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(#21 in our series by Guy de Maupassant)

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Mademoiselle Fifi

By Guy de Maupassant

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Preface

Guy de Maupassant

Guy de Maupassant was born at the Chateau de Miromesnil, near Dieppe, on August 5th, 1850. The Maupassants were an old Lorraine family who had settled in Normandy in the middle of the Eighteenth Century. His father had married in 1846 a young lady of the rich bourgeoisie, Laure Le Poittevin. With her brother Alfred, she had been the playmate of Gustave Flaubert, the son of a Rouen surgeon, who was destined to have a directing influence on her son's life. She was a woman of no common literary accomplishments, very fond of the Classics, especially Shakespeare. Separated from her husband, she kept her two sons, Guy and his younger brother Herve.

Until he was thirteen years old Guy lived with his mother at Etretat, in the Villa des Verguies, where between the sea and the luxuriant country, he grew very fond of nature and out door sports; he went fishing with the fishermen of the coast and spoke patois with the peasants. He was deeply devoted to his mother. He first entered the Seminary of Yvetot, but managed to have himself expelled on account of a peccadillo of precocious poetry. From his early religious education he conserved a marked hostility to Religion. Then he was sent to the Rouen Lycee, where he proved a good scholar indulging in poetry and taking a prominent part in theatricals. The war of 1870 broke out soon after his graduation from College; he enlisted as a volunteer and fought gallantly. After the war, in 1871, he left Normandy and came to Paris where he spent ten years as a clerk in the Navy Department. During these ten tedious years his only recreation was canoeing on the Seine on Sundays and holidays. Gustave Flaubert took him under his protection and acted as a kind

of literary guardian to him, guiding his debut in journalism and literature. At Flaubert's home he befriended the Russian novelist Tourgueneff and Emilie Zola, as well as many of the protagonists of the realistic school. He wrote considerable verse and short plays. In 1878 he was transferred to the Ministry of Public Instruction and became a contributing editor to several leading newspapers such as *Le Figaro*, *le Gil Blas*, *le Gaulois* and *l'Echo de Paris*. He devoted his spare time to writing novels and short stories. In 1880 he published his first masterpiece, "*Boule de Suif*", which met with an instant and tremendous success. Flaubert characterized it as "a masterpiece that will remain."

The decade from 1880 to 1891 was the most fertile period of Maupassant's life. Made famous by his first short story, he worked methodically and produced two and sometimes four volumes annually. By a privilege of nature and his Norman origin, he combined talent and practical business sense, which brought him affluence and wealth. In 1881 he published his first volume of short stories under the title of "*La Maison Tellier*"; it reached its twelfth edition in two years; in 1883 he finished his first novel "*Une Vie*", twenty-five thousand copies of which were sold in less than a year. Glory and Fortune smiled on him. In his novels, he concentrated all his observations scattered in his short stories. His second novel "*Bel Ami*", which came out in 1885, had thirty-seven editions in four months. His editor, Havard, commissioned him to write new masterpieces and, without the slightest effort, his pen produced new masterpieces of style, description, conception and penetration[*]. With a natural aversion for Society, he loved retirement, solitude and meditation. He traveled extensively in Algeria, Italy, England, Britany, Sicily, Auvergne, and from each voyage he brought back a new volume. He cruised on his private yacht "*Bel Ami*", named after one of his earlier masterpieces. This feverish life did not prevent him from making friends among the literary celebrities of his day: Dumas fils had a paternal affection for him; at Aix-les-Bains he met Taine and fell under the spell of the philosopher-historian. Flaubert continued to act as his literary Godfather. His friendship with the Goucourts was of short duration; his frank and practical nature reacted against the ambiance of gossip, scandal, duplicity and invidious criticism that the two brothers had created around them in the guise of an Eighteenth Century style salon. He hated the human comedy, the social farce.

In his latter years he developed an exaggerated love for solitude, a predilection for self-preservation and still worse, a constant fear of death and mania of persecution, which ran like a black thread through all his writings and brought on gradually the final tragic catastrophe.--He became insane in 1891 and died in 1893 without having recovered his mind.

Life, movement, penetrating[*] observation, and hypersensitiveness, both artistic and physical, are the dominant traits of this literary phenomenon. His rise to fame was as vertiginous as his fall and decay. As a novelist he may have his equals and superiors, but

as a short story-writer, with the exception of Charles Nodier and Alphonse Daudet, he had none.--

The Happy Hour Library

[*][Note from Brett: The original uses "penetration" and "penetrating" but I could not find this word anywhere so assumed it was a typographical error.]

Mademoiselle Fifi

The Prussian Commander, Major Graf von Farsberg, was finishing the reading of his mail, comfortably seated in a large tapestry armchair, with his booted feet resting on the elegant marble of the mantelpiece on which, for the last three months that he had been occupying the Chateau d'Uville, his spurs had traced two deep grooves, growing deeper every day.

A cup of coffee was steaming on an inlaid guerdon, stained with liqueur, burned by cigars, notched by the penknife of the conquering officer who, while sharpening his pencil, would stop at times and trace on the marble monograms or designs according to the fancy of his indolent dream.

After he had finished his letters and read the German newspapers, which his orderly had brought him, he rose, threw into the fire three or four enormous pieces of green wood, for these gentlemen were cutting down, little by little, the trees of the park to keep themselves warm and stepped over to the window. The rain was pouring, a regular Normandy rain which one might have thought was let loose and showered down by a furious hand, a slanting rain, thick like a curtain, forming a kind of wall with oblique stripes, a rain that lashed, splashed, deluged everything, a rain peculiar to the neighborhood of Rouen, that watering pot of France.

The Officer looked for a long while at the inundated lawn, and yonder, the swollen Andilles, which was overflowing; and with his fingers he was drumming on the window-pane a waltz from the Rhineland, when a noise caused him to turn around; it was his second in command, Baron von Kelweingstein, holding a rank equivalent to that of Captain.

The Major was a giant, with broad shoulders, graced by a fan-shaped blond beard, flowing down his chest and forming a breast-shield. His whole tall, solemn person suggested the image of a military peacock, a peacock that would carry its tail spread on its chin.

He had blue eyes, cold and gentle; a cheek bearing the scar of a sword wound inflicted during the Austrian war; and he was said to be a kind hearted man as well as a brave officer.

Short, red faced, corpulent, tightly belted, the Captain wore, cropped almost close, his red hair, the fiery filaments of which, when under the reflection of certain lights, might have given the impression as though his face had been rubbed with phosphorus. Two teeth lost in a night orgy and brawl, he did not exactly remember now, caused him to spit out indistinct words which one could not always understand. He was bald only on the top of his head, like a tonsured monk, with a crop of short, curly hair, golden and shiny, around this circle of bare flesh.

The Commander shook hands, and gulped down his cup of coffee (the sixth since that morning), while listening to the report of his subordinate about the incidents and happening in the service. Then both came back near the window and declared that theirs was not a cheerful lot. The Major, a quiet man, married and having left his wife home, would adapt himself to anything; but the Baron Captain, accustomed to leading a fast life, a patron of low resorts, a wild chaser of disreputable women, was furious at having been confined for the last three months to the obligatory chasteness of this out of the way Post.

Presently they heard a scratching on the door; the Commander said: "Come in," and a man, one of their automaton soldiers, appeared in the aperture, announcing by his mere presence that luncheon was served.

In the dining-room they found three officers of lower rank; one lieutenant, Otto von Grossling, and two second-lieutenants, Fritz Scheuneberg and Markgraf Wilhelm von Eyrik, a tiny blond man, haughty and brutal with his men, harsh toward the vanquished foe, and violent like a fire-arm.

Since his arrival in France his comrade called him only Mademoiselle Fifi. This nickname was bestowed upon him on account of his coquettish style of dressing and manners, his slender waist, which looked as if it were laced in a corset, his pale face on which a nascent mustache could hardly be seen, and also on account of the habit he had acquired, in order to express his supreme contempt for persons and things, of using continually the French locution: "Fi! fi donc!" which he pronounced with a slight lisp.

The dining-room of the Chateau d'Uville was a large and regal hall, the ancient mirrors of which constellated with bullet holes, and the high Flanders tapestries, slashed with sword cuts and hanging in shreds at certain places, told the tale of Mademoiselle Fifi's favorite occupations and pastime during his hours of idleness.

On the walls, three family portraits, a warrior wearing his armor, a Cardinal and a Chief Justice, were smoking long porcelain pipes,

while in its frame, ungilt by age, a noble lady in a tight waist, was showing with an arrogant air an enormous pair of mustache crayoned with charcoal.

And the Officers' luncheon went off almost silently in this mutilated room, darkened by the shower outside, sad and depressing in its vanquished appearance, the old oak parquet floor of which had become solid like the floor of a bar room.

Having finished eating, it was time for smoking; they began to drink and, reverting to their usual topic, they spoke of their monotonous and tedious life. Bottles of cognac and liqueur passed from hand to hand, and seating back on their chairs, they were all absorbing their liqueur in repeated sips, holding at the corner of their mouths the long curved pipes ending in a meerschaum bowl, invariably daubed as if to seduce Hottentots.

As soon as their glasses were empty, they refilled them with a gesture of resigned weariness. But Mademoiselle Fifi broke his glass every instant and then a soldier brought him immediately a new one.

A mist of acrid smoke bathed, drowned them, and they seemed to sink into a somnolent and sad inebriety, in that taciturn and morose intoxication peculiar to men who have nothing to do.

But suddenly the Baron sat up. A revolt shook him; he swore: "By heavens! this cannot go on indefinitely; we must in the end invent something."

Lieutenant Otto and Second-Lieutenant Fritz, two Teutons eminently endowed with heavy and serious German faces, replied together: "What shall we invent, Captain?"

He mused for a few seconds and resumed: "What? Well, we must organize an entertainment, if the Commander will permit."

The Major took his pipe out of his mouth: "What entertainment, Captain?"--

The Baron came nearer: "Leave it to me, Commander; I shall send Pflicht[*] to Rouen, and he will bring us some women I know where to get them. A supper will be prepared here; besides we have everything, and I may venture to say we shall spend a rather pleasant evening."

[*]Duty

Graf Farnsberg, shrugged his shoulders and smiled: "You are crazy, my friend!"

But all the officers had risen, surrounding their chief and beseeching him: "Let the Captain go, Commander; it is so sad here!"

Finally the Major yielded: "All right!" said he; and immediately the Baron sent for Pflicht. Pflicht was an old non-commissioned officer, who had never been seen smiling, but who carried out with fanatical punctuality the orders of his superiors, no matter what they were.

Erect, with his impassive face, he received the Baron's instructions; then he left the room; and five minutes later a large military wagon, covered with miller's tarpaulin stretched in the shape of a dome, was being rapidly driven away under the heavy rain at the gallop of four horses.

At once an awakening thrill seemed to run through the group of officers and shook them from their lethargy; the languid poses straightened up, faces became animated and they began to talk.

Although the shower was continuing as heavy as ever, the Major affirmed that it was not so dark, and Lieutenant Otto announced positively that the weather was clearing up. Even Mademoiselle Fifi seemed unable to keep still. He rose and sat down again. His harsh and clear eye was looking for something to break; suddenly, glaring at the lady with the mustache, the young prig drew his revolver: "You shall not witness it, you!" said he, and, without leaving his seat, he aimed. Two bullets fired in rapid succession put out the eyes of the portrait.

Then he exclaimed: "Let us explode a mine!" And at once the conversation was interrupted, as if a powerful and new curiosity had taken hold of every one present.

A mine, that was his invention, his way of destroying, his favorite amusement.

When he hurriedly left his chateau, Comte Fernand d'Armoy d'Uville, the legitimate owner, had had no time to take with him nor hide away anything except the silver-plate, which he had stowed away in a hole made in a wall. Now as he was immensely wealthy and lived in great luxury, his large salon, the door of which communicated with the dining-room, presented the appearance of a Picture Gallery before the precipitate flight of the master.

Priceless paintings and aquarelles were hanging on the walls, while on the tables, the etageres and the elegant cabinets, thousands of bric a brac and bibelots, statuettes, Dresden and Chinese vases, old ivories and Venice pottery peopled the large room with their precious and odd multitude.

Hardly any were left by this time. Not that they had been stolen; the Major, Graf Farsberg, would not have permitted nor tolerated it; but Mademoiselle Fifi once in a while exploded a mine; and on such occasions all the officers enjoyed themselves thoroughly for five minutes.

The little Markgraf went to the salon to fetch what he needed; he brought in a tiny and graceful Chinese tea-pot of the Rose family, which he filled with gun powder, and through the neck of which he carefully introduced a long piece of tinder, lighted it and, running, carried this infernal machine into the next room.

Then he returned quickly and closed the door behind him. All the Germans stood up and waited, their faces wreathed in childlike smiles of curiosity, and as soon as the explosion shook the Chateau, they hurried in all at once.

Mademoiselle Fifi, who had been the first one to rush in, was deliriously clapping his hands in front of a terra cotta Venus, whose head at last had been blown off; and each picked up broken pieces of China, wondering at the strange indentation of the fragments, examining the new damage done, claiming that some of the damage had been caused by previous explosions. And the Major was contemplating, with a paternal look, the large salon upset by this Neronian firework and strewn with the debris of the objects of Art. He came out first, declaring good-naturedly: "It was very successful this time!"

But such a spout of smoke had invaded the dining-room, mixing with the smoke of tobacco, that it was impossible to breathe. The Commander opened the window, and all the officers, who had come back to drink a last glass of cognac, crowded near it.

The damp air blew into the room bringing in a kind of water dust, which sprayed and powdered the beards, and a smell of inundation. They were looking at the tall trees bending under the shower, the broad valley darkened by this outflow of the black low clouds[*], and in the distance the Church spire rising like a gray point in the pelting rain.

[*][Note from Brett: The original uses "clouds," but I think "clouds" was intended.]

Since the arrival of the Germans, the Church bell had not rung. It was in fact the only resistance with which the invaders met in that neighborhood, the resistance of the bell-tower. The Curate had not refused to receive and feed Prussian soldiers; he had even, on several occasions, accepted to drink a bottle of beer or claret with the enemy Commander, who often used him as a benevolent intermediary. But it was useless to ask him for a single ring of his bell; he would rather have faced a firing squad. That was his way of protesting against invasion, a peaceful protest, the protest of silence, the only one, said he, that became a priest, a man of peace and not of blood. And everybody for ten miles around praised the firmness, the heroism of Father Chantavoine, who dared to affirm the public mourning and proclaim it by the obstinate mutism of his Church.

The entire village, enthusiastic about this resistance, was ready to support and back up its pastor to the bitter end, to risk anything, considering this tacit protest as a safeguard of the national honor. It seemed to the peasants that in this way they deserved better of their country than Belfort or Strasbourg, that they had given just as good an example, that the name of their hamlet would remain immortal for it; and with that single exception, they refused nothing to the victorious Prussians.

The Commander and his officers laughed in private at this manifestation of inoffensive courage, and as the entire neighborhood showed themselves obliging to them and docile to their orders, they willingly tolerated the priest's silent patriotism.

Little Markgraf Wilhelm was the only one who would have liked to compel the bell to ring; he was very indignant at the political condescension of his superior officer towards the priest; and every day he was beseeching the Commander to let him do once, just once, "Ding-dong! Ding-dong!" merely for the sake of having a little fun. And he begged for it with feline gracefulness, the cajolery of a woman, the tenderness of voice of a beloved mistress craving for something, but the Commander did not yield, and to console himself, Mademoiselle Fifi exploded mines in the chateau d'Uville.

The five men remained there, in a group, for a few minutes, inhaling the damp air. Finally Lieutenant Fritz spoke with a thick laugh: "Decidedly, the ladies will not have fine weather for their trip."

Thereupon they separated, each going to his work, the Captain having a great deal to do to make arrangements for the dinner party.

When they met again at nightfall, they began to laugh at seeing each other dolled up coquettishly and smart like on grand review days, perfumed, pomaded and hale. The Commander's hair seemed less gray than in the morning, and the Captain had shaved, keeping only his mustache, which looked like a flame under his nose.

Notwithstanding the rain, the window was kept open and from time to time one of them went over to listen. At ten minutes past six o'clock, the Baron reported a distant rolling. They all hurried downstairs, and soon the large carriage came up with the four horses still galloping, covered with mud up to their backs, steaming and blowing.

And five women got off the carriage and stepped on the perron, five graceful girls carefully selected by a chum of the Captain, to whom Pflicht had taken a card from his officer.

They had not been reluctant to come, knowing that they would be well paid; besides, they were quite well acquainted and familiar with the Prussians, having been in intercourse with them for the past three months and making the best of men as of things. "Our business requires it," they told each other on their way, no doubt

in order to ease off some secret pricking of a remnant of conscience.

And, presently, they were ushered into the dining-room. Lighted up, the dining-room looked still more lugubrious in its pitiful dilapidation, and the table covered with viands, rich china and silver plate, which had been discovered in the wall where the owner had hidden them, gave to the premises the appearance of a low tavern, where bandits are having supper after a successful raffle. The Captain, radiant, took hold of the women as of a familiar thing, appreciating them, embracing them, scenting them, estimating them at their value as instruments of pleasure; and as the three younger men wanted to take one each, he objected to it with authority, reserving to himself the privilege of making the assignments, in perfect fairness, according to rank, so as not to injure in any way the hierarchy.

Then, in order to preclude any discussion, any contest and any suspicion of partiality, he lined them up according to height, and addressing the tallest, in a tone of command: "Your name?"

She replied, raising her voice: "Pamela."

Then he announced: "Number one, by the name of Pamela, is adjudged to the Commander."

Having then kissed Blondine, the second as a mark of his claim to ownership, he offered the fat Amanda to Lieutenant Otto; Eva la Tomato to Second-Lieutenant Fritz, and the smallest of all, Rachel, a very young brunette, with black eyes like ink spots, a Jewess whose pug nose confirmed the rule that ascribes hooked noses to all her race, to the youngest officer, the frail Markgraf Wilhelm von Eyrik.

As a matter of fact they were all pretty and plump, without any distinctive character on their faces, shaped almost alike in appearance and style and complexion by the daily practice of their illicit trade and the life in common in disreputable houses.

The three young men wanted immediately to take their partners out of the room under pretext of offering them brushes and soap for washing and freshening up; but the Captain was wise enough not to allow it, claiming that they were clean enough to sit down to dinner, and for fear that those who went up might want to change their girls when they came down, and thus disturb the other couples. His experience prevailed. There were only plenty of kisses, kisses of expectancy.

Suddenly Rachel suffocated, coughing to tears and rejecting smoke through her nose. The Markgraf, feigning to kiss her, had blown a whiff of tobacco into her mouth. She did not get angry, did not utter a single word, but glared at her possessor with anger aroused way down at the bottom of her black eyes.

They sat down to dinner. The Commander himself seemed to be delighted; he took Pamela on his right and Blondine on his left, and while unfolding his napkin, he declared:--"This was a charming idea of yours, Captain!"

Lieutenants Otto and Fritz, polite and obsequious as if they were sitting near Society ladies, did slightly intimidate their neighbors; but Baron von Kelweingstein, let loose in his vice, was beaming; he cracked unsavory jokes, and with his crown of red hair, seemed to be on fire. He paid gallant compliments in his defective French of the Rhine, and his lewd nonsense, smacking of taverns, expectorated through the hole between his two broken teeth, reached the girls in the middle of a rapid fire of saliva.

The girls did not understand his witticisms, and their intelligence did not seem to be awakened until he sputtered obscene words, rough expressions, crippled by his accent. Then all in a chorus began to laugh as if they were demented, falling on the laps of their neighbors, repeating the words which the Baron disfigured purposely in order to make them say filthy things. They vomited at will plenty of them, intoxicated after drinking from the first bottles of wine; and relapsing into their real selves, opening the gates to their habits, they kissed mustaches on their right and those on their left, pinched arms, uttered furious screams, drank out of all the glasses, sang French couplets and bits of German songs they had learned in their daily intercourse with the enemy.

Soon the men themselves flushed and excited by the female flesh spread under their nose and within reach of their hands, lost all restraint, roaring, breaking the plates, while behind them impassive soldiers were waiting.

The Commander only kept some restraint.

Mademoiselle Fifi had taken Rachel on his knees and deliberately working himself up to a pitch of frenzy, kissed madly the ebony curls on her neck, inhaling through the thin interstice between the gown and her skin, the sweet warmth of her body and the full fragrance of her person; through the silk, he pinched her furiously making her scream, seized with a rabid ferocity and distracted by his craving for destruction. Often also holding her in his arms, squeezing her as if he wanted to mix her with himself, he pressed long kisses on the fresh lips of the Jewess and embraced her until he lost breath; but suddenly he bit her so deep that a dash of blood flowed down the chin of the young girl and ran into her waist.

Once more she looked at him, straight in the face, and washing the wound, she muttered: "You will have to pay for it!" He began to laugh, with a harsh laugh: "All right, I shall pay!" said he.

At dessert, champagne was served. The Commander rose and with the same tone as he would have taken to drink the health of the Empress Augusta, he said:

"To our ladies!" And a series of toasts were then drunk, toasts with the gallantry and manner of drunkards and troopers, mixed with obscene jokes, rendered still more brutal by their ignorance of the language.

They were rising one after the other, trying to be witty, making efforts to be funny; and the women, so intoxicated that they were hardly able to sit up, with their vacant look, their heavy, clammy tongues, applauded vociferously each time.

The Captain, no doubt intending to lend the orgy an atmosphere of gallantry, raised once more his glass and pronounced: "To our victories over the hearts!"

Then Lieutenant Otto, a kind of bear from the Black Forest, jumped up, inflamed, saturated with drinks, and suddenly, carried away by alcoholic patriotism, he cried: "To our victories over France!"

Intoxicated as they were, the women kept silent and Rachel, shuddering with rage, retorted: "Well! I know some Frenchmen in whose presence you would not dare say such things."

But the little Markgraf, still holding her on his knees, began to laugh, having become exceedingly exhilarated by the wine: "Ah! Ah! Ah! I never met any myself. As soon as they see us, they run away."

The girl exasperated, shouted in his face: "You lie, you dirty pig!"

For a second he fixed on her his clear eyes, as he used to fix them on the paintings the canvas of which he riddled with revolver shots; then he laughed: "Oh yes! let us speak of it, you beauty! Would we be here if they were brave?"--and he became more and more excited: "We are their masters; France belongs to us!"

She sprang off his knees and fell back on her chair. He rose, held out his glass over the table and repeated: "France, the French, their fields, their woods and their houses belong to us!"

The others, who were thoroughly intoxicated, suddenly shaken by military enthusiasm, the enthusiasm of brutes, seized their glasses and shouted vociferously: "Long live Prussia!" and emptied them at a draught.

The girls did not protest, reduced to silence and frightened. Even Rachel kept silent, unable to reply.

Then the little Markgraf placed on the head of the Jewess his glass of Champaign, refilled, and said--"The women of France belong to us!"

She jumped up so quickly that the glass was upset and spilled the yellow wine in her black hair, as for a baptism; it fell broken to pieces on the floor. Her lips quivering, she looked defiantly at the officer; the latter kept laughing; she stammered in a voice choked with rage: "That, that is not true! you shall never have the women of France!"

He sat down to laugh at his ease and tried to imitate the Parisian accent: "That is a good one! that is a good one! And what are you doing here, you little one?"

Confused, at first, she did not answer, as she did not, in her excitement, understand fully what he said; then, as soon as the meaning of it dawned on her mind, she shouted at him indignantly and vehemently: "I, I, I am not a woman! I am a prostitute! and that is all a Prussian deserves!"

Hardly had she finished, that he slapped her face violently; but, as he was raising his hand again, maddened with rage she caught on the table a small silver-bladed dessert knife, and so quickly that nobody noticed it, she stabbed him right in the neck, just at the hollow where the breast begins.

A word, that he was about to mutter, was cut short in his throat, and he remained stiff, with his mouth open and a frightful look.

All shouted and got up tumultuously; but having thrown her chair in the legs of Lieutenant Otto, who collapsed and fell down at full length, she ran to the window, opened it before they could catch her, and jumped out in the night, under the rain that was still falling.

In two minutes Mademoiselle Fifi was dead. Then Fritz and Otto drew their swords and wanted to massacre the women, who threw themselves to their knees; the Major, not without difficulty, prevented the butchery and had the four bewildered girls locked up in a room and guarded by two soldiers; and then, as if he were disposing his men for battle, he organized the search for the fugitive[*], quite certain that he would catch her.

[*][Note from Brett: The original uses "fugutive," but, again, I think this is a typographical error as there is no such word.]

Fifty men, whipped by threats, were launched on her trail in the park; two hundred others searched the woods and all the houses of the Valley.

The table, cleared in an instant, was turned into a mortuary bed, and the four officers, straight, rigid and sobered up, with the harsh faces of warriors on duty stood near the windows, searching and scanning the night.

The torrential rain was continuing. An incessant rippling filled

the darkness, a floating murmur of water that falls and water that runs, water that drops and water that gushes forth.

Suddenly a rifle shot was heard; then another far away; and thus for four hours one heard from time to time, near or distant reports of firing and rallying cries, strange words shouted like a call by guttural voices.

At daybreak everybody returned. Two soldiers had been killed and three others wounded by their comrades in the eagerness of the chase and the confusion of the nocturnal pursuit.

They had not been able to find Rachel.

Then the inhabitants were terrorized, the houses searched most carefully, the whole region combed, beaten, scoured. The Jewess did not seem to have left any trace of her passage.

The General, who had been notified, ordered to hush the matter up so as not to give a bad example in the Army, and he disciplined the Commander who, in turn, punished his subordinates. The General had said: "We do not go to war to indulge in orgies and caress prostitutes." And exasperated Graf Falsberg resolved to take revenge on the country.

As he needed a pretext to take drastic measures without constraint, he summoned the Priest and ordered him to ring the Church bell at the burial of Markgraf von Eyrik.

Contrary to general expectation, the priest showed himself docile, humble, full of attention. And when the body of Mademoiselle Fifi, carried by soldiers, preceded, surrounded and followed by soldiers, who marched with loaded rifles, left the Chateau d'Urville, on the way to the cemetery, for the first time the bell sounded the knell in a gay tone, as if a friendly hand had been fondling it.

It rang also in the evening, and the next day and every day; it chimed as much as they wanted. Sometimes also, in the dead of night, it would ring all alone and throw two or three notes in the darkness, seized by a singular mirth, awakened one knew not why. All the peasants in the neighborhood then thought that the bell had been bewitched; and no one except the Priest and the Sexton came near the bell-tower.

A poor girl was living up there, in fear and solitude, secretly fed by those two men.

She remained there until the German troops departed. Then, one evening, the Priest having borrowed the baker's cart, drove himself and the prisoner as far as the Gate of Rouen. When they reached the Gate, the Priest kissed her; she got off the cart and quickly went back to the disreputable house, the keeper of which had thought that she was dead.

She was taken out of the house of prostitution shortly afterwards by a patriot without prejudice, who loved her for her brave act, and then, having loved her for herself, married her and made of her a lady as good as many others.

Boule de Suif

For several days in succession the remnants of a routed army had been passing through the City. They were not troops, but disorganized hordes. The men had long, dirty beards and tattered uniforms; they walked with a listless gait, without flag nor formation. All seemed exhausted, worn out, incapable of thought or resolve, marching only by force of habit and dropping with fatigue as soon as they stopped. One saw for the most part hastily mobilized men, peaceful business men and rentiers, bending under the weight of their rifles; young snappy volunteers, easily scared, but full of enthusiasm, ready to attack as well as to retreat; then, among them, a few red trousers, fragments of a division decimated in a great battle; despondent artillery men aligned with these non-descript infantrymen; and there and there the shining helmet of a heavy footed dragon who had difficulty in keeping step with the quicker pace of the soldiers of the line.

Legions of francs-tireurs with heroic names: "Avengers of Defeat"--"Citizens of the Tombs"--"Brothers in Death"--passed in their turn looking like bandits.

Their leaders, former drapers or grain merchants, tallow or soap dealers, warriors for the circumstance, who had been commissioned officers on account of their money or the length of their mustaches; covered with arms, flannel and stripes, they were talking in a high-sounding voice, discussing plans of campaign, and claiming that they alone supported on their shoulders agonizing France; as a matter of fact, these braggarts were afraid of their own men, scoundrels often brave to excess, but always ready for pillage and debauch.

It was rumored that the Prussians were going to enter Rouen.

The National Guard who, for the past two months, had been very carefully reconnoitering in the neighboring woods, at times shooting their own sentries and getting ready to fight when a little rabbit rustled in the bushes, had been mustered out and returned to their homes. Their arms, uniforms, all their deadly apparel, with which they had recently frightened the milestones along the national

highways for three leagues around, had suddenly disappeared.

The last of the French soldiers had just crossed the Seine to go to Pont-Andemer by Saint Sever and Bourg-Achard; and following them all, their general, desperate, unable to attempt anything with such non-descript wrecks, himself dismayed in the crushing debacle of a people accustomed to conquer and now disastrously defeated despite their legendary bravery, was walking between two orderlies.

Then a profound calm, a trembling and silent expectancy hovered over the City. Many corpulent well to do citizens, emasculated by the business life they had led, were anxiously waiting for the victors, fearing lest they might consider as weapons their roasting spits or their large kitchen knives.

Life seemed to be at a standstill; the shops were closed and the streets silent and deserted. Sometimes a citizen, intimidated by this silence, ran rapidly along the walls.

The anguish of suspense made the citizens desire the arrival of the enemy.

In the afternoon of the day that followed the departure of the French troops, a few Uhlans, coming from no one knew where, crossed the City in a hurry. Then, a little later, a black mass came down the Ste. Catherine Hill, while two other invading waves appeared on the Darnetal and Boisguillame roads. The vanguards of the three corps made their junction at precisely the same time in the Hotel de Ville Square; and, by all the neighboring roads, the German Army was arriving, rolling its battalions that made the pavements ring under their heavy and well measured steps.

Orders shouted in an unknown and guttural voice, rose along the houses which seemed dead and deserted, while behind the closed shutters, eyes watched these victorious men, masters of the City, of property and life by the right of war. The inhabitants, in their darkened rooms, felt the bewilderment caused by cataclysms, the great bloody upheavals of the earth against which all human wisdom and force are of no avail. For the same feeling reappears whenever the established order of things is upset, when security ceases to exist, when all that is protected by the laws of men or those of protected nature, is at the mercy of unreasoning and ferocious brutality. The earthquake crushing a whole nation under crumbling houses; the overflowing river swirling the bodies of drowned peasants along with the dead oxen and the beams torn away from the roofs, or the glorious army massacring those who defend themselves, taking away the others as prisoners, pillaging in the name of the sword and offering thanks to God to the thunder of the guns, are as many appalling scourges which disconcert any belief in eternal justice, all the trust we were taught to place in the protection of heaven and the reason of man.

Small detachments knocked at each door and then disappeared in the

houses. It was occupation after invasion. Now the vanquished had to show themselves nice to their conquerors.

After a while, once the first terror had abated, a new tranquility settled down. In many houses the Prussian Officer took his meals with the family. Some were well bred, and out of politeness, showed sympathy for France and spoke of their reluctance to participate in the war. People were grateful for such sentiments; furthermore, they might have needed their protection any day. By being nice to them they would possibly have fewer men billeted to their houses. And why hurt the feelings of a man who had full power over them? To act in that way would be less bravery than temerity--and temerity is no longer a failing of the citizens of Rouen, as in the days of heroic defense when their City became famous. Last of all--supreme argument derived from French urbanity--they said that they could allow themselves to be polite in their own houses, provided they did not exhibit in public too much familiarity with the foreign soldier. On the streets they passed each other as strangers, but at home they willingly chatted, and every night the German stayed up later and later, warming himself at the family fire-place.

Even the City was gradually resuming some of its ordinary aspect. The French were seldom seen promenading in the Streets, but Prussian soldiers swarmed. Besides, the officers of the Blue Hussars, who arrogantly rattled their big instruments of death on the pavements, did not seem to have for the plain citizens enormously more contempt than the officers of the French Chasseurs who, the year before, had been drinking in the same Cafes.

There was, however, something in the air, something subtle and unknown, an intolerable foreign atmosphere like an offensive odor--the smell of invasion. It pervaded the houses and the public places, changed the taste of food and made you feel as if you were traveling in far distant lands, amid barbarians and dangerous tribes.

The conquerors exacted money, a great deal of money. The citizens kept on paying; they could afford to pay, they were rich. But the more a Norman businessman becomes opulent, the more he suffers when he has to make any sacrifice, or sees any parcel of his property pass into the hands of others.

And yet, within a distance of two or three leagues from the City, down the river, in the direction of Croisset, Dieppendalle or Biessart, boatmen and fishermen often hauled from the bottom of the water the body of some German swollen in his uniform, killed with a knife or by a blow of savate, his head crushed by a stone, or pushed from a bridge into the water. The mud of the river-bed buried such obscure, savage and yet legitimate vengeance, unknown acts of heroism, silent attacks more perilous than battles in the open, and yet without any of the halo and glamour of glory.

For hatred of the foreigner always arms some intrepid persons ready

to die for an idea.

As the invaders, although subjecting the City to their inflexible discipline, had committed none of the horrors which rumor credited them with having perpetrated all along their triumphal march, people became bolder, and desire to do business belabored again the hearts of the local merchants. Some of them had large interest in Havre, which was occupied by the French Army, and they tried to reach that sea port in going by land to Dieppe and proceeding from there by boat.

They used the influence of the German Officers, with whom they had become acquainted, and a special permit was secured from the General in Chief. Now then, a large four-horse coach having been engaged for this trip, and ten persons having had their names booked with the driver, it was decided to leave on a Tuesday morning, before daybreak, to avoid attracting any crowd.

For some time past the frost had hardened the ground, and on that particular Monday, at about three o'clock, big black clouds coming from the North brought the snow which fell without interruption all that evening and during the whole night.

At half past four in the morning, the travelers met in the courtyard of the Hotel de Normandie, where they were to take the coach.

They were still half asleep, and shivered with cold under their wraps. They could not see each other well in the darkness, and bundled in their heavy winter clothing, their bodies looked like fat priests in their long cassocks. Two men recognized each other; a third joined them; they talked:--"I am taking my wife with me--" said one;--"So am I"--"And I too"--The first speaker continued, "We shall not come back to Rouen, and if the Prussians should threaten Havre, we shall cross over to England"--They all had the same plans, being of similar disposition.

However, the horses were not yet harnessed. A small lantern, carried by a stable boy, came now and then out of a dark doorway, and immediately disappeared in another. Horses were stamping the ground, but their hooves being covered with dung and straw, the noise of the stamping was deadened; a man's voice talking to the animals and swearing at them was heard from the rear of the building. A faint tickle grew soon into a clear and continuous jingling, rhythmical with the movements of the horses, now stopping, now resuming in a sudden peal accompanied by the deadened noise of an iron-shod hoof, pawing the ground.

The door closed suddenly. All the noise ceased. The frozen passengers stopped talking: they stood motionless and stiff.

An uninterrupted curtain of white, glistening flakes ceaselessly fell on the ground; it obliterated the forms of things and powdered them with an icy foam; and in the great silence of the quiet City,

buried under the winter, one could hear nothing save that vague, nameless rustle of the falling snow--a sensation rather than a sound--an intermingling of light atoms which seemed to fill the space and cover the whole world.

The man reappeared with his lantern, leading by a rope a sad-looking horse who followed him reluctantly. He placed him against the shaft, fastened the straps, turned around for a long time to make sure that the harness was properly fixed, for he could use only one hand, the other holding the lantern. As he was going to bring the second animal, he noticed that all the travelers were standing still, already white with snow, and he told them:--"Why don't you get in the coach? there you would be under shelter at least."

No doubt this had not occurred to them; at once there was a rush to get in. The three men installed their wives in the rear of the coach and then got in themselves; one after the other, the remaining indistinct and snow covered forms took the last seats without exchanging a single word.

The floor was covered with straw into which the feet sank. The ladies in the rear, having brought with them small copper foot-warmers, heated by means of a chemical coal, lighted these apparatuses, and for some time, in a low voice, they enumerated their advantages, repeating to each other things which they had not known for a long time.

At last six horses instead of four having been harnessed to the coach, on account of the difficult roads and heavier draft, a voice from the outside asked: "Is everybody in?"--To which a voice replied from the inside:--"Yes"--And the coach started.

The coach proceeded slowly, slowly, at a snail's pace. The wheels sank into the snow; the entire body of the carriage groaned with creaks; the animals were slipping, puffing, steaming, and the driver's gigantic whip was cracking continuously, flying in every direction, coiling up and unrolling itself like a thin snake, and suddenly lashing some rounded back, which then stretched out under a more violent effort.

Imperceptibly the day was breaking. Those light flakes that a traveler, a pure blood native of Rouen, had compared to a rain of cotton, had stopped falling. A murky light filtered through the big, dark and heavy clouds, which rendered more dazzling the whiteness of the country where one could see now a line of tall trees spangled with hoar frost, now a cottage with a snow hood.

Inside the coach, the travelers eyed each other inquisitively in the melancholy light of the dawn.

Way in the rear, on the best seats, facing each other, Mr. and Mrs. Loiseau, wholesale wine dealers of the Rue Grand-Pont, were slumbering.

Former clerk to a merchant who had been ruined in business, Loiseau had bought his employer's stock and made a fortune. He was selling very cheap very bad wine to small liquor dealers in the country, and was considered by his friends and acquaintances as a sharp crook, a real Norman full of wiles and joviality. His reputation as a crook was so well established that one evening at the Prefecture, Mr. Tournel, a writer of fables and songs, a biting and fine wit, a local literary glory, having proposed to the ladies' whom he saw rather drowsy, to play a game of "L'oiseau vole," (the bird steals--flies) the joke flew through the salons of the Prefect and from there, reaching those of the town, made all the jaws of the Province laugh for a whole month.

In addition to this unsavory reputation, Loiseau was famous for his various practical jokes, his good or bad tricks; and nobody could mention his name without adding immediately:--"Loiseau is merciless; he spares nobody!"--

Undersized, he had a balloon shaped stomach surmounted by a florid face between a pair of grayish whiskers.

His wife, tall, stout determined, with a loud voice, a woman of quick decision, represented order and arithmetic in the business house which her husband enlivened by his mirthful activity.

Beside them sat, more dignified and belonging to a superior class, Mr. Carre-Lamadon, a man of considerable standing, a leader in the cotton business, proprietor of three spinning mills, officer of the Legion of Honor and member of the General Council. During the Empire he had been the leader of the friendly opposition, solely for the purpose of commanding a higher price for his support when he rallied to the cause which he was fighting daily with courteous weapons, according to his own expression. Mrs. Carre-Lamadon, considerably younger than her husband, remained the consolation of Officers belonging to good families who had been quartered in Rouen.

She was sitting opposite her husband, pretty, slender, graceful, curled in her furs, and gazed mournfully at the lamentable interior of the coach.

Her neighbors, Count and Countess Hubert de Breville, bore one of the most ancient and noble names of Normandy. the Count, an old nobleman of aristocratic bearing, endeavored to accentuate by the artifices of his toilette his natural resemblance to King Henry IV, who, according to a legend, in which the family gloried, had caused the maternity of a de Breville lady whose husband, on account of his royal connection, had been made a Count and Governor of a Province.

A Colleague of Carre-Lamadon in the General Council, Count Hubert represented the Orleanist party in his Department. The story of his marriage with the daughter of a small ship-owner of Nantes had

always remained mysterious. But as the Countess had a grand air, entertained better than any other hostess, and was credited with having been the Dulcinea of one of Louis Philippe's sons, the whole nobility showed her the greatest consideration, and her salon remained the most exclusive in the locality, the only one where old gallantry was conserved and admission to which was not easy.

The wealth of the de Brevilles, all invested in real estate, was estimated to yield an annual income of five hundred thousand francs.

These six persons occupied the rear of the coach, the side of wealthy, serene and solid Society, authoritative, honest people who have religion and principles.

By a strange hazard, all the women were seated on the same side; and the Countess further had for neighbors two saintly nuns who fingered long rosaries and mumbled Paters and Aves. One of them was old and had a face so deeply pitted with smallpox, that she looked as if she had been shot full in the face by a rapid-firing gun. The other, very frail, had a pretty and sickly head on a narrow consumptive chest eaten up by that devouring faith which makes martyrs and visionaries. Seated opposite the nuns, a man and a woman attracted the eyes of all the other passengers.

The man, a well known character, was Cornudet the democrat, the terror of respectable people. Since twenty years he had been dipping his large red beard in the bocks of all the democratic Cafes. He had spent, with the help of his brethren and friends, a good sized fortune inherited from his father, a retired Confectioner, and he was impatiently waiting for the advent of the Republic to secure a political position deserved by so many revolutionary libations. On the fourth of September, possibly as a result of a practical joke, he had thought that he had been appointed Prefect, but when he wanted to take up his duties, the clerk, who had remained in charge of the office, refused to recognize him, which compelled him to retire. A very good natured chap, and moreover inoffensive and serviable, he had worked with an incomparable energy to organize the defense of the City. He had had trenches dug in the plains, all the young trees in the neighboring forests cut down, traps set on all the roads, and at the approach of the enemy, satisfied with his preparations, he had hurriedly returned to town. He thought now that he would be more useful in Havre where new trenches were going to be needed.

The woman, one of those called gallant, was famous for her precocious embonpoint which had earned her the nickname of "Boule de Suif" (ball of tallow). Short and rotund all over, fat enough to supply lard, with puffed fingers constricted at the joints and looking like strings of small sausages, a shiny and tight skin, an enormous bust which protruded from under her gown, she was yet attractive and much coveted, her fresh appearance being pleasant to look at. Her face was like a red apple, a peony bud, ready to bloom forth; and in the upper part of her face, two magnificent black eyes,

shaded by large thick lashes which cast a shadow into them; in the lower part, a charming mouth, narrow, moist, ripe for kisses, and furnished with white and microscopic teeth.

Moreover she was said to be full of invaluable qualities.

As soon as she was recognized, whispers circulated among the respectable women and the words: "hussy", "public scandal" were spoken so loud that she raised her head. Then she turned on her neighbors such a challenging and haughty look, that a great silence fell on the company and they all lowered their eyes except Loiseau, who kept on watching her with an exhilarated air.

But soon the conversation was resumed between the three ladies, whom the presence of this girl had suddenly made friends, almost intimates. It seemed to them that they should form a sort of "fasces" of their conjugal dignities in the presence of this shameless mercenary; for legalized love always looks down on its free brother.

The three men, also drawn closer by an instinct of conservation at the sight of Cornudet, spoke of money matters with an expression of contempt for the poor. Count Hubert related the damage done to his property by the Prussians, the losses that would result from their stealing of a tenfold millionaire grand Seigneur whom such reverses would hardly incommode for one year. Mr. Carre-Lamadon, who had suffered serious losses in his cotton business, had taken the precaution of sending six hundred thousand francs to England, a provision for rainy days which would enable him to meet emergencies. As to Loiseau, he had found a way of selling to the French Quartermaster's Office all the low grade wines he had in stock, so that the Government owed him a tremendous sum, which he expected to cash in time at Havre.

And all three cast at each other quick and friendly glances. Although belonging to different social sets, they felt united in the brotherhood of money, the great freemasonry of those who possess, who jingle gold when they put their hands in the pockets of their trousers.

The coach was making such slow headway that at ten o'clock A. M. they had traveled only four leagues. The men got off three times and walked up the hills. They began to feel uneasy, because they expected to have luncheon in Totes and now there was hardly any possibility of getting there before night. Each was watching to find an inn on the road, when the coach foundered in a snow-drift, and it took two hours to extricate it.

Appetites grew and spirits fell; no road-house, no wine dealer could be discovered, the approach of the Prussians and the passage of the starving French troops having frightened away all the trades-people.

The men went to the farmhouses by the roadside to look for food but they did not even find bread, for the suspicious peasants had

hidden away their reserve of provisions for fear of being pillaged by the soldiers who, having nothing to eat, were taking forcibly what they discovered.

Toward one o'clock in the afternoon Loiseau announced that positively he felt a big hollow in his stomach. All of them had been suffering like him for a long time, and the violent craving for food, growing steadily had killed off the conversations.

From time to time one of them yawned, another imitated him instantly; and each, in turn, according to his character, manners and social position, opened his mouth noisily or modestly holding his hand before the gaping hole from which breath steamed out.

Boule de Suif stooped several times as if looking for something under her petticoats. She hesitated a second, looked at her neighbors and the straightened herself up quietly. Faces were pale and drawn. Loiseau said that he would pay one thousand francs for a knuckle of ham. His wife made a gesture as if to protest, then she became calm. She always suffered when she heard of money being squandered, and did not even understand jokes on that subject. "As a matter of fact, I don't feel well, said the Count; why did I not think of taking provisions with me?"--Every one was reproaching himself with the same omission.

Cornudet, however, had a pocket bottle of rum; he offered some to his companions; they refused coldly. Loiseau alone accepted a few drops, and when he returned the bottle, he thanked: "It is good, all the same! it warms you up and it cheats the appetite."--The drink put him in good humor and he proposed that they should do as on the small boat in the song: "eat the fattest of the passengers." This indirect allusion to Boule de Suif shocked the well-bred passengers. There was no response. Cornudet alone smiled. The two good Sisters had ceased to mumble their rosary, and with their hands thrust down in their wide sleeves, they held themselves motionless, obstinately lowering their eyes and doubtless offering up as a sacrifice to God the suffering He had sent them.

At last, at three o'clock, as they were still in the middle of an interminable plain, without any village in sight, Boule de Suif bent down quickly and from under her seat pulled out a large basket covered with a white napkin.

She drew out first a small earthen plate, a fine silver drinking cup, then a large pot in which two whole chickens, carved in pieces, had stewed in their own gravy; and one could further see in the basket other good things wrapped up, pastry, fruit, delicacies, provisions prepared for a three days' trip, so that the traveler would not have to touch the food in the inns. The neck of four bottles emerged from among the food packages. She took the wing of a chicken and, began to eat it delicately with one of those small rolls which in Normandy are called "Regence."

All the eyes were attracted in her direction. Then the appetizing smell filled the coach, making the nostrils dilate and mouths water, while the jaws under the ears contracted painfully. The contempt of the ladies for this girl was becoming ferocious, developing into a desire to kill her or throw her, with her drinking cup, her basket and her provisions, out of the coach on the snow.

All the while, Loiseau had been devouring with his eyes the pot of chicken. He said:--"Well, well, the lady has been more provident than all of us! There are persons who always manage to think of everything."--She raised her head towards him:--"Would you like some, Sir?" "It is hard to fast since morning--" And looking around him he added:--"In moments like this, one is glad to find obliging people."

He had a newspaper which he unfolded on his knees in order not to soil his trousers, and with the point of a knife, which he always carried in his pocket, he picked a leg thoroughly varnished with jelly, bit it off and chewed it with such evident relish, that there arose in the coach a heavy sigh of distress.

Boule de Suif, with a humble and gentle voice, proposed to the good Sisters to share her luncheon. They both accepted instantly and, without raising their eyes, began to eat very fast, after having muttered a few words of thanks. Neither did Cornudet decline the offer of his neighbor, and with the nuns, they improvised a sort of table by unfolding newspapers on their knees.

Mouths were opening and closing constantly, swallowing, chewing, gulping ferociously. Loiseau in his corner was very busy eating, and in a low voice was urging his wife to imitate him. She resisted for a long time, but, after a cramp, which ran through her stomach, she yielded. Then her husband, rounding his sentences, asked their "charming companion" whether she would allow him to offer a small piece to Madame Loiseau. She replied:--"Why, certainly, Sir!"--with an amiable smile, and held out the terrine. An embarrassment occurred when the first bottle of claret was opened: there was only one drinking cup. They passed it around after wiping it each time. Cornudet alone, no doubt in a spirit of gallantry, put his lips on the spot which was still moist from the lips of his neighbor.

Then, surrounded by people who were eating, suffocated by the emanations of the food, Count and Countess de Breville, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Carre-Lamadon, were suffering from that torture which has perpetuated the name of Tantalus. All at once the manufacturer's young wife heaved a sigh which caused every one to turn and look at her; she was as white as the snow outside; her eyes closed, her head fell forward, and she fainted. Her husband, alarmed, was imploring everybody's help. All lost their heads, but the oldest of the two Nuns holding in her arm the head of the unconscious lady, slipped between her lips the drinking cup of Boule de Suif and made her swallow a few drops of wine. The pretty lady moved, opened her eyes, smiled and declared in a dying voice that she felt

better. However, to prevent a recurrence of the fainting, the Nun obliged her to drink a full cup of claret, and she added:--"It is just hunger, and nothing else."

Then Boule de Suif, blushing and embarrassed, stammered, looking at the four passengers who had not yet broken their fast:--"Mon Dieu!, if I ventured to offer these ladies and gentlemen?" She stopped short, thinking she had hurt their feelings. Loiseau began to speak: "Well, by Jove! in cases like this, we are all brothers and sisters and must help each other. Come, ladies, no ceremony! accept what is offered; what the devil! do we even know whether we are going to find a house to shelter us during the night? At the rate at which we are traveling, we shall not be in Totes before to-morrow noon." They hesitated, none daring to assume the responsibility of saying "Yes."

But the Count settled the question. He turned to the intimidated fat girl and assuming his grand aristocratic tone, he said to her:--"We accept gratefully, Madame."

The first step only costs. Once the Rubicon crossed, they ate heartily. The basket was emptied. It still contained one pate de foie gras, one pate de mauvette, a piece of smoked ham, Crassane pears, a Pont-l'Eveque cheese, assorted petits-fours, and a cup full of pickled gherkins and onions, Boule de Suif, like all women, having a predilection for raw things.

One could not partake of the girl's provisions without speaking to her. Now then, they talked, first with some restraint, then, as she behaved very well, with more freedom. Mesdames de Breville and Carre-Lamadon, who had great "savoir-faire," made themselves tactfully gracious. Specially the Countess showed that amiable condescension of great ladies whom no contact can sully, and she was charming. On the other hand, fat Madame Loiseau, who had the soul of a gendarme, remained distant, sullen, saying little but eating much.

Naturally they talked about the war. They told the horrible things done by the Prussians, the deeds of bravery of the French; and all these people, who were fleeing, paid homage to the courage of others. Personal experiences soon followed, and Boule de Suif, related with unaffected emotion, with that warmth of language often characteristic of girls of her class in expressing their natural feelings, how she had left Rouen:--"First I thought that I could stay," she said; "I had my house full of provisions, and I preferred to feed a few soldiers then expatriate myself and go God knows where. But when I saw them, the Prussians, it was too much for me, I could not stand it. They made my blood boil with rage; and I wept all day for very shame. Then some were billeted to my house; I flew at the throat of the first one who entered. And I would have fixed that one, if they had not pulled me away by the hair. After that, I had to hide. Finally I found an opportunity to go, I left, and here I am!"

She was warmly congratulated. She was rising in the esteem of her traveling companions, who had not shown themselves as fearless. And in listening to her, Cornudet had the approving and benevolent smile of an apostle, in the same way as a priest hears a devout person praise God, for long-bearded democrats have the monopoly of patriotism just as the men in cassocks have the monopoly of religion. He spoke, in his turn, with a dogmatic tone, with the declamatory emphasis learned from proclamations daily posted on the walls, and he wound up with a piece of eloquence in which he condemned masterfully that "scoundrel of Napoleon III."

But Boule de Suif became angry immediately because she was a partisan of the Bonapartes. She turned as red as a cherry and stuttering with indignation:--"I should have like to see you in his place, you and your friends! It would have been nice, oh yes! It is you who betrayed the poor man! If we were ruled by rascals like you, there would remain nothing else to do for us but leave France."--Impassive, Cornudet kept a superior and contemptuous smile, but one could feel that big words were impending, when the Count interposed and, not without some difficulty, calmed the exasperated girl by proclaiming authoritatively that all sincere opinions should be respected. However, the Countess and the wife of the Cotton manufacturer, who bore in their hearts the unreasoning hatred of all decent people for the Republic, and that predilection which all women have for the pomp of despotic Governments, felt irresistibly attracted toward this dignified prostitute whose opinions were very much like theirs.

The basket was empty. The ten of them had easily consumed its contents, regretting that it was not larger. The conversation continued for some time, though it flagged since they had finished eating.

The night was falling; darkness gradually grew deeper and deeper, and the cold, felt more during digestion, made Boule De Suif shiver notwithstanding her corpulence. Then Madame de Breville offered her her foot-warmer, the coal of which had been renewed several times since the morning, and she accepted it willingly, for she felt her feet frozen. Mesdames Carre-Lamadon and Loiseau gave theirs to the Nuns.

The driver had lighted his lanterns. They threw a bright gleam on the cloud of vapor rising from the perspiring backs of the rear horses, and on both sides of the road the snow seemed to unroll under the mobile light of the lamps.

Nothing could be distinguished in the coach; suddenly there was a movement between Boule de Suif and Cornudet; and Loiseau, whose eyes scanned the darkness, through that he saw the long-bearded man jump up, as if he had received a noiseless but well aimed blow.

Tiny lights appeared ahead on the road. It was Totes. They had traveled eleven hours which, added to the hours of rest given in

four times to the horses for feeding and breathing, made fourteen hours. They entered the town and the coach stopped in front of the Hotel du Commerce.

The door of the coach opened. A well known noise startled all the passengers; it was the clanging of a scabbard on the pavement. Then the voice of a German called out something.

Although the coach was at a standstill, nobody got off, as if they were expecting to be massacred the moment they left the coach. Then the driver appeared, holding in his hand one of his lanterns which suddenly lighted the interior of the coach and shined two rows of frightened faces, whose mouths were agape and eyes wide open in surprise and terror.

Beside the driver, in full light, stood a German Officer, a tall young man, exceedingly thin and blond, laced in his uniform as tightly as a girl in her corset, and wearing tilted to one side his flat and waxed cap, which gave him the appearance of a porter in an English Hotel. His exaggerated mustache, long and straight, tapering indefinitely on both sides and ending in a single blond hair, so thin that the point could not be seen, seemed to weigh on the corners of his mouth and pulling down his cheeks, impressed on the lips a drooping fold.

In Alsatian French, he invited the travelers to alight, saying in a stiff tone:--"Will you please get off, ladies and gentlemen?"--

The two good Sisters obeyed first with the docility of holy women accustomed to submission. The Count and Countess appeared next, followed by the manufacturer and his wife, then Loiseau pushing in front of him his larger and better half.

Loiseau, as he got off, told the officer: "Good day, Sir!" prompted by a feeling of prudence much more than politeness. The Officer, insolent like all men holding absolute authority, stared at him and did not reply.

Boule de Suif and Cornudet, although near the door of the coach, were the last to alight, serious and dignified in the presence of the enemy. The corpulent girl was trying to control herself and be calm; the democrat, with a tragic and rather shaky hand, was tormenting his reddish beard. They wanted to maintain their dignity, being fully conscious of the fact that at such meetings each represents a little his country; and both equally revolted by the supineness of their companions, she tried to show herself more proud than her neighbors, the honest women, while he, realizing that he owed an example, continued in his whole attitude his mission of resistance, first assumed when he mined and destroyed the highways.

They entered the spacious kitchen of the inn, and the German, having called for and inspected the permit to leave Rouen signed by the General in Chief, in which were mentioned the names, description

and profession of each traveler, examined them for a long while, comparing the persons with the written particulars.

He said abruptly: "All right!", and he disappeared.

Then they breathed freely. They were still hungry; supper was ordered. It required half an hour to prepare it; and while two servants were apparently engaged in getting it ready, the travelers went upstairs to have a look at their rooms. They were all in a long hall ending in a glazed door marked with a speaking number.

They were going to sit down to supper when the proprietor of the inn appeared. He was a former horse dealer, a stout, asthmatic man, always wheezing, coughing and clearing his throat. His father had transmitted him the name of Follenvie.

He inquired:

"Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset?"--Boule de Suif started; she turned around:

--"That is my name!"--

--"Mademoiselle, the Prussian Officer wants to speak to you immediately."

--"To me?"

--"Yes, if you are Mlle. Elizabeth Rousset?"

She became uneasy, reflected a moment, then declared squarely:--"That may be, but I shall not go."

There was a movement around her; each discussed and speculated as to the cause of this order. The Count came near her:

--"You are wrong, Madame, because your refusal might bring considerable trouble not only to you but also to all your traveling companions. We should never resist those who are the strongest. Assuredly your compliance with this order cannot involve any danger; no doubt you are wanted for some forgotten formality"--

All joined the Count in urging her, pressing her, lecturing her and finally they convinced her; for all of them dreaded complications which might result from insubordination on her part. At last she said:

--"I am doing this for your sake, don't forget it."

The Countess took her hand:

--"And we thank you for it."--

She went out. All waited for her return before they sat down at the table.

Each was sorry that he had not been called instead of that violent and irascible girl, and prepared mentally the platitudes he would utter in case he should be called in his turn.

But at the end of ten minutes, she came back, out of breath, red to suffocation, exasperated. She was stammering:--"Oh! la Canaille! la Canaille!"[*]

[*][Note from Brett: This translates, roughly, into "Oh! the rogue! the rogue!"]

All rushed up to her to find out what had happened, but she did not say anything, and as the Count was insisting, she replied with a great deal of dignity:--"No, it does not concern you; I cannot speak..."

Then they took their seats around a high soup tureen from which issued a smell of cabbage. In spite of this untoward incident, the supper was cheerful. The cider was good; the Loiseau couple and the Sisters drank of it by economy. the others ordered wine. Cornudet called for a bottle of beer. He had a peculiar way of uncorking the bottle, making the beer foam, examining it as he inclined his glass, which he then raised between the lamp and his eyes in order to appreciate better its color. While drinking, his long beard, that had kept the color of his favorite beverage, seemed to shake with joy; his eyes squinted in his effort not to lose sight of his glass, and he looked as if he were performing the only function for which he had been created. One would have thought that in his mind he established a relationship and a kind of affinity between the two great passions that occupied all his life: Pale Ale and Revolution; and certainly he could not taste the former without dreaming of the latter.

Mr. and Mrs. Follenvie were dining at the other end of the table, the man, rattling like a broken down locomotive, was too short winded to talk while eating; but the woman never kept silent. She told all her impressions on the arrival of the Prussians, what they did, what they said, execrating them first because they cost them money, and then because she had two sons in the Army. She spoke especially to the Countess, flattered at the opportunity of talking with a lady of quality.

Then she lowered her voice to broach delicate subjects, and her husband interrupted her now and then:--"You better hold your tongue, Madame Follenvie!"--But she did not pay any attention to his admonitions, and continued,

--"Yes, Madame, these people do nothing but eat potatoes and pork, and again pork and potatoes. And you must not think that they are clean. Oh, No, indeed not!--They soil and dirty everything, permit

me the expression. And if you saw them drill for hours and days! they are all there, in a field, and march forward and march backward, and turn this way and turn that way. If at least they cultivated the land, or worked on the roads, in their country!--But no, Madame, these soldiers are good for nothing; what a pity that the poor people should toil and feed them and they should learn nothing but how to massacre!--I am only an uneducated old woman, it is true, but in seeing them wear themselves out by marching from morning till night, I say to myself:--"When there are so many people who make so many discoveries to serve the people, why should others take so much trouble to be harmful? Truly, is it not abominable to kill people, whether they are Prussians, or English, or Polish or French?--If you take revenge on somebody, who has wronged you, that is bad enough, because you are condemned to jail, but when our boys are exterminated like game, with guns, it must be all right, because decorations are given to the man who kills the most--No, indeed, I shall never be able to understand it."

Cornudet raised his voice:

--"War is barbarous when you attack a peaceful neighbor; it is a sacred duty when waged in defense of one's country."

The old woman lowered her head.

--"Yes in self-defense, it is another matter, but shouldn't we rather kill off all the Kings who go to war for their own pleasure?"

--Cornudet's eyes flashed:

--"Bravo, citoyenne[*]!" said he.

[*][Note from Brett: This translates, roughly, into "citizen"]

Mr. Carre-Lamadon was in deep meditation. Although a fanatical admirer of illustrious generals, the common sense of that peasant woman made him think of the opulence that would bring to a country so many hands now idle and necessarily ruinous, so many forces kept unproductive, if they were employed for the great industrial enterprises which, at the present pace, it would take centuries to complete.

But Loiseau, leaving his seat, went and spoke in a very low voice to the inn-keeper. The fat man was laughing, coughing, and expectorating. His enormous stomach shook with merriment at the jokes of his neighbor, and he bought from him six casks of claret to be delivered in the Spring, after the departure of the Prussians.

Hardly were they through with supper, they retired, as they were all tired out.

Loiseau, however, who had kept an eye on what was going on, send his wife to bed; then he pressed now his ear, now his eye to the

keyhole in order to try and discover what he called "the mysteries of the hall."--

After about an hour, he heard a rustle, peeped out quickly and saw Boule de Suif, who looked still more corpulent in a blue cashmere dressing gown trimmed with white lace. She held a candle in her hand and made straight for the room at the other end of the hall bearing a conspicuous number. But a side-door opened, and when, after a few minutes, she came back, Cornudet, in his shirt-sleeves and suspenders, was following her. Boule de Suif seemed to deny him energetically admission to her room. Unfortunately Loiseau could not hear what they said, but in the end, as they raised their voices, he was able to catch a few words. Cornudet was insisting eagerly:

--"Come, now, you are silly! what does it matter to you?"--

She seemed indignant and replied:

--"No, my friend, there are times when we cannot do such things, and why, here, it would be a shame!"

Apparently, he failed to understand and asked why.--Then she became excited and speaking louder, she said:

--"Why? Don't you understand why? When Prussians are in the house, maybe in the next room?" He had a newspaper which he unfolded on his knees. A hussy who denied herself to the solicitations of a man while they were near the enemy, must have aroused in his heart his failing dignity, for, after having kissed her, he went back stealthily to his room.

Loiseau, quite excited, left the keyhole, and quickly jumped into the conjugal bed to seek solace near the hard carcass of his espoused.

Then the whole house became silent. But soon there arose from somewhere, from some indeterminate direction, which might have been the cellar as well as the attic, a powerful monotonous snore, a deep and prolonged noise, like the throbbing of a boiler under pressure--Mr. Follenvie was sleeping.

As it had been decided that they would start at eight o'clock the next morning, at that hour everybody was in the kitchen; but the coach, the hood of which formed a roof of snow, stood solitary in the middle of the yard, without horses and without driver. In vain a search was made for the latter in the stable, barns, and coach-house. Then all the men decided to scour the country, and they set out. They found themselves in the Square, with the Church at the farther end, and on both sides low houses in which Prussian soldiers could be seen. The first one they saw was peeling potatoes; further on, the second was washing the barber's shop. Another, bearded up to his eyes, was kissing a crying child and lulling him on his knees to quiet it; fat peasant women, whose

husbands were "in the fighting army," were showing by the language of signs to their obedient conquerors the work they had to do: chop wood, prepare soup, grind coffee; one of them was even washing for his hostess, an impotent grandmother.

The Count, surprised, questioned the beadle who was coming out of the presbytery. The old Church rat replied:--"Oh, those here are not bad; they are not Prussians, according to what I hear. They come from farther off, I don't know exactly where; and they have all left wives and children at home; they are not so fond of war, I assure you; I am positive that over there they are mourning for their men; and war will cause them much distress, as it does us. Here at least we are not so badly off for the present, because the soldiers don't harm us and they work as if they were in their own houses. You see, Sir, we poor people, must help each other. It is the wealthy ones who make war."

Cornudet, indignant at the cordial understanding established between the conquerors and the conquered, went away, preferring to shut himself up in the inn. Loiseau cracked a joke: "They are re-peopling the country." Mr. Carre-Lamadon, more serious, interjected:--"They are repairing." But they could not find the driver. Finally they discovered him in the village Cafe, fraternizing and drinking with the orderly of the Prussian Officer. The Count interpolated:

--"Didn't you have orders to have the coach ready for eight o'clock?"

--"Oh yes, but I have received other orders since."

--"What orders?"

--"Not to harness the horses at all."

--"Who gave you that order?"

--"Upon my faith, the Prussian Commander."

--"Why?"

--"I don't know. Go and ask him. I am forbidden to harness the horses and I don't; that is all there is to it."

--"Did he tell you so himself?"

--"No. Sir, it is the inn-keeper that gave me the order for him."

--"When did he give it?"

--"Last night, just as I was going to bed!"

The three men became quite alarmed.

They called for Monsieur Follenvie, but the servant told them that

on account of his asthma, that gentleman never got up before ten o'clock. He had even left formal orders not to wake him up earlier, except in case of fire.

They wanted to see the officer, but it was absolutely impossible, although he lodged in the inn. Mr. Follenvie only was authorized to speak to him about civil matters. Then they waited. The women went up to their rooms and got busy with their trifles.

Cornudet sat down and made himself comfortable in front of the high fireplace of the kitchen, in which a big fire was blazing. He had one of the small tables of the Cafe brought there, ordered a jug of beer, and drew out his pipe which, among the democrats, enjoyed a consideration almost equal to his own, as if it had served the country in serving Cornudet. It was a superb meerschaum pipe, admirably blackened, as black as its master's teeth, but fragrant, nicely curved, shining, familiar to his hand, and completing his physiognomy. And he remained still, his eyes fixed now on the flame of the fire, now on the foam crowning his jug; and every time, after he had drunk, he passed, with an air of satisfaction, his thin, long fingers in his flowing greasy hair, while he sucked his mustache fringed with foam.

Loiseau, under pretence of stretching his legs, went out to sell wine to the dealers of the village. The Count and the manufacturer began to talk politics. They were forecasting France's future. The one kept faith in the Orleans dynasty, the other expected an unknown savior, a hero who would rise up when everything was desperate: a Duguesclin, a Jeanne d'Arc perhaps? or another Napoleon the Great?--"Ah! if the Imperial Prince had not been so young!"--Cornudet listening to their conversation, was smiling as a man who holds the keys to destiny.--His pipe perfumed the whole kitchen.

As it was striking ten o'clock, Mr. Follenvie appeared. He was immediately questioned, but he only repeated two or three times, without any variation, the following words:--"The Officer told me so!"--"Monsieur Follenvie, you will forbid the driver to harness up the coach of these travelers to-morrow morning. I don't want them to go without my order. You understand? That is enough!"

Then they wanted to see the Officer. The Count sent in his card on which Mr. Carre-Lamadon added his own name and all his titles. The Prussian sent word that the two men would be admitted to speak to him after he had had his luncheon, that is to say about one o'clock.

The ladies came down, and they all had a bite, in spite of their anxiety. Boule de Suif seemed to be sick and prodigiously worried.

They were finishing their coffee, when the orderly came to call the gentlemen. Loiseau joined the first two, but as they tried to induce Cornudet to go with them in order to add more solemnity to their application, he declared proudly that he expected not to have

any intercourse with the Germans; and he resumed his seat near the fire-place, ordering another jug of beer.

The three men went up and were ushered into the finest room of the inn, in which the Officer received them, stretched on an armchair, his feet resting on the mantelpiece, and smoking a long porcelain pipe, wrapped in a flamboyant dressing-robe, no doubt stolen from the abandoned residence of some bourgeois lacking in taste. He did not get up, neither did he greet them nor look at them. He was a magnificent specimen of the insolence natural to victorious soldiers.

After a few seconds, he said in his defective French:

--"What do you want?"

The Count spoke:--"We wish to continue our journey, Sir."

--"No!"

--"May I inquire what is the reason for this refusal?"

--"Because I don't want."

--"I would respectfully call your attention to the fact, Sir, that your General in chief has delivered us a permit to go to Dieppe, and I don't think we did anything to deserve your rigors."

--"I don't want to let you go, that is all; you may retire!"

Having bowed, all three retired.

They spent a wretched afternoon. They could not in any way account for this German's caprice, and the most singular ideas worried their heads. Everybody stayed in the kitchen and there was endless discussion imagining the most unlikely things. Perhaps they wanted to hold them as hostages--but for what object?--or take them away as prisoners? or, rather, demand from them a large ransom? at this thought they became panic-stricken. The wealthiest were the most alarmed, seeing themselves already compelled, in order to redeem their lives, to pour bags of gold into the hands of this insolent soldier. They racked their brains to find plausible and acceptable lies, conceal their wealth, pass themselves off as very poor, very poor. Loiseau took off his watch and chain and hid it in his pocket. The approaching night filled them with apprehension.--The lamp was lighted, and as they still had fully two hours before dinner, Madame Loiseau proposed a game of "trente-et-un." That would be a diversion. They accepted. Even Cornudet, having put out his pipe, joined the party out of politeness.

The Count shuffled the cards and dealt; Boule de Suif had a full thirty-one; and soon the interest in the game quieted the fears that were haunting the minds. But Cornudet noticed that the Loiseau couple had arranged to cheat.

As they were going to sit down to dinner, Mr. Follenvie reappeared, and with his grating voice announced: "The Prussian Officer sends me to ask Mlle. Elizabeth Rousset whether she has changed her mind?"

Boule de Suif stood still, pale as death. Then turning suddenly crimson, she felt so suffocated by anger that she could not speak. Finally she gasped out: "You will please tell that scoundrel, that rascal, that carrion of a Prussian, that I shall never consent; you understand, never, never, never!"

The fat inn-keeper went away. Then Boule de Suif was surrounded, questioned, solicited by everybody to reveal the mystery of her visit. First she resisted, but soon exasperation got the best of her.--"What he wants?...what he wants?.... He wants me to keep company with him," she exclaimed. Nobody was shocked by this revelation, so great was their indignation. Cornudet broke his jug as he banged it down on the table. There was a general clamor of reprobation against the ignoble soldier, a waive of anger, a combination of all for resistance as if each one of the party had been called upon to make the sacrifice demanded of Boule de Suif. The Count declared just like the barbarians in ancient times. The women specially showed Boule de Suif an affectionate and energetic commiseration. The good sisters who showed up only at meal time, had bowed their heads and said nothing.

They dined however as soon as the first furor had abated, but they spoke little.

The ladies retired early; and the men, while smoking, organized a game of ecarte and invited Mr. Follenvie to join them, because they wanted to question him skillfully as to the means to be used to overcome the Officer's resistance. but he had his mind concentrated on the cards; he did not hear anything, did not answer anything, and kept on repeating: "Attend to the game, Gentlemen! attend to the game!"--His attention was so tense that he even forgot to expectorate, which produced at times a wheezing in his chest like the sounds of an organ. His whistling lungs gave out every note of the asthmatic scale from the deep and hollow tones up to the shrill crowing of young roosters trying to sing.

He even refused to go up when his wife, overcome with sleep, came to get him. Then she went away all alone, because she was an early riser, getting up with the sun, whereas her husband kept late hours, always ready to spend the night with friends. He called to her:--"Put my eggnog near the fire!"--and continued the game. When the travelers saw that they could not get anything out of him, they announced that it was time to retire, and they all went to bed.

They rose quite early again the next morning with a vague hope, a greater desire to be able to proceed on their journey, and a dread of having to spend another day in this wretched little inn. Alas!

the horses remained in the stable, the driver was invisible. Having nothing better to do, they went and wandered around the coach.

Luncheon was very gloomy, and there had developed a general coolness toward Boule de Suif, for night, which brings counsel, had somewhat modified their judgment. They almost bore a grudge against the girl for not having surreptitiously gone to the Prussian Officer to afford a pleasant surprise to her companions when they awoke. Nothing more simple! Beside, who would have suspected it? She might have saved appearances by having the Officer say that he had taken pity on their distress. To her it would have been of little consequence.

But nobody as yet gave expression to such thoughts.

In the afternoon, as they were bored to death, the Count proposed to take a walk around the village. Each one wrapped himself up carefully and the small company set off, with the exception of Cornudet, who preferred to remain by the fire, and the good Nuns who spent their days in Church or at the Parish house.

The cold, growing daily more and more intense, bit mercilessly the nose and ears of the strollers; their feet pained them so much that each step was a torture; and when the country opened up before them, it looked so frightfully dismal under the boundless sheet of white, that they all retraced their steps hastily, with souls frozen and hearts heavy.

The four women walked in front and the three men followed them a little behind.

Loiseau, who understood the situation very clearly, inquired suddenly whether that "wench" was going to keep them much longer in such a place. The Count, always courteous, realized that they could not expect such a painful sacrifice from a woman, and that the offer should originate from her. Monsieur Carre-Lamadon remarked that if the French undertook, as it was rumored, a counter-offensive by way of Dieppe, the battle would certainly be fought in Totes. This remark made the other two quite anxious--"How about trying to escape on foot?" suggested Loiseau. The Count shrugged his shoulders--"That is out of the question in this snow, and with our wives! And furthermore we would be pursued immediately, caught in ten minutes and brought back as prisoners, at the mercy of the soldiers"--That was true. There was silence again.

The ladies talked toilette, but a certain constraint seemed to separate them.

Suddenly the Officer appeared at the end of the street. On the snow that bound the horizon, his tall and wasp-like uniformed figure outlined itself; he walked, knees apart, with that motion particular to soldiers who are anxious not to soil their carefully polished boots.

He bowed as he passed the ladies, and looked scornfully at the men who, it must be said to their credit, had enough dignity not to raise their hats, although Loiseau made a move to take off his headgear.

Boule de Suif blushed red to her ears, and the three married women felt greatly humiliated to have been met by the Officer while they were in the company of this girl whom he had treated so unceremoniously.

Then they spoke of him, of his figure and his face. Madame Carre-Lamadon, who had known many officers and who judged them as a connoisseur, found that this one was not so bad looking after all; she even regretted that he was not French, because he would have made a very handsome husband with whom all the women would have fallen in love.

Once back in the inn, they did not know what to do with themselves. Even acrid words were exchanged about insignificant matters. The silent dinner did not last long and each went upstairs to bed, in the hope of sleeping the time away.

The next morning they came down with tired faces and exasperated tempers. The women hardly spoke to Boule de Suif.

A Church bell began to ring; it was for a baptism. Boule de Suif had a child being brought up by peasants in Yvetot. She did not see it even once a year and never gave it a thought; but the idea of the one that was going to be baptized developed a sudden and violent tenderness for her own and she insisted absolutely on going to the ceremony.

As soon as she was gone, those who remained looked at each other, and drew their chairs closer, for they felt that in the end they had to take some decision.--Loiseau had an inspiration: he suggested that they should propose to the officer to keep Boule de Suif only and let the others go.

Mr. Follenvie undertook again to convey the message, but he came down almost immediately. The German, who knew human nature, had kicked him out of his room. He meant to keep everybody as long as his wishes had not been complied with.

Then the vulgar temper of Madame Loiseau broke loose:--"And yet we are not going to die of old age here! Since it is that vixen's trade to carry it on with all men, I think that she has no right to refuse one rather than another. Imagine, she has taken all that she found in Rouen, even coachmen, yes, Madame, the coachman of the Prefecture; I know it for a fact, because he buys his wine of us. And now that it is a question of getting us out of trouble, she is putting on virtuous airs, the drab! I find that the Officer behaves very well. Possibly he may have abstained for a long time, and here we are three of us whom he certainly would have preferred.

But no, he is satisfied with the girl who is public property. He respects married women. Think of it, he is the master here. All that he had to do was to say: 'I want' and he might have taken us by force, with the aid of his soldiers."

The two other women shuddered slightly. The eyes of pretty Madame Carre-Lamadon sparkled, and she grew a little pale as if she felt herself already taken by force by the officer.

The men who were arguing among themselves, came near them. Loiseau, excited, wanted to deliver up that "miserable woman," bound hand and foot, to the enemy. But the Count, descended from three generations of Ambassadors, and endowed with the physique of a diplomat, was advocating more tactfulness and persuasion--"We should persuade her"--said he.

Then they conspired.

The women drew close to each other; the tone of their voices was lowered, and the discussion became general, each giving her opinion. It was most correct, besides. The ladies specially found delicate euphemisms, charming subtleties of expression to say the most shocking things. A stranger would have understood nothing, so well were the precautions of language observed. But as the thin veneer of pudor[*], with which every Society woman is provided, covers only the surface, they showed their real selves in this wretched adventure, and were as a matter of fact enjoying themselves immensely, feeling themselves in their element, handling love with the sensuousness of a gourmand cook who prepares supper for somebody else.

[*][Note from Brett: I think this is an excellent, though unintentional, pun. "Pudor" is Spanish for "shame," but this meaning makes the sentence difficult to read (at best), although it does convey the intent. I think that the word intended is "powder," but left the original in case I am wrong]

Their gaiety came back of itself, so amusing after all did the whole incident seem to them. The Count found rather risky witticisms, but so cleverly told that they provoked smiles. In his turn Loiseau fired some broader jokes, which did not shock the listeners; and the thought brutally expressed by his wife preponderated in every one's mind: "Since it is her business, why should the girl refuse this man rather than another?"--The pretty Mme. Carre-Lamadon seemed even inclined to think that in her place she would refuse this one less than any other.

The blockade was carefully prepared, as if they were besieging a fortress. Each agreed to play the part assigned to him or her, the arguments to be used, the maneuvers to be executed. They decided on the plan of attack, the stratagems and the surprise assault to be attempted in order to compel this living citadel to receive the enemy.

Cornudet, however, remained apart, completely unwilling to participate in this plot.

The minds were so tensely absorbed in this scheme that nobody heard Boule de Suif coming in. But the Count whispered a gentle: "Hush!" which caused all eyes to look up. There she stood. There was a sudden silence and a certain embarrassment prevented them first from speaking to her. The Countess having more than the others the habit of drawing-room duplicities, questioned her:--"Was the baptism interesting?--"

The girl, still laboring under her emotion, told everything, described the faces, the attitudes, and even the appearance of the Church. She added:--"It does one so much good to pray sometimes!--"

However, until lunch time the ladies confined themselves to being nice to her with a view to make her feel more confident and amenable to their advances.

As soon as they sat down to luncheon, the preliminary attack was initiated. It was at first a vague discussion about self-sacrifice. They quoted instances from ancient History, such as Judith and Holophern, then, without any reason Lucretia with Sextus, Cleopatra who admitted to her intimacy all the enemy generals and reduced them to slavish servility. Then a fancy History was propounded, originating in the imagination of those ignorant millionaires, and according to which Roman matrons used to go to Capua and lull Hannibal in their arms, and with him, his lieutenants and the phalanxes of his mercenaries. They quoted all the women who had stopped conquerors, converted their bodies into battlefields, a means of conquest, a weapon, who by their heroic caresses had vanquished frightful and execrated beings, and had sacrificed their chastity to vengeance and patriotic devotion.

They even spoke, in veiled terms, of that English lady of noble family, who had allowed herself to be inoculated with a horrid and contagious disease, which she wanted to communicate to Bonaparte, and how the latter had been miraculously saved by a sudden faintness during the fatal appointment.

And all this was told without overstepping the bounds of propriety and moderation, with her and there a studied manifestation of enthusiasm intended to provoke emulation.

In the end one would have been led to believe that the only mission of woman on this earth was a perpetual sacrifice of her person, a continual offering of herself to the caprices of enemy soldiers.

The two nuns did not seem to hear this conversation, lost as they were in their own deep thoughts. Boule de Suif was silent.

The whole afternoon she was left to herself. But instead of

calling her "Madame" as they had done so far, they addressed her as mademoiselle, nobody knew why, as if they wanted to lower her one step in their esteem, which she had escalated, and make her feel her shameful situation.

While soup was being served, Mr. Follenvie reappeared and repeated his sentence of the day before:--"The Prussian Officer sends me to inquire whether Mademoiselle Elizabeth Rousset has not yet changed her mind?"

Boule de Suif replied curtly: "No, Sir."

But at dinner the coalition weakened. Loiseau spoke three unfortunate sentences. Each was racking his brains to find new examples and did not find any, when the Countess, possibly without premeditation, prompted by a vague desire to render homage to religion, questioned the elder of the two nuns about the most noteworthy deeds in the lives of the Saints.--Now, many Saints had committed acts which would be crimes in our estimation; but the Church absolves readily such transgressions when they are committed for the glory of God and the love of our neighbors. This was a powerful argument; the Countess made the most of it. Then, either by one of those tacit understandings, those veiled complaisances in which whoever wears the clerical garb excels, or through fortunate stupidity, serviable foolishness, the old nun brought a formidable support to the conspiracy. They thought she was timid; she showed herself bold, talkative, violent. This one was not trouble by the hesitations of casuistry; her doctrine seemed to be an iron bar; her faith never hesitated; her conscience had no scruples. She found quite natural Abraham's sacrifice, because she would immediately have killed her father and mother if she had received an order from heaven to do so; and in her opinion nothing could displease God if the motive were laudable. The Countess taking advantage of the sacred authority of her unexpected accomplice, led her on to make a kind of edifying paraphrase of this axiom of morality: "The end justifies the means."

She questioned her:

--"Then, Sister, you think that God accepts all methods and forgives the act when the motive is pure?"

--"Who could doubt it, Madame? An action condemnable in itself often becomes meritorious by the thought which inspires it."

And they continued in this way, unraveling God's intentions, forecasting his judgments, and making Him take interest in things that really did not concern Him at all.

All this was expounded in a veiled, clever, discreet and insinuating manner. But each word of the holy woman in cornet made a breach in the indignant resistance of the courtesan. Then the conversation drifting somewhat, the woman with the hanging rosary spoke of the

Convents of her Order, of her Superior, of herself, and of her lovely neighbor, the dear Sister Saint-Nicephore. They had been called to Havre to nurse in the Hospitals hundreds of soldiers stricken with small-pox. She described them, those wretched victims, and gave details about their disease. And while they had been stopped on their way by the caprices of this Prussian Officer, a large number of Frenchmen, whom they would probably have saved, might die. It was her specialty to nurse soldiers; she had been in Crimea, in Italy, in Austria, and telling the story of her campaigns, she unexpectedly revealed herself one of those Nuns fond of drums and bugles, who seem to have been created to follow the armies in action, to pick soldiers during the vicissitudes of battles, and, better than a General, to tame with one word the rough and insubordinate troopers; a genuine martial and bellicose Nun, whose wrinkled and pitted face, looked like an image of the devastations of war.

No one uttered a word after she had concluded, so excellent seemed to be the effect of her discourse.

As soon as the meal was over, they went up quickly to their rooms and came down the next morning rather late.

Luncheon went off quietly. They were giving the seed that had been sown time to germinate and come to fruition.

The Countess proposed to take a walk in the afternoon; then the Count, as previously agreed, offered his arm to Boule de Suif and walked with her at some distance behind.

He spoke to her in that familiar, paternal and slightly contemptuous tone which sedate men assume when talking with women of loose morals, calling her: "my dear child," treating her from the height of his social position, his unquestionable honesty. He went straight to the core of the matter:

--"So you prefer to leave us here exposed like yourself to all the violence which would result from a defeat of the Prussian Army, rather than consent to one of those complaisances which you have had so often in your life"--

Boule de Suif did not answer.

He tried kindness, reasoning, sentiment. He managed to remain "Monsieur le Comte" even while showing himself gallant, when necessary, flattering, amiable. He praised to exaltation the services she would render them, spoke of their gratitude, then suddenly, using the familiar "thou," gaily: "And thou knowest, my dear, he might be proud of having tasted the charms of a pretty girl such as he won't find often in his own country."

Boule de Suif did not reply and joined the rest of the party.

As soon as they returned to the inn, she went up to her room and was not seen again. There was extreme anxiety. What was she going to do? If she resisted, what an embarrassment for them all?

The dinner hour struck; they waited for her in vain. Then Mr. Follenvie came in and announced that Mademoiselle Rousset did not feel well and that they might sit down to dinner. They all pricked their ears. The Count came near the inn-keeper and whispered: "Is it all right?"--"Yes."

For the sake of propriety, he did not say anything to his companions, but nodded to them slightly. Immediately a great sigh of relief went up from all breasts; joy brightened every face. Loiseau exclaimed: "By Jove, I'll treat to champagne if any is left in this house!"--And Madame Loiseau felt a pang when the inn-keeper returned with four bottles in his hand. Every one had suddenly become communicative and merry; a lively joy filled the hearts. The Count seemed to notice that Madame Carre-Lamadon was charming; the manufacturer paid compliments to the Countess; the conversation was lively, gay and full of witticisms.

Suddenly Loiseau, with an alarmed face, raised his arms and shouted: "Silence!" They all stopped talking, were surprised nay even frightened. Then he listened, said "Hush!" signaling with his two hands, raised his eyes to the ceiling, listened again and, in his natural voice, he resumed: "Don't be afraid, everything is all right!"

They hesitated to understand what he meant, but soon a smile lighted up all the faces.

After a quarter of an hour, he started again the same farce and repeated it often during the evening; he mimicked as if he were calling a person on the second floor and giving her equivocal advices drawn from his imagination of a commercial traveler. At times he assumed a dismal air and sighed:--"Poor girl!"--or he muttered in his teeth, with a peevish air:--"Rascal of a Prussian!"--Several times, when the others did not think of it, he called out repeatedly in a vibrating voice: "Enough! Enough!" and he added as if soliloquizing:--"Provided that we see her again and that the wretch does not kill her!"

Although such jokes were in very bad taste, they amused more than they shocked the company, for indignation like everything else depends on environment, and the atmosphere that had gradually developed around them was laden with naughty thoughts.

At dessert, even the women indulged in witty and discreet allusions. Their eyes were bright and gleaming; they had drunk considerably. The Count who, even in his moments of relaxation, preserved a dignified appearance, found a comparison with the end of winter in the polar regions and the joy of the ship-wrecked mariners when they see a way open to the South; and this comparison was greatly

appreciated.

Loiseau, warmed up, rose to his feet with a glass of champagne in his hands:--"I drink to our deliverance!"--Everybody stood up; he was acclaimed. Even the two good sisters, urged by the ladies, consented to moisten their lips with the sparkling wine, which they had never tasted. They declared that it tasted like sparkling lemonade, but that it was finer.

Loiseau summed up the situation:

--"What a pity that there is no piano! We might have danced a quadrille!"--

Cornudet had not said a single word, nor made a single gesture; he even seemed to be plunged in very serious thoughts, and from time to time tugged furiously at his long beard as if he wanted to make it longer. Finally, toward midnight, as they were going to separate, Loiseau, who was unsteady on his feet slapped him suddenly on the stomach and spluttered:--"You are not in a gay mood to-night, you don't talk much, citizen?"--But Cornudet raised briskly his head and casting a swift and terrible look at the company, fairly shouted:--"I tell you all, that you have behaved infamously!"--He got up, walked to the door and repeated once more: "Infamous!" and he disappeared.

This threw a chill at first. Loiseau nonplused, stood looking foolish; but he recovered his countenance and then suddenly began to laugh and repeat:--"Sour grapes! my dear Sir, sour grapes!"--The company did not understand what he meant; he explained the "mysteries of the hall"--Then there was a resumption of formidable gaiety. The ladies were immensely amused. The Count and Mr. Carre-Lamadon laughed to tears. They could hardly believe their ears.

--"Why! are you sure? He wanted"--"I tell you that I saw it with my own eyes."

--"And she refused?"

--"Because the Prussian was in the next room."

--"Is it possible?"

--"I swear it is true!"--

The Count was choking with laughter. The manufacturer was compressing his stomach with his hands.

--"And you understand, to-night he does not think it is funny at all."--

And all three began to laugh again, choking, out of breath.

Thereupon they retired. But Madame Loiseau, who had the prickly disposition of a nettle remarked to her husband, at the moment they were going to bed:--"That stuck-up little Madame Carre-Lamadon laughed deceitfully all evening."

"You know, for women, when they chase uniforms, it does not make any difference whether the uniforms are French or Prussian. What a pity, oh Lord!"--

And all night, in the darkness of the hall there were light sounds like tremors, hardly audible, similar to murmurs, contacts of bare feet, imperceptible crackings. And they fell asleep quite late, certainly, because rays of light could be seen for a long time under the doors. Champagne has such effects; I understand it disturbs the sleep.

The next morning a bright winter sunshine made the snow dazzling. The coach, finally harnessed, was waiting at the door, while an army of white pigeons, ensconced in their white feathers, with their pink eyes spotted in the middle with small black dots, were walking leisurely between the legs of the six horses and picking their food from the steaming manure which they were scattering.

The driver, wrapped up in his sheepskin cloak, was up on his seat, smoking a pipe, and all the travelers, looking radiant, were having provisions packed up for the rest of the trip.

Boule de Suif only had not come down. She appeared.

She seemed to be rather confused, bashful; shyly, she walked up to her companions who, all with the same movement, turned away from her as if they had not seen her. The Count, dignified, took his wife by the arm and removed her from this impure contact.

The girl stood still, stupefied; then picking up all her courage she accosted the manufacturer's wife with a--"Good morning, Madame!"--humbly muttered. The other answered only with a short and impertinent nod accompanied by a look of outraged virtue. Everybody seemed to be busy and kept away from her as if she were carrying some infectious germs in her skirt. Then they rushed up to the coach, in which she entered last, without being helped by anyone, and silently she took the seat she had occupied during the final part of the journey.

They feigned not to see her, not to know her; but Mme. Loiseau, looking at her indignantly from a distance, told her husband half aloud:--"Fortunately I am not sitting next to her."--

The heavy coach started and the journey was resumed.

First nobody spoke. Boule de Suif did not dare raise her eyes. At the same time she felt indignant at all her companions, and humiliated for having yielded to the Prussian Officer into whose

arms she had been hypocritically forced by them.

But the Countess, turning to Madame Carre-Lamadon, broke soon this painful silence.

--"I think you knew Madame d'Estrelles."

--"Yes, she is one of my friends."

--"What a charming woman!"

--"Fascinating! Really a select nature, besides highly educated, and an artist to the tips of her fingers. She sings delightfully and paints to perfection."

The manufacturer was talking with the Count, and in the middle of the clatter of the window-panes, one could catch here and there a word:--"Coupon--maturity--premium--term--"

Loiseau, who had stolen from the inn the old pack of cards, greasy after five years friction on dirty tables, started a game of "bezigue" with his wife.

The good sisters took from their belts the long rosaries, made simultaneously the sign of the cross and suddenly their lips began to move rapidly, becoming more and more accelerated, precipitating their vague murmur as if in a race of "orisons;" and now and then they kissed a medal, crossed themselves again, and resumed their swift and continuous mutterings.

Cornudet sat still and deep in thoughts. After they had traveled for three hours, Loiseau picked up his cards and said:--"I am hungry." Then his wife reached out for a package from which she drew a piece of cold veal. She cut it carefully in thin and neat slices and both began to eat.

--"Why shouldn't we do the same?"--said the Countess. Upon general consent, she unpacked the provisions prepared for the two couples. In one of those oval dishes, the cover of which bears a china hare, to show that a hare pie lies inside, there were exquisite delicatessen, the white streams of lard crossing the brown meat of the game, mixed with other fine chopped meats. A handsome piece of Swiss-cheese, wrapped in a newspaper, had taken on its fat surface the imprint:--"Sundry items."

The two sisters opened a hunk of sausage which smelled of garlic; and Cornudet plunging at the same time both his hands in the large pockets of his baggy overcoat, drew from one four hard-boiled eggs and from the other the crust of a loaf of bread. He removed the shells threw them under his feet, on the straw, and began to bite the eggs voraciously, dropping on his large beard small pieces of yellowish yolk which looked like stars.

Boule de Suif, in the haste and confusion of her departure, had not thought of taking provisions; and exasperated, suffocating with rage, she was looking on all those people who ate heartily. At first a tumultuous anger shook her, and she opened her mouth to tell them what she thought of them in a wave of insults that surged to her lips; but she could not speak, so exasperated was she with indignation.

Nobody looked at her, took notice of her. She felt drowned in the scorn of those honest rascals who had first sacrificed her and then cast her away like something unclean and of no further use. Then she thought of her large basket full of good things, which they had devoured greedily, of her two chickens shining in jelly, her pastry, her pears, her four bottles of claret; and suddenly, her furor having died out, like an over strung cord, she felt like crying. She made terrible efforts; stiffened herself up, swallowed her sobs like children, but the tears were surging, shining at the border of her eyelids, and soon two big tears breaking away from her eyes coursed slowly down her cheeks. Others followed them more swiftly, running like drops of water filtering through rocks and fell regularly on the rounded curve of her bosom. She remained upright, her eyes motionless, her face rigid and pale, hoping that the others would not notice her.

But the Countess noticed it and called her husband's attention with a sign. He shrugged his shoulders, as if to say:--"What can I do? It is not my fault!"--Madame Loiseau had a silent laugh of triumph and muttered: "She is weeping for shame!"--

The two good sisters had resumed their prayers after having rolled up in a paper the rest of their sausage.

Then Cornudet, who was digesting the eggs, stretched his long legs under the seat, sat back, crossed his arms, smiled like a man who has thought of a good joke and began to whistle the Marseillaise.

The faces of all the others darkened. Decidedly the popular song did not please his neighbors. They became nervous, fidgety, and seemed ready to howl like dogs that hear a barrel-organ. He noticed it, did not stop. At times he even pronounced the words:

Amour sacre del la patrie,
Conduis, soutiens, nos bras vengeurs,
Liberte, liberte cherie,
Combats avec tes defenseurs.

The snow being harder, the coach traveled more quickly, and as far as Dieppe, during the long dreary hours of the trip, through the jostles of the road, during the twilight, and later in the thick darkness of the coach, he kept on with a fierce obstinacy his monotonous and revengeful whistling, compelling the fagged and

exasperated hearers to follow the anthem from one end to the other, to remember every word that went with each measure.

And Boule de Suif was still weeping; and at times a sob, which she could not restrain, passed between two verses in the night.

FINIS

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