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The INN of the SILVER MOON

by

HERMAN K. VIE

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THE BEQUEST OF

EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
(CLASS OF 1882)

OF NEW YORK

1918

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The Inn of the Silver Moon

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There were drops of water in her hair.

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The Inn of the Silver Moon

BY

Herman Knickerbocker Viele

HERBERT S. STONE & COMPANY
ELDRIDGE COURT, CHICAGO
MDCCCCI

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FROM
THE BEQUEST OF
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TO_____

THE FRIEND OF THE
JOURNEY'S END
AT THE INN OF THE
SILVER MOON

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The Inn of the Silver Moon

I.

"If you will refrain from talking all at the same time, I will tell you everything that I know," said the gardener, loftily, "and as it was I who last saw the master *alive*, what I have to say may be of some importance."

The gardener laid stress upon the adjective, and observing that the under housemaid chanced to be occupied in tying a pink string about the neck of the cat, he waited until she had finished before continuing.

"It must have been five o'clock, or a trifle later. Monsieur was in the white rose arbor taking his afternoon tea. I was near by, at the geranium bed, filling

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in a cavern which Boy had pawed in the very middle. I had been most careful to shut the beast in the tool house, but as usual he had contrived to escape. Just as I had finished resetting the plants the master called—

"'Paul,' he said, 'yesterday was the day for clipping the poodle.'

"'That is true, Monsieur,' I answered, 'but by good fortune, I noticed that the probabilities predicted it would be cooler.'

"'On the contrary,' he replied, 'it is much warmer to-day. Why has it not been done this morning?'

"I was obliged to explain that I had not been able to find the clippers; that, in fact, this Image of Satan had hidden them himself, as he always does on Wednesdays."

The gardener shuffled his feet uneasily and looked about him to note the effect of his disclosures.

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"What else?" demanded the butler, coldly.

"What else? Why nothing else. I took the dog to the stable. That is all I know."

"It is all you would be likely to know," sniffed the butler, waving his hand in stately dismissal.

"That does not settle the question of dinner," said the cook as he bisected an onion.

"The dinner will be served as usual!" spoke the butler, as one having authority.

"But if Monsieur is not here to eat it—"

"That is not our affair."

In June, between the planting and the harvest, there is held at Greslin a market, to which it was the custom in times gone by for the farmers to bring the surplus of young pigs from the spring

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litters to be sold to the townpeople, many of whom were glad to purchase one or more to fatten in their gardens during the summer. Of late years changes in the methods of agriculture, and more stringent sanitary regulations against the keeping of pigs in towns, have caused the abandonment of the original purpose of the market; but the name is still preserved and the date kept as a local fête, celebrated with rustic games, and the attendant assembly of tombolas, carousals, and itinerant amusements of all kinds. A pig is set at liberty in the market place, well smeared with lard, to become the property of whomsoever may succeed in catching him, and stalls for the sale of charcuterie still reflect the origin of the festival. All day the cabarets are filled with thirsty rustics, and the red wine of the country flows freely. In the evening there is a bonfire in the place and

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dancing under the horse-chestnut trees where the peasant girls vie in gaiety of attire with their more sophisticated sisters of the government match factory, and where for the hour the most frugal man becomes a spendthrift, the most sedate a gallant.

Of all the country side, Achille Vifour alone had never seen the Market. Often when after dinner the ladies had withdrawn and the glow of Burgundy fell warm upon the cloth, he had heard his elders chuckle as they recalled some old remembrance of the fair. Year by year through the palings of the Chateau wall he had seen the peasants hurrying toward the town with laughter and clumsy chaff; night after night he had heard them returning with new store of wit and scraps of song learned from the mummers, and at such times he would vow that another year should see him among the merry makers; but with

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every opportunity came a new reluctance, a fear lest a reputation earned by years of studious habit and punctilious conformity to the demands of his position, should be compromised. Then, too, it is poor fun to go rioting alone, and the popular impression that Achille was superior to such frivolity discouraged offers of companionship.

It is the way of the world that when an individual once starts upon a career of exemplary behavior, hands are not wanting to accelerate his progress; to boost him, so to speak, from level to level up the pyramid of Virtue till at last he stands upon an eminence as uncomfortable as it is conspicuous. Thus Achille was not only often overlooked when adventure was afoot, but it was expected of him that on a return from a visit to the Capital, he should bring intelligence of the latest movements in literature and art; that he should have

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opinions touching the music at St. Roche or even of the preaching at the Madeleine, and shall he be blamed if it was behind closed doors that his piano gave forth echoes of the Café Chantant or that the volumes picked up beneath the arcades of the Odeon and Rue de Rivoli were not conspicuously placed upon his library shelves?

It was the day of the Pig Market and Achille Vifour, having finished his tea, placed the cup upon the iron table at his elbow and looked from the white rose arbor across his pleasant acres of fruit and flowers, smooth turf and snowy gravel. From any point of view it was a charming garden, a trifle stiff perhaps, a stranger might have said—but in the eyes of the young bourgeois the place was a veritable Paradise. Nevertheless as he rose and stepped into the sunlight he regarded the familiar scene with less than wonted

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approbation, and stretched his limbs with something like a yawn.

At the far end of the garden the high enclosing wall gave place for the distance of some thirty metres to an equally high iron railing, divided into panels by massive columns of masonry on which were great stone balls. Through this grille the passers-by along the road beyond could see the flowers and trees, and above them the high-pitched, many-gabled roof of the Chateau, with turret and pinnacle such as bear the name of the merriest king that ever lived—the king who set old France a laughing so that the smile has not yet faded.

From the garden one could see the world without, the great flat poplar-studded world, flaming with poppies, gay with gold wheat; and the long white road where the trees in double ranks touched elbows like soldiers on

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parade. Along the road ran well-paved gutters, bordered by belts of close-clipped grass. In all the land there was not a bramble, a weed, or a foot of idle earth.

As Achille looked far out across the fertile plain he shook his head and sighed, then drawing from his pocket a paper-covered book, he opened it and turned to some passage that had caught his fancy. The book was a translation of a tale by Cooper and the passage a description of scenery in the wilds of the Horican.

'The river was confined between high and cragged rocks, one of which impended above the spot where the canoe rested. As these again were surmounted by tall trees which appeared to totter on the brows of the precipice—'

Achille looked out again.

"It must be altogether different," he said.

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He might have continued his reading, but seeing ahead a mention of one Chingachgook, a character for whom he entertained an unreasoning dislike on account of his name, he closed the book, and turned again to watch the moving shadows, the infinite lines of trees, and the pleasant reaches of the distant river Loup. Sometimes when the breeze veered a little to the south it brought the sound of music from the town.

Presently the round-shouldered, pigeon-toed postman came trudging along beneath the trees. With his scrip and staff he might have been a pilgrim who wore for penance a heavy, closely-buttoned woolen coat of winter above the cotton trousers of July. Seeing Achille through the grating, the man unslung his mail-bag, and approaching made a military salute.

"Shall I ring?" he asked respectfully,

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Would Monsieur take his letter himself?

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"or would Monsieur desire to take his letter himself?"

"I will take it," said Achille. "Have you but one?"

"Only one for the moment, Monsieur. There are doubtless others, but every one at Greslin is completely insane on account of the Pig Market. Monsieur is going to the Pig Market—no? Ah, it is a spectacle! It is like Paris. One cannot hear himself speak for the noise, and all the world is intoxicated. Monsieur would find it very agreeable."

"Without doubt," assented Achille. "Give me my letter, and hurry back. Here is something to help you make up for lost time."

"Monsieur is amiable. Au revoir, Monsieur."

Achille retired with his letter to a shady seat near by, and broke the seal. The bees buzzed persistently, a cricket

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chirped in the wall; from the torture chamber came the plaintive moans of Boy and the soothing voice of Paul—

"Have grace, my brave one, till I have finished thy stomach. Keep thy paw in thy pocket or I may cut off thy beautiful wristlets."

The letter was a long one, and after a paragraph or two of formal compliment ran thus:

"It was only yesterday that I was so fortunate as to obtain the long promised interview with Madame la Marquise de Banville. As you have doubtless been informed, Madame is a victim to neurasthenia in its most aggravated form, and is therefore seldom permitted by her physician to do anything that is not amusing. As this was my seventh visit, each by special appointment, you may picture to yourself my joy at being told that I was at last to be admitted. It was the first time that I have had the

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honor of meeting Madame, and though they tell me that she has changed greatly since the days of the Empire, I would swear that she still retains much of her youthful vivacity. From the anteroom I could not help hearing the remark with which my card was received. 'It is that pig of a notary!' she exclaimed, 'I suppose he will never stop coming till I see him. Admit him, and if he stays more than five minutes, announce the doctor.'

"You may be sure that I stated my errand without unnecessary delay. Her answers, I must confess, were both evasive and unsatisfactory. To be brief, my friend, the Marquise refuses to consider your engagement to her niece as serious, avowing that both your late respected father, and her brother, had been dining generously on the occasion when the pledge was made that was to join your infant hand

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with that of Mdlle. de Belle Isle. She insists further,—pardon my frankness, but it is best that you should know the whole truth,—that you must be a rustic in a blue blouse with trousers' pockets large enough to carry wine bottles, and that you doubtless misuse your knife at the table.

"Madame was, however, good enough to say if the young lady upon seeing you should express a wish to become your wife, she herself would make no objections; provided that upon investigation, your fortune proved to be as represented; and added that she expected you to keep clear of all entanglements until such time as it might be convenient for her to arrange a meeting. In a word, that she would consider you as bound while the young woman remained free to choose for herself.

"As I was about to protest warmly

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against the unfairness of this proposition, the doctor was announced."

"It is preposterous!" cried Achille. "Here am I, leading the life of a hermit in obedience to my father's wish, while this old woman is at liberty to treat my name and estate like parcels from the *Bon Marché*, to be returned if unsatisfactory!"

So saying he turned once more to the letter in his hand, a page of which remained unread.

"Concerning Mdlle. de Belle Isle, I regret that I have been able to obtain but the most meagre information. Though nearly twenty years of age the young lady is still at the convent, the fifth at which her education has been conducted, and as each successive institution appears to have been more positive in its piety than the last, I fear that she may have a leaning towards the religious life.

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"Through the intervention of my brother's wife, I have spoken with the good Mother Superior of the convent before last, but all that she could be induced to say in answer to the most delicate questioning was, 'Ah! Mademoiselle de Belle Isle!' raising her eyes to heaven. When I ventured to touch upon the question of personal appearance she answered only—'Beauty is not everything—'"

"Which is to say," muttered Achille, tearing the letter, and scattering the fragments to the wind regardless of the spotless turf—"Which is to say, that I have the honor to be betrothed to a camel who dresses like an English woman and observes the canonical hours! . . . Ah! what forethought on the part of parents! What a beautiful system!"

Taking up the yellow book, he flourished it in the air.

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"It would be better," he cried "to be a savage like this Cooper; this Uncas; this Sacred Chin-gach-gook! Better shoot the Wampum, track the Tomahawk to its lair, and hurl the deadly Moccasin. . . Parbleu! what have I done!"

Achille had not meant literally to hurl anything, but in his excitement the yellow book flew from his grasp, and skimming the palings lighted in the very middle of the white road directly in the path of two ladies upon bicycles who chanced to be approaching.

Both ladies screamed, and the younger losing her balance dismounted hurriedly. Achille rushed to the bars with many protestations of regret, but the lady who was still awheel only elevated her chin disapprovingly as she described a figure eight upon the road while waiting for her companion to remount. She was a comely woman—a

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trifle, plump perhaps for knickerbockers — but she rode gracefully, and Achille would have persisted in his demands for pardon had not the other, turning suddenly toward him, caused him to forget everything else.

It was as if the prismatic universe came in an instant to a focus; as if all the gold of the wheat were suddenly concentrated in one bright aureole of blonde hair beneath which all the blue of the sky shone from two laughing eyes. It was as if all the green of the earth had condensed itself into one tailor-made costume, and the varied colors of the cultivated fields had shrunk to the dimensions of a pair of Scotch plaid stockings.

The lady seemed much amused, and when her companion called to her, "Let us hurry on, this is doubtless a private lunatic asylum," she only smiled the more sweetly, and then to Achille's

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She stopped and picked up the book.

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amazement stooped, and, picking up the "Last of the Mohicans" from where it lay, advanced toward him trundling her wheel by the handle, and laid the volume in his hand—

"Monsieur has lost his book," she said softly, blushing as she spoke. "It is fortunate that we chanced to be near."

Before he could bring himself to utter a word she had mounted and ridden away. As she joined her friend he thought he heard her say:

"He seems perfectly harmless."

Achille watched the figures till they were out of sight. Once he fancied that the slighter of the two turned and looked back and he waved his hand, but in a moment regretted an action that might be misconstrued into further evidence of an unsound mind.

He concealed the Story of Uncas in the hollow of a statue representing the

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God of Love, and, reasoning that the ladies could not possibly have come from a great distance, set about devising plans for the establishment of their identity that would have been creditable to the Bureau of Secret Information. Had he followed his first impulse he would undoubtedly have ordered the English dog-cart, and in the course of a drive stopped casually at the sign of the Golden Cat, whose landlady was a specialist in the doings of the local gentry; but realizing the futility of the most subtle diplomacy during the progress of the Market, he abandoned the idea and, chafing under the burden of enforced inaction, paced to and fro behind the grating with the exaggerated disquiet of a zoölogical specimen.

"Pshaw!" he cried, "I am rapidly becoming the lunatic for which she took me!" and with an effort to regain the contentment of the early afternoon he

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left the grating. But the garden had become an assortment of vegetables stupidly growing in highly fertilized earth, the cricket a noisy imbecile, the bee an intolerable bore, and at last, unable to endure the exasperating calmness of nature, he opened the great gate and stepped out upon the highway.

There lay the road straight and level as a bowling alley, with the trees like misplaced tenpins along the side; beyond, the flat fields took on new flatness, the river stretched motionless as a sleeping snake.

"Ah!" sighed the young man, "the road is like my life. It has a stone for every hundred metres. Ah, if one might but sometimes lose the way!"

Beyond the nearest meadow, a line of willows marked the course of a small stream, the little river Loup, and among them nestled the low, red-tiled roof of a washing shed. The sight of this

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brought to his mind a pleasant suggestion of cool water, and as he knew that all the accessories to a comfortable plunge were there he welcomed the thought as an inspiration.

Achille splashed for awhile in water scarcely above his waist, and then seeking more adventurous sport moved down the stream to a pool behind the willow patch in which a man might swim without encountering the sandy bottom. Here, tempted by the sunshine, he prolonged his bath beyond its usual limits; and when, at last, he waded back, shaking the water from hair and eyes, he did not at first observe that some one had come to the washing shed during his absence.

"Hello!" he cried, when he saw he was not alone. "Hello!——Sacre Bleu!"

The stranger wore his clothes, his favorite pearl gray suit and his broad-

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brimmed straw hat; even his violet necktie and his patent leather shoes.

"Sacre Bleu!" he repeated. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Do not be disturbed," said the stranger, lightly, "I have only taken the liberty of borrowing from your wardrobe to attend the fête. It is possible that I may return the clothes later unless I find that I am becoming attached to them; at any rate, Monsieur has doubtless many more, and I will gladly place my own apparel at his disposal. I hope that he will consider my humble outfit as his own for the time being. I would also suggest that as the evening is getting chilly, and as ladies might pass at any moment, Monsieur should lose no time in making his toilet. I have tied knots in the arms of the blouse and in the legs of the pantaloons which will detain Monsieur some little time and prevent any impetuosity on

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his part in the matter of pursuit, which might be unpleasant for both of us. My address, by the way, is the Inn of the Silver Moon. Pray bear it in mind. I have the honor to say au revoir; a plaisir!"

So saying the stranger lifted the broad-brimmed hat and sauntered leisurely away.

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II

Apparently there was no choice for Achille but to put on the garments left him by the stranger. It would have been futile to look to the Chateau for assistance, for his voice could not have been heard beyond the outer gate; and knowing well the rapidity with which the story of his mishap, once started, would spread throughout the small community, he did not care to attract the attention of chance passers along the road. Amused, in spite of himself, at his predicament, he laboriously untied the knots, and at last, an excellent counterfeit of a needy workman, he laughed heartily at his own reflection in the stream.

He had fortunately taken the precau-

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tion to hide his pocketbook with his watch and keys in a crevice in the wall where they had escaped the notice of the thief, and, the first flush of indignation passed, he argued that it might be the part of wisdom to let the criminal go unpunished rather than furnish material for the merriment of his friends.

Sitting upon the edge of a linen barrow Achille looked the matter fairly in the face. Evidently he must delay his return to the Chateau until dark, and still it seemed imprudent to remain in a place where the servants on discovering his absence would be sure to seek him . . . Suddenly a light broke on his puzzled meditations . . . Surely there was nothing to prevent a shabby young workman passing an hour or two at the Pig Market, where among the throng there were many who knew which chateau of the neighborhood

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sheltered a guest much given to bicycling and Scotch plaid.

With the stealthy tread of an intelligent Mohican, Achille followed the river bank until a kilometre lay between him and the garden gate; then, crossing the fields to the road, he adopted what he conceived to be the bearing of an artisan upon a holiday, and struck out toward Greslin, singing as he went.

The young man sung at first because he considered song to be in keeping with his rôle, but presently he found himself singing from very lightness of heart, and smiled as he recalled the refrain of an old Provençal ditty to recognize in it the meaning of the address given by the stranger—

What care if the day
Be turned to gray,
What care if the night come soon.
We may choose the pace
Who bow for grace
At the Inn of the Silver Moon.

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Ah, hurrying sirs,
Drive deep your spurs,
For it's far to the steepled town—
Where the wallet's weight
Shall fix your state
And buy for ye smile or frown.
Through our tiles of green
Do the stars between
Laugh down from the skies of June,
And there's naught to pay
For a couch of hay
At the Inn of the Silver Moon.

You laboring lout,
Pull out, pull out,
With a hand to the creaking tire,
For it's many a mile
By path and stile
To the old wife crouched by the fire—
But the door is wide
In the hedgerow side
And they ask not bowl nor spoon,
Whose draught of must
Makes soft the crust
At the Inn of the Silver Moon.

Then here's to the Inn
Of the empty bin;
To the Host of the trackless dune,
And here's to the friend
Of the journey's end
At the Inn of the Silver Moon.

Before the song was ended Achille had covered half the distance to Greslin.

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As he walked between the trees he recalled that she, his fair green lady, had passed there not many hours before. At the bridge, where the little river Loup crosses the road, he paused to wonder if she had rested upon the broad stone parapet. As he climbed the long hill to the town he thought of her and pictured her beside him; not the princess that she must be, but a girl of the people, and he the vagabond that his dress proclaimed him. He pictured them, this humble couple, as being very poor, depending on a fiddle and a tambourine for sous and supper. He pictured one impossibility after another, changing scene and circumstance to suit his fancy, but in all his pictures they two were hand in hand.

On the outskirts of Greslin the highway is joined by another of less importance, coming from the hills, the borders of the forest, and the stony uplands

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called by the peasants "Purgatory"; and at this meeting of the ways there stands, on one hand the village octroi, and on the other an uninviting wine shop that has above its door the "carrot" of the tobacco license, and the withered bush that proclaims the debit des boissons.

As Achille approached this suburb he noticed that the entire male population was gathered about the door of a low shed adjoining the tavern, before which a red stain upon the road, and some fragments of glass neatly swept together in the gutter, announced that a bottle of wine had been recently broken. The young man joined the group of blue blouses and, as the attraction that had drawn them together was evidently upon the wane, had little difficulty in forcing himself to the front.

Upon the straw within, the landlord

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knelt beside a prostrate shape, which Achille thought at first must be that of a wounded animal, but which, when his eyes became accustomed to the light, he recognized as a bicycle with its forward tire in a state of collapse.

"Was any one hurt?" he demanded, breathlessly.

"Hurt! not she," growled the landlord, resentfully, without looking up. "But the question is, where am I to put my donkey? He cannot remain on the road; he cannot sleep in the bed with my children, and here there is not room for both. Now she has gone away, without so much as buying a drink, leaving me with this sacred machine. How do I know that I shall see one of them again? How do I know that I shall be paid for my trouble?"

"But the owner, the lady, who was she?" cried Achille, impatiently.

"How can I tell who she was?"

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"What was she like?"

"How do I know! these imbecile rich are all alike. When they are fat they tie themselves in; when they are thin they stuff themselves out . . . Hey! what are you doing in my shed, who told you to come in?"

Achille had, in his eagerness to learn the particulars of the accident, advanced beyond the threshold, and the irate publican, observing for the first time the intrusion of an unpromising stranger, turned upon him angrily—

"What do you want poking your nose into other people's sheds? Par-bleu, I've seen such prowling fellows as you taken in hand by the gendarmes."

"Pardon me," said Achille, who had yet to learn that the poor speak plainly. "Pardon me, but I am greatly interested in this lady."

"Oh, you are, my boy!" sniffed the other, scornfully. "Well, I don't recall

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that the lady expressed any great interest in you. You had better go home and make yourself a little more chic if you are after the girls."

The men about the door laughed, and Achille, anxious to make the best of an awkward situation, said:

"I suppose that I can get a glass of grog?"

The landlord shrugged his shoulders, and made the gesture of one who rubs a coin between his thumb and fore-finger.

In the low, bare taproom a stout carter slept, sitting bolt upright on a wooden bench, with his whip and a half-finished tumbler of spirits before him on the table. Behind the bar, a round-faced girl smiled officially.

She said "good day," and asked what Monsieur desired. Monsieur desired *crême de menthe*, but Monsieur did not get it. In its place he took apple

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brandy. The girl had seen the accident. It was no great thing. Two ladies had gone past toward Greslin on their wheels, and in half an hour she had seen them coming back. A moment before, someone had dropped a wine bottle, and the road was covered with glass. People are so stupid! if bicycles were shod with iron like carriages such things would not occur. Fancy, a little piece of glass had made the machine completely useless! It had been the machine of the younger lady that was injured—that is, if you might call her young, when it was so easy to buy a yellow wig. After the accident there had been a great commotion. The elder lady had been very much agitated, and had insisted upon hiring the landlord's donkey, or the hay wagon of the carter. No one can tell what might have happened if the gentleman had not arrived.

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"What was the gentleman like?" asked the listener carelessly.

"Oh, very elegant; something like this Monsieur Vifour at the Chateau, but with more air, more spirit," explained the girl, adding that the gentleman had talked a great deal with the ladies, and that they had all three gone back to Greslin. To her mind the whole affair was very droll.

Achille paid for the brandy, which he had slily poured into the glass of the sleeping carter, and turned to go.

"Have you been to the Pig Market?" he asked, affably, as he received his change.

"Not yet, Monsieur," replied the maiden looking down, "but this evening when the dancing begins, perhaps, if anyone cared to look near the fountain in the corner of the place . . . "

Achille did not stay to learn what attraction one might expect to find at

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the fountain, and as he raised his cap in parting salutation, the girl added, irrelevantly—"Me, I am engaged for every dance."

About the place of Greslin, in a hollow square, are two ranks of close-clipped chestnut trees. The long cool alleys beneath are usually silent as the arches of a cloister. There are benches in the shadow, but they are rarely used. There is a fountain in the corner, built to commemorate a forgotten man who wrote a forgotten book; but the basin is empty, and in a land of wine the water is not missed. An old man with a broom of twigs sweeps up the brown leaves as they fall, and gathers them into a bag. In the autumn, when there has been a frost, his son helps him and they have a horse and a blue cart. It is very quiet under the trees, and when the priest walks there he draws a small book from the breast of his black cas-

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sock and reads, and the good sisters, crossing from the convent to the church, bow their heads while their lips move silently. The children coming home from school go round another way, for the old man with a broom is known to hold strong views on the subjects of sabots and white gravel, and the soldiers prefer the outer pavements, either on the side of the Golden Cat, or on that of the Coin of France. Commonly the place is as sacred to fleckless order as a New England parlor.

Achille shared in the respect of the townspeople for this their municipal best room, and experienced a feeling of indignation when the desecration wrought by the Pig Market dawned upon him.

Beneath the chestnut trees, grim and erect as policemen at an opera ball, were a score of tents and booths flaming with gaudy banners and impossible

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cartoons, while before each door drums were beaten or men and women in spangles or cotton tights told shrilly of the marvels to be seen within. In the open a Strong Man tossed cannon balls into the air as though they had been melons, trusting for reward to voluntary contribution. Young women hurried to and fro selling bonbons and paper windmills, and older women offered rosaries and pictures of the saints. Somewhere rifles were cracking in a shooting gallery; from another direction came the noise of a steam piano, which shrieked with insane hilarity. Everywhere were squads of awkward peasants, lurching aimlessly from booth to booth, eager to be deceived and cunning to resent deception; their red hands deep in cavernous pockets, guarding greasy sous which they longed to spend; praying in the same breath for temptation to overcome their avarice,

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and for new strength of avarice to resist temptation. There was little talking and less laughter, but upon every face, rosy or wrinkled, was the look of beatified satisfaction that is the national symbol of a fête.

Achille stood still, unable for the moment to collect his thoughts amid the changes that had come to the familiar place.

"Try your strength with the sledge hammer!" shouted a voice to the right.

"Buy a ticket for a trip on the Russian Mountains!" cried one to the left.

"Gentlemen and ladies!" bawled another, "the Lion Tamer is about to enter the den!"

Achille joined a group attracted by the dancing bear, and when the tambourine came round threw in a piece of fifty centimes, more because the solicitor was pleasing than to mark his appreciation of the efforts of the beast.

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Some young men who had seen the silver slapped him on the back and cried, jovially:

"Ah, comrade, you have sold your pig! Come along and pay us a drink!"

"Why should I?" demanded Achille, but not illnaturedly.

"Oh, if you can afford to squander ten sous on an imbecile bear, you might spend a franc on some fellow workmen."

"As to that, I will willingly stand a bock all round," said Achille laughing, and with a gesture of the arm, recalled from convivial peasants upon the theatrical stage, he led the way toward the nearest cabaret.

As he stood with his guests at the bar of the humble drinking shop, one of the men asked:

"What trade have you, my little brother? Your hands are as white as those of a baby."

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"I am a jeweler," answered Achille, raising his glass, and pleased to discover in himself a talent for deception not before suspected.

"It is a good trade," said another, adding slily, "and one that must have its opportunities."

"It has," assented Achille, doubtfully, fearing that too great contentment with his lot might arouse suspicion as to his right to wear a blouse, "it has, but then there are many drawbacks."

"Ah, I suppose so," sighed the first, sympathetically, and glancing cautiously over his shoulder, "I suppose so. One can never be sure. Well, I wish you good luck! Some time when I am flush it will be my turn to treat. Au revoir, little brother, you need have no fear of the gendarmes; but for your hands and your clean collar I should have taken you for a field hand."

Achille did not attempt to correct the

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unjust impression he had given as to his moral character, but he resolved on parting from his fellow toilers to adopt another calling should occasion arise. Then, mingling with the multitude, he allowed himself to drift with the current from one attraction to another, with eyes and ears alert in eager anticipation of the advent of the unexpected.

Before the door of the Golden Cat the garrison of small tables, recruited in honor of the fête from a platoon to a battalion composed largely of conscripts from garret and kitchen, had spread in undisciplined ranks far out in the roadway. Among the tables were gathered assorted generations of prosperous townsfolk, and well-to-do farmers with their families over beer or orgeat, absinthe or syrup of cherries. Here and there sat representatives of the more liberal country families; or a knot of officers in smart uniform. At

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one table a young priest with his old mother; at another a painter with a beautiful girl—one would have said that at last had dawned the millennium of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

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III

Achille, as his eyes wandered from group to group, recognized many faces familiar in his daily life. There were the Courvoisers, male and female, with whom he was to dine on Sunday. There was little Bleauvelt of the Line, who was to breakfast with him on Saturday. There was the saddler and the man who had promised to mend the garden pump. It was amusing that they should not know him, and he laughed inwardly at the humor of the situation. But the laugh was of short duration, for at a far table, so close to the white wall of the Golden Cat as to be within the shadow of the iron balcony, the vision rose before him of a broad-brimmed straw hat with a white

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ribbon about it, and beneath, the shoulders of a pearl-grey coat and a necktie of lavender.

At the sight his sleeping indignation awoke with renewed strength, he forgot the course of clemency on which he had resolved, forgot the possible consequences of publicity, and forcing a passage through intertabulary spaces, before whose narrow limits a waiter would have hesitated, made his way toward the broad straw hat.

Achille had read that a guilty conscience may often be counted on to take much trouble off the hands of an avenger, and he reasoned that it would be well to give a guilty conscience every opportunity; but when at length he stood within a few paces of the object of his righteous wrath, the impulse that impelled the charge had in a measure cooled, and he regretted that he had not called upon the civil

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authorities for assistance. He regretted it still more as he became aware that the stranger was not alone, but seated in the company of two women of apparent respectability. Their faces were turned from him, but their backs were neat and their head covering inconspicuous, and when he lowered his eyes in search of further detail they fell upon a pair of Scotch plaid stockings clearly visible beneath the table!

"Have a care who you shove!" cried the saddler, who felt his shoulder rudely clutched.

"Monsieur is not polite!" exclaimed the mender of pumps, replacing his hat.

Achille felt that public patience had reached its limit during his advance. Before him the unexpected grinned with fiendish mockery. To right and left the saddler and the pump mender grew visibly anxious that he should move on.

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"Image of a pig!" he muttered, glaring at the author of his discomfort.

The image of a pig was not so deeply engrossed in his companions as to be oblivious to what was taking place about him. He had observed the coming of the shabby figure, and now, to Achille's amazement, he rose, and after a few hurried words to the ladies, came forward as rapidly as circumstances would permit; upon his face a smile of ready recognition and in his bearing the evidence of a lively satisfaction.

"Not a word!" he whispered, when near enough to be heard, at the same time holding up a warning hand. "Not a word! I am in disguise."

"You are in my clothes!" retorted Achille fiercely. "It is I who am in disguise!"

"I am so glad that you have come," went on the stranger, still in a whisper.

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The Pig Market.

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"I did not discover your little joke till I had gone two kilos, and then it was scarcely worth while to return. I supposed, of course, that it was a pleasantry, and now that you are here I am sure of it."

"A pleasantry!"

"Yes, about the money. I was astonished to find the pockets of these excellent clothes empty, and the circumstance has caused me some annoyance, but Pierre Rabot can take a joke as well as the next, and we will say no more about it."

"Do you suppose that I would be so foolish as to leave money in my pockets where such a fellow as you could get it?"

"One can never tell, but of course you know, the better one is dressed the more essential money becomes. You must have been greatly amused at the situation. I can fancy how you laughed!"

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"Can you, indeed! I assure you. . ."

"Come, come, no apologies! It is not a joke that I should have played myself, but then, fun is more primitive in the country . . . more elementary, shall we say? And now that you are here . . ."

"Do you imagine for an instant that I have come to give you my money!" cried Achille, allowing amazement at this new impertinence to divert him from the original offence.

"Oh, as to that it shall be as you please," returned the other with dignity. "If you prefer to act as banker I shall be perfectly satisfied. By the way, my charming friend the Countess de Salviac has just this moment been speaking very pleasantly of you. It appears that she passed your chateau this afternoon and saw you at the gate. She was en bicyclette, and with the Bar-

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oness de Brazos. Perhaps you happened to notice her, she wore Scotch plaid stock. . ."

"Silence!" cried Achille, with such vehemence that those who sat nearest looked about.

"Of course," continued Pierre Rabot, "I should not have spoken of such things to a stranger . . . I hope you do me justice to believe it! At all events the young lady is charming, and what is more she has expressed a willingness to have you presented, and with people of her position you know that means a great deal. Come, will you join us?"

It seemed to Achille that he had fallen asleep, and that in his sleep he dreamed that the thief had become his friend and benefactor. He tried to collect his senses, but a furious band had struck up the March of Boulanger, and his thoughts went capering to the tune,

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'En Revenant de la Revue! The world was upside down; the saddler looked at him with scorn; the pumpman with contempt; and in the midst of the confusion, the brouhaha of the café, the tumult of the Pig Market, there sat the lady of his love — the Countess — the goddess — and she had expressed a willingness that he should be presented.

"Come," he gasped, "come," and he started toward her, forgetful of all else, but Pierre Rabot caught his arm and held him back.

"It may be necessary," he said, "to make some explanation of your present costume. I should never have noticed such a matter, but women are so much more observant."

"Camel!" cried Achille, returning suddenly to a consciousness of his condition, "do you imagine that I would meet the Countess in the rags of a vagrant! Wretch, it is you. . ."

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"Be calm, my friend! It is I who would present you. Ah, I have it! We will say that you have been milking."

"Milking!"

"Yes, I will tell her privately that you are eccentric — just a little cracked on socialism and the rights of man. It will be capital! Come on!"

"I will not go with you! I shall denounce you before the whole town. I shall tell them the truth."

"The *truth!*" cried Pierre. "Pray, do not speak so loud. When did you divine my secret?"

"I have divined nothing except that you have stolen my clothes."

"Ah, that again! really you grow tiresome. But the time has come when I should confide in you. You may not believe me. Listen! I am the author of All Evil!"

"The Devil?" gasped Achille, starting back in amazement.

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"No, no, you misunderstand me. The author of a book called "All Evil," which has, I may say, created some small sensation of late. I have been challenged by every officer in the garrison of Paris above a sub-lieutenant."

"Sir. . .!"

"Yes, there was not an exception. Believe me, I have but to raise my hand to deluge France in blood."

"Really. . .!" began Achille, but Pierre Rabot continued rapidly:

"When you have read my book — I shall take the liberty of sending you a copy, Edition de Luxe, very rare — you will understand me, and I hope you will love me, and now, away with care! The Countess waits. Remember you have been milking."

As Achille suffered himself to be drawn beneath the balcony it was with a firm determination that he would become a party to none of the decep-

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tions in which his guide was such an adept. He was convinced that the ladies could know little of the character of Pierre Rabot, and every instinct of chivalry urged him to put them on their guard; to stand, if need be, between them and the consequences of a misplaced confidence.

There was something fine, too, in the idea of a knightly heart beneath a plowman's blouse. Perhaps some day he would meet the Countess when he was better dressed and hear from her the story of the noble artisan. . . It is a violet moment when the rays of blue duty and red inclination meet and mingle.

When Achille stood at last before the Countess, the climax was not as he had pictured it. He found himself wedged into a narrow space between a stout table — borrowed from the *blanchisseuse* — and the rougher por-

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tions of the façade of the Golden Cat. On one side the ladder used to lower baggage from the omnibus barred the way of further progress, and on the other Pierre Rabot pressed close against his elbow. From across the board the Baroness de Brazos regarded him impassively through her lorgnette, and the lady who had expressed a willingness to know him seemed quite unconscious of his presence. He recalled uncomfortably that it was outwardly quite another man who had been the object of her favor, and again regretted that he had not confided in the gendarmes. Meanwhile Pierre Rabot talked. Pierre Rabot was always talking.

"Permit me," he was saying, "permit me to present my old friend Felix DuLorme—the great DuLorme of whom you have doubtless read. He is called the New Jean Baptiste—the Herald of

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Universal Love. Forsaking name, rank and a career of exceptional promise, he has devoted the best years of his life, and a considerable portion of his immense fortune, to the service of the poor and humble. Born in a palace he has chosen to make the cot of the peasant · his shelter for ten long years — but, ladies, to-night his vow expires, and he intends to return to the state in which he was born, and for which he is so eminently fitted. To-night he resumes his title of Duke de . . . but no, I must not speak the name until the midnight bell has tolled! . . . Felix, my boy, lend me five hundred francs to pay the waiter."

"Five hundred francs!" gasped Achille, again allowing surprise to take the place of just resentment.

"Did I say five hundred! I meant five thousand, or five, which was it? Do be quick!"

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Achille would not have acted as he did had not the fat, familiar features of the garçón of the Golden Cat mutely announced a time of reckoning; but he knew the power of penetration beneath that calm exterior, and, reluctant to arouse his curiosity, he drew forth his well-filled pocket book and produced a roll of notes.

"I have not that much silver," he said, "but here is one hundred, perhaps . . . "

Deftly plucking the bill from his fingers, and with a regretful glance at the others more firmly held, Pierre Rabot laughed.

"I will get the change," he said. "I see my old friend Baron Blumm there yonder; trust a banker to have money about him. Excuse me for one moment . . . I will return."

Pierre Rabot did not return at the

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end of one moment, nor at the end of many; in point of fact he did not return at all.

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IV

Achille was left alone with the ladies. Even the fat waiter, seeing in the silver-mounted pocket book security for the modest addition, hurried away to conciliate more pressing patrons. The Baroness continued to regard him through her lorgnette; the Countess to regard everything within range of vision except him.

"Mesdames," he said, when it became evident that the search for the Baron Blumm was likely to be prolonged, "Mesdames, if I have seemed to intrude myself upon you, it is only that I may have an opportunity to warn you that the individual who has this moment left us, is, to speak mildly, a most unre-

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liable person. But, perhaps, you are already aware of this——"

"Indeed, we are not," said the Baroness, lowering her glasses and suddenly becoming interested. "We know nothing of him except that he has a chateau not far from here, and that he has kindly offered his carriage to take us back to St. Ives, Mademoiselle having met with an accident that disabled her bicycle."

At the word "Mademoiselle" the heart of the young man gave an exultant bound.

"I have heard of the accident to the Countess," he said, sympathetically. "I trust that she has escaped uninjured."

"I am not a Countess," exclaimed the victim, impatiently, speaking for the first time but without turning her head. "Pray, do you see this Monsieur Vifour returning?"

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"Monsieur Vifour?" stammered Achille.

"Surely you know the name of your old friend!"

"Achille Vifour?" inquired the young man, meekly.

"No," explained the Baroness, who, now that the ice was broken, had become most affable. "This one is Georges Vifour—a bourgeois family, not distinguished, but highly respectable. He has a brother Achille, who is, I fear, a trifle weak-minded—nothing serious, you understand—this afternoon we saw him at the gate of the chateau behaving in the most singular manner. They are twins and dress alike."

"Madame!" cried the young man, "Achille Vifour may be an imbecile, but he has no twin brother; and if he had it would not be this Pierre Rabot. You have been deceived by a scoundrel who has neither chateau nor carriage,

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and who is at this moment escaping with my hundred francs, and——"

"Merciful heaven!" exclaimed the lady. "He has my cycle satchel that he insisted on carrying! It contains my diamond ring, and eleven francs fifty! Let us follow him!"

"I will notify the authorities at once."

"But the police would ask our names, would they not?"

"Certainly."

"Then we can do nothing. No, it would be a scandal. The ring was no great thing, pretty, but — from the Palais Royal, you understand. Let it go. See, we are attracting attention, pray sit down."

For several minutes the Baroness poured forth an eloquent denunciation of Rabot, and Achille, rejoicing in the misfortune that had brought him into such confidential relations with at least one of the ladies, listened with sympa-

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thetic interest till the other interrupted—

"Madame," she said, "do you realize our position? If this is true, and no carriage has been ordered for us, we are here five kilos from St. Ives, and without means of returning."

"*My* bicycle is uninjured," replied the Baroness, adding sweetly, "but, of course, nothing would induce me to go without you."

"I should hope not!" cried the other nervously. "Really we must lose no time in finding some conveyance."

"Rather a difficult matter I am afraid to-day," remarked the Baroness, blandly.

"Mesdames," exclaimed Achille, "I shall be honored if you will regard me as your servant."

"It would be but another proof of your benevolence, Monsieur Du Lorme," replied the elder lady, gra-

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ciously, "if you could even borrow a donkey."

"I will not ride on a donkey," said the Countess with decision.

"I assure you, Mademoiselle . . ." began Achille, but before he could finish the sentence there arose in the fair a commotion, which grew in the twinkling of an eye to an uproar, and from an uproar to a panic. Smoke curled among the chestnut trees in the direction of the booths, and on all sides frantic voices cried that the menagerie had taken fire, and that the animals would soon be loose. The air was filled with the terrified screams of women, the wild shouts of men, and the seemingly wilder orders of the police striving to reassure the crowd.

"Idiots," cried the captain of the guard, "it is not the beasts that burn, it is the waxworks; can you not smell?"

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But the frightened people did not stop to reason. On they came in a tidal wave toward the Café of the Golden Cat, and, before the charge, tables and benches went down with a resounding crash. Here, owing to the fat waiter's presence of mind in imitating a lion, there was a moment's pause of which Achille was quick to take advantage. Seizing the ladder, he planted one end firmly on the top of the stout table, while the other rested against the railing of the balcony above. Once on the table, the distance was not greater than from the ground to the omnibus roof, and the angle of inclination not alarmingly steep.

"Mount, ladies!" he cried. "Do not be afraid; it is perfectly safe. Step upon the chair, now upon the table—Ah, bravely done!"

When the Countess had climbed nimbly, the Baroness more heavily to

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the balcony, Achille followed and drew the ladder after him, much to the disgust of others who had expected to share in their retreat.

"That was a very clever idea!" exclaimed the Countess with frank appreciation, when she had recovered her breath.

"It is fortunate that we were dressed for wheeling," remarked the Baroness, readjusting her hat.

The confusion subsided almost as rapidly as it had commenced. Even before the notes of a trumpet announced the arrival of the *pompiers* the fire had been extinguished, and with the return of order the dreaded animals could be heard howling reassuringly behind their own particular canvas.

Below the landlady and the fat waiter wept together over damages that it would take more than one Pig Market to make good, and commending his

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companions to their tearful care Achille swung himself to the ground.

After searching through all the town of Greslin, but to find that the Baroness had been right, he returned in desperation to a shed where he had observed an old-time diligence, covered with dust, and long abandoned to the crickets and the mice. The coach, which had once been of a brilliant yellow, was almost paintless, and the wooden sides had offered tempting tablets for the picture writing of the stable yard; the one small window in the door was without glass, and the seats within were bare of cushions; it was entered from the end like an omnibus, and, amid marine surroundings, might have passed for an inferior order of bathing machine; but the wheels were strong enough for a cannon, and the springs would have sustained a load of hay.

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Next, as the result of princely and visible offers of reward, a large white horse was disentombed from the cellar of the blacksmith, where he chanced to be undergoing treatment for some trifling defect of sight, then the baker's wife remembered an old harness in the garret; and when from numerous applicants a lad had been selected who was pronounced by experts to be sufficiently sober to undertake the driving, Achille experienced the satisfaction of one who has conquered circumstances. Impatient as he had been to close his bargain, and little as he had stopped to haggle over terms, before he was at last free to return the sun had set and the evening was drawing on. Although the result of his mission had not been all that he had hoped, he was sure that the ladies would believe that he had done his best, and his only anxiety was lest his long absence should have caused

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them uneasiness. Once more beneath the chestnut trees, he saw that order again prevailed about the café, and that before the door guests were assembled as though nothing had occurred. The ladies were still as he had left them on the balcony, but the ladder rested again upon the table, and mounted on it stood the fat waiter apparently serving an omelet across the railing.

"How is this?" he demanded of the landlady. "Why have you not opened the window?"

"Alas!" replied the good woman, "the room within is locked, and during the excitement, I threw my keys into the cistern to save trouble."

"Come up, Monsieur DuLorme," called the Baroness from above, "we have a cover for you and a chair."

It was, to the young man at least, a charming meal that the three shared, sitting in a row upon the narrow bal-

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cony, and when Achille had slacked his thirst from a bottle of good red wine, he gave such an account of the diligence that the others laughed heartily. Under the circumstances formality would have been a farce and dignity an affectation.

Achille watched for an opportunity to explain that he was neither the excellent DuLorme nor a Herald of Universal Love, but the talk flowed in such impersonal channels that it would have been a want of tact to direct it toward himself. Even the name was not again mentioned.

"Monsieur," said the Baroness as they sipped their coffee, "I must tell you that we are in retreat at the Convent of St. Ives. We have, as you know, been robbed, so if you will kindly pay for the dinner we will send you our share of the amount by the driver."

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Achille made a gesture of protest, but before he could speak the young lady, who had suddenly grown very red, cried out in consternation:

"I never thought about paying or I should not have eaten a morsel! Madame, Monsieur, I have no money! I never have any money. Could you not, Monsieur, make out a bill; I will tell you where to send it—and call it shoes—no, not that—I ate four pounds of shoes last month! call it gloves, two pairs of gloves, you can put on buttons you know, till they equal the amount!"

"Perhaps," suggested the Baroness, "perhaps as the expense was incurred through an accident to *your* bicycle, it would not be unjust if the bill was made out for four pairs of gloves!"

"Of course, of course!" assented the Countess.

Achille bowed gravely.

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"The arrangement would be perfectly satisfactory to me," he said, but when they had descended upon the arrival of the diligence, he took occasion to whisper to the Baroness:

"Shall I divide the expense of the conveyance equally, or will Madame ride back on her own wheel? The charge will be twenty francs for each."

She did not answer him directly, but said aloud as the fat waiter brought the bicycle:

"I think I will ride a little way," and mounted.

"Am I to go alone in this horrible packing case?" exclaimed the Countess, almost in tears.

"Mademoiselle," said Achille, "I could not permit that. The roads are full of intoxicated peasants, and I have little confidence in the discretion of the driver. As it happens, I have business in St. Ives, and with your permission, I

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will sit upon the box and see you safely to your destination."

"Would you mind coming inside?" asked the Countess timidly, "it's awfully dark in there, and I'm not used to being alone on such a journey."

"As you please," he assented with great respect, "I think on the whole that would be the safest plan."

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you," said the Countess.

The Baroness returned and came up behind, before they left the town, and for a while the three exchanged sallies through the broken window, but when they reached the brow of the long hill she grew impatient at the slowness of the pace, and elevating her neat gaiters, called out that she would be waiting at the bridge, and shot past with what the French term "exaggerated quickness."

Although it was now nine o'clock, one

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might still have read clear type in the June twilight, and even in the dim interior of the coach there was light enough to reveal the efforts that Achille had made for the comfort of his charge. A strip of carpet was upon the floor, and on each of the hard seats a feather pillow incased in red cotton. He did not explain that these articles, once of the household of the baker's wife, were his by right of purchase, nor did she attribute the presence of an ample shawl to aught but the forethought of the driver.

"Was it not nice of him!" exclaimed the Countess. "Please do not forget to give him a good *pour boire* and put it in the bill."

"I shall not forget, Mademoiselle."

She wrapped the shawl about her from head to foot, for it had grown chilly, and snuggled comfortably in one corner, while the young man selecting

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for himself another as far remote as the limits of the coach allowed, waited with respectful patience to discover what her conception of the situation might be. He was far too well bred—from a French point of view—to begin a conversation that might not be acceptable, and the lady was presumably too well bred—from a French point of view—to take the initiative, so there was silence in the diligence, broken only by the low monotonous creaking of the leathern springs and the measured beat of hoofs upon the smooth hard road.

Presently the Countess sighed softly, which sign Achille, who felt keenly the delicacy of her position, interpreted as the expression of an inclination towards slumber, and at once composed himself to counterfeit the same desire.

The gait of the white horse, though slow, was steady; the heavy vehicle

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swayed gently as a boat upon a running river; through the broken window the evening air blew cool and heavy with the fragrance of the fields; all about was peace and twilight and the hush of nature sinking into sleep. Near him, so near him in the darkness that his out-stretched hand could have rested upon her, was she who in the waning of a day had so filled his being that it seemed that all the years before were but as idlings in the nursery, and life was only measured by one sun between the zenith and the west.

In the twilight one may hear strange music, and with the first stars come many things that do not walk by day.

In the twilight when youth and love go hand in hand, they come so near the dwelling place of their sweet sister who is the chatelaine of the House of Dreams that they can hear her voice,

"The day is done, abide with me."

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V

"Ciel! . . . Diable! . . . Morbleu! . . . Misericorde! . . ." These words and others expressive of distress greeted the sleepers when they awoke. But it was not the words that awoke them. The diligence had suddenly turned upon one end, and through the small window, now a skylight, the stars were twinkling. It was as dark as an oven and nearly as hot, and somewhere in the gloom, Achille, the lady and the pillows were piled in a conglomerate heap.

"Misericorde!" repeated the voice without, "I suffer, I die! That villain of a horse has kicked out my brains."

"What has happened?" shouted Achille, when he had freed his mouth from a corner of the carpet.

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"My legs are broken, my ribs are crushed and I am dying!" replied a lusty voice now readily recognizable as that of the driver.

"Come here at once and help us out," called back Achille unfeelingly. Naturally his first thought had been for the safety of the Countess, but the sound of smothered laughter in the darkness had at once reassured him and his anxious inquiries were prompted rather by civility than alarm.

"I am not hurt at all," she answered, "but I am standing on my head, and there is something heavy on my shoulder, I think it is your foot."

When after much cautious wriggling, Achille was at last free to stand up and thrust his head from the door, a glance explained the situation. The forward running gear had in some way become detached from its fastening, allowing the body of the coach to drop to the

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road at one end, while the other still firm upon the high back wheels, pointed skyward at so great an angle that the floor was practically perpendicular. Nearby the white horse dragging the missing wheels grazed peacefully, and nearer still the driver lay upon his back and howled.

"What has happened to the horse?" Achille demanded.

"Nothing!"

"Well, what is the matter with you?"

"My lungs are punctured!"

"Bah! do you think yourself a bicycle? What has happened to the carriage?"

"I care not what has happened to that infamy, it is sufficient that it has caused my death."

As he spoke the driver rolled over and over until he was thoroughly powdered with white dust. Then he rose upon all fours; then, with many groans,

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he knelt; and finally, after cautiously testing every bone before depending on its strength, stood upon his feet.

"You are not dead," said the prisoner encouragingly. "Can you not see that you are not even seriously hurt? Come now, and help me."

"There are injuries," returned the young man mournfully, "that do not show upon the surface. Does Monsieur desire to come out?"

Meanwhile the lady, by the aid of an ingeniously constructed pedestal of pillows, had succeeded in bringing her head above the level of the opening and now stood close to Achille composedly viewing the scene.

"Ask him where we are," she suggested, and Achille did so.

"How should I know?" replied the driver scornfully. "I have never before been in this miserable country."

"Where is the other lady?"

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"She is where her machine has carried her. My horse is not an express train to overtake her."

"But was she not at the bridge?"

"I have seen no bridge."

"Surely we have come as far as the River Loup!"

"The River Loup? That is upon the road to St. Ives. We left that long before the bridge."

"Ciel! Where does this road lead to?"

"I had hoped," replied the youth cheerfully, "that it would lead to Tives but it appears that it leads nowhere."

"Tives!" shouted Achille and the lady in one breath, "Tives!"

"Why not?" asked the driver shrugging his shoulders.

"Why, in the name of goodness, should we want to go to Tives?" demanded Achille.

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"That is the affair of Monsieur," replied the lad respectfully.

"But did I not explain to you fully ——"

"Monsieur explained nothing to me. It was to my cousin that Monsieur explained, but at the last moment he received news of the illness of his godparent, and was so much overcome that I——"

"Imbecile, where is this Tives?"

"I do not know, Monsieur."

Further discussion was prevented by the appearance of two peasants, who approached from the darkness, armed one with a scythe of formidable dimensions and the other with a wooden pitchfork, and halting at a safe distance from the upturned carriage inquired the cause of the disturbance.

Achille, who knew the country people, wasted no words in explanation, but promptly offered each a franc if

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they would lift the coach and hold it horizontal for a single minute.

"And now, my man," said Achille, addressing the elder of the peasants, as soon as the travelers felt the ground beneath their feet, "will you kindly tell me where we are?"

As he answered, the man spread his hands, palms upward, and looked about him.

"This is not a city to have a name," he said.

"Are there no houses near?"

"Yes, there are the huts of the sabot makers, and there is the house of my son."

"Surely you must know where you live."

"Oh yes, Monsieur, I know well where I live. I live at the house of my son."

"Are there no women?" asked the Countess, adding in a low voice to her

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companion, "Let us find a woman, they are much less stupid than the men."

"Certainly there are women," replied the peasant; "there is the wife of my son, and there is my wife, and there is the grandmother of my son's wife, and there is the niece of my wife, and there is——"

"Please show us where they are," interrupted the lady.

The peasants turned obediently, but as they moved away the driver protested.

"Will no one help me?" he pleaded piteously, and the younger peasant being promised another franc remained behind.

The country on every side seemed, even in the charitable starlight, both barren and desolate. Gorse and furze grew in disorderly tangles upon the crumbling walls of turf along the road, and the fields beyond were stony and

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uncultivated. The place was unfamiliar to Achille, but he supposed it to be a part of the region called Purgatory, which lies at the outskirt of the State Forest. Here every thirty years the hills are shorn of timber, and then the trees are coaxed to grow again that posterity may keep the pot a-boiling.

The peasant trudged ahead in silence, the travelers following side by side. The Countess wore the shawl about her shoulders, and when Achille reminded her that she had left her hat in the coach, and offered to return for it, she laughed and said it did not matter, and readjusted her drapery in the form of a hood. He could recall none of his comrades who would have met the catastrophe with less agitation, and in the face of her composure the young man felt that any effort at consolation would be misdirected. Her manner of meet-

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ing the inevitable but added to his admiration and esteem, though this would have been equally true of any other manner that she might have elected to adopt.

Presently the silhouette of a wood rose against the sky, and when shortly afterwards they entered the shadow, the smell of timber newly cut announced the nearness of the sabot makers' camp of which the guide had spoken. A few steps more brought them to the centre of a circle of small huts of boughs and leaves, broken on one side by the larger outline of a shelter of the same primitive construction,which heaped up chips and rude machinery marked as a workshop, and on the other by a long, low cottage surmounted by a sagging roof of thatch. A light shone from the four-paned window of the cottage, and when the sound of feet upon the dry leaves and twigs announced their coming, the

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door opened and a belt of light shot out across the rough uneven ground.

As the door opened, the man stood still and called—

"Babette, come here!"

Then as if in apology for his seeming lack of hospitality, he added—

"Perhaps Madame would not desire to enter—we are occupied in skinning a cow."

"I should think," commented the Countess, "that you would have preferred to do that in the forest."

"It would have been better for a thousand reasons," assented the man, "but she was too large to pass through the door."

"How did she ever get in?" inquired Achille.

"As a calf," replied the peasant simply.

Babette, when she came forth wiping her hands upon a burlap apron, expressed

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interest, if not sympathy, in the misfortunes of the travelers, and glancing at the Countess she exclaimed—

"Saints in Heaven! it must have been terrible, Madame has lost her petticoat! and doubtless, too, she had a hat."

Babette knew the names of several hamlets at varying distances from the camp of the sabot makers, none of which were at all familiar to Achille. When asked if she had heard of Greslin she admitted that she had, and supposed it to be across the hills, very far away—perhaps twenty kilos. Tives was somewhere to the south on quite another road, that is if it were anywhere, which she greatly doubted. Oh la, la! it was a shame that such things should happen. Perhaps when the driver came he would have some practical suggestions to make. Monsieur and Madame must excuse her appearance! it was not an

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easy thing to skin a cow, and the operation takes much longer than one would suppose.

The mention of time prompted Achille to look at his watch, and when he held it to the light of the open door he saw that it was half-past twelve o'clock. Even making the most unflattering allowance for the speed of the white horse, they must have traveled twenty kilos.

"Mademoiselle," said he, turning to the Countess, "I must tell you that we have strayed much farther than I supposed, and that it is now past midnight. My unfortunate nap has not only put you to this inconvenience, but will, I fear, be the cause of the greatest anxiety to your friends."

"I beg that Monsieur will give himself no uneasiness on that account," replied the lady graciously," I have reason to believe that the good Sisters would

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not be sorry to dispense with my society altogether."

"But your friend, the Baroness?"

"I do not so much as know her name."

"Mother," called a voice within the cottage, "shall we cut off the tail?"

"That will be for to-morrow," replied Babette. "Wash thy hands, we will go to bed as soon as it shall please these good folks to leave us."

A voice sounded through the woods and a moment later the young peasant who had borne the pitchfork appeared singing lustily. When he drew near he stopped singing and laughed heartily.

"It was a good joke on that driver!" he chuckled. "Would you believe me, nothing was broken! A hook had worked loose, and we had only to put the two parts together, and there was his machine as strong as new."

"Good!" exclaimed Achille, "where is he now?"

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"He has gone home."

"Gone where?"

"Home, I suppose. He turned and went in the direction from which he came at a gallop. But doubtless," he added hopefully, seeing that his intelligence was unwelcome, "doubtless he will return."

"If we can be of no further service to Monsieur and Madame," said Babette, with cold politeness, "we would ask permission to retire. The poor must sleep if they are to do their work. *A plaisir, Monsieur et dame.*"

"Stop!" cried Achille, "we must have a conveyance of some sort. I have plenty of money."

"Monsieur is fortunate, but if he were to pay me a million francs I could not create a horse. I am sorry, but we are poor and have nothing to offer."

"But, if you refuse to help us, what are we to do?"

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"There is always the Inn of the Silver Moon," laughed Babette, adding with withering sarcasm, "if *I* were rich I would buy a ticket and take a seat in the railway train like a general."

"The railway! Where is it? Are there trains to-night?"

"The station is not far; you cannot miss it, for there is a gate across the road. The trains pass when God wills, I do not trouble myself with such matters."

"Good night, and thank you for little!" cried Achille, losing his patience. "Come Mademoiselle, there is nothing to be gained from these idiots."

"Good night to you for a pair of vagabonds, who will end in the galleys!" replied Babette, and as they left the grove she called after them many things that he hoped the Countess did not understand.

"Mademoiselle," said Achille humbly,

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when they were once more upon the road, "I can never hope to be forgiven for my carelessness in going to sleep, but I trust you understand that when I have succeeded in restoring you to your friends, my one thought will be to efface myself so completely from your life that you will be able to account for your absence in any way that may seem credible. Meanwhile I am your slave."

"Of course," replied the Countess lightly, "but how fortunate we were to learn about the railway. It was a good idea of mine to see the woman, they are always so much more clever than men."

If it occurred to Achille that it was through making the acquaintance of Babette they had lost the diligence, he put the thought from him as unworthy. Neither did he feel himself in a position to debate the relative cleverness of the sexes. He could have

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wished, too, that the idea of his own annihilation had not been accepted quite so calmly. Nevertheless, when they reached the highway he said, cheerfully:

"At least we know the direction not to take," and they turned toward the unknown.

The way led through a part of the wood, where the axe had not fallen since the days when the king wore green velvet to deceive the deer. The trees stood far apart, wonderful oaks and beeches that had come to honorable age untrammeled by the rabble of the thicket, and beneath, the fern and bracken grew waist deep. In the open spaces were stretches of soft turf, smooth as bowling courts, and beds of tufted heather just purpling into blossom, through which the white road shone dimly like a path of phosphorus The air was sweet with faint aromatic

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odors; the wood still as a cathedral, and as filled with silent prayer. Once they passed close to a little tarn of water teeming with stars. Once they went beneath an arch of whispering pines.

It was only a corner of the forest, and soon they saw again the desolate upland, and beyond, a wide expanse of dark mysterious country to which the road descended rapidly. Here they stood for a moment looking back.

"Is it not beautiful!" she said. "See the moon is coming up behind the trees. Could we not sit down and wait till morning? I am very tired."

"I have read," said the young man softly, "that once, while hunting, the Duchess Anne rode so far from her company that she lost her way, and, attended only by one faithful lackey, slept all night upon a bed of fern here in the forest."

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"Poor thing," sighed the Countess "I do not suppose she had even a shawl!"

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VI

The Countess rested well, as doubtless did the Duchess Anne before her, and perhaps it was above the same mirror that each bent in the early dawn to smooth her hair, and bathe her face in the cool water.

Achille had kept a solitary watch, but he was very happy. When it was light enough, while still the lady slept, he had carved an arrowhead upon the bark of a beech tree, saying to himself:

"Uncas, my friend, after all you were not the last." He even thought pleasantly of Chin-gach-gook.

There were drops of water on her hair, and mimic tears in her eyes as she came back to him from the lake. She

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had gathered sprigs of early heather and wore them at her throat, and her shawl fell about her like Rosalind's doublet.

"Come," he said laughing, "we must take the road, for we cannot expect the fairies to provide our breakfast."

"Anything may happen," she replied, as they left the wood, "anything, even that."

A few minutes later she said again:

"Was I not right?" and even as she spoke there came upon the air the unmistakable smell of newly made coffee.

They had been moving rapidly down the hill, and now a turn in the road brought them suddenly upon a large green van drawn close against the hedge Across the van was painted in white letters, "Pol Paret, General Merchandise," and beneath the inscription sat a moon-faced person upon a box brewing coffee in a copper pot above a

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charcoal brasier. Beside him on the ground lay an earthen dish containing butter and a loaf of tempting bread.

"Good morning, mates!" called Pol Paret without moving, "you are up early."

"No earlier for us than for others," replied Achille.

"You'd call it late if you had been up all night as I have! Where are you from?"

"From the Pig Market."

"But you cannot have come from Greslin!"

"So you say."

"On foot!"

"So you see."

The man whistled in surprise.

"Oh la, la, it's a shame to make a boy like that walk such a distance!"

"Yes, poor little fellow, he is tired," assented Achille readily, "both tired and hungry, I fear, and I must tell you

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my nephew is deaf and dumb. That coffee of yours smells good."

"It ought to, it cost two francs the livre. What are you doing to the boy?"

Achille with his hands close to the opening in the shawl, that his afflicted kinsman had wrapped about his head, made gestures with his finger which might seem to those unfamiliar with the sign language to have a sinister significance.

"I am explaining to him," he answered, "that you will no doubt allow us to purchase some coffee and a piece of bread. I am telling him that we have money to pay for it, and that his mother would be displeased if he did not eat; I am also telling him to go and sit under that tree and that I will bring him his breakfast."

"It is really wonderful how you can do it," commented Pol Paret, greatly

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interested; "but why do you send him away?"

"He is very timid, they are all like that."

"Are they?" said Pol Paret.

The Countess drank her coffee with her back turned to them, while Achille encouraged his host to tell of the cast shoe that had delayed him on his way to the fair, and himself gave an account of the fire in the waxwork booth.

The merchant assured him that the station was but a few steps further on, and begged him to stay while he asked many questions about the folk at the fair whom he had often met. He said that Mother Rehan could afford to lose one or two figures, and that her Jeanne d'Arc had been Esmeralda before the cultus of the new saint had grown so popular; for himself, he did not approve of such dishonesty. He said the Lion

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Tamer was afraid of his wife, and that he had known the Wild Man of Borneo when he was a barber. As they parted, he produced from his stock of general merchandise a cravat of brilliant scarlet.

"This is for your nephew," he said. "There is a spot on one end, but you can tie it so that it will not show. I am sorry that he is so afraid of old Paret."

From a safe distance, the Countess held up the bit of flaming silk and threw a kiss back at the merchant, and he waved a fat good bye. Then, they broke into a run, for the train was already nearing the station, and the final "En voiture, s'il vous plait," was being called as they climbed breathless into the third-class carriage that the Countess had insisted they should take.

There was but one other passenger in the compartment, a young country girl, who held a bird cage on her knees,

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and sat with her eyes protectingly fastened upon a large black basket on the seat before her. Her appearance was reassuringly commonplace, but no sooner was the door slammed than she sprang to her feet with a cry of delight and clasped the Countess in her arms.

Eager explanations followed, to which the young man was careful not to listen, and sinking into a corner he feigned an interest in the passing landscape, till suddenly the Countess turning to him, said:

"Please put your head out of the window, and keep it there till you feel yourself pinched."

Achille did as he was told, keeping his face toward the locomotive till his eyes were filled with cinders, and then in the opposite direction till the air upon his neck made him sneeze. He had suspended thought as far as the actions of the Countess were concerned,

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and, as he watched the leisurely flow of ties and bolts beside the omnibus train, he speculated only upon what would happen should he reach the next station unpinched. But his anxiety was unnecessary, for, just as the speed began to slacken, he felt upon his arm the clasp of two soft fingers, and meanly allowed the signal to be repeated before responding.

When he put his head out of the window there had been with him a peasant maiden, and another who had passed for his nephew. Now there were two peasant maidens and the boy had gone. Rosalind had gone—the Duchess Anne had gone.

"Mademoiselle!!" began Achille, in wild consternation, but the sentence ended in a fit of uncontrolled laughter.

The Countess blushed and laughed also, and the real peasant laughed loudest of all. Then the train stopped

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and the owner of the black basket, having kissed the Countess again, descended and Achille handed her the bird cage.

"Give me a gold piece, please," said the Countess, and when he had hastened to obey she threw it to the peasant girl, saying:

"That is for the little Jules;" then to Achille she added. "Put twenty francs on the bill."

"Gloves?" asked Achille.

"No," she answered, thoughtfully, "Dress material."

"Thank you," said Achille, respectfully.

Other passengers entered—a priest, a soldier, a woman with a hen, and a man with a basket of eels—and the two sat close together and spoke in confidential undertones.

"Where are we going now?" asked the Countess, smoothing her apron.

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"I haven't an idea," replied Achille, as he produced the tickets. "I took passage to the end of the line, which is a branch. The place is about two hours from where we started, but my plan is to get out at the first town of importance, where we will be sure to find a carriage, for we must still be within driving distance of . . . ." Achille paused, embarrassed, and added, "Pardon me, but I have not asked where you want to go."

"I think," replied the Countess, thoughtfully, "that for many reasons it would be better for me to go to Paris."

"Quite so," assented Achille, readily, but his composure cost him an effort.

"But I am in no hurry," continued the lady, looking down at her dress. "Now that I have this, a day or even longer, would make no difference."

"Quite so," said Achille again, step-

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ping on his own toe to make sure that he was awake. "I think we are coming to a large town, and it might be well to stop."

"I should like an omelet for my breakfast," said the Countess, "and you must buy a new cap—that one is insufferable—and a new blouse. Then we can pass for respectable peasants—brother and sister."

"St. Juste! Vingt minutes d'arret!" called the guard, and the train emptied itself of hungry passengers, who crowded toward the buffet—all save two respectable peasants, brother and sister, who quickly left the platform, and disappeared into the town.

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VII

An hour later, when they had breakfasted at the Black Eagle, and exhausted the shop windows about the market place, they entered an old church and the Countess offered Achille a drop of holy water on the end of her finger. Then they admired the windows and wandered leisurely from chapel to chapel, and he told her which parts of the edifice were Norman and which later Gothic, and pointed out the alterations of the Period of the Renaissance, and she listened and asked questions, and together they found wonderful old figures and bits of carving, and bribed the sacristan to show them the vestments and jewels; and the bells rang for ten o'clock before

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they remembered that they had forgotten the conveyance.

"Before we go," said the Countess, "we must light two candles for St. Anthony of Padua."

"Why for him?" asked Achille.

"He has a special care for lost articles," she answered.

They bought their tall candles from an old crone dozing in a corner, and set them on the spikes of the candlestick where other votives burnt; and as the girl knelt in the soft light beneath, the young man stood behind her, and looking up at the kind old Saint, assured him privately that the matter was not pressing.

The day had grown warm, and when they left the church they strolled into the small botanical garden which is the chief ornament of St. Juste, and sat upon a bench beside the fountain. The place at this hour was occupied only by

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an elderly gentleman who read his paper on a distant seat, and some nursemaids on the other side of the basin gossiping together while their charges played about them.

"It will be pleasanter driving when the afternoon grows cool," said Achille.

"Much pleasanter," assented the Countess. "Do you know, this garden reminds me so much of the convent? Have you ever been in a convent?"

"Only in an extinct convent, I have never seen one in active operation."

"I suppose not. Well, there is a broad path like this in the middle of the garden where the girls walk up and down, but there are statues of saints along the side and whenever you come to one you must say a prayer and think how bad you are! It is nothing but a long rosary."

"But suppose that you are not at all bad?"

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"You can't help being bad where everything you can possibly do is wrong. There is another path around the garden near the wall, but only the Sisters are allowed there; they are afraid that people will throw notes over the wall."

"Notes?"

"Yes, letters, but of course nobody does."

"Of course not."

"It is so much simpler to have them directed to the cook, and then they are brought up with your coffee."

"That cook should be discharged," said Achille firmly.

"Oh no, indeed! if it had not been for a cook I should never have had a book to read."

"Were there no books in the convent?"

"Not the kind I mean. I think, Monsieur DuLorme, I ought to tell you something that I fear will lower me in

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your estimation. Listen, please, and do not interrupt till I have made my confession. Two years ago I happened to overhear the Mother Superior severely condemning a writer and his books. Naturally I desired nothing in the world so much as to read those books, and naturally I read them—thanks to the cook. It was wrong, but I did. They were written by a foreigner—an American—one William Dean Howells; a wicked and dangerous man. It was his fiendish object to depict the world, not of course as it is, filled with dangers and pitfalls, but instead as peopled with kind and generous men and women who would not hurt one if they could.

"The girls of whom he wrote could speak to perfect strangers and meet with nothing but respect and courtesy. He made light of the perils that beset women who stray from the path of convention. He did not argue against

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restraints: he ignored them. Like the snake in Eden, he held out the apple saying: 'Eat and know, thou shalt not surely die.'

"I know that this is false and wrong, or why should those who are wiser than I take so much trouble to teach me that it is? But having once tasted the intoxication of freedom, I fear that I shall never again like the watered wine of conventional restraint. I feel that the insidious poison of confidence in mankind has entered my blood, and that I shall never know again the sweet suspicion and mistrust of my earlier years. Monsieur, I have lost my belief in universal depravity."

The Countess paused, and Achille said cautiously—

"I have read the works of this Monsieur Howells, and, believe me, I have not found them as bad as you have pictured them."

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"Have you read 'The Lady of the Aroostook'?"

"I have, and although the startling exploits of that extraordinary young person in crossing the world without a chaperon shocked me at the time, I must own that I have since thought that I should like to know her."

"It is only your kindness of heart. Monsieur, that prompts you to comfort me."

"Not altogether," said the young man seriously, "for I have a confession to make also. In my boyhood I fell a victim to the American romance; I read the writings of Monsieur Cooper, and since then my life has been duplex. I have outwardly accepted the standards of my station, while inwardly chafing beneath its limitations. Mademoiselle, may I venture the hope that I have at last met one who can understand that beneath the exterior of a provincial

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rentier may lurk the spirit of Uncas, the Last of the Mohicans ?"

"I do not know of Monsieur Uncas," sighed the Countess, "but tell me, and tell me truly, would he have despised the Lady of the Aroostook ?"

"He would have adored her, he would have worshiped her!" cried Achille with ardor, at the same time making a movement to capture the hand that chanced to rest near his own.

"Do you think," said the lady, withdrawing her hand, "that he would have told her so until she was in the wigwam of her people ?"

"No," answered the young man sitting erect, "that would have been the act of an inferior savage."

"Have you any dogs, Monsieur ?" asked the Countess.

Of all the sentences that had fallen from her lips, Achille treasured this question as the most angelic. He told

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her of Boy, and Toto the pug, and Brutus the watch dog, and incidentally something of his garden and the servants. Presently their talk drifted back to the Pig Market and mention was made of her companion who had, so suddenly disappeared.

"She was a chance acquaintance," explained the Countess. "The convent, which is really a hotel with bars on the windows, was crowded, and we were given a room together. It seems that the Sisters (in addition to taking care of girls who must be somewhere, but are not wanted anywhere in particular) maintain a species of consigne where wives may be checked till called for, and that her husband being obliged to go abroad had left her there. I soon found that my roommate had an arrangement with the baker, who has a key to the small gate in the garden wall in order to bring in the bread, by which

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she was able to go out during the hours of private meditation. The baker rented bicycles, and sometimes we went riding together, but never very far. It was my fault that we were at the fair. I had heard of the country about Greslin and wanted to see it."

"I trust that you were not disappointed."

"I think it well repays a visit."

"If you will allow me to say it," ventured Achille, "it might have been more prudent to have selected another day, although of course your adventure would not have turned out as it did, had it not been for my stupidity in going to sleep. Mademoiselle, can I ever thank you for not reproaching me!"

The Countess laughed softly.

"That would not have been fair," she answered, "especially as I happened to be awake when we made the wrong turning."

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"You were awake! You knew!"

"Yes, but it would have been so stupid to go straight back."

"Mademoiselle, it was the height of imprudence!"

"Pooh! I knew that I should be as well cared for as though I had gone roaming the hills with Leo XIII."

"Ah!" cried Achille, "let this be a lesson! You thought yourself with the worthy DuLorme, of whom, believe me, I have never so much as heard, while I . . . "

"While you are Monsieur Achille Vifour. I have known that from the first."

"PARDON!"

The voice was like that of a cannon breaking in upon the quiet of a summer evening. The speaker wore his cocked hat sideways, and by other peculiarities of costume proclaimed himself an officer

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of the law. While the wanderers had laughed and whispered of their own concerns, Fate had come upon them in the uniform of a sergeant of gendarmes, who stood making a military salute in sickening travesty of respect.

"I regret the necessity of disturbing Monsieur," said the officer, "but he will not deny that the cap which he has now upon his head was purchased one hour ago at the chapellerie Rosenberg for the sum of two francs-fifty."

"I do not attempt to deny it," answered Achille, "especially as I saw you watching me from the street, but why should I not buy it?"

"Have a care!" said the officer, sternly, "let me caution you that whatever you may say will be used against you at your trial."

"At my trial!" cried Achille, flushing with anger and surprise.

"The old cap left in the shop of

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Rosenberg contains evidence of the most incriminating nature."

"Of what am I accused?" gasped Achille.

"Of what is Pierre Rabot, of many aliases, not accused?"

"Pierre Rabot is a scoundrel!"

"I advise you to reserve any confession that you may have to make. It will be more useful to denounce yourself before the court. Come with me. Madame may remain."

"Madame will not remain," retorted the Countess, with spirit. "You have made some imbecile mistake for which you will be reprimanded by the judge."

The gendarme smiled grimly.

"The Law does not make mistakes," he answered. "That is left for foolish women who leave their household duties to keep appointments in the garden."

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"The Military never have appointments in the garden!" said the Countess, tossing her head, which pleased the gendarme, for he liked to be considered of the military, and his moustaches were waxed.

The officer, holding Achille firmly with his large right hand, marched from the garden, while the Countess upon the left kept up a running fire of conversation, and laughed with affected gaiety, to give the procession the semblance of an amiable promenade.

"Unnecessary words are not permitted while on duty," said the sergeant.

"That does not prevent your listening," laughed the Countess. "I knew a gendarme once who arrested a dressmaker's dummy for being out in the street too late, and the circumstance so affected her reputation that he was obliged to marry her."

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"Marry the dummy?"

"No, the dressmaker, stupid! I knew of another . . . "

"Silence, we are about to pass the residence of the judge."

"Is that the judge? that little jackdaw there in the garden, eating his breakfast with his napkin tucked under his chin! Will he try us with the cotelette aux pommes? will he give sentence with the fromage de brie?"

"Madame," said the gendarme, "I dare not look in that direction, but if you can do so unobserved will you have the goodness to note what he is eating?"

"He is at this moment breaking an egg with his knife."

"Parbleu! he will not be through for an hour, and he has the key of the court in his pocket. It will be necessary for us to continue marching."

"But not in the streets, I pray you!

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Let us go down to the river and walk up and down along the bank."

The sergeant drew himself to his full height; but when the Countess nudged him with her elbow, he gave the order "left wheel" to his prisoner, and they turned into a steep and narrow lane at the end of which was a glimpse of trees and the shimmer of water.

The river that washes the quiet quay of St. Juste is an orderly river. It has guide posts telling the voyager where he must not land and where he is forbidden to fish; there are neat walls along the edges like a canal, and tree-lined sidewalks like a boulevard; the very islands in the stream remind one of the refuge places where the timid seek safety from omnibuses.

When the sergeant with his charge came out upon the quay they found the place almost deserted. Two scows of sand, one full, the other half unloaded,

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lay moored against the wall awaiting the return of the workmen from their breakfast. In the shadow of a pile of bricks some horses munched their oats. A woman came up the ramp from the water's edge wheeling a barrow of wet linen; below a boy washed a large yellow dog, and near him a skiff with oars still in the rowlocks was drawn up a little on the flags that it might not float away during its owner's absence.

"Let's go down and see him wash the dog," said the Countess. "We shall not be seen there, and you know if it should turn out that you have made a mistake you would be sorry if we were too conspicuous."

As they reached the waterside, the dog, being at the moment liberated, shook himself violently and with such effect that the officer, who happened to be nearest, was spattered from head to foot.

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"Bad luck to the beast!" he shouted, angrily. "How am I to present myself before the judge looking like . . . like . . . "

"An educated seal," suggested the Countess, but the gendarme only said coldly:

"Now we shall have to remain in the sun till I am dry."

The Countess clapped her hands.

"I have it!" she cried, "we will go out in the boat and you can sit in the sun and dry. Perhaps we might row over to that lovely little island, and while your prisoner roamed about you and I could stay in the boat and chat. It would be much pleasanter than walking three abreast on these scorching stones, and your poor hand must be tired holding his arm. Ah, come! your sweetheart will never know."

The sergeant, who was the father of a family, chuckled fatuously, and as the

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plan seemed feasible, ordered Achille to push the boat into the water while he kept a firm hold on the skirts of the stiff new blouse. Pierre Rabot's garment had been rolled into a ball and carefully tied in a red cotton handkerchief in accordance with the Countess' theory that such a piece of baggage was indispensable as an evidence of peasant respectability.

When they embarked Achille was assigned to the oars, the Countess claimed the privilege of the rudder, and the sergeant sat forward where he could enjoy the benefit of the sun and at the same time keep a close watch upon his captive. A hundred strokes sent the light craft across the strip of water, and as nobody happened to be looking out ahead, brought the prow in such violent contact with the shelving bottom full two metres from the bank, that the officer was for a

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moment in imminent danger of falling out.

"Have a care what you are about," he shouted. "I warn you that any act of disrespect will be used against you at the trial."

"Pardon," said Achille, and this was the first word he had spoken since they left the fountain.

"Can't we get nearer?" asked the Countess.

"No," replied the sergeant who had been taking soundings with his sword, "the prow is already on the sand and the water ahead is more shallow."

"What shall we do?"

"Go back. Stop rowing there, you are pushing aground."

"I will not go back until I have seen that island. I will tell you how we can manage. You, Monsieur la Capitaine, leap ashore, the boat will easily go up when you are out."

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That might be used against me at the trial.

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The sergeant stood up and measured the distance with his eye.

"It is a pretty good jump," he said dubiously.

"I am sure that I could do it," said the Countess.

"Will you give me a kiss if I do it?"

"The moment I am on the island."

"Well, here goes," said the sergeant, and he jumped.

He alighted in water above his ankles and splashed toward the land muttering soldierly expletives, and the boat relieved of his weight floated freely, but the recoil of the jump had driven it well out in the stream where the current took it rapidly still further away.

"Come right in here," yelled the sergeant, "the water is deep enough. Pull on your left oar, idiot!"

"I am afraid," retorted Achille, "that might be used against me at the trial."

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VIII

Achille rowed with more force than finish, taking the direction of least resistance, and the current being strong, the marooned official was soon a gesticulating speck far astern. As long as he remained in sight the Countess continued to wave her handkerchief, and to a chance observer on the shore the scene might readily have been interpreted as the parting of exceptionally good friends.

"Mademoiselle," exclaimed the rower, pausing to wipe his forehead, "words fail me to express my admiration for your strategy. It was Napoleonic."

"The favoring circumstances may have been Napoleonic," she answered

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modestly, and there was a note of regret as she added "but it did not go as far as strategy."

"Surely you would not have wished it to go further?"

"Well," sighed the lady, "I was prepared to fall in love with the judge."

Achille resumed the rowing with unnecessary vigor, and there was silence till presently she asked:

"Ought the water to come into the boat?" and a hurried examination revealed an open seam through which the river entered with alarming rapidity.

Achille at first made light of the difficulty, and began to bale industriously, but when it became apparent that the leak was gaining, he gave the dipper to the Countess and put his whole strength to the oars. They were now in the open channel, and from the rapidly settling boat the shore seemed at every stroke to recede still further, but con-

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cerned only with their present danger the fugitives noticed nothing till, startled by the clanging of a gong, they looked up to see the sharp red prow of a vessel bearing down upon them.

"Place, if you please! What do you mean by getting in my way like that?" shouted a man in the guttural accents of an Alsatian.

"Here you, take us aboard, we are sinking. You can put us on shore wherever you please," called Achille.

"If you are really sinking I must take you on board, but I cannot stop to put you on shore. I have business to attend to and no time to trifle with idiots who row in a sieve."

"You may take us where you are going, and we will pay our fare."

"In that case I should be fined, for I have no license to carry passengers."

"Let us discuss that when we are on

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deck. Don't you see that we are in danger?"

"Your boat will not sink for several minutes, and I must know in what capacity you are to come on my vessel. Monsieur is evidently not a man of business."

"We will become members of your crew."

"And great additions you would be! Can you cook?"

"Perhaps; I have never tried."

"I can," interrupted the Countess, "I can cook like a cordon bleu, and my brother is an excellent valet de chambre."

"Well," said the captain, "at all events you are a fine girl, and I will employ you both; but remember it is to be without pay. My cook was at the last moment obliged to go to the dentist's and the mousse is frivolous and light-minded."

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"We will agree to your terms," cried Achille, impatiently, "but do hurry and let down a ladder."

"Not so fast, my friend. I must ask you first if you leave the boat willingly?"

"Willingly!" exclaimed Achille, "I assure you I have never in my life been more willing to leave a place."

"It is important that this should be understood, because if you abandon the boat of your own accord it becomes a derelict and the prize of whoever picks it up, whereas if it were only a question of salvage. . ."

"The boat is yours!" interrupted Achille savagely, and a ladder being lowered the travelers were assisted to the deck where the captain greeted them with greater show of good will than his words had led them to expect.

"You see," he said, "I am in the

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wrecking business and make my living by accidents on the river, and I am now on my way to recover a cargo of wine that has sunk in a barge. I am glad to have been of service, but the delay has cost me something, and I cannot afford to relinquish any rights that are mine by law."

"What a beautiful ship," exclaimed the Countess, looking about her at the various appliances that adorned the vessel's deck. "Is that a yard arm?"

"No," replied the captain, smiling, "that is a derrick."

"I thought," said the Countess, "that it was where you hang people when you have a mutiny. This I suppose is a boiler or a binnacle, or is it a belaying pin?"

"It is neither," replied the delighted seaman, with whom the imparting of information was a passion. "That is what we call a windlass. It is an im-

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provement on the ordinary pattern which I have invented myself, and if you will come nearer I will explain exactly how it works."

"I think that as I am to be the cook, it would be better to explain the kitchen first."

"As you please, my dear young lady. We started hurriedly and have not breakfasted, so you may begin your duties at once. Here is the kitchen—small but very convenient, and opening directly on the deck. Here are the provisions still in the boxes, nothing has been unpacked. You will find a hammer on the shelf and your brother can open the crates. There is a lobster somewhere and some cutlets, onions for soup, and a quantity of artichokes."

"Do you think that one lobster will be enough for all the sailors?"

The captain was in ecstacy.

"You will ruin me," cried he, "lobster

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for the crew? No, my charming cook, we have nothing to do with those fellows down below. You will prepare only the most dainty dishes, and we will eat them together quite like a family. I am a true democrat, and the cook shall sit at my table."

"And the valet?"

"And the valet, the brother, certainly! As the saying is, 'the hair goes with the hide.' Now I shall leave you to your work. I will return from time to time to see if you need anything."

"Mademoiselle," began Achille, when the two were alone, "I must caution you not to be quite so—so agreeable to this animal of a captain."

"It never does any harm to have people feel pleasantly toward you," pouted the Countess. "Come, let us find the lobster. Do you think it would be well to serve it a la Diable?"

"By all means."

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Achille took the hammer and began viciously striking the covers from the six boxes ranged along the kitchen wall. The first one contained candles wrapped in blue paper in packages of five, so he turned to the next. This disclosed other packages of candles, as also did the other four. Neither lobster nor cutlet, nor artichoke nor onion, only candles in blue paper wrappings. It was plain that some fatal error had been made.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Achille, "here is a breakfast for the czar! How will the noble captain have his candles, plain, or cooked in their own fat?"

"It is too bad," cried the Countess, "I always wanted to make a lobster a la Diable."

"I forgot," said the captain, thrusting his head in at the door—"I forgot to tell you about the duckling, smothered in onions—"

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When the captain returned from behind the wheel house where he had spent the first moments of his disappointment, his face had lost much of the cheerfulness that had been its chief attraction.

"I had intended," he explained sadly, "to make this something of a fête. I receive pay in proportion to the value of the wreck, and this cargo of wine is composed of the most costly vintages. It is not often that I can afford such extravagances, and that lobster was a dream."

"As there is nothing to cook," suggested the Countess, "perhaps there are other ways in which we could be useful."

"Not a word of such a thing!" exclaimed the mariner. "You are my guests. There is nothing in my license to prevent my carrying guests; it was

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stupid of me not to have thought of that sooner."

"Monsieur is very amiable," replied the lady, "but we should not be idle. If you could supply me with some colored thread I should be happy to work your monogram on anything in the boat you may select."

The worthy Alsatian refused to entertain the suggestion, and soon after invited his guests, with many apologies, into his private cabin, where the mousse served them bountifully with an excellent mutton stew from the forecastle mess, and some fried cat-fish that were not so good.

During the meal, the Countess displayed a curiosity concerning the wrecking industry which Achille was far from sharing, and the host—cheered by her interest, and the contents of a bottle which, he said, had lain for twenty years under water in the hull of a Bor-

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deaux wine ship—told with a nice attention to detail of his experiences upon the river and the profit or loss that had resulted from several ventures.

Meanwhile the little steamer, aided more by the current than her own clanking engine and splashing paddles, went rapidly upon her course, and although one looking toward the tree-lined shore would have found it difficult to believe that St. Juste was not still in sight, that thriving city lay in reality leagues astern.

"How long will it take to get where we are going?" asked the Countess, when the party had seated themselves on coils of rope upon the quarter deck.

"About seven hours," replied the captain, lighting a cigarette and offering the package to Achille, who declined. "We shall cast anchor beside the wreck for to-night, and if all goes well

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we shall be ready to begin hoisting by five o'clock to-morrow morning."

"How long will that take?"

"Possibly three days, possibly longer —I think I was saying, that the wreck of the oil barge was not so fortunate as the last expedition of which I told you. The value of the cargo was five thousand four hundred and seventy-five francs, as shown by the insurance policy which was for three thousand two hundred and fifty. My share should have been ten per cent, or five hundred and forty-seven francs, and I should have made a profit of perhaps two hundred and thirty or two hundred and forty francs at least, if the eccentric had not broken. I must first explain to you, Mademoiselle, that this eccentric—"

"Monsieur," interrupted the Countess, with difficulty suppressing a yawn, "I am much fatigued, and I am sure

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that I should understand your story better if you would allow me take a nap on that delightful sofa in your cabin."

"If Mademoiselle will consider herself the owner of the cabin," said the gallant wrecker, rising, "I shall be supremely happy."

Achille, alone with his entertainer, resigned himself to the story of the oil barge, but the end thereof he was not destined to know. No sooner had the cabin door closed upon the Countess, than he felt the heavy hand of the captain descend affectionately upon his shoulder, and heard his voice exclaiming in the guttural accents of Alsace—

"Your sister is charming!"

"My sister! Ah, oh yes. She is a worthy young woman and not considered unattractive," assented Achille modestly, as one who does not care to boast of merit in his own family.

The captain puffed his cheeks till his

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eyes bulged out in a manner which recalled the facial expression of the lamented lobster.

"Monsieur," he said in the bluff and hearty manner of the sea; "Monsieur, I am a man of affairs. I make up my mind quickly. I act quickly. I use few words; when I say 'yes' I mean 'yes,' and when I say 'no' I mean 'no.' I am not like the Normans who say 'We shall see' or 'Perhaps, if things go our way we will consider.' I come to the point quickly. It is my habit and I have found that it is good policy. 'Few words and to the purpose,' that's my motto—'Few words and to the purpose!'"

"An excellent motto," said Achille, who wished that they had not left the topic of the eccentric.

"You think so, don't you! Then we shall get on admirably."

"I trust that we shall."

"Now some men," pursued the cap-

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tain, "cannot buy a chicken without poking a hole in it with their fingers. Some men will not employ a sailor till they have seen his baptismal certificate. Some men won't drink a bottle of wine till they have examined the cork. That is not my way. In our business it would never do; one must learn to rely upon his own judgment."

"Certainly!" said the other, writhing.

"You see what I am coming to?"

"Well, not exactly."

"I shall marry your sister! No, do not protest. I anticipate all that you would say,—I have known her but an hour! Parbleu, it is a risk, but all marriage is a risk. 'A pig in a bag,' as they say, but it is my way. I own that I might perhaps have done better, but then, after all, who knows? I admit that there is a widow—no entanglement I assure you!—a widow with an excellent cheese business, who will be

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disconsolate, but we cannot account for the heart."

"Monsieur!" cried the young man, crimson with indignation.

"Monsieur the captain," interrupted a sailor, touching his cap, "the mousse has used all the machine oil to fry the cat-fish and the engineer is in despair."

While the captain pursued the mousse from one end of the deck to the other with the avowed intention of taking his life, Achille sat upon a heap of chain and reflected dismally upon this new perplexity, his eyes fixed upon the green door of the cabin, behind which slept the Countess, happily unconscious of the trouble that awaited her. Finally he arrived at two conclusions; first, that in their present position, it would be imprudent to quarrel with the captain of the vessel, on which they were practically prisoners; and second, that

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the knowledge of the man's proposal must be kept from the Countess until she should be free from any possible annoyance at his hands. He had disapproved from the first of her efforts to make the captain "feel pleasantly" toward her, but he reflected that it was a like pleasant feeling in the breast of the gendarme that had contributed to their escape from St. Juste, and resolved to continue her plan of battle, while keeping a close watch for a circumstance that might induce the captain to make a landing. With this in view he greeted the seaman cordially on his return and inquired with affected unconcern if it would be necessary to go on shore to procure more oil.

"No," replied the captain. "We will use butter and the cost will be deducted from the boy's pay."

"That is only fair."

"And now, my dear friend, let us

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return to more agreeable matters. You have been thinking of what I said?"

"I have indeed; but I must tell you, Monsieur, that, flattered as I am by your proposal for my sister's hand, I can say nothing until we have laid the matter before our grandmother. She has promised that her entire fortune shall go to my sister on condition that no marriage shall take place without her consent."

"Is the good lady old?"

"Yes, she is ninety-seven and lately her health has given us much anxiety."

"You say she is not in want?"

"Ah, Monsieur, she is very rich, and I have good reason for believing that her fortune is even greater than we suppose."

"Where does she live?"

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Achille, springing to his feet in evident excitement, "Monsieur, what town is that

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upon the left bank? Yes, surely there is the church! It is, it must be—!"

"That is Aix-sur-Ouse."

"I knew it! I was certain! There, my friend, just below the church is the red roof of my grandmother's cottage. Ah, little does she know, good soul, how near her beloved Suzette is passing!"

"Do you mean the long roof with the two chimneys?" asked the captain, breathing audibly.

"No, Monsieur, the smaller one a little to the right. It is a humble cottage, for grandmother is very economical."

"Do you think that it would be well to stop?"

"Ah, Monsieur, think of your business. There will be time enough when we come back; everything can be settled in an hour."

"Do you think we could see her now?"

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"This is the time of day when she is the most amiable; but your business—"

"That shall wait. I am not a man to hesitate when I have made up my mind! Here, mate, slow up! Give orders to land at Aix!"

"Good!" cried the grandson with enthusiasm, adding in a whisper, "remember not a word to my sister; she is a sensitive girl and would shrink from any mention of her marriage till all has been arranged."

"I am not a Breton to be guilty of such indelicacy," replied the sailor, proudly.

Achille now rapped upon the cabin door and called in joyous tones:

"Suzette, come out! We are approaching Aix and the good captain has consented to stop for an hour that we may visit our beloved grandmother."

The face of the Countess as she ap-

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peared wore the puzzled expression common with persons recently roused from slumber, but she clapped her hands and cried:

"Ah, the dear grandmother, what joy to see her! and the dear grandfather too!"

"Grandfather!" ejaculated the captain.

"His grave is in the cemetery beside the church," said Achille, softly.

The captain lifted his hat and the Countess wiped her eyes.

"I cannot think of him as gone," she said.

* * * * * *

"Steady! Back a little! Jump off and catch the rope! Monsieur, the landing is made!"

After an earnest consultation between the prospective brothers-in-law it was decided that the impatient lover should remain on his vessel until the old lady

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had been made acquainted with his proposal.

"I will rely upon you, my dear friend, to present the matter in its proper light. You know something of my business, you know what sort of a man I am."

"I know all that I care to know of both," said Achille, warmly pressing his hand.

"I shall expect you in an hour!"

"It will be sooner. Meanwhile I will confide this bundle to your care, it does not appear valuable, but may I ask you not to let it leave your hands till I return."

"I promise faithfully that it shall not," replied the captain as he received with great respect the cast off blouse of Pierre Rabot.

"Au revoir, my friend. Come, Suzette,"—but Suzette was already on shore.

The brother and sister skirted the

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short row of low-gabled houses that led in the direction of the red-tiled cottage; and neither paused nor seemed to hesitate till they had passed the corner and were hidden even from the mousse upon the derrick.

"Have you ever been here before?" asked the Countess.

"No, but I have seen a diligence from here pass my house every evening, and I have hopes that we may catch it."

"What did you say to the captain?"

"I promised that you should be engaged to him in an hour."

"Monsieur!"

"Yes, I have given my consent, and nothing is lacking but the formal blessing of your grandmother."

The Countess tossed her head.

"For my part," she said, "I should rather be engaged to the captain than arrested."

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IX

Guided by eight native children and a resident goat, no market place is difficult to find, and it was not long before the travelers, emerging from the shadow of the church, uttered exclamations of joy at the sight of a small red omnibus standing before the inn. Its seated passengers and exalted driver announced the moment of departure to be near, and upon the door of the vehicle were the two words, GRESLIN —AIX.

Tossing a handful of copper coins to the expectant escort, Achille lost no time in pre-empting the seat behind the box, which had fortunately been left vacant by the peasant patrons of the line, and almost before he could turn to

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his companion with felicitations on their good fortune, they were rattling over the stones to the post office for the mail. Thence they drove up a side street and waited while a stout peasant bound a cord about his hair trunk and embraced his tearful family.

"Are we really off?" asked the Countess, glancing nervously behind, when the trunk had at last been lifted tenderly to the top.

"All in the hour, Madame," replied the conductor, soothingly, "I have but one other passenger, who lives upon the quay."

"Upon the quay!" cried Achille, thrusting a hand into his pocket, "I'll give you twenty francs to forget him."

"Let me see your money," said the coachman.

The omnibus did not drive to the house upon the quay, but straight out into the country, and before long the

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red-tiled roof of the captain's dreams, and even the tower of the church were lost behind the trees. It was a pleasant land of haystacks and hamlets through which they rode, a land of cattle and children, of dogs and hollyhocks; and, in spite of some little uncertainty concerning the future, the spirit of homewardbound came over the travelers, and they chatted gaily of past experiences as folks who near their journey's end. Achille was amusing at the expense of the captain, and the Countess showed him the cork of the bottle that she had taken from the cabin for a souvenir. Then he asked her to tell him the secret of the peasant girl in the railway carriage.

"She is my foster sister," said the Countess, "who happened by good fortune to be on her way this morning to attend the christening of her brother's child, with her entire wardrobe in a

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black basket. Of course, she would do anything for me, and sometime I shall send her a new frock."

"At the next village," said the coachman, who had been making the most of the rare experience of passengers unfamiliar with the road, "one can buy barley sugar manufactured at the convent."

"And what is the name of the place?" inquired the lady, politely.

"St. Ives."

"You have now made the circuit of the Department," said Achille, laughing.

"Dear me, is that all? And the Lady of the Aroostook went half around the world!"

"The barley sugar is to be bought at the baker's; shall I stop?" asked the driver.

"On no account," cried the Countess, "I hate barley sugar."

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As they passed beneath a long white wall she showed Achille the tops of trees that shaded the cool green alley where the Saints stood, the figure on the chapel roof that was better than a lightning rod, and the window from which she had watched the haymakers during the hour of private meditation.

"I do believe," she cried, "that Sister Marie-Joseph is still trying to make that wretched little crocus grow in a broken tooth mug." It seemed to her that she had been away a year.

"Dear me, he is going to stop!" she whispered, a moment later, clutching her companion's arm, "please don't let him."

"I cannot pass the Post Office," protested the driver who had overheard, "and besides there appears to be a lady who wishes to get on . . . Whoa, my children! . . . Mount here, Madame, it is the only place."

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"You can take her on your way back," suggested the Countess hurriedly, but the next instant she had sprung from her seat, and seemingly without aid of the steps, alighted on the road just as the veiled head of a nun arose upon the other side.

"Don't wait for us," gasped Achille, as he made haste to follow, "this is where we live!"

"Well!" exclaimed the Countess, still panting, as, from a distance, they watched the omnibus drive away, "that is what I call a narrow escape!"

"I suppose you wished to avoid the nun," reflected Achille, doubtfully, "but she seemed to have a gentle face."

"You don't know Sister Marie-Joseph," replied the Countess, adding, "Oh! was it not fortunate that I saw her in time to get off."

"Very," assented the other, warmly, as he looked about him, comprehending

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in a glance the ten small houses of the hamlet. "Very fortunate indeed!"

They moved aimlessly and in silence beside the white wall, and for a time the young man's brow was wrinkled in perplexity, then, glancing at his companion, he saw that there were tears in her eyes, and asked humbly if he had said anything to offend her.

"No," she answered, mournfully, "but I know exactly what you are thinking."

"I was thinking," he protested, "of nothing more terrible than that those distant trees must mark the course of the little river Loup, and that by the path along the shore my house is not two kilometers from St. Ives. I have often heard the chapel bell."

"I knew it!" cried the Countess, wiping her eyes, "you were saying to yourself that if I would only walk up to the convent gate and knock, you could

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go home in peace and be rid of me forever."

"Mademoiselle! . . . "

"Yes," she went on, her voice broken with suppressed sobs, "you wish me to go back to prison, and that is why you have brought me here instead of forwarding me to Paris, when you could, by grande vitesse."

"Mademoiselle," replied the young man, proudly, "I have sworn not to leave you until you are in the wigwam of your people."

To this she made no answer, but, presently, when they came to a lane at the end of the wall, she said, laughing:

"I am going to take one peep at them through the keyhole of the little gate; you wait here and call me if any one should be coming."

So saying she ran a few steps along the lane, and as she bent to carry out her purpose he turned again to the

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highway; but, before a minute of the watch had passed, he fancied that he heard a cry and wheeled about. The Countess had vanished.

Achille sprang to the gate and shook it violently, but without result. Then, looking through the keyhole, he saw figures in the distance moving toward the convent in obedience to the summons of a bell.

Refraining from further demonstration (for had the Countess been entrapped it was improbable that she should still be within hearing), Achille leaned against the wall and tried to decide how others, more experienced than himself, would set about a rescue, involuntarily turning in his perplexity less to Uncas than to Pierre Rabot.

"Adieu, je pars!
Plus de retard!
Mais j'ai l'espoir
De vous revoir! . . . "

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So sang the unsympathetic voice of a person who now approached from the end of the lane. From his dress and the burden in his arms, Achille divined at once that he was the baker, and then, recalling what he had heard of that individual's character and history, he determined to make good use of the knowledge.

"What do you mean by raising such a row outside of our wall?" he demanded sternly, standing erect as a sentinel before the gate.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" replied the baker, taken aback, "I thought that they had all gone in—it is nearly six o'clock."

"Ah, you remembered that! Then why are you so late with the bread?" It seemed safe to assume that the baker was late.

"The oven was slow to-day on account of the east wind," replied the

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man, apologetically, adding, with less humility, "Who are you anyway?"

"That you will find out soon enough. Give me the bread, and let me tell you one thing—we are not going to have any more note-carrying and bicycle-renting here."

"Ah!" sneered the baker, "so you are the porter they have been threatening to get! Well, I suppose that we shall have to divide profits."

"That we shall see later," replied Achille, with dignity, "meanwhile you had better hand over that key."

"Oh, as to that . . . "

"As to that, my brother is a baker in Greslin."

"Come now," protested the tradesman as he produced the key, "fair play! What do you say to one-third?"

"One-half and all tips my own," replied the porter with determination

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as he opened the gate, "Good evening."

The garden appeared deserted to Achille as, long loaves under each arm and a large brioche carried carefully in both hands, he advanced with stealthy steps amid the sweet smelling shrubbery, but in the Alley of the Saints he came upon two figures in whispered consultation—the Baroness de Brazos and, to his great relief, the Countess!

"Ah," said the elder lady, scarcely looking at him, "the baker has a new boy. Just tell your master, 'no rolls this evening,'—he will understand," but the Countess clasped her hands and gave a cry of pleasure.

"I am so fond of brioche!" she said in explanation.

For an instant their eyes met.

"Oh, save me!" she said tragically, "save me a great big piece!" Then turning to her companion she remarked

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audibly: "When will these stupid people learn to take the right hand path to the kitchen!"

The convent cook hummed snatches of the Marseillaise as with a fork he prodded fancied foes of freedom boiling in a pot before him.

"Well, my friend," he observed across his shoulder, "you grow later every day, but soon the breakfast bread will come in time for dinner and then we shall be all right again."

"My uncle said that the oven—," began Achille, but at the sound of a strange voice the other turned and regarded him with unconcealed suspicion.

"I don't suppose that you have heard the news," went on the baker's relative laying down the bread—"the stage driver has just brought it."

"What news?" demanded the cook.

"Why, that the Emperor William has abdicated!"

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"Hurrah!" cried the patriot, waving his fork. "There will be a revolution!"

"That's what I say," assented Achille, amiably adding details of the great event with such rapidity that the other poured out a brimming glass of cider to moisten his throat.

"How do you like being chef in a nunnery?" inquired Achille when the enthusiasm had somewhat abated.

"Bah!" cried the other. "It's a mole's life! Were it not that I should hate to see the institution closed I too would abdicate."

"Of course," faltered Achille, "a great deal depends on you."

"Everything," replied the chef impressively. "You see our boarders are our main reliance. What brings them? our piety? There is as good elsewhere. What keeps them? our wall? A small matter to women, my boy. Ah, they

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are cute, these fuzzy heads. They know that nowhere can be found such lapin en casserole, such tripes a la mode de Caen. Goodness!" The cook had opened the shutter of the buttery hutch on a crack, and peered into the adjoining room. "They are all at table and the soup is still in the pot!"

"Can't I do something?" cried Achille, jumping up with alacrity.

"Yes, take in that bread like a good fellow."

"Anything to oblige!"

"It's not the Sisters," went on the cook, reassuringly, "they had gruel at five and are now listening to a discourse from the bishop. Here, before you show yourself put on an apron and that cap; now you look less like a plowboy. Thank heaven, Sister Marie-Joseph is away!"

Achille, assisted by a push of encouragement, burst suddenly into a low

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arched room where a dozen ladies sat demurely about a long table, while from a high seat by the window a pale young nun read aloud the Life of Saint Elizabeth. The Baroness de Brazos occupied the place of honor and on her right the Countess made a little signal with her napkin.

"'Her husband was a coarse and brutal nature, and altogether incapable of appreciating her delicacy of sentiment and feeling,'"—read the Sister, and thereupon several of the ladies exchanged sympathetic glances.

Achille contrived to touch the Countess's hand with the end of a long loaf and returned to the kitchen.

"Give me the soup!" he cried exultantly.

"Good for you!" exclaimed the cook. "I wish I had a butler to help me every day. Careful now, and be sure that each one gets a carrot."

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"What kind of soup is this?" asked the Countess when her turn came.

"We call it "*Garden Gate*," Madame," whispered Achille.

As he helped her to the roast he said:

"The *outside* is the best."

"Are you the new waiter?" she asked innocently.

"No, Madame, but *I shall wait this evening*."

They did not speak again until the coffee appeared and then he asked how many lumps she took.

"*About eight*, I think," she answered absently, then laughing, she said that she had been thinking of something else.

"'And at the touch of the angel,'" read the Sister, "'behold the bread was changed to roses. . .'"

"Is it not a sweet story!" sighed all the ladies.

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"You are a good fellow!" said the chef to Achille for the twentieth time as they dined together. "Come fill your glass. Here's death to all tyrants! Lord! here comes the Mother Superior. Run for your life!"

So saying the apostle of liberty dropped upon all fours and crawled beneath the table, while Achille, not knowing what else to do, caught up a dish cloth and began polishing a copper pan.

"Come at once to the library!" The summons from the doorway was low but firm. "Come at once, do you understand!"

Conscious of guilt, Achille made no remonstrance, and determining to throw himself upon the mercy of the worthy woman at the first opportunity, he followed meekly. As he went he heard the labored breathing of the cook.

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He commenced polishing a pan.

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X

The silence was profound in the refectory where all the ladies stood in respect for the good abbess as she passed, and Achille glanced furtively about, hoping to give the Countess some mute assurance of his discretion; but he could not find her in the group, and began to fear that, ignorant of his fate, she might find herself unprotected beyond the walls.

The Mother moved rapidly, and they now traversed a gloomy corridor which ended in a large apartment dimly lighted by stained glass windows, and filled with book shelves.

"And now," said the Abbess sadly, as they paused in the shadow of a pillar, "what have you to say for yourself?"

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"Nothing, Madame," murmured Achille truthfully, and the lady continued:

"My first impulse was to banish you forever."

Achille was about to reply that such an arrangement would have been mutually satisfactory, but he controlled himself.

"To think!" went on the Mother Superior, clasping her white hands, "that you should have forgotten Friday three times in one month!"

"Ah!" gasped the culprit, seeing light.

"Mutton!" sighed the Mother, "roast mutton!"

"Veal, Madame," pleaded the sinner softly.

"I do not turn you away, because a person of your incompetence would surely starve in the uncharitable world. I shall give you one more chance. The Bishop has graciously consented to ad-

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monish you severely, and I trust that he may get some sense into your stupid head. Wait here!"

As the stout door closed Achille heard the bolt drawn, and realized that he was a captive.

Of course he must meet the Bishop as man to man, but whether one man should be the cook, the baker, Pierre Rabot or himself was a difficult question, for each character in turn seemed the one least likely to meet the prelate's approbation.

His reflections were cut short by the grating of the lock, followed by the appearance of a veiled nun who beckoned in silence.

"Yes, Madame," murmured Achille dejectedly, and once more he entered the corridor, rehearsing as he went: "My Lord, I am a baker." "My Lord, I am a poor artisan." "My Lord, I am—"

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"This way if you please."

Straight through the great front door they passed, and in another moment Achille stood blinking in the light of day, with the free fields spread out before him, but his guide did not allow him to stop till they had turned an angle in the convent wall. Then as she threw back her veil, he heard a familiar laugh, and a welcome voice exclaimed:

"Well, Monsieur Vifour, what do you think of me now?"

"I thought at first," he answered, restraining an impulse toward untimely demonstration, "that you were the directress of the Torture Chamber."

"Oh, I am so glad I frightened you!" she cried with charming frankness. "I walked right past them all; this is the second best habit of Sister Marie-Joseph."

"I am sure that it is very becoming,"

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There's that cheeky porter!

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he remarked, admiringly, "but the other dress was perhaps a trifle—less noticeable."

"Indeed," replied the lady tossing her head, "if you fancy yourself inconspicuous in that white apron and cap, you are very much mistaken."

"I had forgotten!" gasped Achille, "I was planning, if we ever got out, to reach Greslin and there take the landlady of the Golden Cat into our confidence, but now—"

"It would have been perfect, but I am afraid that we must think of something else!" sighed the Countess.

"Good evening, my Sister," croaked the voice of an old woman close at hand. She had come up unobserved, and now stood dropping courtesies that threatened to dislodge the basket balanced on her head.

"Good evening," replied the Countess graciously. "What have you there?"

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"Cêpes, my Sister! I have been gathering them in the wood."

"How do you sell them?"

"Oh, I do not expect to sell them, they are for my rabbits."

"But I want to buy. Will ten francs be enough?"

"Too much, my lady."

"And five more for the basket?"

"Heaven bless you, good Sister!"

"Auguste!" said the Countess loftily, "just pay this good woman."

"What in the world are you going to do with the things?" demanded Achille when the peasant had gone rejoicing on her way.

"Oh, you shall see. Put the basket on your head and follow me, just as you did the Mother."

"But you have no idea how heavy they are."

"So much the better. Keep just five paces behind."

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As they passed along the village street the townsfolk before the doors spoke approvingly of the errand of mercy, and greeted the Sister with many benedictions.

"There is that cheeky porter!" remarked the baker, "I wonder how he likes his situation now."

"I do not think that we shall need the cêpes any more," said the Countess when the last house was far behind—"but wasn't it fun?"

"Jolly!" replied Achille. "I believe there is a permanent dent in my skull. And now, Mademoiselle," he added, deferentially, "I have a plan that I think will solve all our difficulties."

"Excellent!" she exclaimed, "that is just what we want."

He led the way across the fields toward the little river Loup, and then along the path beneath the trees. Sometimes she loitered to put corn

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flowers in her girdle, or poppies in the close drawn convent cap. When in the distance a glimpse of blue slate stood against the blue sky, he said softly—

"There yonder is the Chateau," and she, for no reason, blushed.

Then she told him how her former roommate had been waiting to waylay the baker at the gate, and how the Baroness's noisy joy had forced her to avoid a scene by going in, and he told of the Emperor's abdication, and they discussed the Bishop and the veal, and the surprise awaiting Sister Marie-Joseph—

"Really," she remarked, "we are getting to be as untruthful as Saint Elizabeth."

After an hour, walking slowly, they came to the washing-shed under the willow tree, and there he threw open the door with an exaggerated show of welcome.

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"What place is this?" she asked as she entered laughing.

"This," he answered gaily, "is the original Inn of the Silver Moon. You will find it perfectly appointed! See we have both soap and Javelle water. Will Mademoiselle sit upon the washing box or the linen barrow? Both are delightfully comfortable!"

The Countess knelt down at the water's edge and dipped her handkerchief in the stream and beat it with the wooden paddle after the manner of laundresses, and when she grew tired of the play they looked together from the crack of the door, and he showed her the gables of the house and told her which wing had been built by his father, and which by his grandfather, the colonel of Napoleon. Once when there was a sound of barking in the garden he said—

"Jules is feeding the dogs. Listen

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to the great Brutus! That is Boy grumbling at his biscuit, and asking for meat like the others. Toto, the rascal, is too busy eating to say a word."

As the long June twilight waned they spoke of books they had read, and poetry and music, and of days at school, but of the future not a word. She did not ask why they waited there, and for the time it was enough for him to know that it was his ground beneath her feet, that the linen barrow on which she sat was his linen barrow. Bye and bye there were stars in the water, the frogs croaked from the pool behind the willows, and they heard the noise of Jules locking the gate, and watched the kitchen lights go out to reappear in the windows of the servants' hall; then Achille said—

"You will not be afraid, Mademoiselle, if I leave you for a half an hour?"

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"No," she answered, "I shall not be afraid."

"You do not ask me what I am going to do."

"Because I know that it is something for me."

Achille jingled a bunch of keys in the dark—

"I am going," he said, "to burglarize my own house."

"I do not think," said she, "that that could be used against you at the trial."

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XI

During the evening spent by the master with the Countess in the washing-shed, the butler of the Chateau Vifour, seated in his armchair in the servants' hall, read the *Petit Journal* from feuilleton to medical advertisements, while the cook on the other side of the lamp entertained himself with the columns of a more highly-seasoned publication. At the end of the table Jules played solitaire.

"Where are the others?" asked the butler, looking up suddenly after a long silence.

"The maids are in the housekeeper's room admiring some trumpery that Madame Jane has received from Paris."

"Parbleu! the old lady grows vainer

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every day. It is unfortunate for her purse that she still retains her figure. Where is Paul?"

"He has gone to the saddler's for Boy's collar."

"He has gone to the wine shop to gossip! When the master returns I will report him."

"Ah! when he returns! Two dinners and a breakfast! I never made a better soufflet."

"It was excellent," assented Jules . . . "Behold Madame Jane and the foolish virgins."

As the ladies entered the cook remarked cynically, "Women are fortunate; they are able to forget all trouble in the contemplation of a new gown."

"I have a presentiment that I shall never wear it," sighed Madame Jane, picking up her knitting.

"If you had only ordered it black," sighed the under housemaid, picking up

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the cat. "I suppose that nothing has been heard of Monsieur?"

"Monsieur will not return to-night," said the butler. "Let us not forget to remember Monsieur in our prayers. Jules, put out the pug."

Presently Paul came in and greeted the company with an air of unconcern which was clearly affected. It was evident that he had weighty matters on his mind, and that in his anxiety to communicate them he had been walking rapidly.

"Oh la, la, it is warm!" he panted, sinking into a chair, then continuing, carelessly, "Where is the *Journal*—— Ah, pardon, Monsieur le Maitre d'hotel, I did not observe that you were reading it."

"Did you get the collar?" demanded the butler.

"The collar? Ah, yes, no—it was not finished."

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"Whom did you see in town?" asked Madame Jane.

"One or two, I don't remember. I was there but a moment."

"Come," said the butler, throwing down his paper, "we all know that you have been gossiping. It was not dignified for one of us, but since you have demeaned yourself to do it, you may as well tell us what you have heard."

"If some of us did not have ears, nobody would know anything," remarked the under housemaid.

"Out with it before it chokes you," put in the cook.

"Perhaps," began Paul, unable to contain himself longer, "perhaps it would interest you to know that the master has been seen."

"Where? How? When?" the others cried in chorus.

"Oh, at several places and several

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times. First, at the buvette near the octoir——"

"Never there?!!"

"Yes, there, and in the company of two ladies; very chic; very blonde, and dressed like boys with pretty stockings——"

"Never mind the details," interrupted Madame Jane.

"Monsieur was amusing himself," chuckled the cook, "what then?"

"One of the two punctured her bicycle, and Monsieur took them to the Pig Market on foot, afterwards he returned and repaired the leak himself and rode away."

"Monsieur does not know how to ride a bicycle!" exclaimed the butler.

"He could not repair a lead pencil," said Jules.

"We do not know what he can do," resumed Paul. "There can be no doubt that it was he. He wore the

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white straw hat and gray suit that he had on when I saw him in the garden, the landlord recognized him at once."

"What did he do then?"

"That you may well ask. What did he not do? He went mad! He dressed himself like a peasant, and told people he was a jeweler. He ate an omelet on the top of a ladder, and finally he bought two red pillows and drove off in a circus wagon with one of the blondes. In the end, the Devil came out of the woods with a scythe and carried them both away, and the lad who drove them barely escaped with his life. What do you think of that?"

"I think that you have been drinking," said the butler.

"You do not suppose that he could hear all that without treating once or twice," remarked the cook.

"You are a fool and they have been making fun of you," said the butler.

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"The story seems to me quite probable," the under housemaid whispered.

"Hark!" cried Madame Jane, "I thought I heard a footstep overhead."

"The Saints preserve us! what can it be?" gasped the laundress.

"Silence! it is nothing," said the butler calmly.

"What is that at the front door?"

"It is Brutus scratching to get in."

"He never did that before."

"Never!"

"Holy Saints!"

"I have left my wardrobe unlocked."

"There is the step again!"

"Yes, I heard it then."

"Perhaps it is a rat."

"It is too loud for a rat."

"Paul, open the door!"

"Sacre Bleu! Open it yourself."

"Holy Saints!"

"The cat has stopped purring."

"There it is again!"

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"Jules," said the butler, rising and buttoning his coat, "Jules, come with me. Paul, follow us."

"And leave the women alone? Not I."

"Please do not leave us alone," sobbed the under housemaid.

Arming themselves with such offensive weapons as the kitchen could supply, the butler and Jules took each a candle and went cautiously into the darkness of the house, while Paul stood bravely in the doorway and followed only with his ears.

Stealthily they crept from room to room, pausing often to note the now unmistakable movements of the mysterious invader, and so by slow degrees they mounted to the second story, keeping always at a prudent distance, but following relentlessly upon his track. After a little they became aware that the visitor had discovered the pursuit

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Surrender or die!

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and was retreating, and they advanced more boldly, pressing him closer, till at last they drove him for refuge to the bathroom, where, checked by the clicking of a key, they paused for consultation.

"We have trapped him!" cried Jules exultantly. "Let us leave him there till morning."

"Never," replied the butler who was a man of much stronger character, and tapping on the panel he cried out: "Surrender, or I will shoot."

"You can't shoot with a basting spoon," whispered Jules.

"Surrender or die!" repeated the butler loudly.

At the second summons the door swung slowly open and they beheld the master—Achille Vifour himself, a candle in his hand. His hair was dishevelled, his face was ashen pale, and he was dressed in his pink silk pajamas.

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The pursuers turned and fled without a word. As they re-entered the hall, Jules well in the lead, Paul closed the door and drew the bolt, and the servants looked in each others' faces in awful silence. . .

"Without doubt," said the butler solemnly, "something terrible has happened."

* * * * * *

In the morning it was discovered that the thing that had been seen was not the wraith of Monsieur, but the clever disguise of a burglar who had plundered the house. In the master's room the safe stood open, and the master's closets had been ransacked; his English portmanteau had gone, his hat box and his jewel case. Not content with this rich booty, the villain had entered the housekeeper's room and helped himself to the choicest treasures of Madame Jane's wardrobe; her new gown from

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They entered a fiacre.

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Paris; her hat with parrot feathers, and her russet boots.

From the boat house the punt was missing, and it was surmised that the thief had poled his way by star light along the reedy reaches of the little river Loup, but at the railway station it was learned that only two passengers had taken the midnight express, a lady who was dressed like a Parisienne and a gentleman who looked English, and had a cold that required close attention; only the lady spoke French.

"Doubtless Americans," remarked the mayor.

* * * * * *

In the morning a well-dressed gentleman, carrying an English portmanteau, and accompanied by a lady with a parrot in her hat, passed from the portals of the Gare St. Lazare and entered a fiacre.

"Allez, cocher," said the gentleman.

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"Bien, Monsieur."

"And now Mademoiselle," said the gentleman, "I must ask you a question that until this moment would have been impertinent. Where do you live?"

"At the house of the Marquise de Banville."

"The Marquise de Banville! . . . she is . . . she is . . . ."

"The guardian of Gabrielle de Belle Isle—your affianced bride!"

"Never, Mademoiselle! By my life there can be but one—!"

"Monsieur," said the lady softly, "there need be but one—I am Gabrielle de Belle Isle."

THE END

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