed as if her only grief was the distress of others. He was overcome by the discovery he had made, and incapable of coming to a decision. The idea of having a complete explanation with Antoine terrified him. The weeks went by, and still he put it off. He accused himself of cowardice, but took no action. Henriette, seeing him more taciturn than usual, hesitated to believe that age alone accounted for the change. "Why don't you confide in me?" she said; "you are in grief, am I not here to listen?" But he gave no answer.

In the latter half of November, a few days before the departure of the conscripts, Eloi decided to go through with the business. He waited for his nephew outside the work shop.

"Listen, Antoine," he said. "I was angry the other night because you attacked the army, but you must not leave like this. The day before you go is a holiday. What do you say to my calling for you, and we'll drink together?"

The astonished young man, suspicious as usual, hesitated before answering.

"If you don't speak of Monsieur Lemarié," he said at last, "I have no objection."



## CHAPTER XXIII.

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SINCE eight in the morning Eloi Madiot had been making a tour of the cabarets, to celebrate Antoine's entry into the army. The conscripts were to be at La Roche-sur-Yon on the morrow; Antoine and his comrades, therefore, were to leave by a night train.

It was mid-day. Uncle and nephew had called at the Croix de Fer, an old inn near the ruins of the Lemarié Works, then on to a cabaret in the district of Mauves, "a famous place," said Eloi, "where they have a muscadet which makes you dance only to look at it." He was dancing even before seeing it, as a result of the fresh wind and wine. He was celebrating this entry into the army according to traditions, which he considered glorious, and which made it almost a military duty to make the last day one of riot and drunkenness. He spoke loud, telling anecdotes of an army no longer in existence, citing names long forgotten of officers he had known, and villages where he had camped. He drew his puny, unresponsive nephew along with his left arm, still stiff from his wound. By his gayety, the old man seemed the younger of the two, his head, with its reddened face and white hair, rolled from side to side on his broad shoulders. In passing before the vegetable sellers, sitting among their baskets

which formed a green nest, he looked down on the soft hat which brushed his shoulder with a disdainful smile, as though saying, "Here is a conscript of to-day. Is he like me? See, my beauties, what we were and what we are."

His nephew, his little ferret eyes as untroubled as usual, let himself be led along. Presently they made their way back through the town, but not knowing why, with no appetite for lunch, but wishing to rest themselves, entered the Sept Frères Tranquilles, in the Rue Saint-Similieu. Eloi, with his face to the light, continued to talk with animation, but his face was no longer expressive. His mind moved with difficulty, his mouth alone moved; his eyes were fixed in a drunken stare. Antoine, leaning against the wall, did not drink. Seated by a marble table, the two men occasionally lifted a glass of bad absinthe with the words, "Your health," but only the old man opened his mouth to try and drink, and each time drops of green liquid ran down his chin on to his beard, and made him smart as though it were fire, which irritated and excited him as much as what he had drunk.

The room was full of steam from a boiling pot of stew. The other customers were eating at tables in the front part of the room. None seemed to hear the conversation which was becoming animated, Eloi Madiot's deep chant mixing with Antoine's falsetto. The servant only, a tall, red-haired, indolent girl, seated near the window so that the sun fell on her hair, looked from the corner of her eyes at the young man, who was known to her.

"In my days," said the uncle, "we were more gay the last day. You don't look like a conscript."

"I have told you my opinion, Uncle; I don't change it from day to day. I have to join the regiment, worse luck."

He finished his speech with a toss of the head which seemed to say, "I shall be thinking the whole time how to get off, and will make any means serve my purpose."

"You'll see," continued the old man, who could not resist giving advice, and who was too drunk to notice the cold wrath of Antoine's speech, "just get the theory into your head, and obey your chiefs, and watch what the others do. Not too much drinking in the army, and not too many women. The officers don't like the soldiers to have a wife in town. If you have a little friend, Antoine," he said, winking, "don't take her with you."

The poor man thought his nephew was laughing, whereas he shuddered. The shaft had struck deep, for he loved the unhappy girl whom he was leaving. His uncle attempted to laugh, and thought the moment opportune for the long-postponed question.

"You have a bad temper, Antoine, but all the same I am sure you want to be an honour to the family."

"The family?" hissed his nephew.

"Yes, the family, your sister and me!"

"Don't try to hoodwink me, I know my family, and I know that I have been robbed, robbed, robbed; do you understand?"

Antoine leaned over the table toward his uncle, who made a sign with his damaged hand: "Not so loud, not so loud." He could hear the customers turn to listen. The red-haired servant leaned back in her chair laughing.

"You mustn't fight, you two," she cried.

But the young man was carried away by the rancour that had blighted his life.

"Yes, I have been robbed by the girl who had no right in our house. She took my share of all; you deceived me, Uncle Madiot," he said, throwing the words in the old man's face.

"It is not true. I said nothing."

"But I know, I have learned all. The day I heard it I left never to return. I was nothing at home, and she was in control. Do you dare deny it? And yet I am Père Madiot's son. When I see her I shake with jealousy."

"Be silent, Antoine; now, be silent."

"If that is what you are after, here's your answer: I hate her."

Antoine sprang up, he gave no heed to Uncle Madiot, whose huge shoulders were bowed in shame. He looked round the room at the customers whose curiosity had been aroused, and who turned their heads cautiously toward the scene of the battle, but as they met the young man's gray eyes they immediately dropped theirs on their glasses, with an air of indifference. When he thought that they had settled down, Antoine drew a franc from his pocket, and threw it on the table.

"I pay," he said. The money rang on the



marble, and with his eyes fixed on the street and his face deadly pale, he made his way between the tables.

The old man followed slowly, his eyes on the ground, his face puckered pitifully. Many thought the two men were going out to fight, but not so. Antoine stopped in the doorway of the Sept Frères Tranquilles, looked at the white mud, at the autumn sun, and turned to the left.

Behind him a terrible voice, which anger and drink had rendered unrecognizable, rang through the streets: "Wretch!" it cried.

This was their farewell.

The young workman shrugged his shoulders, and went on his way, straight to his mistress, and instead of slipping cautiously into the doorway of the court, crowded like a human hive, he called out, "Marie."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

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SHE was waiting for him. For her, too, the day marked an entry on the unknown. Twice already Marie Schwarz had felt the anguish of utter destitution, the first time when her mother had turned her out of doors, the second when she had arrived in Nantes alone, in that hour of distress when she first met Henriette. And now her lover was leaving her, it meant not only misery for the morrow, but the actual separation that very night, perhaps forever. Such, however, is the prodigious vitality of youth, that she met him with a smile ready for their last walk.

Antoine, still pale, seized her wrist.

"Come," he said, "I must get some air; I have just bid farewell to Uncle Eloi, and I think for a long time."

She gathered that he had been drinking, that they had quarrelled, that his Breton temper was aroused. Hiding her smile, she followed him, speaking quietly to avoid a scene in the street. The young workman told his tale, he held himself straight, but his eyes were strange. Marie, slipping on the greasy pavement, had passed her arm through his, her one aim being to pacify the angry man.

They soon reached the Rue Grebillon, where Marie used formerly to work, and which she usu-

ally avoided now. A feeling of modesty, which he would not have understood, prevented her from going down this street which she used to frequent, when an honest girl, during the summer. Behind the shop windows she caught sight of workmen whom she knew by sight, and who had often looked after her when she passed on the beautiful May evenings. Several of Madame Clémence's clients went by, pink under their tight veils, their necks swathed in furs, women for whom she used to try on hats, perhaps the very ones they now wore. These ladies did not look at her, they had perceived from a distance that the couple were not of their world. Nevertheless she was embarrassed. She was afraid of meeting one of the girls from the shop, or one of the employees from Mourieux's. Therefore when Antoine, sobered by the fresh air, turned to her, saying, "I don't know what I am doing here, shall we go into the country?" she eagerly accepted.

They turned to the right and went toward Ville en Bois and Chantenay, avoiding the rich districts by taking turnings familiar to them. Marie grew tired, but did not complain. Antoine having recovered himself, bore no trace of the morning's work beyond an air of black depression, which she knew well, and which was merely the effect of his descent from a race formerly associated with the sadness of the Breton Sea. He spoke low; he endeavoured to comfort her; but he found no words wherewith to soothe her double loss. His words had no value but that of being spoken softly and sadly.

“I will send you my advance pay; that will help you a little. And then, in two years, perhaps I shall be on half-pay. When I am free I will marry you, eh, Marie?”

She listened. She knew that the advance pay would not buy food for two days, that Antoine would not return; that, free from the Service, he would not marry her. And then this woman, creature of devotion and immortal love, brightened at the sound of words not meant for her, but for others who have not fallen, and whose heart is in the future.

As they ascended a hill, they suddenly came face to the sinking sun. The chill air struck them. Marie thought of the distant day when she had gone with Henriette to the Loutrels’—that day of enervating heat.

“You will bid her good-by, Antoine,” she suddenly said.

“No,” he answered, harshly. She was silent, and turned her face in sorrow on the gardens that lined the country road. A few yellow leaves still hung to bare trees; the wind swept them along the enclosures, green with moss and blackened with smoke. The mournful sound of running streams, the groaning of machinery, broke upon the autumn air. A flight of linnets, attracted by the last scattered thistles, rose against the sky. Antoine and Marie walked no longer arm-in-arm. The name of Henriette had broken the harmony of their thoughts.

Presently, through a gap in an enclosure, they caught sight of some houses at their feet, and,



away in the distance, the open country and a labourer at work. On the left, not far from them, was the open gate of a cemetery.

"I did not think we were so near," said Antoine. "I won't go without bidding her farewell."

"That is right," replied Marie. "We are only two minutes from the Rue de l'Ermitage. If she is in, how happy she will be."

But going on ahead of her, Antoine entered the cemetery.

"Antoine," called Marie, "I won't go in. I am afraid of cemeteries."

He gave no heed to the call, and Marie decided to follow him. He was already at some distance from her. She crossed herself by habit, and with a gesture of alarm lifted her dress on both sides, as though it might carry away the germs of death. She kept to the middle of the path, as far as possible from the white tombstones. Here and there faded wreaths lay in her way, which she carefully avoided. Tired as she was, she ran to rejoin Antoine. The young workman had reached a part of the cemetery where wooden crosses were mingled with the stone ones. He was standing still, his hat pressed against his vest, and his eyes fixed upon an old black cross on which the following inscription was written in white letters: "To Prosper Madiot, aged forty-four years, six months, two days, and to Jacqueline Melier, his wife, aged thirty-one years and eight months, by their broken-hearted children."

Marie joined him, and knelt down behind.

"It's a pity they were not happy, those two,"

he said aloud, with the dreamy look she knew so well.

A bunch of roses still fresh, but crushed by the heavy rains, had been placed on the tomb. Antoine pushed it with his foot from the grave where his dead lay buried.

“I’ll send them a beautiful crown for my farewell. Sleep well you, woman, who lie there; I am not angry with you. I am going off to join my regiment. It’s Lemarié who angers me, that man who seduced you with money—oh! my miserable mother—and who passed you on to one of his workmen. You were too good for a workman. You were not happy every day, my fair-haired mother. My father beat you; he detested his master, and vented his rage on you. You shed more than your share of tears. I am the son of you both, that is why I am sometimes sad. I would rather have been your daughter; you loved her better than me. You used to take her to school with your blue apron on, and you hid apples for her in your pocket. At night you kept her warm, while I lay alone in a corner of the room. And then when you died, my father, who drank, kicked and cuffed me; you at least did not strike me. I remember all, my wretched mother, and my heart is sad. But be at rest, I have never mentioned my secret to any one but Uncle Madiot, when he provoked me. I will tell no one else. I don’t want people to speak ill of you, for you would certainly pity me, were you here; pity me because I have to join the army. My blood turns sour to think of it. They have taken my

mistress from me. I will make a bad soldier. Perhaps I should have been of some use if I had had a home, a family, and work to keep things going, like the very old men who need not serve, and like the coming generation. But the time has not yet come. Good-by, father; good-by, mother. I am sad, and so were you. But I am not like you who were patient, and I am nearer to my rights. Good-by."

Antoine turned away, and leaned over the kneeling girl.

"I have no one but you," he said.

He was about to embrace her, but saw that she was deadly pale, that her eyes were wide open in an agonized stare.

"What is the matter, Marie?"

She made no reply. What was the matter? In listening to her lover she had realized for the first time with cruel clearness the dreadful desolation of the morrow, with no Antoine, no profession, no friendship, and no courage. She felt incapable of bearing the dreadful burden, and was almost fainting.

"What is the matter, speak," cried Antoine.

He supported her and looked round for help, for some one to summon should she faint. Near the entrance a woman was tenderly planting a newly made grave. That was all. The light was fading. The scared linnets rose in the air seeking shelter.

Tears welled up in Marie's eyes and ran down her cheeks, sobs shook her slight form. Antoine, seeing her cry, and realizing that it was just a woman's weakness, pushed her away.

“That’ll do, that’ll do,” he said brutally, “dry your eyes, and come along.”

She answered as do so many other poor wretches, by a submissive look of grief, a shudder that ran through her whole being, and followed him, letting her dress drag across the tombs. The woman who was planting thought that they had been weeping over their newly buried dead, and they had but wept over themselves.



## CHAPTER XXV.

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FROM the gray-covered diary. "My brother has left without bidding me farewell. Uncle Madiot came home furious with him, so that I had some trouble in pacifying him. If he had told me the cause of the quarrel, I might have been more successful. But he simply said, 'Henriette, I will not have you send him any more money. I don't want you to see him again.' I don't know whether I shall be very strict in obeying the order. I am the eldest, our mother is dead, and I am forewoman—three reasons why it is my duty to help him, when he has spent all.

"This morning my uncle went to see the Lou-trels. It seems that Etienne had a friend, a sergeant in the regiment stationed at Roche-sur-Yon, and uncle will receive news of Antoine through him.

"My chief grief is for Marie, left alone again in misery, and, I feel certain, with remorse added to it. If I only knew that she would receive me! I can still feel her kiss on my cheeks when she said at Mauves, 'Love me.' I will beg Madame Lemarié to find out. She will go to her, and tell me whether I, in my turn, may go, since she repulsed me. It was shame that drove me away; if poverty calls me back, how joyously I would open wide my arms. What joy it is to bend down

and console: I know of none equal to it. Antoine refused my sympathy; Marie soon rejected it.

“What things are happening round me to take my thoughts off myself! My uncle is a source of anxiety; for the first time he is reserved. It must be very difficult for him to hide his trouble. I did not think he had secrets from me; now I know that he has one.

“The house is sadder. I have difficulty in living up to the title of ‘gay Henriette.’

“It is always better to think of others. The idea of finishing the Litany of the prayer-books came to me. It is simple: I say——

“Lord, have mercy on mothers whose children suffer.

“Have mercy on those who have a love of justice, and do not believe in Thee.

“Have mercy on girls who feel the weight of the debt to their cheated youth.

“Have pity on young girls abandoned to sin.

“Have mercy on those who love, and whose love may not be returned.

“Have mercy on the weak whom you call softly.”

Bad news of Antoine came to his uncle, through Etienne, at the close of December—a reputation of being insubordinate and quarrelsome. They had their eye on him in barracks, and punishments were frequent—some deserved, and others added as a result of the bad name which he had acquired, so that he was a scapegoat for others.

Eloi was ashamed; and when the first of Janu-

ary arrived he dared not go to Mauves, as other years, for fear of hearing—"Sad news, eh, Madiot?"

It was Etienne who came a few days later, one Sunday, when the sun was shining. But he did not seek the uncle; he sought Henriette.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

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HENRIETTE was out. It was afternoon, the pale blue sky shone through a light mist; the flags of the ships on the Loire hung motionless. Now and again, at regular intervals, chill air seemed to rise from the ground.

All the poor of the district, especially the women and children, were on the esplanade of Saint Anne's Church, which terminates abruptly to the south, with a double staircase leading to the quay. They were at home here; the rich never came, and vehicles crossed the avenue barely once a day.

The kindly warmth had brought out of doors the sick, the old, and new-born infants. Marcelle Esnault was there, propped up on her pillows, her face shining with new life; it was one of her rare good days. The vesper bells rang out.

The same little groups gathered by force of habit round their own particular trees, seated on chairs brought from their own homes. Some knitted, others talked, others sat silent, their hands in their pockets or lying idle on their knees. Now and again mothers cast a glance toward the children playing in groups by the walls, counted their own, and resumed their former attitude. Misery basked in the winter sun; worn spirits revived.



Henriette, also an habituée, wandered from group to group greeting her friends. Of the whole crowd she alone looked rich, but was not; but for this exception nothing but cotton frocks, or aprons over black or striped skirts could be seen. Hair drawn tight from the temples into chignons, jackets of all seasons, old men with caps pulled over their ears. Tall and slight, a little black felt hat set on her golden hair, a picturesque figure in the misty light, she bent to question, or turned to listen. Neighbouring groups eyed her jealously, lest she might pass them by.

She went to each group, and as she left it was as if the spirit of joy had passed on.

A numerous group sat round the first tree—Marcelle Esnault, the invalid, her mother, and four Breton women, wives of carriers. All looked anæmic; their lank hair was like wet flax.

“Just imagine, Madame Esnault, little Marcelle pretended the other day that I was going to get married, and was crying over it. You are consoled now, Marcelle?”

While she was speaking, Henriette caressed the child's calm face.

“Don't get married; don't get married; don't get married; don't get married,” cried the four women at once.

“If you find a good husband, marry,” said Marcelle's mother at last, “because you will grow old.”

The invalid said nothing; her friendship and her sufferings were things she did not speak of aloud.

A little further on was another group of Henriette's friends, three habitués of the place. An old blind man in a workman's blouse, a woman, dark and still pretty, and a little girl, too serious and pale for her age—grandfather, mother and daughter.

Henriette, who knew their story, and the deferred hope that haunted their lives, asked Madame Lusignan whether they had had any news.

"No, Mademoiselle Henriette," replied the grandfather; "a railway bookseller's license is like a promise made to children to get peace, which one has no intention of keeping. All the same, Ernestine has a right to it. Her husband was killed by accident in the service."

"But, of course, Father," threw in the little woman warmly, "no one says the contrary. Unfortunately he was not killed on the spot, and the company gives others the preference over me. It's weary waiting," she added, looking at her child.

"One needs the influence of the rich," she said, glancing at Henriette.

Henriette chatted with the woman for about a quarter of an hour, and knowing a rich woman with influence, hoped to interest her in the matter, on which the future of the three depended, and which was their one theme of conversation.

"Mademoiselle Henriette," interrupted the fresh young voice of a bread carrier, who was dressed in a light frock, in spite of the season, and against whose shoulder was leaning a younger sister, an employee at a dress-maker's, a frail, anæmic

creature, "isn't it wrong of her not to put on a poultice?"

"There is no more room for one," said the pale-faced dress-maker. "I ache all over, and my eyes are painful. Do your eyes ever feel like burning coals, Mademoiselle Henriette?"

"Sometimes, when I have been up at night, and from looking at different colours."

"If only you could help her to get away to the South," threw in the sister, "or to some house where she could be better cared for than at home."

The sick girl, who was among those who feel too ill to believe they can be cured, shook her head, but Henriette knelt down by her, speaking so gently and so convincingly that the young girl finished by saying: "Do you think so? Can I be cured? Will you find the necessary funds?"

The faces of the three young girls, so close to one another, bore the harmonious expression of a common interest, though in themselves they were so dissimilar.

And so Henriette passed on, stopping to visit each group. They were not always composed of the poor and sick; some were well off, that is to say, people who have enough work and do not fear want, there were also healthy men and buxom housewives who had reared ten children, and whose patience was equal to twelve at least; red-cheeked boys and young girls whose merry laugh rang like bells over the Loire. But Henriette lingered longest with those who suffered; they needed her, they regretted her departure; blessings fell on her from the crowd; she felt in

the midst of thoughts which said to her, "Do not abandon us; who but you has comforted our wretchedness?" They became stronger, they became better, there was a virtue in her that softened sorrow. "Mademoiselle Henriette," they seemed to say, "be the spirit that leaves behind it an amazed feeling of happiness, for hope grows sick in this life."

She walked with a light step, and passed by the church, when suddenly Etienne came upon her from a neighbouring street. Almost simultaneously they caught sight of each other. Henriette scarcely changed expression, but she stood still to let him come up to her. With his black vest and white buttons, his strong face, his head that towered above the passers-by, he came quickly up, dominated by the one desire of reading his destiny in her transparent, star-like eyes. The hour had come, and they no longer had any secrets from each other.

She had paled a little, and drew off her glove slowly, that her friend might better feel her warm clasp, that he might not say again: "I am too insignificant for you."

She held out her hand so frankly that he was surprised.

"You are not shy of me to-day?"

"Not more than usual, Etienne."

"I went to see you at the Rue l'Ermitage as I have news of Antoine. He is in prison for ten days. I don't quite know what he has done; we are not told. They are more severe with him than with others," he added, to postpone the



sovereign question of love that was in both their minds.

He was not thinking of Antoine, he had no thought but for the beautiful girl before him, whose smile was like the brief warmth of the closing day, very soft but holding out no promise.

"Mademoiselle Henriette," he said at last, "since the last time I spoke to you, I have thought of nothing else. It is months ago; I can no longer bear this sorrow; I have no heart for fishing, or hunting, or anything. My mother knows, and she said, 'Ask her in the name of Mère Loutrel her friend, and she will answer.'"

He saw her grow paler; her eyes fell.

"My poor friend, my poor friend," she said. "It grieves me to pain you," she continued, her voice becoming more humble, "but I cannot, I cannot answer 'yes.'"

The young man's face grew harsh, his eyes frowned.

"That's what I have got by loving you, by waiting for you."

"How can I help it, Etienne? I have often questioned myself, but perhaps my profession has changed me; I don't think I shall ever marry. You don't believe me?"

"No, certainly not."

"What do you think, then?" she asked quickly, for his tone wounded her.

"That you love another, a richer man, some one who knew how to woo you better, and who does not love you so well."

He spoke almost loud, and burning to learn his

fate, and determined to end the matter. "Who is he; I must know," he cried angrily.

Reproach faced him from Henriette's face. "You are right, come," she said.

It mattered little to her now to walk down the avenue side by side with Etienne. Was not all over between them?

"Come;" he followed without understanding, and they went forward, he haughtily seeking his rival among the groups that she whispered to him to look at. He was amazed to see none but old men, women, and children.

"These are the Goulvens," she said; "these the Mennerets—Culine, Maquet, the dress-maker and her sister; Père Lusignan; the Esnaults."

Some gave Henriette a friendly smile as she went by, but she forgot to greet them. She barely saw them. Etienne's desperate suffering heart throbbed near her, though he was silent. She did not hear Marcelle Esnault's sad whisper: "There they are together again."

She came to the foot of Saint Anne's statue, on the last step far enough away from the trees not to be overheard: "Those are my friends, Etienne," she said; "I feel that I must serve them; how, I know not or scarcely know. Believe me or not as you like, they are the cause of my not marrying. Were I to abandon them, remorse would haunt me, and for their sake I accept the pain which I feel in telling you, Etienne, to leave me free, for they need my life, my whole being. You cannot understand what there is between us. I lose myself in thinking of it; look how jealous they are."

Under the first tree, she pointed out Marcelle Esnault's perambulator, which had been turned so that the child could watch Henriette. She was too far to hear what was said, but the quick perceptions of the little invalid were awakened and she was anxious and sad. She had both hands on the sides of the perambulator, and had raised herself by an effort which was a martyrdom; but she could see Henriette, and her thoughts were expressed by the tears, which ran over her cheeks on to the woollen rug.

Etienne looked from Marcelle Esnault to the exquisite beauty of Henriette's face, where compassion and grief were blended; and although he did not fully understand, yet he knew that she was not deceiving him, he felt that a mysterious power stronger than love, but which by no means excluded it, kept them apart.

"I must speak to you," he said; "let us go down."

He descended, and she followed until they were lost to sight from the avenue. The stone steps reddened by the dying sun were deserted; Henriette and Etienne were alone, both young, both handsome, their hearts torn with love. Their secret had no witnesses but the Loire flowing at their feet, and the deserted winter landscape, where tall bare poplars rose like columns of blue smoke from the green meadows.

"Look over there beyond the islands," said Etienne.

"Yes," murmured Henriette, "it is Nantes."

"I have passed years there in loving you."

“Had you but told me when I was quite young!” replied Henriette with a burst of tenderness, that dyed her cheeks blood-red.

“Sometimes months passed without my seeing you, but when I caught a glimpse of you, I went home happy. ‘There is no other girl in Nantes with such a heart,’ said my mother, and she was not mistaken. Poor mother, how you wronged me; you should have said, ‘She has a heart for all but you, she will despise you, she will send you away; don’t think of her.’ But I believed in you, believed in you because we had played together, and because you looked happy when you came to Mauves. When I was fishing on the Loire I had no thoughts but for you, Henriette. When I was worn out with casting the nets, when my hands were frozen in dragging them up, I said: ‘It is for Henriette.’ When I felt inclined to lie in bed on winter mornings when my father woke me before it was light, my mother came to my bedside: ‘You are hastening your wedding day,’ she would say—and that was enough.”

Henriette listened, leaning against him, her head thrown back, her eyes fixed on his angry face; she seemed to implore him to be silent.

“Listen still,” he continued without looking at her; “I have passed whole nights at my post, I have cast more nets than any fisherman on the Loire; I have taken boat-loads of vegetables to Trentemoult to be able one day to give you the fruit of my labour. Now the money is earned, but she for whom I worked despises me; I will go away.”



"No, no, Etienne; stay, stay, for the sake of others; forget me."

"No, you cannot marry me; I cannot stay. My mother cannot comfort me; every inch of the Loire reminds me of you; the river has heard my secret too often. I have made up my mind. I have three brothers already at sea; my father counted on me for fishing, but his fourth son, too, must go to sea—you have decided that."

He began to laugh in anger and sorrow.

"Look from your window to-morrow, Mademoiselle Henriette, toward the dockyards of the Loire; not later than to-morrow they will begin to build there a fishing smack. She will bear your name, The Henriette, and she will carry me from here, where I suffer too much, as soon as possible, never to return, never."

He stood with one arm extended, pointing to the west, where a white sail was visible; then running hastily down the remaining steps, was lost to sight behind the cliffs.

"If he had only spoken sooner, my whole life would be different, and to think that I am letting him go!" repeated Henriette over and over again in a dazed tone, but she did not follow him.

She gazed over the river to the horizon and already she saw his ship put to sea, never to return. Several couples came down the steps to enjoy the fresh air, and brushed against her in passing. She woke from her dream, climbed the steps, and leaning over Marcelle Esnault, "You

will never know," she said, "how much I love my little friend to-day."

Marcelle looked up, but this time she did not understand.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

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ORDERS flowed in at Madame Clémence's, and during the weeks which followed the Sunday when she had said good-by to Etienne, Henriette had little time to think of herself.

One morning at the end of January she was told at Madame Clémence's work room that Eloi Madiot was waiting for her at the foot of the stairs. As soon as he caught sight of her he said:

"Ah, my dear, what do you think? Antoine—Well."

Old Madiot looked very much upset. He was out of breath with his hurried walk, and spoke in broken sentences.

"Antoine is to be court-martialled."

"Oh, my God!" said Henriette, "I had a presentiment of it."

"So had I, though I said nothing to you. What a disgrace! A Madiot, my own nephew, to be court-martialled. It will be in the papers!"

"What has he done?"

"I have just come from Mauves. Etienne did not know the details; I only know what he told me. It seems that Antoine had a quarrel with an officer in one of the barrack rooms two days ago."

"With Monsieur Lemarié, I suppose?"

She leaned forward, holding on to the banisters with one hand.

He looked at her, trying to avoid the danger of betraying himself.

"Yes," said he, "Lemarié or some other, it makes no difference. It is all the same, you know. He insulted and struck him. It is the most serious offence in the army."

"Oh!" she interrupted, "the penalty. What is the penalty?"

Seeing her anxiety, he tried to draw back.

"Why, my dear, that depends——"

"It is death, isn't it? They are so hard! Death! Oh, Uncle, our poor Antoine!"

The old man went up one step, overcome with pity for the sobbing girl, and put his arm round her shoulders.

"No, no, child—I was wrong, I spoke too fast. I don't know what really happened—it may not be so very serious. Don't cry like that; you will make yourself ill—they often get off with imprisonment. Come, Henriette, I tell you Etienne doesn't know the details. Don't upset yourself so—you are tired enough already. We must wait."

They soon heard the facts of the case.

It was only too true. Antoine, who had been drinking, went into the wrong barrack room on coming back from target practice. A corporal ordered him out; the soldier answered with abuse, and as Sublieutenant Lemarié, hearing the noise, came in and repeated the order, Antoine fell upon the officer and struck and kicked him twice, shouting, "I'll soon settle him!" He had been quickly overpowered and arrested. Now the case



was coming up for hearing at Nantes, the headquarters of the military district.

It was a bitter trial to Henriette, and still more to old Madiot. The old soldier was wounded in his tenderest spot, his military pride as a faithful servant of his country, his love of the army, which he held sacred above all things. It was agony to him to think that the name of Madiot would be dragged through a court-martial as the name of the accused and condemned; for he had no doubt of the issue. But another anxiety robbed him of rest and sleep. Antoine would speak. The secret would be divulged at the trial, and discussed as part of the case, probably printed in the papers, of which he had a superstitious dread. There was no doubt about it: there was only one way for Antoine to try and save his life. The facts were undeniable; he could only plead, "I did not strike the officer, I struck the man I hated in revenge for a family grudge, a blood-feud. These Lemariés were the cause of my mother's death, of my estrangement from Henriette, of all my revolutionary opinions and wasted life. The quarrel was between man and man, between the son of a woman who was betrayed and the son of her betrayer." He would be sure to say this especially as he hated Henriette.

Eloi Madiot was haunted by this thought. The days flew by with frightful rapidity. He was informed that Antoine had been transferred from the prison of Roche-sur-Yon to that of Nantes, and of the probable date of the trial. At last he received a summons to appear as witness

on the 27th of February at one o'clock in the afternoon.

A few days after Antoine's arrest, Henriette had written to Madame Lemarié: "You will understand, Madame, that I cannot come and see you at the risk of meeting Monsieur Lemarié. I should be unworthy of the name of sister if I were not disposed to take my brother's part, and if I did not suffer at the thought of the dreadful penalty which threatens him. I shall never forget your kindness to me, and shall always remain, Madame, yours respectfully and sincerely, HENRIETTE MADIOT."

She also waited in an agony of apprehension, forced to hide her thoughts and work listlessly, without that freshness of imagination which had often been the envy of her companions. As she passed along the quay to her work, she could see the framework of Etienne's sloop surrounded by scaffolding. The workmen were already putting in the planks. She thought to herself that the boat would soon be ready, and the sound of the hammers echoed in her heart. Two days were approaching which she looked upon with equal dread. That of Antoine's trial, and that of Etienne's departure.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

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AT the extreme east end of Nantes stands a new street between white walls; it contains the cavalry barracks and the military prison—a dreary spot where no one passes except on business, soldiers, vegetable sellers, milkmen, and officers on duty. The prison wing forms the corner of the street on the left, continued by a low building, the court-martial room in which Antoine Madiot is to be tried; then the wall runs straight in blinding whiteness toward the open country.

The hour has struck. Inside the Court nothing is heard but the whispered conversation of a dozen soldiers, seated on the benches round the walls in the part of the room reserved to the public. They sit talking with their rifles between their knees; the sergeant in command is silent, his surly glance, which holds his men in awe, wandering from the shine of his beautifully blacked boots to the rich blood-red curtain on the window. He is thinking of the fine weather and the luck of one of his comrades who has got leave of absence from noon until evening. The room looks almost pretty in the sunlight with its woodwork of polished oak all round. Beyond the balustrade which divides the room in two halves are two raised tables covered with blue cloth brightened by a row of gilt nails; the largest, facing the room

is that of the tribunal; the other, placed perpendicularly, is for the public minister and clerk.

It is half-past one. The windows rattle as a carriage passes; several saddle horses stop before the door. The soldiers listen as the officers dismount; a sword clatters against the pavement. Absolute silence reigns in the room where there is no public audience. The soldiers have risen and stand in rank facing those who are to enter. Two officers come in with portfolios under their arms, a pink and white young lieutenant of infantry who looks like a good fellow, and the officer who is to act as secretary. They place their papers on the smaller table and await the judges.

There are fourteen men in the room, and not one has a thought for Antoine Madiot. When he comes in every eye will be hostile or indifferent. The public prosecutor reads over the opening and concluding sentences which he has written down; the clerk arranges the documents; the sergeant and soldiers do not know Madiot. At this moment a veiled woman in black timidly enters the empty space allotted to the public. She takes a seat in a corner close to the dividing balustrade. Her dark eyes gleam through her veil. Her thoughts of Antoine are enough to make up for the indifference of all the rest.

“Shoulder arms! Present arms!”

The seven officers of the court-martial come in through the farthest door. They are in full uniform. The youngest are about the same age as Antoine, lads with budding moustaches, who run their fingers through their hair as they bare their



heads and lay their white gloves on the edge of the table beside the cap with gold braid or the helmet whose horsehair plume lies along the blue cloth of the table. They are all very grave, some by a conscious effort. They are prepared to be bored by these cases, always the same, which it is their habit and duty to judge. What is that dark heap against the woodwork obstinately gazing at the door by which the prisoner must enter, the door leading to the prison courtyard, where an old retired sergeant keeps guard? It is only a common girl with rather fine eyes. Then they stare at the wall above the line of soldiers. They sit down in order of rank, officers of infantry, artillery, and cavalry, a major, two captains and the lieutenants.

Marie crouching in her corner only glanced at them for a second. She had eyes for one thing only, the dark shadow of the doorway through which her shame, her life, her only love must enter. A fat man in a black gown comes in late, puffing and blowing; he crosses the room and stands behind a kind of box with a grating destined for the prisoner. She took no notice of him. Some one followed him: old Madiot in his Sunday coat, ashamed and dignified, holding his silk hat in his hand, in hesitation. The sergeant made him sit down opposite the blue table on the other side of the balustrade. She kept her eyes upon the funereal gloom of the doorway, waiting for the turning of the door handle.

All of a sudden, the dark space is illuminated; it opens, letting in the sunlight like a fiery

sword, as a man is brought in between two policemen.

Marie stood up, resting one knee on the bench, only the upper part of her face and her felt hat, from which she had removed the red feathers, were visible above the wooden partition. Perhaps Antoine would recognize her thus. He advanced with bent head, a frail figure in his undress uniform. Marie thought he looked shrunken, narrower in the shoulders, like a being of another species than his judges. As he came in, the officers watched him frowning and contemptuous, until he reached the cage-like dock and sat down. A slight stir passed among them, an almost imperceptible sign of intelligence. "The Madiot case, the most serious charge to-day—a bad lot."

Antoine kept his head bent, absorbed in thought. He seemed to have no curiosity with regard to his judges, the public, if any were present, or the room into which he had been brought.

"Stand up!" said the Colonel.

His voice was rough and thick. He was a tall, stout man, tightly buttoned in his tunic, with a ruddy complexion, blue eyes, and a heavy, gray moustache. He was one of those habitual judges who never have any doubt about the guilt of the prisoners brought before them. He knew that the cases were carefully prepared. He could have recited the military code by heart. He classified the accused at a glance, according to their temperament: there were the cunning prisoner, the liar, and the threatener. If any one of them tried to argue, he soon forced him to contradict himself.

“Your name is Antoine Jules Madiot, born at Nantes, a working mechanic, at present enrolled under the flag of the 93rd Regiment of Infantry, in garrison at Roche-sur-Yone?” he asked, in the same tone as before.

He had scarcely finished speaking when every one present looked up with a start of surprise. Antoine Madiot had raised his eyes; he was no longer the same man. Officers and soldiers gave a start of interest, like that which runs through the crowd when the torril is thrown open and the bull dashes out, strong and ready for the fray. His hard, steely, gray eyes were fixed upon the Colonel without a shadow of fear. They showed an indomitable will and a pride that rough voices, grand uniforms, and certain punishment could not shake. The life and audacity in those eyes were out of all proportion to the boyish figure worn out before it had reached maturity. The Breton reappeared once more, with his expression of dumb and passive violence. No one could read what lay behind it. Tears might flow in this secret soul, but they would be hidden from all men forever.

He answered, firmly, in a clear voice, “Yes, Colonel, that is my name.”

His pale lips were parted, showing his white teeth; his eyelids never quivered. The officers thought: “He has the eyes of a convict.” Marie had but one thought: “I hope he will not recognize me; it would shake his courage!”

“You have a bad record. Your officers regard you as unruly and obstinate. Though you have only been in the regiment since last November,

you had already been a fortnight in the guard-room, and ten days under arrest, before the 25th of January, when you struck two of your superior officers—Sub-Lieutenant Lemarié and Corporal Magnier. Tell us what occurred.”

Antoine stood regarding him with a fixed stare, and answered not a word.

“You will not speak? Very good, then the witnesses will. Sergeant, bring in the first witness.”

The first witness was Corporal Magnier, a wide-awake peasant, well fed, and satisfied of the good opinion of his superiors. He advanced, saluted with a sweep of the arm, took the oath, and said: “I had gone up to the barrack room first on coming back from target practice. I put my rifle down on my bed to clean it, and I heard some one behind me. I turned round and saw Private Madiot, who threw down his rifle behind mine. Then I said: ‘Take your rifle away, this isn’t your room.’—‘Yes, it is,’ says he. ‘No,’ said I, ‘hurry up and clear out, your room is on the next floor.’ As he wouldn’t obey I caught him by the shoulders; he resisted, but I was shoving him along all the same, and it made a row. Lieutenant Lemarié was on the stairs, and heard it. ‘What’s all this? Madiot again?’ He had hardly got the words out of his mouth, Colonel, when Madiot rushed at both of us, gave him two kicks in the stomach and me one in the legs, shouting, ‘I will soon settle him!’ The men seized him, and that was all.”

“Was he drunk?”

“Almost, Colonel; he had been drinking on the



exercise ground, and he cannot stand much liquor."

"Are these the facts, Madiot?"

"Yes," said the calm voice.

"For whom were the words, 'I will soon settle him,' intended—the officer or the corporal?"

"For the officer," said Magnier.

"Are you sure?"

"Certain: he was looking straight at him!"

"Is this correct, Madiot?"

The accused nodded.

"Very good, Corporal Magnier, sit down."

"Sergeant, bring in Monsieur Lemarié!"

At this name, which meant no more to the judges than any other, two poor hearts beat fast, Marie's and Eloi Madiot's. Antoine never flinched. He was staring now at the red curtain over the window before him. He seemed as indifferent to this witness as to the first. But when the young man in his elegant civilian dress, his gloves crumpled in his left hand, advanced before the tribunal, looking rather pale, Antoine's eyes flashed with rage and hatred. Then they were fixed again upon the folds of the red curtain.

The examination began again, the same at first, with more detail and differently worded answers; but presently the question arose as to the former relations between Antoine and M. Lemarié. Old Eloi, overcome with emotion, had half risen from his chair, bending forward to listen, and regarding the prisoner with terror, wondering if the secret would fall from the lips which had hitherto been so silent.

“Do you think the attack was premeditated, Monsieur Lemarié?”

“No, no, Colonel, I think not, though there had been some unpleasantness between my father and the prisoner’s family. We had some difficulty over money matters.”

“The point must be cleared up. Come Madiot, had you any grudge against Monsieur Lemarié here present, or against his family?”

“Yes,” said Antoine in a loud voice.

“Explain yourself first, Monsieur Lemarié, the accused may correct you if necessary.”

Eloi thought “We are lost.” He made a movement with his arm to call Antoine’s attention, in order to implore him by a gesture not to disclose the past, but Antoine never lowered his eyes.

“It was like this, Colonel. My father had refused to give a pension to one of his workmen, whom I see yonder,” he pointed to Eloi, “to which he was not legally entitled, on account of an accident due to his own carelessness. This man is the prisoner’s uncle. Both of them had insolently demanded the pension several times. My father was inflexible, and I think Antoine Madiot’s animosity arises from this cause alone. I must add that directly after the accident my mother sent her own doctor to attend the invalid at her own expense, and provided all the necessary remedies. I must also tell the Court that after my father’s death she immediately granted the prisoner’s uncle a pension of 500 francs a year.”

The young officers at each end of the table

shrugged their shoulders as much as to say, "What a scoundrel he is, this Madiot!"

"You hear this, Madiot! It seems that your claim against the Lemarié family was open to question, nor did it directly concern you. While the kindness shown to your uncle is undeniable. Do you admit what has just been said? Is there anything else we do not know? Speak. It is greatly to your interest to hide nothing."

Antoine continued staring at the window, and seemed not to hear the question.

The President repeated it twice. Not a muscle of the soldier's face quivered. He seemed to stand outside the discussion. The whole room hung upon his silent lips.

The minutes slipped by. The Colonel bent from right to left, questioning the officers with his outspread hands. "It is impossible to make him speak. Have I said enough? Is it sufficient?" And the officers bending forward in their turn answered, "Evidently the man has no excuse. He is just a blackguard."

The advocate intervened and said:

"Monsieur le President, since the prisoner persists in his silence, perhaps the workman Eloi Madiot, who brought him up, might give some useful information."

The old man came forward and stood before the tribunal. His face at that moment was as white as his hair. He stood before his superiors whom he had respected all his life, and he tried his best to assume the bearing of an old soldier who has served faithfully, knows how to address

his officers, and has nothing to fear. But his arm trembled, and so did his voice as he said:

“Eloi Madiot, sixty-six, fourteen years’ service, seven campaigns, twice mentioned in despatches, thirty years workman in the Lemarié factory.”

“What do you know?”

He turned toward Antoine, and their eyes met for the first time. Antoine’s were still hard, unmoved, and full of a fierce decision, but they seemed to say: “It lies with the two of us, Uncle Madiot, to save the old mother’s honour! I have done my share, it is your turn now!” Eloi understood him. “To save Henriette,” he thought, then he turned and said:

“I know nothing.”

There was some laughter. Two or three of the judges shrugged their shoulders.

“Tell us at least what you think of the accused,” said the Colonel.

Madiot raised his hand as if about to take an oath, glanced at the poor trooper behind the grating, and said, “The lad was never worth much, Colonel, but he has a good heart.”

“Take no notice, Monsieur le President,” said the advocate, “the witness never had a reputation for intelligence and he is obviously worn out.”

The pitying glances cast upon Madiot, as he went back to his place, showed that this was the general opinion—a poor old man who hardly knows what he is talking about.

The case was closed. The sub-lieutenant who acted as prosecutor for the Government, made



his speech without vehemence, almost excusing himself for demanding the capital sentence in conformity with the severity of the military law. But the crime was admitted, the violence undeniable, the code inflexible. Antoine's counsel waved his arms in the air, pleaded the irresponsibility of drunkenness, and feeling ill at ease in the midst of his military audience which barely tolerated him and scarcely heeded his words, stopped short, and sat down, mopping his forehead with his handkerchief.

"The case is closed," said the President. "The Court will withdraw to consider the verdict."

Antoine hardly seemed to notice that his judges were rising, each taking up his cap or helmet, glad to escape from this unpleasant duty and disappearing in single file through the farthest door. The gendarmes opened the grated barrier, and the prisoner obeyed them mechanically, following with bent head. The gray eyes were seen no more staring at the window curtains.

At last Marie dared to rise. She made her way along the balustrade to the spot where Eloi Madiot leaned against the other side of the wooden partition. She hesitated a moment, then she said humbly, as fearing a repulse:

"Monsieur—Monsieur Madiot!"

He glanced over his shoulder and recognized Marie from having seen her with Henriette.

"What will they do to him, Monsieur Madiot? They will only put him in prison, won't they? They cannot want to kill him."

She waited in vain for an answer. With grow-

ing terror she saw the old man turn silently away, and bow his head.

Was it possible? They would condemn him to death? M. Madiot thought so. That young officer with the face like a girl, that other with the kind eyes, would they not take pity on a lad of twenty who was drunk at the time, and had not even hurt this Lemarié?

Marie bent forward leaning against the balustrade, still waiting for a word of hope. Her hands grew cold. She did not hear the soldiers on guard forming into line. Suddenly the sergeant's words of command "Shoulder arms! Present arms!" brought her back to the immediate reality. She shuddered to the deepest fibre of her heart and of her poor bewildered brain. The rattle of the soldiers' arms upon the floor sounded behind her. The seven officers were back in their places, and stood with cap or helmet on their heads, their left hands resting on their sword hilts. She tried to read the sentence in their eyes. They all wore the same serious expression, calm and unaffected. The Colonel recited certain formulas, quoted certain Articles, and then said clearly with terrible precision:

"Upon the first question we unanimously find the prisoner guilty.

"Upon the second question we find unanimously that the violence was committed while on duty.

"In consequence, the Court condemns Antoine Jules Madiot, private of the 93rd Regiment of Infantry, to the penalty of death, in accordance with Article 222 of the Military Code of Justice."

A cry arose from the audience, a short piercing cry of anguish dying to a stifled moan.

The judges were already leaving the room. The Colonel stopped, raised his eyebrows inquiringly at the sergeant on guard, rising on tiptoe to look over the balustrade.

“A woman has fallen down, Colonel,” said the sergeant.

It was only a trivial incident. In obedience to a sign from the Colonel, whose gold braid was disappearing into the shadow of the corridor, the sergeant approached Marie, who lay upon the ground with her head on the bench in a dead faint, and had her carried out into the air.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

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It was one o'clock in the morning, in Eloi Madiot's home.

For hours he had been trying to console Henriette, whom nothing could console. They sat beside the stove, which he had twice refilled, close together in the heavy atmosphere, repeating the same phrases over and over again without freeing themselves from their obsession or exhausting the sorrow they expressed. Henriette had stopped crying, but her voice had the weak high-pitched tone that tells of some broken chord in the soul.

"No," she repeated, "I cannot understand you; we see things in a different light. Why do you say that he showed good feeling? In what? Because he did not defend himself? It would have been better if he had. I see nothing but shame for all of us. Uncle and sister of a condemned criminal. How can we hold up our heads again? I don't know if I shall dare go back to work; but you look as if you were almost pleased."

"No, my dear, I could not say that. But indeed things might have been worse. The proof is that the lieutenant who spoke for the prosecution promised to try and get him off. He promised me after the trial."

"Will he succeed? And even if the penalty is



commuted, can't you see that the shame will be just as great? You who were always so honourable, Uncle!"

"Ah! but you were not there, my dear. Antoine was very brave, I assure you; he showed no fear. He never tried to throw the blame on others."

"How could he? How could he possibly when it was all his own fault?"

Eloi said no more. He was silent. Once more, in this most serious crisis of her life, Henriette thought she felt the gulf of mind and education between them which had made their home intimacy vain. No! truly Uncle Madiot did not suffer as she did. He was getting very old and broken, too, and her loneliness was great though there were two of them.

A thought shaped itself slowly in her uncle's mind, in the intervals of silence while the stove roared and drew in the chips of wood that fluttered on the hearth. He could not leave Henriette in this despair; and since he, a poor old man of few words, and unable to speak freely for so many reasons, could not console her, perhaps there might be some other way, a very good one, almost infallible.

He looked at Henriette sunk in the arm-chair he had drawn up for her, silent now, and almost defiant. "My little girl is ill," he thought.

"Give me your hand, child," he said aloud.

Her hands were hot and her pulse rapid.

"You are feverish; go to bed and try and sleep, do! Try not to think, and do not get

up to-morrow morning until I knock at your door."

"Why?"

"Because—why, because you need rest and it is very late. I want to see you before you go out to work."

"But you are not going out, are you?"

He continued: "Go to bed, Henriette, please do! If you are ill to-morrow, I will go and tell Madame Clémence."

"Tell her!" she said, rising. "She will have heard what my illness really is from my companions!"

She bent forward to kiss him as she spoke, and when she had left the room, he listened for a time to make sure that she had gone to bed.

When all was silent in the house, and he could hear nothing but the wind rattling on loose slates here and there on the roof, the old man took the hairy coat he used to wear at his work, his iron-tipped walking stick and hat, and crept out of the house.

The night was not cold. As often happens at the approach of spring, a warm blue mist defended the earth from the violent gusts of the higher air. The first clumps of primroses began to unfold their mossy leaves that night.

Hasten, Uncle Madiot, your little girl is still sobbing in her bed, though you cannot hear her!

He passed along the quays; the moon was sinking in the horizon and illumined the way; the town lay asleep, prostrate with the fatigues of the day before; the Loire alone was alive and

lifted the boats as it flowed past, throwing the dancing shadows of the masts upon the pavements.

The old soldier could not walk so well as he used to; he was hot, and he had to stop upon the bank near the station, where the signal lights made the solitude less oppressive.

It was half-past three by the station clock. "I shall be at the cottage at Mauves in an hour," thought Madiot, "so long as they have not started for their fishing." He called to mind the image of Etienne, who could make all right. Yes, he was a man of decision, capable of carrying a girl off, even against her parents' will, and therefore able to despise all prejudices. "I know them, those big fellows of the Loire, once they fall in love, it is for good and all. I will tell him."

Madiot continued on his way along the Saint Felix Canal, then along the Loire, walking in the soft wet grass. It reminded him of his military marches by night through lands he would never see again. He slackened his pace now and then to see if the valley showed pale in the east, but it did not. And the thought of Henriette urged him forward faster, toward the little cottage where the winds and waters lulled to sleep the humble inmates all the year round.

At last he saw it in the distance, the little house of tarred planks. A ray of light showed through the door. He knocked hard with his fist three times.

"Open the door. It is I, old Madiot."

Almost immediately a hand shot back the bolt.

“I was mending my nets,” said old Loutrel, calmly; “what can I do for you?”

Near the candle, which was placed on a chair, the two men stood and talked, separated by the brown shadow of the net which Loutrel was mending. They spoke in low tones because of Madame Loutrel, who was still sleeping behind the serge curtains. Madiot told the other of the court-martial, and the despair of Henriette, and his idea of calling Etienne to the rescue.

The fisherman finished the net and said, as he tested the last knot with his little finger:

“As I have told you, Monsieur Madiot, my son is out already—he has gone shooting so as to be able to buy some cordage which he needs for his new boat. I will willingly take you to him.”

“Then let us start,” said Madiot, “for my little girl is crying.”

“Very well, but I cannot say what my son’s answer will be—whether he will go with you or not. I do not force my lads; I leave their hearts as Nature made them.”

They walked a few steps from the cottage and entered a flat boat. Loutrel set up a pole with a square of old sail-cloth, and the rising wind swept them against the stream into the night, which was already streaked with the pale light of dawn. The moon seemed to bend forward like a watcher who is tired out.

“Henriette! Henriette!” the old man muttered, below his breath.

That name to him was food for endless thought. Birds were calling to the day. It was the sports-



man's hour when the light hesitates, and the curlew, sea-gull, snipe and lapwing stretch their cramped wings, fly along the sands, greet and cheer each other for the start, and take their flight in light-winged bands.

Loutrel and Madiot went a good way up the stream toward a clump of poplars, steered for the point of the island, and the boat rose half out of the water as they touched the spur of land, sharpened by the current. The fisherman whistled. A man came out of the shadow of a willow which was already in bud. It was Etienne; he had a dozen lapwings slung round his waist.

He raised his eyebrows when he saw Madiot, and came down to the open beach.

Eloi twirled his moustache, his face half hidden by the turned-up collar of his coat, and he watched approach this young man whom he admired so much.

"Antoine is condemned," he said.

"Too bad, Monsieur Madiot."

"To death!"

The young man raised his soft felt hat, as he would have done before Antoine's coffin.

"No," said Madiot, "you are wrong, Etienne. It seems they may let him off. We can do nothing to help him. But there is some one else, who is grieving."

The young man's fine manly face was turned toward the waving branches of the poplars. The pale dawn was beginning to show between their trunks.

"She has made herself ill with crying."

“Oh!” cried Etienne; and there was such sorrow in his voice that Madiot replied:

“I think she is not so ill, my lad, but that you could console her. Come with me. I came to fetch you.”

“She did not ask for me, did she?”

“She is asleep,” said Madiot, gently, “but I think that if when she wakes, the child could be sure you are not changed by what has happened to Antoine—that you still care for her: I think she would be more consoled than with me. For it does not change you, my dear Etienne, that Antoine has turned out badly, does it? You still think the same about her?”

Joy gleamed in Etienne’s blue eyes; he untied the string of the lapwings and threw them at his father’s feet, stretched his arm toward the first gleam of day, and cried out, by way of answer:

“Jump in, Madiot, I’ll take the oars!”

He had much less hope than the old man, but youth was in him, youth that so little sets a-singing.

## CHAPTER XXX.

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Two hours later they drove their boat in between the schooners lying at anchor, and landed at the foot of the projecting rock on which the house stood. Etienne was still in his knitted jersey, and Madiot had not turned down the collar of his rough jacket. They mounted the stairs in silence: something gripped them at the throat; each of them was fighting against his fear, knowing that only ten steps, five, one more, separated them from the unknown fate awaiting them. The two men, standing at the opposite extremes of life, Madiot near its close, Etienne on the threshold, trembled, uncertain what the will of one young girl might be. Was it to be life or suffering for them? Would she say "Stay" or "Leave me forever." When they neared the door they each drew back to let the other pass in first, in such great dread were they of that which they came to seek.

Henriette heard them, and recognized their voices. She was in her black every-day dress, ready to start for work. The little remnant of colour that was in her cheeks faded away. But she, the woman, she also had courage to face her fate. She went straight to the door which separated the two rooms, and seeing Etienne, said: "Come in."

Etienne went in, Uncle Madiot hiding, trembling

in the background, to let him pass. Henriette had retreated to the fireplace, and her hair, escaping all round from under the brim of her hat, shone in the glass above it like a large golden flower. She had understood at once what Uncle Eloi had done, and the proof of love which Etienne was giving her. And there they stood, those two, Etienne and Henriette. Etienne a few paces from her, near a small table. His eyes, accustomed to the deep waters, were interrogating those clear eyes of hers, through which, at this moment, her soul seemed speaking. He had never before been so keenly aware of Henriette's friendship for him, now touched with such tender emotion that it almost resembled love; but yet, it was not love, for he could read other things in those dear eyes: signs of a fresh resolution, of recent suffering and struggle, out of which she had come victorious, but with a trembling remembrance of what it had cost her. And so, looking at her, he knew all that she had to tell him, and no words could have expressed such affection, such regret, such pity. And he, loving her, understood.

Uncle Madiot, who was listening, not catching any sound, thought they must be speaking in low voices.

Etienne felt the tears rising, but still he would not take his eyes from her, and to prevent them falling, he forced himself to speak:

"You see neither your brother nor anything in the world would have kept me from you."

And she who, with her loving lips, knew so well how to console, said gently:

"My big Etienne, I shall love you as long as I



live. As long as I live I shall remember with gratitude that which you have done. I have had no brother but you, no friend but you."

And then, seeing the tears running down his tanned cheeks, she continued:

"If my heart were my own, I would give it to you. But God has taken it for His poor. Forget me."

Then, hardly knowing what he was doing, Etienne held out his arms to her. In his great trouble, he was not afraid to call to the woman, who was never to be his. And she heard. Henriette, her head already bent to receive his caress, threw herself into his open arms. He felt the pretty fair head upon his shoulder. He clasped his arms round her, and held her to his breast with all his strength. For one short moment their hearts beat against one another. Then he put her gently from him, gave her one last look, and left her.

She remained standing where he had last embraced her, still bending forward.

Madiot, who had been watching them, was already beginning to feel more cheerful. But when Etienne passed him, and he saw him seize the handle of the staircase door:

"Stop him, Henriette, he is going, he is going!"

She did not move until Etienne was gone. As soon as she heard the latch fall behind him, she went in to the old man in the kitchen; she took him by his two hands and led him into the beautiful room, which was her own domain, and where she ruled alone. Still holding the two

trembling hands which clung to hers, she made him sit down, and then, with her eyes on him, and troubled with the consciousness of her own pain and that which she was going to cause another:

“Uncle Madiot,” she said, “I did not call Etienne back, because I have a secret.”

“And what is that, my child?”

“I do not wish to marry.”

So many successive shocks seemed to have broken the strength of the old man. He put up his poor tired face, which had become just a mass of wrinkles, with no sign of life about it but the two sad eyes; he seemed to be looking about him in search of the peace of former days, of the quiet home where they had been so happy, of the merry Henriette of the olden time.

“But, child,” he said, “since he wishes it so much?”

“I shall never marry.”

“Not even with another man?”

“No, Uncle.”

“What are you going to do then? Become a nun?”

“Perhaps.”

Then he rose like one whose youth has returned, and standing away from her, looked her up and down.

“Ah! ungrateful girl!” he cried, “she was not happy then!”

The worn aged eyes were ablaze with all that remained to him of his energy, his anger, his power of astonishment. He was again the old

soldier of former years. He began striding up and down the whole length of the room, from the farther wall to the window, through which the pale morning light was shining.

"Somebody has been persuading you," he growled. "Yes—I know—Ah! the misery of life!—and now I am alone—my child is leaving me—my child forsakes me."

Henriette had gone back to the fireplace, and there she stood drawn up to her full height, as full of fire as the old man, but more mistress of herself:

"You are mistaken," she said, "no one has persuaded me. I have suffered, that is all—not from anything you have done, Uncle, but from that which you had no power to prevent—the sight of so many miserable beings that no one tried to help. Whenever I went near them, do you understand, they always turned and appealed to me. One cannot resist a call like that. And you, Uncle Madiot, are the only relation I have in this world, and I want you to give me to the poor, who are in need of me."

She followed him with her eyes. He paused a moment, looked at her with an expression of bewilderment, and then resumed his march, the floor resounding beneath his strides.

Was he thinking of what she was telling him? No; he knew her too well to hope to turn her from any resolution she had come to after mature reflection. His bitter complaint at the vision of the solitary life that was before him had no sooner passed his lips than another thought had sud-

denly arisen, and it was that which was now torturing him. His Henriette was lost to him. His Henriette would never marry. "Well, then," he thought, "I shall have to tell her everything. There is no use now in sparing her the knowledge. My duty now is to defend Antoine's character. I cannot let her go on thinking all her life that a nephew of my own blood, a Madiot, was a bad soldier, disloyal and lawless. His was not the chief fault. He was brave in his own way. He kept silence for her sake; it was for her he allowed himself to be condemned. I must speak—there is no help for it—I must avenge an innocent man!"

For the second time he paused in his walk. His whole being was shaken at the thought of the terrible thing he had to tell. He looked long and intently into the eyes of his child, who had yet so many tears to shed. There were no traces now of the anger he had displayed a short while since. As he faced Henriette, who stood pale and self-possessed, he was the old man again, an old man sorrowfully obeying the call of honour.

He seated himself again in the arm-chair he had left.

"Come here," he said, "I also have something to say."

When he had her close to him, the dear fair head leaning toward him and his secret, he spoke again:

"I have some hard things to break to you."

She shook her head incredulously.

"Even harder," he added, "than those I have heard from you."



Henriette smiled sadly.

“Can anything be hard to me now, Uncle, when I have said good-by to my friend, and am leaving you?”

“Alas! my poor little one! There are hard things of which you have never dreamt. But you shall hear all.”

Then, in a low voice, and very tenderly, in words which he had difficulty in uttering, he told her of the past.

Henriette listened motionless, like one stupefied.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

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HENRIETTE was absent from the work room that day. Uncle Eloi called on Madame Clémence during the course of the morning and made her excuses.

She did not leave the house at all until toward six o'clock, when it was beginning to grow dark. Unconsciously she had followed Marie's example, and had taken the two roses out of her hat. Avoiding the quays, and the shorter cut through the busier and more fashionable quarters, she went up the Ermitage road, and made a long circuit which brought her at last to the street of Saint Similieu. She had been conscious of but one desire since Uncle Madiot had told her all, and that was to see Marie again. As she walked along she kept on repeating to herself, her lips hardly moving beneath her veil: "Marie, Marie, you who must have known everything and yet never spoke! I thought myself above you, and it is you who have shown me charity: you said nothing! Marie, what worth and what friendship even in your shame! Ah! poor girl! we may now sit and weep together!"

She went in under the porch that served as a frame for the distant view of the cathedral and its adjacent buildings, which could be seen between the walls of the workmen's city, bathed in blue

mist. Turning into the corridor to the left, she knocked once, and then a second time, but no answer came.

She knocked a third time, and then a woman called out from the landing above:

“What is it you want?”

“Mademoiselle Marie Schwarz. Is she out?”

This woman, like many of the lower class, evidently objected to answering any one whose face was invisible, so she came down the stairs, her head showing above the side rail. She was the young wife of a workman, faded-looking, with the remains of pink in her dull-complexioned face, and her hair, which was the colour of tow, done up in an untidy knot.

Seeing a well-dressed young woman, she guessed that Henriette was one of Marie Schwarz's comrades, and said:

“You do not know, then, that she has left this place?”

“How long ago?”

“A fortnight at least. All her things were sold, as you will see.”

She drew a key from her pocket and opened the door. Henriette saw at a glance, without going in, that the room was as empty as the day that Marie took it. Curtains, table, looking-glass, the two water-colours she had lent her, everything which served as a memento of their friendship, or rather which served to recall Marie, had disappeared. The next passing lodger would find nothing but her iron bed, her two chairs, and the whitewashed walls.

The woman, guessing by the colour that came into Henriette's face that she was more than an ordinary or indifferent friend, said:

"You see, she found it very hard to earn her living. She turned her hand to anything in order to buy herself bread and to pay her lodging. She made shirts, blouses, and knitted garments, and one could see that she was not new to it. She hardly ever went out of doors. I used to go in to her now and again this last winter, and I would see her hold her hands over the candle, like that, to try and warm them. I could not help saying to her: 'The man you went away with must be a perfect blackguard not to send you something to make yourself a bit of fire.' But she would never open her lips to say a word about him. It seems he was a soldier, just a plain soldier, and a bad one into the bargain, for it was only the other day he was condemned."

"Yes, yes, I know; but what has become of her?"

"Well, you know what she was! How can I tell what has become of her?"

The woman broke off, while she locked the door of the room. "I don't like inventing stories. All I know of her is that for two months she has hardly had the strength to go on working. You see she fretted herself so, and then the want of proper food and the cough undermined her health. She could not pay her rent, and so, good-evening. Her knickknacks were soon sold off. That is a fortnight ago, as I told you."

"But she herself, Marie Schwarz?"



“Well, my dear, I have never seen her since. Some of the neighbours have met her. She must have got a lodging for the night, in the same way others do. Yesterday, however, some one told me that she had returned to Paris. To think of such wretchedness!”

She went up the stairs again, her old shoes clacking against them at every step she took.

Perhaps she was afraid she had said too much, or some regret for the chance lodger stirred within her, for she called down from the landing:

“She was not a bad girl, you know; but she was fond of pleasure; she was young and foolish and she had no mother.”

From the little gray-paper book. “Now at last I am yours, you poor ones of the earth. There is nothing to keep me from you. I feel absolved from all my ties. The sole pride I had, in believing myself the daughter of an honest family, I have no further right to keep. I can no longer even look back with pleasure on the past days of my childhood. I said good-by to Etienne before I knew of all these things. I see now that I could not have married him. What sort of a wife would he have had—he who talked of forgetting my brother, and who, to love me, would have had to forget my mother also. Believe me, my friend, you will have a place in my heart forever. She whom you will some day choose will be a happy woman.

“But less so than I. That happiness should have come to me out of such heartrending griefs

is a mystery. And yet I am conscious of a lightness of heart, and of having escaped from myself. I please myself with the thought that my family will be restored. I am coming to you—the suffering, the troubled, the disgraced. The Order I have chosen to enter is one of the smallest. I shall have the care of those who cannot pay for themselves; I shall look after the house when the housekeeper is ill; I shall wash and dress the children before they go to school; I shall cut up the bread for the soup; I shall mend all the old clothes; perhaps I shall do millinery again, and trim hats and caps for the poor. They will have no difficulty in recognizing me as one of their number, for I, too, have struggled to earn my living, have had friends who betrayed me, a divided family, temptations similar to theirs, and I am the sister of a condemned man, and the offspring of sin. I shall be their sister in every respect; soon, in a few weeks' time, I shall be with them. I have promised my uncle to wait a while, so that he may accustom himself to the thought of our separation, which I fear is hardly possible. I am staying on, also, for the sake of Madame Clémence, who has to find some one to take my place. It is a great trial to me to go into the work room, but I yielded on account of Uncle Madiot, so that I might not begin a life that is to be one of love with an act of unkindness.”

The following morning Henriette returned to work. She was surprised that Antoine's condemnation, which had been such a terrible ordeal

to her, had made very little impression on her fellow-workers. Judicial sentences make little stir among the lower classes. Those who were fond of Henriette asked her if it was true, and expressed their pity for her. The others all knew of far worse cases in their own families, and so said nothing. It was just then the busiest season of the year, and conversation soon turned to other matters.

The weeks went by with their usual sameness. Henriette went oftener to call on the old priest who lived under the shadow of St. Anne's Church. The sun began to shine again. The days grew longer.

Fresh green blades were forcing their way upward to the light, and the earth heaved with Spring.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

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THE birth of Spring. Life, breathing through all things, rose like an exhalation from the earth toward the languorous sky. The grass had burst forth on all sides into green tufts. Trees, as yet without leaf, had at least their buds; and the buds, glistening with sap, gleamed like blossoms. Men felt the blood beating in their veins. It was the time when older breasts are moved with love, and the children blow through their straw pipes. Lilacs were being sold about the streets. The Loire was in bloom.

For the water, too, has its season of love. It lay now shot through and through with lights in all directions; along its sides ran lanes of warm mauve, which were the reflection of nothing, and might have been taken for trails of drowned irises borne along by the current. From afar, round the sandy points, came a ripple of light laughter, where the golden waves broke and re-formed, looking like wreaths of jonquils as they were flung up from the depths. Broad streets of foam, like fields of snow, vanished at a touch. Elsewhere, the eddies wound their silver stems to the slimy bottoms of the hollows. The light was uninterrupted by any shadow. All the mingled splendours had made a pathway for themselves, and chased each other to the sea.



And it was on such a day as this that Etienne set sail from Mauves in his boat, *The Henriette*.

The father and mother, and the three children whom the mother held by the hand, were standing on a hillock at the extreme edge of the field, the group looking like a small dark spot in the midst of the wide expanse of grass, as the distance diminished their figures. They watched the sloop as it glided down the river toward the open water. Their son and their fortune were both committed to the hazard of the sea. The sloop, which had cost so much hard work, was a fine vessel. Its prow was cleaving the light—the light of the air, the light of the sea—one could hardly have distinguished where one began and the other ended, had it not been for the quivering garland of foam which separated before it, like the broken half of a bride's bouquet. The mast creaked with pleasure under the straining sail, as if it felt again the weight of its leaves. One could hear its cry of youth and defiance. Its sharp point bent and threw out backward the branch of green laurel fastened to the top. The hull was black, marked out with a red line, red as the blood from wounds. Etienne's six friends—Jean, Michel, Césaire, Mathieu, Pierre, and Guillaume—all of the same age and all children of the Loire, were standing in the shadow of the mainsail and on the poop; they intended to remain with him till he reached the sea. Etienne himself was at the helm, with bare head, and clad in his tightly fitting sailor's jersey. Having said good-by to everything, he would not look back, fearing that his strength

might fail him, but kept his eyes turned seaward.

“Good-by, tall, strong Etienne, good-by to him who looked after the nets and the eel traps in the hidden channels of the river; good-by to him who could guide his boat with a single arm among the currents and the swirling waters of winter, the industrious workman, the breadwinner, the pride of the humble homestead at Mauves! Good-by to him whose figure it was such joy to watch growing larger and larger as he stood at the back of his boat, bringing in the fresh fish on his return from the islands, and calling out, while still far from shore: ‘Good fish, friends, good fish!’ Good-by, the child, good-by, the brother, good-by, happiness!”

The sloop was already making its way along the broader sweep of the river. The top, main, and staysails, bathed in sunlight, were filling with the wind. The good people of Trentemoult, who were experienced sailors, asked:

“Whose is that? Look how it’s rigged! A capital boat!”

It sailed past the schooners and brigs lying at anchor, and their crews had also something to say about it:

“It can only be a yacht. There are seven men on it, and that’s too many for its build.”

But no, it was just a plain Loire fisherman, whom love and despair were driving out to sea.

As they passed in front of the white house, the six companions lifted their hats. Etienne did not stir; he did not ask, “Is she there?” Had

she beckoned to him at that moment with her white hands, he would still have gone on his way.

And Henriette had seen him. She had asked Madame Clémence to give her leave for two hours, and had then gone down to the farther end of Chantenay, from which point she could see far along the Loire. She hastened along the footpath which ran beside the river, so as to get a good start and to have the figure of her friend as long as possible in sight. She kept on looking behind her as she walked, for the sloop was bearing quickly down the stream before the breeze. The six young men were singing as they sailed along. She could hear their voices.

It was impossible either for them or for Etienne to recognize the slight black figure, who might be any working girl or workman's wife, dimly discernible against the wide-spreading landscape.

In another minute or two they had passed her. She seemed to feel the shadow of the prow, the shadow of the mast and sail, and the shadow of Etienne himself fall upon her across the blue expanse. She hastened forward. She wanted to see him again—the man who, for her sake, was sailing away, who was not singing with the others, but standing motionless as a statue next the helm. But the wind was rising. The prow of the vessel was beginning to rise and dip as it met the first undulating waves, messengers from the far-off sea, which was advancing to claim its own. The sail bent before the wind. The figures of the men silhouetted against the light grew smaller, soon

they appeared only a confused group standing on the poop, which looked no wider than a shaving of wood. The laurel branch, floating from the masthead, fluttered like a hand waving farewell.

And then everything was lost to sight, vanishing in light.

Etienne had seen nothing.

Toward evening he landed his six friends and took on board the crew that had been engaged for some time past. When the blue night sky was alight with all its stars, the man who had not been loved, the man who, from the moment he left the fields of Mauves to that when he reached the cliffs of Saint-Marc, had never once ceased to think of Henriette, set his helm and steered for the high sea, ready to plunge into the open.

That same evening, as the sun was sinking, Henriette went to the old priest who was now her adviser. He received her in his garden, near the old cedar tree that spread its branches over the La Hautière road. The factory hands were coming home from work, and the dust raised by their feet fell in clouds on the lilacs and privet, the leaves of which even at this spring season were quite gray. The abbé, however, did not trouble himself about that. He was listening to Henriette, and listening to the passing crowd, and inwardly he was joining the fate of the one with the sufferings of the other. One of his most cherished desires seemed on the eve of being realized. He was bringing his poor a woman of virgin soul, who knew what life was, whose heart had been enlarged by suffering, and who was safe to come



in contact with the evil of the world without fear of being corrupted by it.

“It is well for you,” he said, “to have thus suffered. The heart that has been stricken is more open to the sorrows of others. If you are to go among those who are now passing, as you intend, my child, listen to the advice of an old man, whose only regret is that he has no longer strength to spend on their behalf.

“There is no need to go searching for a remedy for the evils of the time. The remedy already exists—it is the gift of one’s self to those who have fallen so low that even hope fails them. Open wide your heart. Love them, whatever their sins; forgive them, however ignorant they may be. They do not understand.

“There is less kinship among the poor than formerly. What with the factory, the long distances, the tavern, and the drunkenness that follows, there are many among the men who hardly know their children, and many children who have both father and mother and are yet orphans. Mademoiselle Henriette, it is for you to become a mother to these little ones. Bring joy, bring union into this immense separated family. Do not speak to them of duty before they have known consolation. Hold out your arms to them that they may know what comfort is. God never reviles. His reproaches spring from His pity. He forgave the sins of the spirit: and, remember! more often still He forgave those of the heart and the flesh: the Magdalene, the Samaritan woman, the woman taken in adultery, and many others

I feel sure, of whom we have no record. He knew the weakness of our human nature.

“You will tremble with joy at the happiness which is for others only. You will know the sweetness of commiserating tears. You will learn how beautiful life can be when it is no longer one’s own. Do not fear to come in contact with evil. Mix freely with it. Ah! my child, only those know what lies on the reverse side of the evil who have taken it in their own hands and turned it over. And to what splendid opportunities it gives rise for devotion, for sacrifice, for repentance, for rising again, for efforts which atone for everything!”

And, as Henriette listened to him, she knew that this life he was describing to her was to be her own; that she loved the poor with the love of one about to be betrothed or married, a love that was to last forever, strong to bear all shame, all contempt, all ingratitude. She smiled at all the misery of the world, as a mother who runs forward to lift up her weeping child.

When back again in her room, she took out the little gray-covered book and wrote in it the one line:

“With my whole soul!”

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

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SHE waited for an opportunity, for a sign.

On the 15th of May she received a letter, clumsily addressed and bearing the Paris post-mark: "To Mdle. Henriette Madiot, milliner, Rue de l'Ermitage, about half-way up."

Henriette tore open the envelope; she had recognized the handwriting. "At last!" she said.

The letter was short, and as follows:

"HENRIETTE,—I feel I must write to you, and must know that you forgive me. I have not dared to do so before, but now I am ill. I have been through great trouble. But there is no need to tell you all my tale. I was already beginning to cough badly when I reached Paris. It was impossible for me to take any care of myself. By degrees I was forced to give up work, and just when I thought I was going to die of starvation a friend wrote for me to the Sisters of Villepinte. I have been here now a week, well looked after and spoiled; but I am not getting any better. My chest pains me so that I feel it through my back. It is like needles running into me continually. The Sisters tell me I shall get well. Life is not so pleasant that I cling to it much. If you saw what I look like now you would not recognize me, and I am changed, too, in other ways. If you knew how

I longed to see you! But I know it is unreasonable of me to wish it, and not even possible. I feel that it would do me good; but I shall be satisfied if you will say you forgive me. Will you let me kiss you once more? "MARIE."

Henriette sent off her answer that same morning. As she was taking her place in the work room that day, she said:

"You remember Marie Schwarz? She is ill."

"She suffered with her chest, did she not, as I do?" replied Mademoiselle Irma. "Those who get into low water always fall ill of it, and sometimes those who are not so unfortunate."

A shadow of anguish passed across the eyes of one or two of the girls at these words. Mademoiselle Anne, who had hollows in her pink cheeks, remarked:

"And yet she was a strongly made girl!"

Reine added, in a low voice:

"I was very fond of her. At times she was so cheerful."

No more was said, and the talk turned to other matters. Outside the sun was shining brightly. Through the top panes of the window could be seen the blue sky and the top of the poplar tree, which sparkled so in the sun's rays that it looked like the silver-tipped aigrette which Mademoiselle Mathilde was just then fixing in position on a straw hat.

Ten days later there came another letter.

"I am better, Henriette. I know you will be glad to hear this. No sound reaches me here from



my large noisy Paris, and the air is good. They bring me a bowl of warm milk every morning and I fall to sleep after I have drunk it. I think it must be the strong air which makes me sleep from nine o'clock at night till seven in the morning. Just think of me being able to walk in the beautiful park here! Some one always goes with me, it is true, as I am not yet very strong. There are green lawns and cows, and chestnut trees under which I sit, and when I am more equal to the exertion I am going down to the lake, which lies quite at the bottom, surrounded by tall trees. I meet young girls; they do not know me, but they smile at me out of kindness. So you see I am really better. If you write to me again, please do not write so small; it tries my eyes.

“MARIE.”

Another two weeks went by. One morning, when she was starting a little later than usual for work, she met the postman coming upstairs.

“I have a letter for you, Mademoiselle Madiot.”

“Ah! So much the better! Give it me.”

“It is an answer from Marie,” she thought. The postman gave her the letter, and went away. The writing was not Marie's. It was long and regular, and written by a trained hand. Henriette gave a little start of fear. She read the following words, dated from Villepinte:

“MADEMOISELLE,—Our little boarder, Marie Schwarz, has had a relapse. We fear, and the doctor fears, that she will not get over it. The

poor child has but one dream—to see you again. She calls for you, and talks of you whenever she is able to speak. I promised to send you her message, and she has just asked me to say, ‘Tell her that I shall wait to die until I see her.’ If it is possible for you to come, Mademoiselle, come quickly.

“SISTER MARIE SYLVIE.”

Henriette wept all along the way, until she reached Madame Clémence’s house. Then she wiped her eyes, and thrust the letter inside her dress. In answer to her friends’ inquiries, she only said that she was not well.

All day long, as she sat over her work, her thoughts were full of Marie.

Shortly before closing time she left the work room to go and speak to Madame Clémence. All the girls noticed how pale and agitated she looked on her return. They were all seated, although most of them had left off work. One or two were putting a final touch to a bow of ribbon.

One by one the heads, with their dark, fair, or chestnut-coloured hair, lit up by some straggling rays of the glorious June sun, turned toward Henriette, as if she had called them by name. And indeed her eyes were wandering round the two green-covered tables, near which she had spent so many days of her life. She was trying to fix in her mind’s eye the image of those young faces and figures, that she was never to see again. In thought she laid mute kisses on their brows, their laughing and tender lips; all at once, old memories revived and clung about them, as when

an elder sister, on the eve of her marriage, looks round on the sisters from whom she is about to part. Had she loved them all? What did that matter at this last hour? They had shared her days of humble toil, which had now come to an end. In those few minutes she had re-lived her life with them, and had said to each the good-by that she wished without response. Then mastering her overpowering emotion:

“Mesdemoiselles,” she said, “I have received fresh news of Marie. She has become worse.”

Then all the young faces, sad, gentle, foolish or love-stricken, looked up with the same expression of pity:

“Oh!” exclaimed Irma, “what a short time it has taken.”

“She is my age,” said Jeanne, who had just turned twenty.

And then several of them began asking at once:

“Where is she? Still at Villepinte? Does she suffer much? She will get better, will she not? Did she write herself?”

Henriette, standing near the door, her face pale in the beautiful sunlight, answered them amid her tears, hardly knowing for whom she was weeping most, those she was leaving or the one who was dying down there. After their first exclamations of distress, which was felt equally by all although expressed in different words, the girls fell silent, as often happens after the first blow has been struck and while sorrow is making its way to the very heart of our being. It was broken by a voice

close to Henriette, Reine's voice, clear, harmonious, and agitated, saying:

"If you would be willing, Mesdemoiselles, I have thought of something which I am sure would give her pleasure."

The apprentice was the only one to speak:

"What is it?"

The others looked at Reine, who continued:

"Let us make a hat, all of us together, a pretty one, and send it her."

"But she would not be able to wear it," put in the child again.

The clear voice replied:

"Perhaps not, but she will say: 'Am I going to get well then? Do they think I am going to get well?' It will give her a few minutes' pleasure. It needs so little to cheer one, when one is ill!"

"That is true," said Irma. "I am ready; it is a good thought of yours, Mademoiselle Reine."

"And I too, and I too," exclaimed all the girls.

"Put on your thimbles again."

"I haven't put away my needles, and here is my thread."

"It had better be a round straw hat, I suppose."

"Or a pretty little felt? Don't you think so?"

One said one thing, and another, another. Then Mademoiselle Jeanne drew out her purse and threw a new franc on the table.

"Here is my contribution. Who will give the same?"

There was soon a little white heap of francs and half-francs on the green cloth. The apprentice,



her hair more dishevelled than ever, put out her hand with two sous in it, and said blushing:

“That is all I have.”

“Perhaps Madame Clémence will give us something,” said one of the girls.

“I will go and ask that we may stay overtime to-night,” said Henriette.

The permission having been obtained, they all drew their stools to the table, and elbow to elbow, each eager to have a share in the work, began trimming Marie’s hat. With their bright thimbles on, they had regained some of their ordinary carelessness and gayety. Two or three searched the boxes for ribbons and feathers, for any remnants that were out of fashion, and other trimmings. Several hands were held up together.

“Will you have a shot ribbon, Mademoiselle Henriette? Here is one, blue and yellow? No? Well, a gray wing? This is a pretty one! a gull’s wing, I think. Look here, Mesdemoiselles. And this satin, what a love! Perhaps you are right, the red would go best; she is dark. Poor girl! Poor Marie! You will let her know all our names, and tell her there have been changes in the work room. I should like to be there when she receives the box, well packed up, with the name of the house on it. It would be sad, all the same!”

Henriette had left Jeanne and Irma to finish Marie’s hat, which was a white straw, trimmed with red bows and a peak at the back, and very pale roses, just seen emerging from the dull green and reddish-brown moss which surrounded them.

It was artistically designed to suit the strong dark beauty of the girl who would never wear the moss roses or the red bows. Three pairs of scissors were thrust forward whenever a thread wanted cutting.

These children sat, full of youthful alertness and thought, watching the two at work upon the masterpiece. They forgot dinner and home and fatigue for the sake of giving pleasure to Marie, whom they had known but in passing, and would never see again. And when Irma held up the finished hat, one of them said:

"I am sorry; now we shall leave off talking about her! How are we going to send it to her?"

Henriette, who had risen with the others, replied:

"I will see that she has it."

Something in the tone of her voice as she said these words made two or three of the girls turn and look at her.

Reine, who was quick of instinct—Reine, who loved her, went up to Henriette as the latter was taking her hat and gray boa from the cupboard.

"Henriette," she said in a low voice, "you are surely not going to leave us? You are not going to take the hat to her yourself, are you? I have always been afraid of seeing you go away!"

"Go away where?"

Reine looked up with her sweet eyes and said:

"I know—Go!"

Henriette could not answer her. The other workers, anxious to get home, had already left the room. She drew the young Breton girl

toward her, and leaned her fair head gently down against her friend's cheek.

"I love you, dearest," she said; "I shall never cease to love you. Now run home quickly; I am sure your fiancé is waiting for you."

She was the last to leave the empty house; she went slowly; never before had it taken her so long to reach the street.

Outside a storm was threatening. Gigantic clouds were driving from the west across the crystal clearness of the sky.

Eloi Madiot and Henriette sat up late into the night in their home in the Rue de l'Ermitage. In the acuteness of their mutual suffering, they felt strengthened by the consciousness of the great love they bore one another.

At last Madiot spoke:

"I shall travel about a bit. I shall see my little one again."

The storm was rolling down over the hills, and half the sky was now black with clouds.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

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It was a warm, misty, oppressive afternoon at the Asylum of Villepinte.

“My sister, Mademoiselle Marie Schwarz?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle.”

“Is she still alive?”

“Yes, but very ill.”

“Oh! Let me go to her at once.”

Henriette followed the nun through the vast building, so white, so clean, with its polished wainscotings and floors and staircases. It was almost a palace, built by the tenderest of pity for the worst of suffering, for women, young women, attacked by the malady that spares so few. Everything was done to soften the last hours of the dying ones who came within its shelter, and to offer something better than a hospital, with its chill monotony, to the poor, worn-out women who recovered health and strength beneath its roof. Pity had surrounded them with light, air, and verdure, and added a little luxury to please the eye, and to afford company during the long hours.

Henriette passed several large rooms, containing four or five beds, christened with the names of saints: Saint-Denis, Saint-Martin, Saint-Stanislas, Saint Louis de Gonzague. She caught sight of beautiful faces ravaged with disease; of inquisitive glances, and wet eyes; of hair-nets with



blue bows. One child tried to follow her upstairs, but had to stop to take breath after the third step, holding her hand to her chest.

"We are not going too quickly, Mademoiselle?" asked the nun.

She was accustomed to being followed more slowly.

Henriette was carrying a hat box, done up in paper, with the name upon it of the millinery establishment at Nantes.

Mother Marie-Sylvie, who was conducting her, paused before a door on the second floor, the Saint-Agnes ward. Henriette began to tremble violently.

The mother, with her hand on the door, looked back and said in a low voice:

"She is here," and then, without a sound, she glided into the room like a breath of air.

The ward was similar to the others, only lighter if anything. Eight white beds were ranged at right angles to the windows. At the end of the room, on a table surrounded with flowers and ornaments, stood a figure of the Madonna of Lourdes. The blue sash gave the impression of flying, and the feet, starred with a golden rose, seemed hardly to touch the ground. And there, in front of her, Henriette saw her she had come to find.

Marie was not asleep; she was free from pain; she was waiting, as she had promised. Her hands were hidden. The head, with its wavy mass of hair on either side, which no net could hold, lay so lightly on the pillow that it hardly made an

impression. The lips were the same red lips of other days.

Henriette went forward, in secret terror of heart, as she saw the motionless face and the thin outline of the body under the white sheets. Those past days, those days of exultant youth, those days such a little while ago, when they were running in the field of Mauves! But when she came within range of the sick woman's eyes she saw a light come into the face, and a smile from Marie greeted her.

The smile seemed to rise from some far deep, whither life and thought had fled; there was a still, radiant sweetness in it, of which life knows nothing. In a low voice, from which all tone had disappeared, as unearthly as the smile, she murmured:

“How good of you to come!”

Slowly; and with an effort, she turned her head a little toward Henriette, who was bending over and kissing her.

“How beautiful you are! For me, you see I am at peace. God has forgotten; God knows nothing more about it. Henriette, my own Henriette, tell me again that you forgive!”

“Yes, my beloved one, long ago, almost from the very first, when I knew that he had forsaken you.”

The eyes drowned in shadow moved in a little circle round the room, taking in the sister, the Virgin, Henriette, the bed.

“I am not forsaken now.”

Then a childish look came into them.

“What is that, a hat shape?”

She was looking at the hat box, and recognized the cover.

“Dearest, all our friends remember you. When they knew that I was coming to see you they wanted to send you something, and so they made a hat for you, which you are to wear when you are better. Would you like to see it?”

For the first time a tear rolled down Marie’s hollow cheeks.

“No, do not undo it! It is of no use! But how good of them to do it! You will thank them for me. You are going back, are you not?”

“No.”

“Where are you going, then?”

“Into a convent.”

Henriette had drawn herself up a little. She saw a look of joy rise again to the sufferer’s face; she felt herself enfolded in a last flame of love, of admiration, of intense longing, from that burning soul.

“Ah! Blessed one!” said Marie.

She closed her eyes. What visions floated through her mind? For the last time she saw again, no doubt, the vanished days, the lost opportunities, the sins redeemed by suffering.

She lay long without moving, in calm contemplation of her dream.

When she returned to consciousness Henriette was kneeling by the bed.

She looked at her with her fast-fading eyes, which had no power now to express their love, and which only seemed to say:

“Why do you stay? What are you waiting

for? I am tired. We have said all we wanted to."

She did not understand.

But Henriette remained kneeling, her eyes looking into those of her sad and dying sister.

Then Marie understood what she wanted. It brought a look of mysterious grandeur into her face. Slowly she drew her right arm from under the clothes; she leaned forward; and she, the pardoned sinner, blessed her who was without sin, and traced on the forehead of the virgin the sign of the Cross of Redemption.

THE END









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