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(19)
“La Bête Humaine,” Émile Zola’s new novel, which is now creating a wonderful sensation in Paris, where 45,000 copies were sold on the first day of publication, has just been issued by T. B. Peterson & Brothers, Philadelphia, Pa. It is certainly Zola’s masterwork, the matured fruit of his truly phenomenal genius, and this translation fully reproduces this great master’s wonderful style, dash and spirit. It is a deep and ingenious study of the French railroads, and interwoven with this are passionate love, the heredity of murder, the greed of gold and the thirst for the gambling-table. Jacques Lantier, the hero, belongs to the Rougon-Macquarts, whom Zola introduces in all his novels; he is the brother of Nana, Zola’s great heroine, and is, besides, a sort of Jack, the Ripper, of Whitechapel murder fame, that undiscovered assassin having, no doubt, been the model after which the character was formed. Zola’s description of his peculiar fits or crises, when he wants to murder every woman he sees, is simply wonderful in point of depth and power. Séverine’s history is vividly told, and Roubaud’s gradual decline from a reliable under stationmaster at Havre to a thoroughly infatuated gambler is set forth with those bold and rugged strokes at which Zola excels. Flore, the wild country girl, who guards the barrière at the Croix-de-Maufras, is an entirely original and very finely drawn character, while Misard, the wife poisoner, is also graphically sketched. Hosts of thrilling episodes claim attention—the murder of President Grandmorin, the snowbound train, Roubaud’s danger, the railway smash-up, Flore’s suicide and the fight on the engine—and the reader is kept constantly under an irresistible spell.

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(20)
LA BÊTE HUMAINE.

BY ÉMILE ZOLA.


CHAPTER I.

THE CONFESSION.

ON entering the chamber, Roubaud placed the pound loaf of bread, the pâté and the bottle of white wine on the table. But, in the morning, before going down-stairs to her post, Mère Victoire had covered the fire in her stove with such a layer of coal dust that the heat was stifling. And the under station master, having opened the window to the left, leaned out of it.

It was on the Impasse d'Amsterdam, in the last house to the right, a lofty building in which the Compagnie de l'Ouest lodged certain of its employés. The window,
on the fourth floor, at the corner of the sloping mansard roof, looked out upon the dépôt yard, that broad cut making a gap in the Quartier de l'Europe, a sudden display of the horizon, which seemed further enlarged, that afternoon, by a gray sky of the middle of February, a sky of a damp and warmish gray, traversed by sunlight.

Opposite, beneath this dust of rays, the houses of the Rue de Rome were blurred, effaced and shadowy. To the left, the marquées of the covered buildings, opened their gigantic porches, with smoky skylights, that of the great lines, an immense one into which the eye plunged and which the station and freight buildings separated from the other and smaller ones, those of Argenteuil, of Versailles and of the Ceinture; while the Pont de l'Europe, to the right, with its glittering ironwork divided the cut, which one saw reappear and stretch away beyond as far as the tunnel of the Batignolles. And, below the window, occupying all the vast area, the three double tracks, which emerged from the bridge, ramified and spread out in a fan, the multiplied and innumerable metal sticks of which lost themselves beneath the marquées. The three switch-tenders' posts, in front of the arches, showed their bare little gardens. Amid the confused blurr of passenger cars and engines, encumbering the rails, a huge red signal spotted the pale light.

For an instant Roubaud was interested, comparing, thinking of his Havre station. Every time he came in this way to spend a day in Paris and stopped at Mère Victoire's house his business caught hold of him again. Beneath the marquee of the great lines the arrival of a train from Mantes had animated the quays; and he followed with his eyes the manœuvring engine, a little tender-engine, with three low and coupled wheels, which was commencing to dismember the train, alert, busy, bringing and backing the passenger cars upon the sidings. Another engine, a powerful one, an express engine, with
two great crushing wheels, stood by itself and emitted from its smoke-stack a thick black smoke which went straight upward, very slowly, into the calm air. But all his attention was taken up by the 3.25 train, the destination of which was Caen, filled already with its passengers and awaiting its engine. He did not see this train, which had stopped beyond the Pont de l'Europe; he only heard it demanding the right of way with slight, hurried whistles, like a person becoming impatient. An order was shouted; it answered with a short whistle that it had understood. Then, before the start, there was silence, when the valves were opened and the steam hissed along the ground in a deafening jet. And he then saw overflow from the bridge that whiteness which increased, whirling like a down of snow let loose across the iron framework. A whole corner of space was whitened by it, while the accumulated smoke of the other engine enlarged its black veil. Behind were stifled, prolonged trumpet sounds, shouts of command, shocks of turning plates. There was a tearing noise; he distinguished in the background a train from Versailles and a train from Auteuil, one coming, the other going, which were passing each other.

As Roubaud was about to quit the window, a voice which pronounced his name made him lean out. And he recognized, below, upon the balcony of the third floor, a young man of thirty, Henri Dauvergne, a head conductor, who lived there in company with his father, assistant superintendent of the great lines, and with his sisters, Claire and Sophie, two adorable blondes of eighteen and twenty, keeping the family going with the six thousand francs of the two men, amid a continual burst of gayety. The elder was heard laughing, while the younger sang and a cage full of birds of the isles entered into rivalry with roulades.

"Aha, Monsieur Roubaud, so you are in Paris! Ah! yes, for your business with the sub-préfet!"
Again leaning on the window-ledge, the under station master explained how he had left Havre that very morning by the 6.40 express. An order from the chief manager had summoned him to Paris where he had been soundly lectured; but he was delighted not to have lost his place!

"And Madame?" asked Henri.

Madame had decided to come also in order to make some purchases. Her husband was waiting for her there, in that apartment, the key of which Mère Victoire handed over to them on each of their trips, and where they loved to breakfast quietly and alone while the good woman was kept below at her post in the ladies' toilet room. That day they had taken a lunch at Mantes, wishing to do their errands the first thing. But three o'clock had struck and he was perishing with hunger.

Henri, to show his friendship, asked another question:

"And do you stay over night in Paris?"

No, no, they would both return to Havre in the evening by the 6.30 express. Ah! holidays, indeed! They disturbed you only to toss you your bundle and so at once to the niche.

For a moment the two employés looked at each other, shrugging their shoulders. But they no longer could hear what they said, as a furious piano had broken out in sonorous notes. The two sisters must be pounding upon it together, laughing louder and exciting the birds of the isles. Then, the young man, filled with gayety in his turn, bowed and went back into the suite of rooms; and the under station master, left alone, remained for an instant with his eyes fixed upon the balcony from which ascended all that youthful joyousness. Then, having looked up, he saw the engine which had closed its escape valves and which the switch was sending towards the Caen train. The last clouds of white steam lost themselves amid the big whirls of black smoke which were staining the sky, and he also withdrew into the chamber.
In front of the cuckoo clock, which showed that it was twenty minutes past three, he made a gesture of despair. What the devil could be keeping Séverine so late? Once in a shop, she couldn't get out of it again! To deceive the hunger which was gnawing his stomach he conceived the idea of setting the table. The vast room, with its two windows, was familiar to him, serving at once as bed-chamber, dining-room and kitchen, with its walnut furniture, its bed hung with red cottonade, its buffet dresser, its round table, and its Norman closet. He took from the buffet napkins, plates, forks, knives and a couple of glasses. All these articles were of extreme cleanliness, and he amused himself with these household cares as if he were playing getting dinner, delighted with the whiteness of the linen, very much in love with his wife and laughing with the fresh, hearty laugh with which she would burst out when she opened the door. But, when he had placed the pâté on a plate and put the bottle of white wine beside it, he was bothered and looked around him as if searching for something. Then, he hastily drew from his pockets two forgotten packages—a small box of sardines and some gruyère cheese.

The half hour struck. Roubaud walked back and forth, turning his ear towards the stairway at the slightest sound. In his unoccupied waiting, as he passed in front of the mirror, he stopped and looked at himself. He was not ageing; the forties had approached without the ardent red of his curly locks having paled. His beard, which he wore full, had remained thick and of a sunlight blonde, and, of medium height, but of an extraordinary vigor, he was pleased with his person and satisfied with his somewhat flat head, with low forehead, joined to a thick neck, with his round and ruddy face, lighted up by two big bright eyes. His eyebrows joined each other, bristling his forehead with the bar of the jealous. As he had wedded a wife younger than himself
by fifteen years, these frequent glances in the mirror reassured him.

There was a sound of footsteps and Roubaud ran to open the door a little and peep out. But it was a woman who sold newspapers in the dépôt returning to her room next to his. He walked back and interested himself in a shell box upon the buffet. He was well acquainted with this box, a gift from Séverine to Mère Victoire, her nurse, and this little object sufficed to bring up all the story of his marriage, which had taken place nearly three years before. Born in the South, at Plassans, where his father was a carter, having left the service with the grade of sergeant-major, for a long while general porter at the Mantes dépôt, he had been made chief porter at that of Barentin; and it was there that he had become acquainted with his dear wife when she had come from Doinville to take the train, in company with Mademoiselle Berthe, the daughter of President Grandmorin. Séverine Aubrey was only the younger daughter of a gardener who had died in the service of the Grandmorins; but the President, her godfather and guardian, so spoiled her, making her his daughter's companion, sending them both to the same boarding-school at Rouen, and she herself had such native distinction that for a long while Roubaud had contented himself with desiring her from afar, with the passion of a refined workman for a delicate jewel which he judges precious. There was the sole romance of his existence. He would have married her without a sou for the joy of having her, and when he had finally become emboldened the realization had surpassed the dream; besides Séverine and a marriage portion of ten thousand francs, the President, now in retirement and a member of the Conseil d'Administration of the Compagnie de l'Ouest, had given him his protection. The day after the wedding he had been promoted to the post of under station-master at the Havre dépôt. He had, doubtless, in his favor the record of a good employé,
THE CONFESSION.

reliable at his post, punctual, honest, of a narrow but just spirit, all sorts of excellent qualities which might have explained the prompt action accorded to his demand and the rapidity of his advancement. But he preferred to believe that he owed everything to his wife. He adored her.

When he had opened the box of sardines, Roubaud absolutely lost patience. The meeting had been arranged for three o’clock. Where could she be? She certainly would not tell him that the purchase of a pair of boots and six chemises demanded an entire day, and, as he again passed in front of the mirror, he noticed that his eyebrows had bristled up and that his forehead was cut with a hard line. Never had he suspected her at Havre. In Paris, he imagined all sorts of dangers, tricks and sins. A flood of blood mounted to his cranium and his fists, which were those characteristic of a former railway porter, clinched as in the days when he pushed cars. He again became the brute unconscious of his strength; he would have crushed her in a burst of blind fury.

Séverine opened the door and appeared, blooming and joyous.

“IT is I. Did you think I was lost?”

With the brightness of twenty-five, she seemed tall, slender and very supple, but she was fat and had little bones. She was not pretty at a first glance, having a long face and strong mouth, lightened by admirable teeth. But, when one looked at her, she seduced by the charm and strangeness of her large blue eyes, below her head of thick black hair.

And so, as her Roubaud, without answering, continued to examine her with the troubled and uncertain look which she well knew, she added:

“Oh! how I hurried! Just think of it—impossible to find an omnibus. Then, not wishing to spend the money for a carriage, I hastened along. See how hot I am!”

“Look here,” said he, violently, “you can’t make me
believe that you have come direct from the Bon Marché stores!"

But, immediately, with the pretty way of an infant, she threw herself upon his neck, as she put her pretty little plump hand over his mouth. "Villain, villain, be still! You know well enough that I love you."

Such sincerity came from all her person, he felt that she had remained so pure, so frank, that he clasped her madly in his arms. That was the way his suspicions always ended. She gave way to him, loving to be cajoled. He covered her with kisses which she did not return; and that very thing was the cause of his obscure uneasiness—that big passive child, full of filial affection, in whom the lover was never awakened.

"Then, you have stripped the Bon Marché?"

"Oh! yes. I'll tell you. But first let's eat something. I'm awfully hungry! Ah! listen, I have a little gift. Guess what it is!"

She laughed close up to his face. She had thrust her right hand into her pocket, where she held an object which she did not draw out.

"Guess quick. What is my little present?"

He also laughed heartily. He made up his mind and said:

"My little present!"

It was a knife she had bought for him to replace one he had lost and been lamenting for two weeks past. He uttered an exclamation and thought it superb—that handsome new knife, with its ivory handle and its gleaming blade. He wished to use it at once. She was ravished with his delight and made him give her a sou that their friendship might not be cut.

"Let's eat, let's eat," repeated she. "No, no, I beg you, don't shut the window yet. I'm so hot!"

She had rejoined him at the window and stood there several seconds, leaning upon his shoulder and looking at
the vast yard of the dépôt. For the moment the smoke had cleared away and the coppery disk of the sun came down in the mist behind the houses of the Rue de Rome. Below, a manoeuvring engine was bringing, completely made up, the train for Mantes, which was to start at 4.25. It backed it along the landing and was uncoupled under the marquee. In the background, under the shed of the Ceinture, the knocking together of car protectors announced the addition of other carriages to the train. And alone in the midst of the rails, with its engineer and its fireman, a heavy omnibus engine stood motionless, as if weary and out of breath, with no other steam than a slender thread escaping from a valve. It was waiting for the track to be cleared in order to return to the dépôt of the Batignolles. A red signal flashed and was effaced. It started off.

"How gay those Dauvergne girls are!" said Roubaud, quitting the window. "Do you hear them banging away on the piano? A little while ago I saw Henri, who told me to present his respects to you."

"To the table, to the table!" cried Séverine, and she fell upon the sardines and began to devour them. Ah! how long it had been since the little lunch at Mantes. It intoxicated her when she came to Paris. She was vibrating throughout with the delight of having scoured the sidewalks; she had yet the excitement of her purchases at the Bon Marché. In a wink, every spring, she spent her winter savings there, preferring to purchase everything there, saying that she saved enough there to pay for her trip. So, without losing a mouthful, she rattled on. A trifle confused, coloring, she finally stated the sum total she had expended—more than three hundred francs.

"Fichre!" exclaimed Roubaud, astounded, "you have done well for the wife of an under station-master! But were you not going to get merely six chemises and a pair of boots?"
“Oh! my friend, such bargains! A silk with delicious stripes, a tasty hat—a perfect dream!—and ready made skirts with embroidered ruffles! And all these things for almost nothing; they would have cost me double in Havre. They are going to send them to me and you will see!”

He had burst out laughing, so pretty was she in her joy, with her air of supplicating confusion. And, besides, this little improvised dinner was so charming in the depths of this chamber where they were alone, very much better than at the restaurant. She, who usually drank water, gave herself the rein and emptied her glass of white wine without knowing it. The box of sardines was finished and they began upon the pâté with the handsome new knife. It was a triumph, so well did it cut.

“And how about your business?” demanded she. “You make me chatter, but don’t tell me how you came out with regard to the sub préfect.”

Then he related in detail the way in which the chief manager had received him. Oh! it was a regular head washing. He had defended himself, had told the real truth—how that little swell of a sub préfet had persisted in getting into a first-class car with his dog, when there was a second-class carriage reserved for hunters and their animals, and the quarrel which had thereupon ensued and the words which had been exchanged. In sum, the chief had sustained him in endeavoring to have the orders respected; but the most terrible thing was the expression he had made use of: “You will not always be the masters!” They suspected him of being a republican. The discussions which had marked the opening of the session of 1869 and the secret fear of the coming general elections had made the Government suspicious. So he should certainly have been displaced without the kind recommendation of President Grandmorin. Nevertheless, he had been forced to sign a letter of apology, advised and drawn up by the latter.
Séverine interrupted him, exclaiming:

"Now, wasn't I wise in writing to him and making him a visit with you this morning before you went to receive your soap? I was sure he'd get us out of the trouble."

"Yes, he likes you a great deal," resumed Roubaud, "and he has strong influence in the company. You see now what use it is to be a good employé! Ah! I got plenty of praise—not much for taking the initiative, but for conduct, obedience, courage and all that! But, my dear, if you had not been my wife and if Grandmorin had not pleaded my cause out of friendship for you, I should have been lost; they would have sent me to some little station to do penance."

She stared fixedly into space and murmured, as if speaking to herself:

"Oh! certainly, he is a man of strong influence."

There was silence, and she sat with wide eyes lost in the distance, ceasing to eat. Without doubt she was calling up the days of her childhood down there at the Château de Doinville, four leagues from Rouen. She had never known her mother. When her father, the gardener Aubrey, died she was entering her thirteenth year; and it was at that epoch that the President, already a widower, had taken her as companion for his daughter Berthe, under the supervision of his sister, Madame Bonnehon, the widow of a manufacturer, to whom the château at present belonged. Berthe, her elder by two years, married six months after her, had espoused M. de Lachesnaye, a counsellor at the court of Rouen, a withered and yellow little man. The preceding year, the President was yet at the head of that court, in his district, when he had gone into retirement after a magnificent career. Born in 1804, substitute at Digne on the morrow of 1830, then at Fontainebleau, then at Paris, afterwards procureur at Troyes, avocat-général at Rennes and finally First President at Rouen.
Several times a millionaire, he had formed part of the Conseil-Général since 1855 and had been appointed Commandeur of the Legion of Honor on the very day of his retirement. And as far back as she could recollect, she remembered him such as he yet was—thick-set and solid, early white-haired, but of a white gilded by a former blonde, shock-headed, beard cut short, without moustaches, with a square face which eyes of a hard blue and a big nose rendered severe. He made everybody about him tremble.

Roubaud was compelled to raise his voice, repeating twice:

"Well, what are you thinking about?"

She gave a start and a little quiver passed through her, as if she were surprised and shaken by fear.

"Why, about nothing."

"You have stopped eating. Has your appetite left you?"

"Oh! no. You shall see."

Séverine, having emptied her glass of white wine, finished the slice of pâté which she had on her plate. But there was an alarm—they had devoured the pound loaf of bread and not a morsel remained to eat with the cheese. They uttered exclamations, then laughed, when, overturning everything, they discovered in the depths of Mère Victoire's buffet a remnant of stale bread. Although the window was open, it continued to be warm, and the young woman, who had the stove behind her, was not cooled off, rosier and more excited by reason of the unforeseen occurrences of this chatty dinner in this chamber. Apropos of Mère Victoire, Roubaud went back to Grandmorin. Here was another who owed him a great deal! Bereft by death of her own child, nurse of Séverine, who had cost her mother her life, and later the wife of a fireman of the company, she was living wretchedly in Paris on a trifle she made by sewing, her husband spending all his wages, when a meeting with
her foster daughter had renewed the ties of the past by making her also a protégée of the President; and soon he had obtained for her a position in the ladies' toilet room, keeper of the fine retiring cabinets, than which what could be better? The company paid her only a hundred francs a year, but she made nearly fourteen francs out of the receipts, without counting the lodging, this chamber in which even a fire was furnished her. In short, it was a very agreeable situation. And Roubaud calculated that if Pecqueux, the husband, had brought in his fireman's pay of two thousand, eight hundred francs, so much for the prizes and so much for the fixed rate, instead of squandering everything at both ends of the line, the family would have united more than four thousand francs, double what he, as under station-master, made at Havre.

"Without doubt," he concluded, "all women would not want to have charge of cabinets, but it's not such a bad occupation."

Meanwhile their great hunger had been appeased and they now ate but languidly, cutting the cheese in little bits to make the treat last. Their words also came slowly.

"Apropos," said he, "I forgot to ask you why did you refuse the President's invitation to go spend two or three days at Doinville?"

His mind, in the comfort of digestion, had recalled their visit of the morning to the hôtel in the Rue du Rocher, near the dépôt; and he had again seen himself in the big solemn study; he had again heard the President tell them that he should start the next day for Doinville. Then, as if yielding to a sudden idea, he had offered to go with them that very evening in the 6.30 express and afterwards take his goddaughter down to see her sister, who for a long time had been asking for her. But the young woman had alleged all sorts of reasons which prevented her, she said.
"For my part," continued Roubaud, "I saw no harm in that little trip. You could have stayed there till Thursday; I would have managed somehow. In our position, we have need of them, don't we? It isn't very sharp to refuse their politeness; the less so in this instance because your refusal seemed to give him genuine pain. So I ceased to urge you to accept only when you pulled me by the coat. Then, I echoed your words, but without understanding. Why didn't you want to go?"

Sévérine, with shifting glances, made an impatient gesture.

"How could I leave you alone?"

"That's no reason. Since our marriage, in three years, you have been twice to Doinville and spent a week there. Nothing prevented you from going there a third time."

The young woman's embarrassment increased; she turned away her head.

"Once for all, I didn't wish to go. You don't want to force me to do things disagreeable to me, do you?"

Roubaud opened his arms as if to declare that he would not force her to do anything, but resumed:

"Ah! You are hiding something from me. Did Madame Bonnehon treat you ill the last time you were there?"

Oh! no, Madame Bonnehon had always received her most cordially. She was so agreeable, tall, strong, with magnificent blonde hair, handsome still despite her fifty-five years! Since her widowhood, and even during the lifetime of her husband, it was related that she had often had her heart occupied. They adored her at Doinville: she made the château a spot of delight; all the Rouen society visited there, especially the Magistracy. It was in the Magistracy that Madame Bonnehon had had many friends.

"Then admit that it was the Lachesnayes who treated you coldly."
Without doubt, since her marriage with M. de Lachenesnaye, Berthe had ceased to be for her what she formerly had been. She was not improving, that poor Berthe, so insignificant with her red nose. At Rouen, the ladies vaunted her distinction a great deal. But a husband like hers, ugly, hard and avaricious, seemed rather made to sour his wife and make her wicked. But no, Berthe had behaved as was fit to her old friend; she had no special complaint to make of her.

"Then it was the President who did something to displease you down there?"

Séverine, who until then had answered slowly in a steady voice, gave another impatient toss.

"He! what an idea!"

And she continued in short, nervous phrases. They scarcely ever saw him. He had reserved for himself in the park a pavilion, the door of which opened upon a deserted lane. He went out, he returned, without any one knowing it. His sister, for that matter, never exactly knew the day of his arrival. He took a carriage at Barentin, was driven at night to Doinville and spent days in his pavilion unknown to all. Ah! it was not he who gave anybody trouble down there.

"I mentioned him, because you have told me twenty times that in your childhood you were mortally afraid of him."

"Oh! mortally afraid! You exaggerate, as you always do. To be sure, he wasn't very genial. He looked at you so fixedly with his big eyes that you lowered your head immediately. I have seen people get embarrassed and be unable to say a word to him, so much did he impose upon them with his great renown for severity and wisdom. But he never scolded me; I have always felt that he had a weakness for me."

Again her voice slackened and her eyes were lost in the distance.

"I remember, when I was a child and played with
friends in the alleys of the park, if he appeared all of them hid themselves, even his daughter Berthe, who was constantly afraid of being in fault. As for me, I tranquilly awaited him. He passed and, on seeing me there, smiling, my muzzle raised, gave me a little tap on the cheek. Later, when I was sixteen and Berthe had a favor to obtain from him, she always commissioned me to ask it. I spoke, I did not lower my glances and I felt his penetrating beneath my skin. But I didn't mind that, I was so certain he would grant me all I wished. Ah! yes, I remember, I remember! Down there there's not a corner of the park, not a corridor, not a room in the château that I cannot see again by simply shutting my eyes."

She paused, her eyelids closed; and across her hot and puffed up visage seemed to pass the quiver of those old things, the things she did not speak of. For an instant she remained thus, with a slight trembling of the lips, as if an involuntary convulsion had painfully drawn a corner of her mouth.

"He has certainly been very kind to you," resumed Roubaud, who had lighted his pipe. "Not only has he reared you like a lady, but he has also very sagely managed your four sous, which he made a good round sum at the time of our marriage, without counting that he is going to leave you something, for he said so in my presence."

"Yes," murmured Séverine, "that house of the Croix-de-Maufras, that property which the railway cut. We used to go there occasionally to spend a week. Oh! I don't count anything on that; the Lachesnayes will so work on him that he'll leave me nothing. But then I prefer to be left nothing, nothing!"

She uttered these last words in such an earnest tone that he was astonished and, removing his pipe from his mouth, he stared at her with amazed eyes.

"You're funny! They say the President has millions, so what harm will it do for him to put his goddaughter
in his will? Nobody would be surprised and it would nicely settle our affairs."

Then an idea shot through his brain and made him laugh.

"It can't be that you're afraid of passing for his daughter, eh? For, you know, they whisper some queer stories about the President in spite of his icy air. They say he had a soft spot for the nurse maids even while his wife was alive, and even now he is a great admirer of the ladies. Mon Dieu, if you should be his daughter!"

Séverine had violently arisen, her visage all aflame, with a frightened shifting of her blue eyes beneath the heavy mop of her black hair.

"His daughter, his daughter! I don't want you to joke on that subject, I'd have you to know! How is it possible for me to be his daughter? Do I resemble him? But enough of this; let's talk of something else. I don't want to go to Doinville because I don't want to, because I prefer to return to Havre with you."

He shrugged his shoulders, he appeased her with a gesture. Well, well, he'd stop it, if it jarred on her nerves. He smiled; he had never seen her so nervous. The white wine, without doubt. Desirous of winning her pardon, he took up the knife again, again went into ecstasies over it, carefully wiping it; and to show that it cut like a razor, he trimmed his nails with it.

"Already a quarter past four," murmured Séverine, standing before the cuckoo clock. "I have still some errands to do. We must think about our train."

But, as if to finish calming herself before putting the chamber a little to rights, she returned to the window and leaned out. Then, dropping the knife and putting down his pipe, he quitted the table in his turn, approached her and gently took her in his arms from behind, and he held her embraced thus; he had placed his chin on her shoulder and laid his head against hers. Neither of them stirred; they looked out of the window.
Beneath them, the little manœuvering engines were constantly coming and going without rest; and one scarcely heard them stir like active and prudent housewives, the wheels deadened, the whistles discreet. One of them passed and disappeared beneath the Pont de l'Europe, drawing to the siding the carriages of a Trouville train which was about being parted. And down there, beyond the bridge, it passed an engine which had come alone from the dépôt, like a solitary promenader, with its shining copper and steel, fresh and sprightly for the trip. The latter came to a stop, demanded the right of way, with two short whistles, from the switch-tender, who almost immediately dispatched it to its train, which was entirely formed at the landing beneath the marquee of the great lines. It was the 4.25 train for Dieppe. A crowd of passengers hurried along; the roll of vans loaded with baggage was heard and men thrust one by one the trunks into the carriages. But the engine and its tender had reached the covered car at the head of the train, bumped against it with a hollow sound, and a train master himself was seen to put the coupling pin in place. The sky had grown dark towards the Batignolles; an ashy twilight, obscuring the house fronts, seemed to be already falling upon the outspread fan of the rails, while in this effacement, in the distance, the departing and arriving trains of the suburbs and the Ceinture passed each other incessantly. Beyond the gloomy piles of the huge covered buildings, ruddy and rugged clouds of smoke flew away over obscured Paris.

"No, no, let me alone," murmured Séverine.

His breath had brushed her neck, and little by little he had clasped her closer, full of the love of the early days of their courtship. She intoxicated him the more as she strove to free herself. He drew her from the window, closing the inside shutters with his elbow. His mouth had encountered hers, almost crushing her lips.

"Let us sit beside each other, let us court as we did of old."
"No, no," repeated she, "we are not at home. Not in this chamber, I beg of you."

She herself seemed intoxicated, benumbed by food and wine, still vibrating from her exciting run across Paris. This too warm apartment, the table on which lingered the disorder of the meal, the unforeseen incidents of the trip which had ended in a feast, all these things fired her blood and made her quiver. And yet she refused a scene of tenderness, resisted with a species of rebellious terror of which she could not have told the cause.

"No, no, I don't want to."

He, with tingling blood, restrained his big brutal hands. He trembled; he could have crushed her.

"Stupid! Who will know about it?"

Usually she indulged him in such whims with an accommodating docility at their home in Havre after breakfast, especially when he had been out on night service. She took no pleasure in these love scenes, but yielded because he had a fondness for them. And now what set him wild was to find her, as he had never found her before, ardent and quivering with passion. The black hue of her hair sombred her calm periwinkle eyes, her strong mouth was like a dash of blood in the soft oval of her face. She was a woman altogether different from the one he had known. Why did she refuse?

"Come now; we have plenty of time."

Then, in inexplicable anguish, in a struggle in which she did not seem to have a clear idea of things, as if she also had no knowledge of herself, she uttered a cry of genuine pain which quieted him.

"No, no, I implore you; let me be! I don't know why, but the very idea stifles me at this moment. It would not be well."

He passed his hand over his face as if to relieve thesmarting sensation with which he was suffering. On seeing him regain his senses, she gently leaned over and
gave him a great kiss upon the cheek, wishing to show him that she loved him all the same. For an instant they remained thus, without speaking, recovering themselves. He had taken her right hand and was playing with an old gold ring, a gold serpent with a tiny ruby head, which she wore on the same finger as her wedding ring. He had always seen it there.

"My little serpent," said Séverine, in an involuntary, dreamy voice, believing that he was looking at the ring and feeling an imperious need of speaking. "It was at the Croix-de-Maufras that he made me a present of it on my sixteenth birthday."

Roubaud raised his head, surprised.

"Whom do you mean? The President?"

When her husband's eyes settled on hers she gave a sudden start of awakening. She felt her cheeks grow icy. She strove to reply, but could find no words, choked by a sort of paralysis which had seized upon her.

"But," continued he, "you have always told me that your mother left you that ring."

Even at that instant she might have corrected that phrase uttered in the forgetfulness of everything. It would have been sufficient for him had she laughed, played the bewildered. But she persisted, no longer possessing herself, unconsciously.

"Never, my dear, never in the world did I tell you that my mother left me that ring."

Roubaud stared at her, turning pale.

"What! you never told me that? You have told it to me twenty times! There was no harm in the President having given you a ring. He has given you many things besides. But why did you hide it from me, why did you lie in speaking of your mother?"

"I did not speak of my mother, my dear. You are mistaken."

Her obstinacy was imbecile. She saw that she had
tripped herself, that he read clearly beneath her skin and she wished she could go back, swallow her words; but the time for that had passed; she felt her features become distorted; the confession came in spite of her from her entire person. The icyness had spread from her cheeks to her whole face and a nervous convulsion twitched her lips. And he, frightful, suddenly turned red again to such a point that the blood seemed about to burst his veins; he had seized her by the wrists and was looking right into her visage in order to discover in the terrified aspect of her eyes that which she did not utter.

"Nom de Dieu!" muttered he. "Nom de Dieu!"

She was frightened and lowered her face to hide it in her hands, divining a blow. A little, miserable, insignificant fact, the forgetfulness of a lie in regard to that ring, had brought forward the evidence in a few words exchanged. And a single minute had been enough. He threw her across the bed by which they were standing; he struck her with both fists haphazard. In three years he had not given her a blow and now he was murdering her, blind, drunken, with the fury of a brute, of the man with big hands who formerly had pushed cars.

"Nom de Dieu, wretch, he was your lover; yes, your lover!"

He grew more enraged as he repeated these words; he struck her every time he uttered them as if to drive them into her flesh.

"Nom de Dieu, wretch, wretch!"

His voice was so choked with rage that it hissed and was unintelligible. Then only he realized that, weakening beneath his blows, she was saying "no." She found no other defence; she denied that he might not kill her. And the cry, this persistence in falsehood, put the climax to his madness.

"Confess, confess!"

"No, no!"

He had caught hold of her again; he was holding her
in his arms, preventing her from falling back with her face against the coverlet like a poor creature who hides, and he compelled her to look at him.

"Confess, confess!"

But, slipping away, she escaped and strove to run towards the door. In one bound he was again over her, his fist uplifted; and furiously, with a single blow, he knocked her down beside the table. He threw himself beside her and grasped her by the hair to pin her to the floor. For an instant they remained in this position, face to face, without stirring, without speaking. And, amid this frightful silence, they heard come up from below the songs and laughter of the Dauvergne young ladies, whose piano raged joyously down-stairs, stifling the sound of the struggle. It was Claire singing childish words, while Sophie furiously accompanied her.

"Confess, confess!"

She was afraid to say "no" any longer; she did not answer.

"Confess, nom de Dieu, or I'll kill you!"

He would have killed her; she read it plainly in his look. As she fell, she had seen the knife lying open on the table; and she again saw the flash of the blade, she believed that he had extended his arm. Cowardice took possession of her, an abandonment of herself and everything, a need of bringing matters to an end.

"Well, yes, it's true! Let me go away!"

Then it was abominable. This confession, which he had so violently wrenched from her, struck him full in the face like something monstrous and impossible. It seemed to him that he never could have supposed such an infamy. He grasped her by the head and knocked her against a foot of the table. She resisted and he dragged her by the hair about the room, overturning the chairs. Every time she made an effort to get up he sent her back on the floor with a blow of his fist. And he did this panting, with set teeth and a savage, imbecile
fury. The table, whirled towards the stove, came within an ace of overturning it. Hair and blood stuck to a corner of the buffet. When they took breath, stupefied, gorged with this horror, weary of striking and being struck, they had got back beside the bed, she still groveling on the floor, he squatting down and yet holding her by the shoulders. And thus they took breath. Below the music continued and very youthful and sonorous laughter ascended.

With a push Roubaud got Séverine on her feet and backed her against the framework of the bed. Then, remaining on his knees and keeping his weight upon her, he was at last able to speak. He no longer beat her; he tortured her with his questions, pricked on by an unquenchable desire to find out everything.

"So he was your lover, trollop! Repeat, repeat that old man was your lover! And how old were you at the time, eh? Very young, very young, were you not?"

She suddenly fell to crying and her sobs prevented her from answering.

"Nom de Dieu! won't you tell me!—eh? You were not ten years of age when you amused that old wretch, were you? That was the reason he reared you in luxury! Say so, nom de Dieu, or I'll begin again!"

She was still weeping, could not utter a word, and he raised his hand, stunned her with another blow. Three times, as he could obtain no response, he struck her, repeating his question.

"At what age was it?—tell me, trollop! Tell me, won't you?"

Why struggle further? Her very life was ebbing away. He would tear out her heart with his stiff former workman's fingers. And the questioning went on; she told all, so crushed by shame and fear that her sentences breathed in a very low tone could scarcely be heard. And he, bitten by his atrocious jealousy, grew enraged at the suffering with which the pictures called up tore him. He never
knew enough, forcing her to go over the details again, to make the facts precise. With his ear glued to the lips of the miserable woman, he suffered agony from the confession, constantly threatening her with his uplifted fist, ready to strike again if she stopped.

Again all the past at Doinville, her infancy, her youth, was unrolled. Was it in the depths of the groves of the vast park? Was it in an out-of-the-way turn of some corridor of the château? Was the President already thinking of her when he had kept her at the death of his gardener and raised her with his daughter? For sure matters had begun those days when the other little girls had fled in the midst of their games upon his appearance, while she, smiling and with muzzle raised, had waited for him to give her a little tap on the cheek as he passed by. And later, if she had dared to speak to him face to face, if she had obtained everything from him, had it not been because she felt her power when he, so dignified and so stern with others, had bought her with his tricky complaisances? Ah! what a wretched business it was!—that old scoundrel causing himself to be kissed like a grandfather, watching the young girl grow, tapping her familiarly and experimenting with her a little every hour, without the patience to wait until she was mature!

Roubaud panted out:
“Come, at what age was it? Repeat at what age!”
“Sixteen years and a half.”
“You lie!”
“Lie, mon Dieu, why?” She gave a shrug of the shoulders, full of utter weariness and abandonment.
“And where did he make his first advances?”
“At the Croix-de-Maufras.”
He hesitated a second; his lips quivered and a yellow gleam troubled his sight.
“Come, I want you to speak out! What did he say?”
She remained mute. Then, as he brandished his fist, she murmured:

"You would not believe me."

"Tell me, nevertheless. He did not offer you violence, did he?"

She nodded her head in reply. It was, indeed, so. And then he wanted a full description of the scene, he questioned her minutely. She no longer unclenched her teeth; she continued to say "yes," to say "no," with a sign. Perhaps both of them would feel easier when she had confessed. But he suffered further from these details which she had thought would have a weakening effect. Normal, complete reports would have haunted him with a vision less torturing. Her revelations spoiled everything, thrust into the depths of his flesh and twisted there the poisoned blades of his jealousy. Now, it was finished; he would no longer live, he would be constantly looking the execrable picture.

A sob tore his throat.

"Ah! nom de Dieu—ah! nom de Dieu!—it can't be—no, no!—it's too much—it can't be!"

Then, suddenly, he shook her.

"But, nom de Dieu, trollop, why did you marry me? Do you know that it was ignoble to have deceived me so? There are thieves in jail who haven't as much on their conscience. So you despised me, you did not love me? Why did you marry me, eh?"

She made a vague gesture. How could she tell at present? When she married him the hope of finishing with the other made her happy. There are so many things that one don't want to do and yet does because they are the wisest. No, she did not love him; and what she had shunned telling him was that had it not been for what she had just confessed never would she have consented to be his wife.

"He wanted to have you settled down. He had found you to his liking, eh? He wanted to have you settled
down that this business might go on. And you kept up the intimacy on your two trips down there. That was why he took you."

With a sign she confessed again.

"And that was why he invited you this time, eh? Until the end, then, this thing would have gone on! And if I don't strangle you it will begin again!"

His twitching hands were thrust forward to again take her by the throat. But this time she rebelled.

"See here, you're unjust, since I refused to go there. You wanted to send me and I was forced to get angry, you will remember. You can see plainly enough that I wanted no more of it. It was done with. Never, never more would I have consented."

He felt that she spoke the truth, but that did not comfort him any. The frightful pain was not diminished, the knife still remained plunged in his breast. What had occurred between her and that man was irreparable. He suffered only because of his powerlessness to undo what had been done. Without yet letting go of her, he had brought his face close to hers; he seemed fascinated, attracted there, as if to find again in the blood of her little blue veins all that she had confessed to him. And he murmured, possessed, hallucinated:

"At the Croix-de-Maufras, in the red chamber. I know it well; the window looks out on the railroad, the bed is opposite. And it was there, in that chamber. I understand why he spoke of leaving you the house. You surely have earned it. He could well afford to watch over your sous and dower you—you earned that, too. A judge, a man several times a millionaire, so respected, so learned, so high! Truly, it's enough to make one's head swim! And tell me now if he is your father, will you?"

Séverine, with an effort, got upright on her feet. She had pushed him back with extraordinary vigor considering her weakness as a poor conquered creature. She protested violently.
“No, no, not that! All you want but that! Beat me, kill me, but don’t say that—it’s a lie!”

Roubaud had kept hold of one of her hands.

“Do you know something on that score, eh? Is it because you have suspicions yourself that you’re moved that way?”

And as she wrenched her hand away he felt the ring, the little golden serpent with a ruby head, forgotten on her finger. He tore it off and ground it beneath his heel on the floor in a new fit of rage. Then he walked from one end of the room to the other, mute and bewildered. She sank down in a sitting posture on the edge of the bed and, mute also, stared at him with her big fixed eyes, and the terrible silence lasted for some time.

Roubaud’s fury did not calm down. No sooner did it seem a little dissipated than it instantly returned, like intoxication, in huge redoubled waves which bore him away in their whirl. He could no longer control himself; he was nearly crazy, blown hither and thither by every gust of the hurricane of violence which had him in its grip, but always coming back to the one need of appeasing the howling animal within him. It was a physical, immediate need, like a thirst for vengeance, which twisted his body and would leave him no rest until he had satisfied it.

Without pausing, he tapped his temples with his two fists, muttering in a voice of anguish:

“What shall I do?”

Since he had not killed that woman on the instant, he would not kill her now. His baseness in having let her live augmented his rage, for it was base, it was because he still clung to her trollop’s skin that he had not strangled her. He could not, however, keep her after what had happened. So he would have to drive her off, put her into the street, never to see her more? And a new flood of suffering came upon him, an execrable nausea took entire possession of him when he felt
that he would not even do that. What then? It only remained to accept the abomination and take that woman back to Havre, there to continue his tranquil life with her as if nothing had gone wrong. No, no!—rather death, death for them both on the instant! Such distress shook him that he cried louder, in a bewildered way:

“What shall I do?”

From the bed on which she remained seated, Séverine constantly followed him with her big eyes. With the calm, comrade-like affection she had always had for him, she pitied him already because of the unbounded misery in which she saw him. Harsh words and blows she would have excused, if his mad fury had left her less surprise, surprise from which she had not yet recovered. She, passive and docile, who when a child had simply obeyed an old man and who later had let her marriage be contracted merely with the desire of arranging matters, could not comprehend such a burst of jealousy on account of past faults of which she had repented; and, without vice, her flesh ill-awakened yet, in the partial unconsciousness of a gentle girl, pure in spite of all, she watched her husband come and go, and turn furiously about, as she would have watched a wolf, a creature of another species. What had he within him? There was so much of it without anger! What frightened her was to find the animal, suspected by her for three years past from low growls, to-day unchained, enraged and ready to bite. What could she say to him to prevent a disaster?

At each return he came beside the bed, in front of her. And she awaited him as he passed, she dared to speak to him.

“My friend, listen——”

But he did not hear her; he started off again for the other end of the room like a bit of straw swept away by a tempest.
"What shall I do?—what shall I do?"

At last she seized him by the wrist and held him a minute.

"My friend, see here; remember I refused to go there. I should never have gone there any more, never, never. You are the man I love."

And she grew caressing, drawing him to her and raising her lips that he might kiss them. But, having sunk down beside her, he repulsed her with a movement of horror.

"Ah! trollop, you want to court now, eh? Awhile ago you didn't, you had no wish for me! And now you want to in order to get hold of me again, eh? When a woman holds a man through love she holds him firmly. But it would scorch me to sit beside you; yes, I feel it would scorch my blood with poison!"

He quivered. The idea of going through a love-scene with her, the picture of two beings so divided courting each other, shot through him like a flame. And amid the troubled darkness of his flesh, in the depths of his soiled and bleeding love, suddenly arose the necessity of death.

"In order that I may not die from loving you again, I must first kill the other! I must kill him! I must kill him!"

His voice grew louder; he repeated the words as he got upon his feet, straightening himself up as if the sentence by bringing him a resolution had calmed him. He ceased to speak; he walked slowly to the table and looked at the knife, the blade of which, wide open, shone. Mechanically he closed it and put the knife in his pocket. And, with hanging hands, his glances lost in the distance, he stood still and thought. Obstacles cut his forehead with two big wrinkles. To form his plan, he went to the window, opened it and planted himself there, his face in the cold twilight air. Behind him his wife had arisen, again seized upon by fear; and not
daring to question him, striving to divine what was passing in the depths of his hard skull, she waited, standing also opposite the broad sky.

In the incipient night the distant houses stood out in black and the vast dépôt yard was filled with a violetish mist. In the direction of the Batignolles, especially, the deep cut was of an ashen hue amid which the framework of the Pont de l'Europe had begun to fade out. Towards Paris, a last gleam of daylight paled the glass roofs of the huge covered buildings, while under them the amassed darkness rained down. Sparks shone forth—they had lighted the gas-jets along the landings. A great white brightness was there—the headlight of the engine of the Dieppe train, full of passengers and with the car doors already closed, which was awaiting the order of the under chief of service to start.

There was some trouble; the red signal of the switch-tender had closed the way, while a small engine came to take up some carriages which an ill-executed manoeuvre had left on the route. Incessantly trains went off in the growing darkness over the labyrinthine network of rails, amid the files of motionless cars stationed upon the sidings. One started for Argenteuil, another for Saint-Germain; a very long one arrived from Cherbourg. Signals, whistles and horn blasts were multiplied; in every direction lights appeared one by one—red, green, yellow and white; it was a fearful confusion at this transition hour amid which everything seemed destined to be wrecked, but everything passed, came together and was disentangled with the same easy and crawling movement, shadowy in the depths of the twilight. But the red light of the switch-tender vanished; the Dieppe train whistled and set out. From the broad gray sky occasional drops of rain commenced to fall—the night was going to be very damp.

When Roubaud wheeled about, his face had a thick and obstinate look as if the falling night had imparted
to it some of its darkness. He had decided, his plan was formed. In the fading light he looked at the cuckoo clock to see what time it was and said aloud:

"Twenty minutes after five."

And he was astonished: one hour, scarcely one hour, for so many things! He would have believed that he and his wife had been fighting there for weeks.

"Twenty minutes after five. We have time enough."

Séverine, who dare not question him, steadily followed him with her anxious glances. She saw him hunt in the closet and take out of it paper, a small bottle of ink and a pen.

"See here, you're going to write."

"To whom?"

"To him. Sit down."

And as she instinctively drew away from the chair, without yet knowing what he was going to exact from her, he brought her back and seated her at the table with such a push that she remained there.

"Write—Start this evening by the 6:30 express and don't show yourself until you get to Rouen?"

She held the pen, but her hand trembled; her fear was augmented by all the unknown things which these simple lines piled up before her. Therefore she emboldened herself sufficiently to raise her head and say, in a supplicating tone:

"My friend, what are you going to do? Explain it to me, I beg you."

He repeated in his loud, inexorable voice:

"Write, write!"

Then, with his eyes on hers, without anger, without harsh words, but with an obstinacy, the weight of which she felt crush and annihilate her, he said:

"What I am going to do you will see. And, understand, what I am going to do I want you to do with me. In that way we will remain together and there will be something solid between us."
He frightened her and she recoiled again.

"No, no, I want to know. I will not write before knowing."

Then, ceasing to speak, he took her hand, the frail little hand of a child, and grasped it in his iron fist with the continuous pressure of a vise until he nearly ground it to pieces. It was his will which thus entered into her flesh with the pain. She uttered a cry and everything was crushed within her, everything submitted. The ignorant creature she had remained in her passive gentleness could do nothing but obey. Instrument of love, instrument of death.

"Write, write!"

And she wrote, with her poor aching hand, painfully.

"Good, you're kind," said he when he had the letter. "Now fix up a little here, put everything to rights. I'll come back after you."

He was very calm. He rearranged the knot of his cravat before the mirror, put on his hat and then went out. She heard him double lock the door and take off the key. The night was falling more and more. For an instant she remained seated, listening intently to all the sounds from without. In the adjoining room, that of the woman who sold newspapers, there was a continuous, deadened plaint, without doubt a forgotten little dog. Below, in the apartments of the Dauvergnes, the piano had stopped. It was now a gay clatter of pots and pans, the two housekeepers occupying themselves in the depths of their kitchen, Claire in looking after a ragout of mutton, Sophie in preparing a salad. And she, crushed, heard them laughing, in the frightful distress of the night which was falling.

At quarter past six the engine of the Havre express came out from the Pont de l'Europe, was sent to its train and coupled. Because of an incumbrance they had been unable to run this train beneath the marquee of the great lines. It was standing in the open air beside the
landing, which prolonged itself in a sort of narrow jetty amid the darkness of an inky sky, where the file of gas-jets, planted along the sidewalk, was but a line of smoky stars. A shower had just ceased; it had left behind it a breath of icy dampness spread over this vast uncovered space, which a fog enlarged as far as the pale little glimmers of the house fronts of the Rue de Rome. This was immense and melancholy, here and there pricked by a ruddy light, confusedly peopled by opaque masses, the solitary engines and cars, the stumps of trains sleeping upon the sidings; and from the depths of this lake of gloom came sounds, gigantic respirations panting with excitement, whistle shrieks like the sharp cries of women in distress, notes of distant horns sounding mournfully amid the roar of the neighboring streets. Orders were shouted to add a car. Standing motionless, the engine of the express was emitting through a valve a big jet of steam which ascended in all this darkness where it spread out in little clouds, sowing with white tears the boundless mourning hung in the sky.

At 6.20 Roubaud and Séverine appeared. The latter had just returned the key to Mère Victoire as she passed the cabinets beside the waiting-rooms; and Roubaud was pushing her along with the hurried air of a husband whom his wife delays, he, impatient and rough, his hat on the back of his head, she, with her veil drawn about her face, hesitating as if broken by fatigue. A flood of passengers was rushing along the landing; they mingled with it, passing the file of cars and searching for an empty first-class compartment. The sidewalk grew animated, porters rolled to the covered car at the head of the train the vans filled with baggage, a superintend-ent occupied himself with establishing a numerous family in places and the under chief of service gave a glance at the couplings, his signal-lantern in his hand, to see that all were correctly made. And Roubaud, having at last found an empty compartment, was about to put
Séverine into it, when he was perceived by the station master, M. Vandorpe, who was walking there in company with his chief assistant for the great lines, M. Dauvergne, both of them with their hands behind their backs, watching the manœuvring for the car that was to be added. Bows were exchanged and they stopped to talk.

At first they spoke of the matter of the sub-préfect, which had ended to the satisfaction of everybody. Afterwards they chatted of an accident which had happened at Havre in the morning and which the telegraph had transmitted: an engine, the "Lison," which, on Thursday and Saturday, ran the 6.30 express, had had its driving-rod broken just as the train was entering the dépôt yard; and the repairs would keep down there for a couple of days the engineer, Jacques Lantier, a man from the same district as Roubaud, and his fireman, Pecqueux, Mère Victoire's man. Standing in front of the door of the compartment, Séverine was waiting, without getting in, while her husband was affecting with these gentlemen a great freedom of mind, raising his voice and laughing. But there was a crash and the train was driven back several yards: it was the engine which was backing the first cars upon that which was to be added, No. 293, in order to get a reserved coupé. And the younger Dauvergne, Henri, who accompanied the train in the capacity of chief conductor, having recognized Séverine beneath her veil, had prevented her from being hit by the open door by drawing her away from it with a prompt movement; then, apologizing and smiling very amiably, he explained to her that the coupé was for one of the administrators of the company, who had asked for it half an hour before the time for the departure of the train. She gave a little nervous laugh, without cause, and he ran away to his duties; he quitted her enchanted, for he had often said to himself that she was a very agreeable woman.
The clock marked 6.27. Yet three minutes. Suddenly Roubaud, who was keeping a watch on the doors of the waiting-rooms in the distance, as he chatted with the station-master, quitted the latter and returned to Séverine. But the car had changed its place and they were compelled to go several paces to get to the empty compartment; and, turning his back, he jostled his wife and made her get in with a movement of the wrist, while in her anxious docility she instinctively looked back to see what was the matter. It was a belated passenger who had arrived with nothing but a wrap in his hand, the collar of his big blue coat turned up and so ample, the rim of his Derby hat so far down over his eyebrows, that one saw of his face, in the flickering light of the gas, only a bit of white beard. Nevertheless M. Vandorpe and M. Dauvergne had advanced, despite the evident desire the traveler had not to be seen. They followed him; he did not bow to them until he was three cars further on, in front of the reserved coupé, into which he hastily climbed. It was he. Séverine, trembling, had let herself fall upon the seat. Her husband ground her arm with a clutch, like a final entrance into possession, exultant now that he was certain of doing the thing.

In a minute the half hour struck. A hawker persisted in offering evening newspapers and some passengers were still promenading upon the landing, finishing their cigarettes. But everybody got in; superintendents were heard coming from both ends of the train, shutting the car doors. And Roubaud, who had experienced the disagreeable surprise of perceiving, in the compartment which he had believed empty, a sombre form occupying a corner, a woman in mourning no doubt, mute and motionless, could not restrain an exclamation of veritable rage when the door was reopened and a superintendent pushed in a couple, a big man and a big woman, who sank down there almost in a state of suffocation. The
train was about to start. A very fine rain had resumed falling, enwrapping the vast dark space, which incessantly was traversed by trains of which one could make out only the lighted glasses, a file of little moving windows. Green blazes were lighted and some lanterns went dancing along the ground. And there was nothing else, nothing but an immense blackness, amid which appeared only the marquées of the great lines, paled by a faint reflection of the gas. Everything was swallowed up, the sounds themselves were deadened; there was but the thunder of the engine, opening its valves and sending forth whirling floods of white steam. A cloud arose, unrolling like the winding-sheet of an apparition, in which passed a big stream of black smoke come from one knew not where. The sky was again obscured by it, a cloud of soot flew away over Paris plunged in night, reddened by its street lamps.

Then the under chief of service raised his lantern that the engineer might demand the right of way. There were two whistle shrieks, and down by the post of the switch-tender the red light vanished and was replaced by a white light. Standing at the door of the baggage car, the chief conductor awaited the order to start, which he transmitted. The engineer let off another whistle, a long one, and opened his regulator, freeing the engine. Off they went. At first the movement was imperceptible, then the train rolled along. It went off under the Pont de l'Europe and plunged towards the tunnel of the Batignolles. One saw of it, bleeding like open wounds, only the three rear lights, the red triangle. For several seconds longer one could follow it in the black quiver of the night. Now it was in rapid flight, and nothing further could stop this train launched forth under a full head of steam. It disappeared.
CHAPTER II.

AT THE CROIX-DE-MAUFRAS.

At the Croix-de-Maufras, in a garden cut by the railway, the house stood sidewise, so near the track that all the passing trains shook it; and a single trip sufficed to bear it away in one’s memory; everybody shooting by it at top speed knew it was at that place, without knowing anything about it, always closed, left as if in distress, with its gray window shutters which the rains from the west had turned green. It was abandonment itself; it served still further to augment the solitude of that out-of-the-way corner, which a league in all directions separated from every living soul.

The house of the barrière guard alone was there, at the corner of the highway which was crossed by the line going to Doinville, five kilomètres distant. Low, the walls cracked, the tiles of the roof eaten by moss, it crouched with an abandoned air of poverty, in the midst of the garden which surrounded it, a garden planted with vegetables, closed with a live hedge and in which loomed up a huge well, as high as the house. The passage at grade was between the stations of Malaunay and Barentin, exactly midway, four kilomètres from each. It was but little frequented, the old half-rotten barrière rarely opening except for the trucks from the stone quarries of Bécourt, half a league off in the forest. One could not imagine a more sequestered hole, one more separated from the living, for the long tunnel in the direction of Malaunay cut off all communication and the only connection with Barentin was by an ill-kept road that ran along the line. Hence visitors were rare.
That day, at nightfall, amid the very mild temperature of cloudy weather, a traveler, who had just quitted at Barentin a train from Havre, was following with a swinging gait the Croix-de-Maufras road. The district is but an uninterrupted suite of valleys and hills, a sort of wave-like arrangement of the soil, which the railway traverses alternately upon banks and in cuts. On each side of the way, these continual variations of the land, the ascents and the descents, add the finishing touches to the difficulty of the roads. The sensation of great solitude is thereby augmented; the poor, chalky lands lie uncultivated; trees crown the hills with little groves, while along the narrow valleys run streams shaded by willows. Other chalky knobs are absolutely bare and the sterile hillocks succeed each other in the silence and abandonment of death. And the traveler, who was young and vigorous, hastened his pace as if to escape from the sadness of that soft twilight upon that desolate region.

In the garden of the barrière guard a girl was drawing water from the well, a tall girl of eighteen, blonde, strong, with a thick mouth, big greenish eyes and a low forehead beneath heavy locks. She was not pretty; she had the solid hips and the hard arms of a boy. As soon as she perceived the traveler coming down the path, she dropped her bucket and ran to the wicket gate which closed the live hedge.

"Hallo, Jacques!" cried she.

He raised his head. He was past twenty-six, also tall and very dark, a handsome fellow with a round and regular visage which was spoiled by too heavy jaws. His thick hair curled, as did his moustache, and both were so bushy and black that they added pallor to his complexion. One might have thought him a gentleman from his fine skin, well-shaven upon the cheeks, if one had not found elsewhere the indelible imprint of his trade, the grease which had already yellowed his engineer's hands, hands which, however, had remained small and supple.
"Good-evening, Flore," said he, simply.

But his eyes, which were large, black and sparkling, seemed as if troubled by a ruddy smoke which dimmed them. His eyelids quivered and his eyes turned away with a sudden embarrassment, an uneasiness which nearly approached suffering. And his entire body had an instinctive movement of recoil.

She, standing motionless, her glance fixed straight upon him, had perceived this involuntary start, which he strove to master each time he spoke to a woman. She seemed very serious and sad because of it. Then, desirous of concealing his embarrassment, as he asked her if her mother was in the house, although he knew that she was ill and incapable of going out, she stood aside that he might enter without touching her and returned to the well with her figure proudly drawn up.

Jacques, with his rapid step, crossed the narrow garden and entered the house. There in the centre of the first room, a vast kitchen where they ate and lived, Aunt Phasie, as he had called her since his childhood, was alone, seated at the table, upon a straw-bottom chair, her legs wrapped in an old shawl. She was a cousin of his father, a Lantier, who had been his godmother, and who, when he was six years old, had taken him to her house, when, his father and mother having disappeared, fled to Paris, he had remained at Plassans, where, later, he had followed the course of the École des Arts-et-Métiers. He was very grateful to her for this and said that if he had made his way he owed it to her. When he had become an engineer of the first class of the Compagnie de l'Ouest, after two years spent on the Orléans railway, he had found his godmother here, remarried to a barrière guard of the name of Misard, exiled with her two daughters by her first husband in this out-of-the-way hole of the Croix-de-Maufras. To-day, though scarcely forty-five, the handsome Aunt Phasie of the past, so tall and strong, seemed sixty, thinned away, yellowed and shaken by continual chills.
“What! it’s you, Jacques! Ah! my big boy, what a surprise!”

He kissed her on the cheeks and explained that he had suddenly got two days of forced leave: the “Lison,” his engine, on arriving at Harve that morning had had its driving-rod broken, and as the repairs could not be finished before twenty-four hours, he would not resume his service until the morrow evening for the 6.40 express. Then, he had made up his mind to come and kiss her. He would sleep there and would not start for Barentin until the 7.26 A. M. train. And he kept in his her poor thin hands; he told her how uneasy her last letter had made him.

“Oh! yes, my lad, things don’t go any more, things don’t go any more at all! How kind you were to have guessed my wish to see you! But I know how closely you are kept and did not dare ask you to come. Well, you’re here and I’ve such a heavy heart, such a heavy heart!”

She paused to cast a timid look out of the window. In the fading light, on the other side of the way, they saw her husband, Misard, in a station post, one of those plank huts, established every five or six kilomètres and connected by telegraph in order to assure the proper circulation of the trains. While his wife and later Flore had taken charge of the barrière of the passage at grade, they had made Misard a station man.

As if he might be able to hear her, she lowered her voice into a tremble.

“I really believe he’s poisoning me!”

Jacques gave a start of surprise at this confidence and his eyes, also turning towards the window, were again affected by that singular trouble, that little ruddy smoke which paled their black brightness, sown with gold.

“Oh! Aunt Phasie, what an idea!” murmured he. “He seemed so gentle and so weak.”

A train from Havre had just passed and Misard had
come out of his post to close the way behind it. While he raised the lever, bringing up the red signal, Jacques examined him. He was a sickly-looking little man, with thin and faded hair and beard, with a hollow and pinched face. Add to this that he was silent, unobtrusive, mild, and obsequiously polite to the chiefs. But he had gone back into the plank hut to enter upon his blotter the hour of passage and to push the two electric buttons, one of which opened the road to the preceding post, while the other announced the train to the post succeeding.

"Ah! you don't know him," resumed Aunt Phasie. "I tell you he must be giving me some nasty stuff. I was so strong that I could have eaten him and it is he, this bit of a man, this nothing at all, who is eating me!"

She grew excited with secret and timid bitterness and emptied her heart, delighted to have found at last some one to whom she could talk. Where had she got it into her head to remarry with such a sullen fellow, who hadn't a sou and was a miser, she older than he by five years, having two daughters, one six and the other eight at the time? It was nearly ten years since she had made this beautiful stroke and not an hour had passed in which she had not repented of it—a life of poverty, an exile in this icy corner of the north, where she shivered and almost died from never having anybody to talk to, not even a female neighbor. He was a former track-layer, who now received twelve hundred francs as station man; she at first had been paid fifty francs for attending to the barrière of which to-day Flore was in charge; and there was the present and the future—no other hope—the certainty of living and dying in this hole a thousand leagues away from the living. What she did not relate were the consolations she yet had before having fallen sick, when her husband was working at ballasting the road and she was left to guard the
barrière with her daughters; for she possessed then all along the line from Rouen to Havre such a reputation as a handsome woman that the track inspectors visited her as they passed by; there had even been rivalries, the inspectors of another service were always on a tour to redouble the surveillance. The husband was not a bother, yielding to everybody, gliding through the doors, going and returning without seeing anything. But these amusements had ceased, and she remained there for weeks and months upon that chair, in that solitude, feeling her body melt away a little more from hour to hour.

"I tell you," repeated she in conclusion, "that he is hard after me and he will finish me, little as he is."

A sudden ringing of a bell made her cast outside the same uneasy look. It was the post on ahead which had announced to Misard a train going to Paris; and the needle of the station house apparatus placed before the window had inclined in the direction. He stopped the bell and went out to signal the train with two horn blasts.

Flore at that moment closed the barrière; then she took her place, holding straight aloft the signal-flag with its leather staff. They heard the train, an express hidden by a curve, approaching with an increasing din. It passed like a flash of lightning, shaking and threatening to carry away the low house in the midst of a tempest gale. Already Flore had returned to her vegetables, while Misard, after having closed the ascending way behind the train, reopened the descending way by lowering the lever to efface the red signal; for a new alarm on the bell, accompanied by the raising of another needle, had notified him that the train which went by five minutes before had passed the succeeding post. He went in, notified the two posts, entered the passage upon his blotter and then awaited. This was the toil, always the same, which he did for twelve hours, living there, eating there, without reading three lines in a newspaper, without appearing to have an idea in his slanting skull.
Jacques, who in the past had joked his godmother on the ravages she made among the track inspectors, could not help smiling as he said:

"Perhaps he is jealous."

But Phasie gave a shrug of her shoulders, full of pity, while a laugh she could not resist also mounted to her poor faded eyes.

"Ah, my lad, what's that you're saying? He jealous! He always snapped his fingers at it, provided it took nothing from his pocket."

Then again seized upon by her chill:

"No, no, he did not care anything about that. He cares only for money. What raised the row between us, you see, was that I wouldn't give him the thousand francs I inherited last year from papa. Then, as he threatened me, this brought me misfortune—I fell sick and the illness has not quitted me since that time—no, not since that very time."

The young man understood, and, as he believed that sick women had gloomy notions, he again strove to dissuade her. But she persisted with a shake of the head, like a person whose conviction is made. Therefore he said finally:

"Well! nothing is more simple if you wish to bring matters to an end. Give him your thousand francs."

With an extraordinary effort she got upon her feet and, resuscitated, she exclaimed violently:

"My thousand francs, never!—I'd rather die. Ah! they are hidden, well hidden, my boy. He can turn the house upside down but I defy him to find them. And, the scoundrel, he has turned it upside down enough. I've heard him at night sounding all the walls, hunting, hunting! The only thing that kept me patient was the pleasure of seeing his nose get longer. You'll see who'll let go the first, he or I. I'm suspicious—I don't swallow anything more that he touches. And if I peg out, well! he won't have them all the same, my
thousand francs! I would prefer to leave them in the ground."

She fell back upon the chair, worn out, shaken by a new horn blast. It was Misard on the threshold of the station house, who this time was signaling a train going to Havre. Despite her obstinate persistence in not giving him the heritage, she had a secret, growing fear of him, the fear of a colossus for an insect which is devouring him. And the train announced, the omnibus which had left Paris at 12.45, was heard in the distance with its hollow roll. They heard it come out of the tunnel and blow more loudly in the country. Then it passed with the thunder of its wheels and the mass of its cars, in the invincible power of a hurricane.

Jacques, his eyes raised toward the window, had watched the little square panes of glass, at which appeared the profiles of travelers, shoot by. He strove to banish Phasie's sombre notions, resuming in a joking voice:

"Godmother, you complain that you don't see even a cat in your hole. But there goes company!"

Astonished, she did not at first understand.

"Where's company? Ah, yes, those people who pass. That's a good one! Why, you don't know them—and can't talk to them."

He continued to laugh.

"You know me well enough and you often see me pass."

"You? Yes, I know you and I know the hour of your train and I watch for you on your engine. But you fly, you fly! Yesterday, you waved your hand to me. I couldn't even reply. No, no, that's not a way of seeing people."

However, this idea of the crowds with the ascending and descending trains carried past her amid the great silence of her solitude left her thoughtful, her glances fixed upon the road on which the darkness was falling. When she was strong and went and came, planting her-
self before the barrière, the flag in her fist, she had never thought of those things. But confused reveries, scarcely formed, had bothered her brains since she had sat for days upon that chair, having nothing to think of but her sullen struggle with her husband. It seemed droll to her to live lost in the depths of this desert, without a soul in whom she could confide, when continually, day and night, so many men and women rushed by in the tempest of the trains, shaking the house, flying under full steam. Very sure the entire world passed there, not French people alone, but strangers also, people come from the most distant countries since nobody now could remain at home and as all the people, as was said, would soon be but a single one. That was progress, all brothers, rolling all together down there toward the district of Cocagne.

She strove to count them at so many per car, but there were too many, she didn’t succeed. Often she thought she recognized faces, that of a gentleman with a blonde beard, an Englishman doubtless, who made a trip to Paris every week; that of a little brunette lady, passing regularly Wednesdays and Saturdays. But they were carried past like a lightning flash and she was not quite sure of having seen them; all the faces were jammed together, confounded, as if alike, disappearing one in another. The torrent flowed by, leaving nothing of itself behind. And what made her sad was, beneath this continual roll, beneath so much comfort and such an expenditure of money, to feel that this growling crowd did not know that she was there, in danger of death, ignorant of the point that if her husband finished her some evening the trains would continue to pass near her corpse without even suspecting the crime in the depths of the solitary house.

Phasie sat with her eyes upon the window, and she gave a résumé of what she felt too vaguely to explain it in full.
“Ah! It’s a fine invention, no doubt of it. One goes quickly, one is more learned. But the wild beasts remain wild beasts, and it will be in vain that they invent machines better still—there will be, nevertheless, wild beasts at bottom!”

Jacques again tossed his head, to say that he thought as she did. For an instant past he had been looking at Flore, who had opened the barrière to let a truck, loaded with two enormous blocks of stone, pass through. The road went only to the quarries of Bécourt, so at night the barrière was generally padlocked, and it was very rarely that the young girl was called up. On seeing her chatting familiarly with the quarryman, a little brown young man, he exclaimed:

“Ah! so Cabuche is sick and his cousin Louis drives his horses? Poor Cabuche, do you see him often, Godmother?”

She raised her hands, without replying, uttering a heavy sigh. It was a whole drama, last fall, which had not been calculated to restore her health: Her daughter Louisette, the younger, placed as femme de chambre with Madame Bonnehon at Doinville, had run away one evening, frightened and bruised, to go die at the house of her good friend, Cabuche, that house which the latter inhabited in the midst of the forest. Stories had circulated, which accused President Grandmorin of violence; but no one dared to repeat it aloud. The mother herself, though well satisfied on that head, did not like to return to the subject. However, she finished by saying:

“No, he goes home no more, he has become a regular wolf. That poor Louisette, who was so pretty, so white, so gentle—she loved me greatly and would have attended to me, while Flore, mon Dieu! I don’t complain about it, but there’s surely something wrong with her; she’s always fixing up, disappears for hours and is proud and violent! All that is sad, very sad.”

As he listened, Jacques continued to gaze after the
quarryman, who was now crossing the track. But the wheels got caught in the rails and the driver was forced to crack his whip, while Flore herself cried out, exciting the horses.

"Fichtre!" declared the young man. "If a train should come along now there'd be a smash up!"

"Oh! no danger," resumed Aunt Phasie. "Flore is funny at times, but she knows her business and keeps her eye open. God be praised, for five years we haven't had an accident. Before that a man was cut in two. We only had a cow which nearly derailed a train. Ah! the poor animal. They found the body here and the head down there near the tunnel. With Flore, one need fear no danger."

The quarryman had passed, they heard the heavy thumps of the wheels in the ruts die away in the distance. Then she returned to her constant preoccupation, the idea of health, others' as well as her own.

"And you, does it go all right with you now? You remember what you suffered with here, and of which the doctor understood nothing, do you not?"

He again had his shifting, uneasy look.

"I'm all right, Godmother."

"Indeed! All that pain gone, which shot through your head behind the ears, and the sudden fits of fever, and those attacks of sadness which made you hide yourself like a beast in the depths of a hole?"

As she chatted on he grew more troubled, attacked by such uneasiness that he finished by interrupting her in a short voice:

"I assure you that I am very well. I've nothing the matter with me any longer, nothing at all."

"So much the better, my lad! Your being sick would not cure me. And, besides, it belongs to your age to have health. Ah, there's nothing so good as health. It was very kind of you, all the same, to have come to see me when you might have gone to amuse yourself elsewhere."
You'll take dinner with us, won't you? And you'll sleep up-stairs in the garret, beside Flore's chamber."

But once more a horn blast cut her short. The night had fallen and, turning toward the window, they could but confusedly distinguish Misard talking with another man. Six o'clock had just struck, he was turning over his service to his successor, the night man. He was about to be at liberty at last, after twelve hours passed in that hut furnished only with a little table, on which was the electrical apparatus, with a stool and a stove, the heat from which was so powerful as to oblige him almost constantly to keep the door open.

"Ah! here he is, he's about to come in," murmured Aunt Phasie, her fear again taking possession of her.

The train announced arrived, very heavy and very long, with its increasing din. And the young man had to bend down to make the sick woman hear him, moved by the miserable condition to which he saw that she had reduced herself and desirous of comforting her.

"See here, Godmother, if he really has evil notions, perhaps it will put a stop to them if he knows I'm mixed up in the business. You would do well to entrust your thousand francs to me."

She rebelled again at this.

"My thousand francs! I won't give them to you any more than I would to him. I tell you I'd rather die!"

At that moment the train passed in its tempestuous violence, as if it had swept away everything before it. It made the house tremble, enveloped by a gale of wind. That train, which was going to Havre, was heavily laden, for there was to be a fête there the next day (Sunday), the launching of a ship. Despite its speed, through the lighted sashes in the doors they had had a vision of full compartments, files of heads packed in rows, each with its profile. They succeeded each other and disappeared. How many people! Again the crowd, the endless crowd, amid the roll of the cars, the hissing
of the engines, the click of the telegraph and the tinkling of bells. It was like a great body, a gigantic being lying across the country, the head at Paris, the vertebrae all along the line, the limbs spreading out with the branches, the feet and hands at Havre and in the other cities where trains arrived. And all this passed, passed, mechanically, triumphantly, going to the future with mathematical correctness, in the voluntary ignorance of what remained of man on both sides of the track, hidden and always stirring, eternal passion and eternal crime.

Flore was the first to come in. She lighted the lamp, a little kerosene lamp without a shade, and set the table. Not a word was exchanged, she scarcely shot a glance towards Jacques, who had turned away and was standing at the window. Upon the stove some cabbage soup was being kept warm. She served it, when Misard appeared in his turn. He showed no surprise at finding the young man there. Perhaps he had seen him arrive, but he did not question him, being without curiosity. A grasping of hands, three short words, but nothing more. Jacques himself was compelled to repeat the story of the broken driving-rod, his idea of coming to embrace his godmother and sleeping there. Misard contented himself with gently nodding his head as if he approved, and they sat down, eating without haste, at first in silence. Phasie, who, since morning, had not taken her eyes from the pot in which the cabbage soup was boiling, accepted a dish of it. But her husband having risen to give her her iron water, forgotten by Flore, which was on some nails in a decanter, she did not touch it. He, humble, puny, coughing a wretched little cough, did not seem to notice the anxious looks with which she followed his slightest movements. As she asked for salt, of which there was none on the table, he said to her that she would repent of eating so much of it, as it was that which made her sick; and he got up again to get some, brought a pinch of it in a spoon,
salt purifying everything, she said. Then they chatted of the warm weather of the last few days, of the derailing of a train which had taken place at Maromme. Jacques came to the conclusion that his godmother was beset by waking nightmares, for he saw nothing suspicious about this bit of a man, so complaisant, with dreamy eyes. They lingered more than an hour at table. Twice, at the horn signal, Flore had disappeared for an instant. The trains passed, shaking the glasses on the table; but none of the parties gave this circumstance even the slightest attention.

Another horn blast was heard, and, this time, Flore, who had removed the dishes, did not reappear. She left her mother and the two men sitting in front of a bottle of champagne cider. All three remained there half an hour longer. Then, Misard, who, for an instant past, had fixed his searching eyes on a corner of the room, took his cap and went out with a simple good-evening. He poached in the small streams of the neighborhood, where were superb eels, and never did he retire to bed without paying a visit to his bottom lines.

As soon as he was gone, Phasie looked fixedly at her godson.

"Well, would you believe it? Did you see him staring at that corner? He's got the notion that I might have hidden my hoard behind the butter-pot. Ah! I know him—I'm sure that to-night he'll remove the pot to see."

Sweat broke out on her and her limbs trembled.

"Look! here it is again! He must have drugged me, for my mouth's as bitter as if I'd swallowed old sous. God knows, however, that I took nothing from his hand! I must distrust even water! This evening, I can't hold out any longer and it's best for me to go to bed. So good-bye, my lad, because if you start at 7.26 in the morning that will be too early for me. Come back, won't you?—and let's hope that I may still be here."
He helped her into her chamber, where she went to bed and fell asleep, overcome. Left alone, he hesitated for a moment, asking himself if he should not go upstairs also to stretch himself on the straw which awaited him in the garret. But it was only quarter past eight o'clock and he had plenty of time for sleep. And he went out in his turn, leaving the little kerosene lamp burning in the empty and sleepy house, shaken from time to time by the sudden thunder of a train.

Outside, Jacques was surprised at the mildness of the air. Without doubt it was going to rain again. In the sky a milky cloud was uniformly spread out and the full moon, which could not be seen, concealed behind it, lighted all the heavenly vault with a ruddy reflection. Hence he clearly distinguished the country, the lands of which about him, the hills and the trees stood out in black beneath that even and dead light, of the tranquillity of a night-lamp. He walked through the little kitchen-garden. Then he thought of going in the direction of Doinville, the road in that quarter ascending less roughly. But the sight of the solitary mansion, planted crosswise on the other side of the line, having attracted him, he crossed the track and passed through the little gate, for the barrière was already closed for the night. He was well acquainted with that mansion; he looked at it on each of his trips amid the rattling swinging of his engine. It haunted him, why he knew not, with the confused sensation that it was connected with his existence. Each time he experienced a sort of fear that he would not find it there again, and afterwards a sort of uneasiness on convincing himself that it was still there. Never had he seen either the doors or the windows open. All that he had learned about it was that it belonged to President Grandmorin, and, that evening, an irresistible desire seized upon him to take a turn around it in order to learn more.

For a long while Jacques remained planted in the road
in front of the grating. He drew back and stood on the tips of his toes, striving to make out what was beyond. The railway, in cutting the garden, had left in front of the house only a narrow parterre closed by walls, while behind stretched away quite a vast field, surrounded simply by a live hedge. It was of a lugubrious sadness in its abandonment beneath the red reflection of that smoky night; and he was about to go away, with a shiver on the surface of his skin, when he noticed a gap in the hedge. The idea that it would be cowardly not to enter made him pass through the gap. His heart beat as if it would burst. But, immediately, as he was going along beside a little green-house in ruins, the sight of a shadow squatting at the door brought him to a halt.

"What! is it you?" he cried in astonishment as he recognized Flore. "What are you doing there?"
She also had given a start of surprise. Then she answered, tranquilly:
"You can see that I'm getting ropes. They have left a lot of ropes here which are rotting without being of use to any one. So, as I am always in need of some, I come here for my supply."
In fact, with a pair of strong scissors in her hand, seated on the ground, she was straightening out the ends of the ropes and cutting the knots when they resisted.
"So the proprietor don't come here any more, eh?" demanded the young man.
She burst out laughing.
"Oh! since the affair of Louisette there is no danger that the President will risk the tip of his nose at the Croix-de-Maufras. I can take his ropes with impunity."
He was silent for an instant and seemed troubled by the remembrance of the tragic adventure which she had evoked.
"And you believe the story Louisette told, do you?"
Ceasing to laugh and growing suddenly enraged, she cried out:
"Louisette never lied, neither did Cabuche! Cabuche is my friend!"

"Your lover, perhaps, at this hour."

"He! Ah! I'd have to be a famous trollop for that! No, no, he's my friend; I have no lovers and I don't want any."

She had raised her powerful head, the thick blonde fleece of which curled very low upon her forehead; and from all her solid and supple being mounted a savage energy of will. Already a legend was forming concerning her in the district. Stories of rescues were related: a cart withdrawn from a collision on the passage of a train; a car stopped as it was tearing alone down the declivity at Barentin, like a furious animal galloping towards an express train. And these proofs of strength astonished and made men like her, the more as they had believed her easy to get around at first, always running the fields as soon as she was at liberty, seeking out-of-the-way nooks and lying in the depths of holes with her eyes in the air, mute and motionless. But the first who had taken a risk with her had no desire to recommence the adventure. She loved to bathe in a neighboring stream, and as one day she caught a lad of her own age watching her in the water she hurled a stone and struck him with such force that, when the story spread, none of the lads judged it prudent to annoy her again. Finally, the rumor was afloat of her affair with a switch-tender of the Dieppe branch at the other end of the tunnel. He was named Ozil, a fellow about thirty years old and very honest. She seemed to have encouraged him for an instant, but, one evening, he offered her an insult and she nearly beat him to death with a stick. She was pure and a fighter, as well as disdainful of the fellows, which facts ultimately convinced the people around her that she was surely gone in the head.

On hearing her declare that she didn't want any lovers, Jacques continued to joke.
"So your marriage with Ozil is off, eh? I had been told that every day you went through the tunnel to rejoin him."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah! goodness, my marriage! The tunnel amused me! Two kilomètres and a half to gallop in the dark, with the idea that one might be cut in two by a train if one did not look sharp. You ought to hear the trains thundering away in there. But I got tired of Ozil. He's not at all the man I want."

"You want another then?"

"Ah! I can't tell. Ah! ma foi, no!"

She burst out laughing again, while a tinge of embarrassment caused her to resume work on a knot of one of the ropes which she could not unfasten. Then, without raising her head, as if greatly absorbed by her work:

"And you, have you no sweetheart?"

In his turn, Jacques grew serious again. His unsteady eyes were turned away and fixed afar off in the darkness. He responded, in a short voice:

"No."

"That's it," continued she. "I've been told that you abominate women. And, besides, though I did not become acquainted with you yesterday, you have never addressed an amiable word to me. What's the reason of that?"

He was silent; she dropped the knot and looked at him.

"Is it the fact then that you love only your engine? People joke about that, you know. They say that you are always rubbing it in order to make it shine, as if you had caresses only for it. I tell you this because I am your friend."

He also was now looking at her in the pale brightness of the smoky sky. And he remembered her when she was little, violent and headstrong already, but hanging about his neck the moment he arrived, smitten with a
wild girl's passion for him. Afterwards, having often lost sight of her, he had found her, on each return, grown taller, but receiving him with the same hanging about his neck and embarrassing him more and more by the flame of her big bright eyes. At this hour she was a woman, superb and desirable, and she had loved him without doubt from very far back, from the depths of her very childhood. His heart began to beat; he experienced the sudden sensation of being the one she was waiting for. A great trouble mounted to his skull with the blood of his veins; his first impulse was to fly in the anguish which had taken possession of him. His excitement had made him mad, he saw red.

"Why are you standing up there?" asked she. "Will you sit down?"

Again he hesitated; then he let himself sink down on the pile of ropes. He no longer spoke; his throat was dry. It was she now, the proud and silent one, who gabbled on till she lost her breath, very gay, amazing herself.

"See, now, where mamma was wrong was in marrying Misard. He will play her some scurvy trick. I don't care, because I've had enough of his affairs. Don't you think so? And besides, mamma packs me off to bed as soon as I wish to interfere. So let her get out of it herself! I live out-of-doors and think of things for later on. Ah! do you know that I saw you pass this morning on your engine from the bushes down there amid which I was seated. But you never look! And I'll tell you the things I'm thinking about, but not now, later, when we are altogether good friends."

She had let her scissors drop and he, still silent, had taken possession of both her hands. In delight, she had abandoned them to him. Nevertheless, when he raised them to his burning lips, she gave a frightened start. The fighter was awakened in her and ready to do battle.

"No, no, don't do that, I don't want you to. Sit still
and we will talk. Ah! suppose I repeat to you what Louisette related to me the day she died at Cabuche's? Besides, I knew more about the President then than that, because I had seen his carryings-on when he came here with young girls. There is one of them whom nobody suspects, one whom he married off."

He was not listening to her, did not hear her. He had seized her with a brutal clasp and was crushing her mouth against his. She uttered a slight cry, or rather a plaint, so profound and so mild, in which burst forth the confession of her long-concealed tenderness. But she still struggled, refusing through an instinct of combat. She wanted him and yet disputed with him, having the need of being conquered. Suddenly, in the midst of the struggle, she turned pale and, falling over on the ropes, fainted.

Then, he stared at her, panting, and sprang to his feet. A fury seemed to take possession of him, a ferocity which made him look around him for a weapon, a stone, something with which to kill her. His glance encountered the scissors, gleaming amid the bits of rope. With a bound he picked them up and would have plunged them into her throat, but the cold sobered him and he threw them down and fled, while she lay like a stone. When she came to no trace of him remained.

Jacques fled in the melancholy night. He galloped up the path of a hill, which went down into the depths of a narrow valley on the other side. Pebbles rolling beneath his feet frightened him; he turned to the left among the bushes, made a cross-cut which brought him back to the right upon an empty plateau. Suddenly he went down and brought up against the hedge of the railway. A train arrived, thundering and flaming; and he did not understand at first, so terrified was he. Ah! yes, all these people were passing there, the continual flow, while he was agonizing! He started off again, climbed, and descended again. Now he constantly
encountered the railroad, either at the bottom of deep trenches which hollowed out abysses, or upon banks which shut off the horizon with gigantic barricades. This deserted district, cut by hillocks, was like a labyrinth without issue, where his flight wheeled round and round in the mournful desolation of the uncultivated land. And for long minutes he had been beating the declivities, when he saw in front of him the black opening, the open muzzle of the tunnel. An ascending train was being engulfed there, howling and hissing, leaving when it had disappeared, been drunk by the earth, a long shock behind it, with which the soil trembled.

Then Jacques, his legs broken with fatigue, fell at the side of the line and burst into convulsive sobs, stretched out upon his stomach, his face in the grass. Mon Dieu! so it had returned, that abominable curse of which he had believed himself cured! He had wished to kill that girl! kill a woman!—that rang in his ears from the depths of his childhood, with the growing fever of excitement. Instead of wishing to marry one, like the rest, he had wished to slay one. For he could not lie to himself—he had picked up the scissors to plant them in that flesh as soon as he had seen it, that flesh, that warm and white throat. And it was not on account of anger; no! it was for pleasure, because he had a desire to commit the deed, such a desire that if he had not caught hold of the grass he would have galloped back down there to slaughter her. She, mon Dieu! that Flore whom he had seen grow up, that savage child by whom he had just learned that he was beloved so deeply! His twisted fingers entered the ground, his sobs tore his throat, in a frightful rattle of despair.

However, he strove to calm himself; he would have liked to have understood. In what was he different when he compared himself to others? At Plassans, in his childhood, he had already asked himself the question often. His mother Gervaise, it was true, had borne him
very young, at fifteen and a half years of age; but he was the second to arrive, she having scarcely entered her fourteenth year when she gave birth to the first, Claude; and neither of the two brothers, Claude or Étienne, the latter born later, seemed to suffer because of such a youthful mother and of a father as young as she was, that handsome Lantier, whose evil heart was to cost Gervaise so many tears. Perhaps, also, his brothers had each his malady, which he did not avow, the elder especially, who was striving so furiously to be a painter that people said his genius had driven him half-crazy. The family was not well balanced, many of them had had a screw loose somewhere. He, at certain hours, had felt that this hereditary difficulty had descended to him, not that he was in ill health, for the apprehension and shame of his crises alone had thinned him in the past; but there were in his being sudden losses of equilibrium like breaks, holes through which his individuality escaped from him, in the midst of a sort of great smoke which deformed everything. He no longer belonged to himself, he obeyed his muscles, he obeyed the enraged animal. Nevertheless, he did not drink, he even refused a pony glass of brandy, having remarked that the slightest drop of alcohol set him wild. And he had come to think that he was paying for the others, the fathers and grandfathers who had drunk, the generations of drunkards whose spoiled blood he had inherited, a slow poisoning, a savagery which placed him with the wolves who preyed on women in the depths of the woods.

Jacques had raised himself upon one elbow, reflecting, looking at the black entrance of the tunnel; and a new sob shook him from head to foot, he fell down again, he rolled his head on the ground, crying out with pain. That girl, that girl whom he had wished to kill! This pain returned to him sharp and frightful as if the scissors had entered into his own flesh. No reasoning appealed
him: he had wished to kill her, he would kill her if she were still there, lying with her bare throat. He remembered clearly, when he was scarcely sixteen, the first time his malady had broken out, one evening when he was playing with a young girl, the daughter of a relative and his junior by two years: he fell upon her and nearly killed her. The following year he remembered having sharpened a knife and plunging it into the neck of another, a little blonde whom he saw pass his door every morning. This girl had a very fat and very rosy neck; he had already chosen his place—a brown mark beneath the ear. Then there were others, others still, a nightmare army, all those who had been grazed by his sudden desire of murder—the women elbowed in the street, the women whom a meeting made his neighbors—one especially, a new made bride seated beside him at the theatre, who laughed very loudly and from whom he had been forced to flee in the midst of an act to avoid ripping her open. Since he had not known them, what fury could he have had against them? For, every time, it was like a sudden crisis of blind rage, a thirst constantly renewed to avenge very old offences, the exact memory of which he had lost. Did that come from such a long time back, from evil which women had done to his race, from the amassed bitterness transmitted from male to male since the first deception? And he felt also in his fit a necessity for fighting to conquer the female and tame her, the perverted need of throwing her dead upon his back like a prey one has stolen from others forever. His skull was bursting beneath the effort. He could not answer his questions, too ignorant, thought he, his brain too deadened by that anguish of a man driven to acts in which his will has no part and of which the cause had disappeared in him.

A train again passed with the lightning of its fires and plunged with a roll of thunder which growls and dies away into the depths of the tunnel; and Jacques, as
if this nameless, indifferent and hurried crowd had been able to hear him, had drawn himself up, choking back his sobs and assuming an attitude of innocence. How many times, after one of these fits, had he thus had starts like a culprit at the slightest sound! He lived tranquilly, happy and detached from the world, only when on his engine. When it bore him away with the crashing of its wheels, with great rapidity, when he had his hand upon the starting lever, wholly taken up with watching the way and looking out for signals, he no longer thought, he breathed great draughts of the pure air, which always blew like a tempest. And it was for this that he so strongly loved his engine, fully as much as if it had been an appeasing mistress, whom he weakened only with happiness. When he had quitted the École des Arts-et-Métiers, despite his lively intelligence, he had chosen this trade of engineer for the solitude and annihilation in which he would live while exercising it; besides, he was without ambition; in four years he had reached the post of first-class engineer, gaining already two thousand eight hundred francs, which his fireman’s and cleaner’s premiums raised to more than four thousand, but thinking of nothing beyond. He saw his comrades of the second and third class, those who belonged to the Company, the adjusting workmen whom it took to make pupils, he saw them nearly all marry work-girls, quiet women who were seen only at the hour of departure when they brought the little baskets of food; while his ambitious comrades, especially those who had come from a school, waited to be dépôt chiefs in order to get married, in the hope of finding some well-off lady of the bourgeoisie, a woman who wore a hat in the street. As for him, he had fled the women, for what did they matter to him? Never would he marry—he had no other future than to roll on alone, again and again, without rest. Hence all his chiefs looked upon him as a phenomenal engineer, not drinking, not running
after women, joked only by his merry comrades on account of his successive good conduct, and greatly disturbing the others when he fell into his fits of sadness, mute, with wan eyes and earthy face. In his little chamber of the Rue Cardinet, from whence one saw the dépôt of the Batignolles, to which his engine belonged, how many hours he remembered to have passed, all his free hours, shut up like a monk in the depths of his cell, wearing out the revolt of his malady by dint of slumber, lying upon his stomach!

With an effort Jacques strove to arise. What was he doing there in the grass on that warm and misty winter night? The country remained plunged in darkness, there was light only in the heavens, in the fine mist and the immense cupola of ground glass, which the moon hidden behind it, illuminated with a pale yellow reflection, and the black horizon slept with the motionlessness of death. It must be nearly nine o'clock—the best course was to go in the house and go to bed. But in his stupor, he saw himself returning to the house of the Misards, climbing the garret stairway and stretching himself out on the hay opposite Flore's chamber, a simple plank partition. She would be there. He would hear her breathe; he even knew that she never closed her door and that he might rejoin her. And a great chill swept over him again; the image evoked of this girl, her limbs abandoned and warm with sleep, shook him once more with a sob, the violence of which again brought him down on the soil. He had wished to kill her, wished to kill her, mon Dieu! He was choking, he was agonizing at the idea that he would go and kill her in her bed, presently if he returned. It did not matter that he had no weapon, it would be enough to envelop her head with his two arms to smother her; he felt that the human animal, beyond the control of his will, would push open the door and would strangle the girl under the impulsion of the instinct of destruction and from the
need of avenging the old-time injury. No, no! rather pass the night running about the country than return there! He arose with a bound and again fled.

Then again for half an hour he galloped across the dark country, as if the unchained pack of fears had pursued him with its cries. He climbed hills, he went down into narrow gorges. One after another two streams presented themselves: he crossed them, wetting himself to the hips. A bush which barred his road exasperated him. His sole thought was to go straight ahead, further, further, still further, to flee from himself, to flee from the other—the enraged animal which he felt within him. But he bore it away with him, it galloped as rapidly as he did. For six months past, since he had believed he had driven it away, he had resumed the everyday existence; and now all was to be done over again, he must fight it again in order that it might not slay the first woman elbowed by chance. However, the great silence and the vast solitude quieted him a little and made him think of a mute and deserted life like this desolate district, in which he was still marching without ever meeting a single soul. He must have turned about without his knowledge, for he had come back to the other side and run against the track after having described a large semi-circle among the declivities thick with bushes over the tunnel. He recoiled with uneasy anger at falling back upon the living. Then, having endeavored to take a short cut behind the hill, he got lost and found himself again before the railway hedge, just at the opening of the tunnel opposite the meadow where he had been sobbing a little while before. And, overcome, he was standing there, when the thunder of a train coming from the depths of the earth, slight yet, but swelling from second to second, stopped him, attracted his attention. It was the Havre express, which had quitted Paris at 6.30 and which passed there at 9.25: A train he ran every two days.
Jacques at first saw the dark muzzle of the tunnel brighten like an oven in which fagots are burning. Then, amid its din, the engine sprang forth from it, with a dazzle of its big round eye, the headlight, the glow of which cut the country, lighting the rails in the distance with a double line of fire. But this was an apparition, like a flash of lightning; immediately the passenger cars succeeded each other; the square little glasses of the doors, brightly lighted, showed the compartments full of travelers with such a vertigo of speed that the eye afterwards doubted the existence of the faces of which it had caught a glimpse. And Jacques, in the quarter of a second precisely, which it took the train to pass him, saw very distinctly through the flaming glasses of a coupé a man who was holding another back on the bench and was planting a knife in his throat, while a black mass, a third personage perhaps, perhaps some baggage which had fallen down, was pressing with all its weight upon the convulsed limbs of the man in the act of being murdered. But already the train had fled, had lost itself in the direction of the Croix-de-Maufras, showing nothing more of itself in the darkness than the three rear lights, the red triangle.

Rooted to the spot, the young man followed the train with his eyes and heard its din extinguished in the depths of the great dead quiet of the country. Had he seen correctly?—and he hesitated now, he no longer dare affirm the reality of that vision, brought and carried away in a flash. Not a single feature of the two actors in the tragedy had remained to him in lifelike colors. The black mass was probably a traveling wrap, fallen across the body of the victim; nevertheless he had at first thought he had distinguished a sharp, pale profile beneath a thick head of hair. But everything had become confounded, had melted away as in a dream. For an instant the profile, summoned up, reappeared; then it faded away definitely. It was without doubt only a
freak of his imagination. And all this froze him, seemed so extraordinary to him that he finished by admitting the whole affair to have been an hallucination, born of the frightful crisis through which he had just passed.

For nearly an hour longer Jacques walked, his head made heavy by confused thoughts. He was broken, a relaxation had taken place, a great internal cold had borne away his excitement. Without having decided to do so, he mechanically went back toward the Croix-de-Maufras. Then, when he again found himself in front of the house of the garde-barrière, he said to himself that he would not go in, but would sleep under the little shed attached to one of the gable ends. But a ray of light passed under the door and he mechanically opened that door. An unexpected sight stopped him on the threshold.

Misard had removed the butter-pot from its corner, and on all fours upon the floor, a lighted lantern placed near him, was sounding the wall lightly with his fist; he was searching. The sound of the opening of the door made him get upon his feet, but he was not confused the least in the world. He simply said, in a natural way:

"I was looking for some matches which had fallen down."

And when he had put back the butter-pot in its place, he added:

"I came to get my lantern because, awhile ago, on returning, I saw a man stretched out upon the track. I think he is dead."

Jacques, seized at first with the thought that he had surprised Misard preparing to search for Aunt Phasie's hoard, which changed into sudden certainty his doubt on the subject of the accusations made by his godmother, was afterwards so violently shaken by this news of the discovery of a body that he forgot the other drama, that which was being played in that little out-of-the-way house. The scene of the coupé, the brief vision
of a man slaughtering another, sprang up again in the
glimmer of the same flash.
“A man on the track! Whereabouts?” demanded
he, growing pale.
Misard was about to relate that he was bringing home
two eels, which had been caught by his bottom lines,
and which before all he was running back to hide in his
house. But what was the use of confiding in this young
man? He made a vague gesture as he replied:
“Down there, about five hundred yards, I should say.
One should see clear to know.”
At that moment Jacques heard, above his head a
deadened shock. He was so anxious that it caused him
to start.
“It’s nothing,” resumed Misard. “Flore is only stir-
ring.”
And the young man, in fact, recognized the sound of
two bare feet on the floor. She had evidently been
waiting for him, and had come to listen at her partly
open door.
“I will accompany you,” said Jacques. “Are you
sure he’s dead?”
“Dame! that’s the way it seemed to me. With a
lantern we’ll see all right.”
“Well, what do you say about it? An accident,
eh?”
“Quite likely. Some fellow, who has let himself be
cut in two; perhaps a traveler who jumped from a
car.”
Jacques trembled.
“Come quickly! come quickly!”
Never had such a fever to see and know agitated him.
Without, while his companion who showed not the
slightest emotion, followed the track, swaying the lantern,
the round of brightness of which gently followed the
rails, he ran on ahead, irritated by this slowness. It was
like a physical want, that internal fire which hastens the
steps of lovers at the hour of rendezvous. He was afraid of what awaited him down there and was flying to it with all the muscles of his limbs. When he arrived, when it was necessary to grapple with the black heap, stretched out near the descending track, he stood there and a shock ran from his heels to his neck. And his anguish at not being able to distinguish anything clearly turned into oaths against the other, who was poking along more than thirty paces in the rear.

"Nom de Dieu, hurry up! If he is yet alive, we may be able to do something for him."

Misard shrugged his shoulders and advanced phlegmatically. Then, when he had surveyed the corpse from head to foot, with the aid of his lantern, he said:

"Ah! Quitche! his account is settled!"

The individual, who without doubt had tumbled from a car, had fallen upon his stomach, his face to the ground, about fifty centimètres at most from the rails. Of his head only a thick crown of white locks was seen. His legs were stretched apart. Of his arms, the right lay as if torn out, while the left was folded beneath the breast. He was handsomely clad—an ample paletot of blue cloth, elegant boots and fine linen. The body bore not the slightest trace of having been crushed, but a great deal of blood had flowed from the throat and stained the shirt collar.

"A bourgeois whom somebody has fixed!" tranquilly resumed Misard, after a few seconds of silent examination. Then, turning towards Jacques, who stood motionless and gaping, he added: "Mustn't touch! It's against the law. I want you to remain there and watch the body, while I run to Barentin and notify the chief station master." He raised his lantern and consulted a kilométrical post: "Good! just at post 153."

And, placing the lantern on the ground beside the body, he went off with his dragging step.

Jacques, left alone, did not stir, but still gazed at that
inert mass, fallen down there, which the vague light of the lantern left confused, and within him, the agitation which had hastened his steps, the horrible attraction which had held him there concentrated in this poignant thought leaping from his entire being: the other, the man of whom he had caught a glimpse with the knife, had dared—the other had gone to the goal of his desire—the other had killed! Ah! that he were not a coward, that he could finally satisfy himself by plunging in the knife!—he who for ten years had been tortured by the desire to do so. In his excitement were mingled contempt for himself and admiration for the other, and especially the need of seeing that, the unquenchable thirst to again gaze upon the eyes of that human tatter, that broken automaton, that flabby rag which a knife cut had made of a creature. What he had dreamed the other had realized, and it was that. If he had killed there would be the same thing on the ground. His heart beat as if it would burst, his itch for murder was increased by the spectacle of this tragic death. He took a step, approached nearer like a nervous child familiarizing itself with fear. Yes! he would dare, he would dare in his turn!

But a rumbling behind his back forced him to leap to one side. A train had arrived, which he had not even heard in the depths of his contemplation. He might have been crushed; the hot breath, the formidable respiration of the engine alone had warned him. The train passed in its hurricane of noise, smoke and flame. A great many people were in it; the flood of travelers continued in the direction of Havre for the marine fête. A baby had mashed its nose against a window glass, staring at the black country; profiles of men were sketched, while a young woman, letting down a window, threw out a piece of paper stained with butter and sugar. Already the joyous train was thundering along in the distance, utterly unconscious of the corpse its wheels had grazed. And the body still lay upon its face, vaguely lighted by the lantern amid the melancholy quiet of the night.
Then Jacques was seized with the desire to see the wound while he was alone. A feeling of uneasiness stopped him, the idea that if he touched the head it would perhaps be seen. He had calculated that Misard could hardly return with the station master before three-quarters of an hour. And he let the minutes pass; he thought of that Misard, of that puny fellow, so slow and calm, who also dared, killing with drugs in the most tranquil fashion in the world. So it was very easy to kill? All the world killed. He approached; the idea of seeing the wound pricked him with a sting so sharp that it made his flesh burn. Oh! to see how it had been made and what had flowed from it—oh! to see the red gap! If he replaced the head carefully no one would know.

But there was another unavowed fear in the depths of his hesitation, the fear of blood. Always and in all with him the fear had awakened with the desire. For yet a quarter of an hour he would be alone and he was about to make his decision when a little noise at his side made him start.

It was Flore, standing, looking like himself. She was curious about accidents; one was sure to start her off on a run by the announcement of an animal crushed or a man cut in two by a train. She had got into her clothes again, wishing to see the dead body of which her father had spoken, and, after the first glance, she did not hesitate. Stooping and taking up the lantern in one hand, with the other she took hold of the head and turned it around.

"Take care! It's forbidden!" murmured Jacques.

But she shrugged her shoulders, and the face appeared in the yellow light, the face of an old man with a big nose and the blue eyes of a former blonde, wide open. Beneath the chin the wound gaping, frightful, a deep gash which had cut the neck, a ploughed wound as if the knife had been turned in it. Blood had inundated—
ted all the right side of the breast. On the left, at the boutonnière of the paletot, a commander’s rosette seemed like a red clot of blood which had strayed there.

Flore uttered a slight cry of surprise.

“Ah! the old man!”

Jacques bent over like her, advanced and mingled his locks with hers to see the better; and he was choking, he was gorging himself with the spectacle. Unconsciously he repeated:

“The old man—the old man.”

“Yes, old Grandmorin—the President.”

For a moment yet she examined that pale face, with its twisted mouth and its big eyes full of fear. Then she dropped the head which the cadaveric rigidity had begun to freeze and which fell back upon the ground, closing the wound.

“He’s done laughing with the girls!” resumed she in a lower tone. “This was done because of one of them for sure. Ah! my poor Louisette! Ah! the pig! It’s just what ought to be!”

And a long silence reigned. Flore, who had put back the lantern, was waiting, casting slow glances at Jacques, while the latter, separated from her by the body, had not stirred, as if he had been overset, annihilated by what he had just seen. It must have been nearly eleven o’clock. She remained patient for a few minutes longer, astonished at the silence he preserved. Embarrassment after the scene of the evening prevented her from speaking first. But a sound of voices was heard—it was her father, who was bringing the station master; and not wishing to be seen she made her decision.

“You are not going in to sleep?”

He gave a start, a struggle seemed to agitate him for an instant. Then, with an effort, with a desperate recoil, he said:

“No, no!”

She did not make a gesture, but the falling line of her
strong arms expressed much vexation. She was very humble and said again:

"Then if you don't come in, I shan't see you."

"No, no!"

The voices approached, and without seeking to grasp his hand, since he seemed to have put the corpse between them expressly, without even casting him the familiar adieu of their juvenile comradeship, she went away and was lost in the darkness, breathing hoarsely as if she were being choked with sobs.

Immediately the station master arrived, with Misard and two laborers. He also bore witness to the identity: it was indeed President Grandmorin, whom he knew from seeing him get off at his station every time he went to see his sister, Madame Bonnehon, at Doinville. The body might remain in the place where it had fallen; he simply caused it to be covered with a cloak which one of the men had brought. An order had been given to an employé to start from Barentin by the eleven o'clock train to go notify the Imperial Procureur of Rouen. But the latter could not be counted upon before the five or six o'clock train in the morning, for he would have to bring the Judge of Inquiry, the register of the tribunal and a doctor. Hence the station master organized a guard service about the dead man; during the entire night there would be relays—a man would constantly be there to watch with the lantern.

And Jacques, before resolving to go stretch himself out under some shed in the station at Barentin, from whence he was not to start for Havre until 7.20 o'clock, remained for a long while yet motionless and possessed. Then the idea of the Judge of Inquiry, who was expected, troubled him as if he had felt himself an accomplice. Should he tell what he had seen on the passage of the express? He resolved at first to speak, since, in fact, he had nothing to fear. His duty, besides, was not doubtful. But afterwards he asked himself what was
the good: he would not bring a single decisive fact, he would not dare to affirm any precise detail concerning the assassin. It would be imbecile to put himself in it, to lose his time and get excited without profit to any one. No, no, he would not speak! And he went off at last, and he returned twice to see the dark hump which the body made upon the soil in the circle of yellow light from the lantern. A keener cold fell from the smoky sky upon the desolation of this desert with its arid hills. More trains had passed, and another, a very long one, had arrived bound for Paris. All these had crossed each other in their inexorable mechanical power, going to their distant goal in the future, grazing, without heeding it, the half-cut off head of this man whom another man had slaughtered.
CHAPTER III.
THE BLOOD-STAINED CAR.

The next day, which was Sunday, five o'clock in the morning had just sounded from all the clock towers of Havre when Roubaud came down under the dépôt shed to go on duty. It was yet pitchy dark; but the wind, which was blowing from the sea, had freshened and was driving the mist, blotting out the hills, the heights of which stretch from Sainte-Adresse to the fort of Tourneville; while toward the west, above the sea, a bright spot showed itself, a section of sky in which the last stars were shining. Beneath the shed the gas-lights still burned, paled by the damp cold of the early hour; and there the first train for Montivilliers was being made up by the station men under the orders of the sub night chief. The doors of the waiting-rooms were not open and the quays stretched out deserted in this benumbed awakening of the dépôt.

As he came out from his apartments above, over the waiting-rooms, Roubaud had found the cashier's wife, Madame Lebleu, standing motionless in the middle of the central corridor, upon which opened the lodgings of the employés. For weeks past this woman had got up in the night to watch Mademoiselle Guichon, the cash-taker, whom she suspected of intimate relations with the station master, M. Dabadie. But she had never surprised the slightest thing, not a shadow, not a whisper. And that morning she had quickly re-entered her room, taking with her only astonishment at having perceived at the Roubauds', during the three seconds which the husband had taken to open and shut the door, the wife standing
in the dining-room, the handsome Séverine, already clad, combed and shod, she who habitually lingered in bed until nine o'clock. Hence Madame Lebleu had awakened Lebleu to acquaint him with this extraordinary fact. The preceding night they had not retired until the Paris express had come in, at 11.05, burning to know what had happened in the matter of the sub-préfet. But they had been unable to learn anything in the attitude of the Roubauds, who had returned looking as they did every day; and vainly, until midnight, they had listened attentively: not a sound had come from the apartments of their neighbors, who must immediately have fallen into a deep sleep. Certainly their journey had not had a good result, otherwise Séverine would not have been up at such an hour. The cashier having demanded how she looked, his wife had endeavored to describe her: very stiff, very pale, with her big blue eyes exceedingly bright beneath her black locks; and not a movement, the air of a somnambulist. But they would discover how things stood during the day.

Below, Roubaud found his colleague Moulin, who had been on duty during the night, and he relieved him, while Moulin chatted, walking about for a few minutes longer, posting him in the trifling matters which had occurred since the evening before: tramps had been surprised just as they were getting into the baggage-room; three station men had been reprimanded for lack of discipline; a fastening hook had broken while the Montivilliers train was being made up. Silently Roubaud listened, with a calm countenance; and he was only a little worn, without doubt a remnant of fatigue, which his sleepy eyes showed also. When his colleague had ceased to talk, he seemed to be questioning him still as if his attention had been centred on other events. But this was all; he bent his head and looked for an instant at the floor.

Walking along the quay, the two men had arrived at
the end of the covered shed, at the place where, upon the right, was a sheltered house in which stood the rolling stock that had come in the night previous and would serve to make up the trains of the morrow. And he had raised his face, his glances had fastened themselves upon a first-class carriage provided with a coupé, number 293, which a gas-jet was illuminating with a flickering glimmer, when the other exclaimed:

"Ah! I forgot——"

Roubaud's pale face colored and he could not restrain a slight movement.

"I forgot," repeated Moulin. "That carriage is not to go out, so don't put it this morning in the 6:40 express."

There was a short silence before Roubaud asked, in a very natural voice:

"Ah! what's the reason?"

"Why, a coupé has been engaged for this evening's express. It is not sure that one will come in during the day, so this one is to be kept."

Roubaud was still looking fixedly at it. He responded:

"All right."

But another thought absorbed him; he suddenly burst out:

"It's disgusting! Just see in what way those cleaners do their work! That carriage seems to have on it the accumulated dust of a week!"

"Ah!" rejoined Moulin, "when trains get in after eleven o'clock there's no danger of the men giving a car a touch of the rag. But it will be all right when they make up their minds to go the rounds. The other evening they forgot a passenger asleep on a bench and he did not awake until the next morning."

Then, stifling a yawn, he said he would go up to bed. And, as he was going, a sudden curiosity brought him back.

"What about your affair with the sub-préfect? It's finished, isn't it?"
“Yes, yes, the trip paid me. I’m satisfied.”

“Ah! so much the better. And bear in mind that 293 don’t go out.”

When Roubaud was left alone upon the quay, he walked slowly back towards the Montivilliers train, which was waiting. The doors of the halls were open; passengers appeared, some hunters with their dogs, two or three families of shopkeepers taking advantage of Sunday—very few people in the aggregate. But this train off, the first of the day, he had no time to lose, being compelled to make up the 5.45 omnibus, a train for Rouen and Paris. At this early hour the personnel not being numerous, the work of the under station master was complicated with all sorts of cares. When he had superintended the manœuvre, each carriage taken from the shelter house, pushed by men and brought under the shed, he was compelled to hasten to the hall of departure to give a glance at the distribution of tickets and the registry of baggage. A quarrel broke out between some soldiers and an employé which necessitated his intervention. For half an hour, amid the currents of icy air, amid the shivering public with eyes still heavy with sleep and in that ill-humor caused by a crush in the midst of darkness, he multiplied himself, gave himself not a single thought. Then, the departure of the omnibus having cleared the dépôt, he hurried to the post of the switch-tender to assure himself that all was going right in that direction, for another train had arrived, the direct train from Paris, which was behind time. He returned to assist at the disembarkation and waited untill the flow of passengers had given up their tickets and were piled in the hotel coaches, which at that time waited under the shed, separated from the track by a simple palisade. And then only he was able to breathe for an instant in the dépôt which had grown silent and deserted again.

Six o’clock struck. Roubaud quitted the covered hall
at a promenade pace; and, outside, having space before him, he raised his head and breathed on seeing that the dawn was breaking at last. The wind from the sea had finished driving off the mist; it was the clear morning of a fine day. He saw toward the north the line of Ingouville, as far as the trees of the cemetery, come out in a violetish hue upon the paling sky; afterwards, turning toward the south and west, he noticed, over the sea, a final flight of light white clouds, which swam slowly in a squadron; while the entire east, the immense gap of the mouth of the Seine, began to glow with the coming rising of the sun. With a mechanical movement he took off his silver embroidered cap as if to cool his forehead in the keen and pure air. This horizon to which he was accustomed, the vast flat unrolling of the dependencies of the dépôt, to the left the place of arrival, then the round house of the engines, to the right the place of departure, a whole town, seemed to quiet him, to restore him to the calmness of his daily work, eternally the same. Above the wall of the Rue Charles Laffitte factory chimneys smoked; one saw the enormous heaps of coal of the establishments which ran along the Vauban basin. And a noise was already mounting from the other basins. The whistling of the merchandise trains and the awakening and odor of the water brought by the wind made him think of the fête of the day, of that ship which was going to be launched and around which the crowd was crushing.

As Roubaud returned beneath the covered building he found the laborers commencing to make up the 6.40 express; he believed that the men were bringing out No. 293, and all the quieting effect of the cool morning was swallowed up in a sudden burst of rage.

"Nom de Dieu! not that carriage! Let it be! It don't go out until this evening!"

The chief of the laborers explained to him that they were merely shifting the carriage to get another which
was behind it. But he did not hear, deafened by his anger beyond all measure.

"Awkward scoundrels, you were told not to touch it!"

When he had finally understood, he remained furious, falling upon the inconveniences of the dépôt yard, in which they could not even turn a car. In fact, the dépôt yard, one of the first of the line made, was insufficient, unworthy of Havre, with its old frame shelter-house, its marquee of wood and zinc, with its narrow sky-lights, and its bare, miserable buildings, cracked in every part.

"It's a shame. I don't know why the Compagnie has not already torn it down."

The laborers stared at him, surprised to hear him speak freely, he of a discipline habitually so correct. He noticed this and all at once controlled himself. And, silent, stiffened, he continued to supervise the manœuvre. A wrinkle of discontent cut his low forehead, while his round and ruddy face, studded with red beard, took a deep tension of will.

From that time Roubaud had all his sang-froid. He busied himself actively with the express, looking after every detail. Some couplings having appeared to him ill-made, he exacted that they should be tightened under his eyes. A mother and her two daughters who visited his wife desired that he should install them in a compartment reserved exclusively for ladies. Then, before sounding his whistle as the signal for departure, he again assured himself of the good order of the train; and for a long while he watched it moving away with the clear glance of one minute of neglect on whose part may cost human lives. Soon, however, he was compelled to cross the track to receive a train from Rouen, which was entering the dépôt yard. There he found a post-office employé with whom, each day, he exchanged the news. It was a brief period of rest in his greatly occupied morning, nearly a quarter of an hour, during which he
could breathe, no immediate service demanding his attention. And that morning as usual he rolled a cigarette and chatted very gayly. The light had increased and they had just extinguished the gas beneath the marquee. It was so poorly furnished with skylights that a gray gloom yet reigned there; but, beyond, the vast section of sky upon which it opened was already flaming with a fire of rays; while the entire horizon grew rosy, with a sharp clearness of details, in that pure air of a fine winter morning.

At eight o'clock M. Dabadie, the chief station master, was accustomed to come down-stairs, and then the under station master went to make his report. He was a fine-looking man, very dark, handsomely dressed and having the bearing of a great merchant wholly devoted to his business. Besides, he paid but small attention to the passenger dépôt; he devoted himself particularly to the movement of the basins, to the enormous transit of merchandise, in continual relations with the high commerce of Havre and of the whole world. That day he was late; and twice already Roubaud had pushed open the office door without finding him there. Upon the table the mail was not even opened. The eyes of the under station master fell upon a dispatch among the letters. Then, as if held by a spell, he had no longer quitted the door, turning around in spite of himself and casting quick glances toward the table.

Finally, at ten minutes past eight, M. Dabadie appeared. Roubaud, who had seated himself, did not speak in order to permit him to open the dispatch. But the chief did not hasten, wishing to show himself amiable with his subordinate, whom he esteemed.

"And, naturally, in Paris, everything went well, eh?"
"Yes, monsieur, I thank you."

He had finished by opening the dispatch; and he did not read it; he still smiled at the other, whose voice had sunk low under the violent effort he was making to control a nervous spasm which was convulsing his chin.
"We are delighted to keep you here."

"And I am very happy to remain with you, monsieur."

Then, as M. Dabadie decided to run through the dispatch, Roubaud, whose face was moistened by a slight sweat, watched him. But the emotion which he expected was not produced; the chief quietly finished reading the telegram, which he threw back upon his desk: without doubt it related to some simple detail of service. And immediately he continued to open his mail, while, according to the custom of each morning, the under master made his verbal report concerning the events of the night and the morning. Only, this morning, Roubaud, hesitating, was forced to search before he could recall what his colleague had said to him on the subject of the tramps surprised in the baggage-room. A few words more were exchanged and the chief was dismissing him with a gesture, when the two chief adjoints, the one of the basins and the one of the fast freight, entered, having also come to report. They brought with them a new dispatch, which an employé had just handed them upon the quay.

"You can withdraw," said M. Dabadie, aloud, seeing that Roubaud had stopped at the door.

But the latter waited, his eyes round and fixed; and he did not go until the little paper had fallen back upon the table, pushed aside with the same movement of indifference. For an instant he wandered beneath the marquee, perplexed and stunned. The clock marked 8.35; there was no further departure before the omnibus of 9.50. Ordinarily he employed this hour of respite in taking a turn in the dépôt yard. He walked for a few minutes without knowing where his feet were taking him. Then, as he raised his head and found himself again before carriage No. 293, he made a sudden turn and went off toward the round house of the engines. The sun had now mounted to the horizon, a golden dust was raining down in the pale air. And he no longer
enjoyed the fine morning; he hastened his steps, with a very busy air, striving to kill the nightmare of his waiting.

A voice suddenly stopped him.

"Monsieur Roubaud, good-day! Did you see my wife?"

It was Pecqueux, the fireman, a tall, brisk fellow of forty-three, thin, with big bones, his face yellowed by the fire and smoke. His gray eyes beneath his low forehead and his large mouth in a projecting jaw laughed with the continual laugh of a pleasure-seeker.

"What! It's you?" said Roubaud, pausing in astonishment. "Ah, yes! The accident which happened to the engine. I had forgotten it. A leave of absence of twenty-four hours—not hard to take, eh?"

"Not so very," said the other, who was still drunk from last night's jollification.

"And did you see my wife?" demanded he again.

"Oh! yes, we saw her," answered the under station master. "We even breakfasted in your chamber. Ah! what a fine wife you have, Pecqueux! You are very wrong to behave toward her as you do."

He laughed more violently.

"Anyhow," resumed Roubaud, "it's not very kind in you."

But he stopped on seeing a tall, lean woman emerge from a shed in front of which they were standing. It was Philomène Sauvagnat, the sister of the dépôt chief and Pecqueux's supplementary spouse at Havre for a year past. She was accused of drinking. She had flirted with all the men of the dépôt yard in the little house which her brother occupied near the engine round house and which she kept in a very dirty condition. This brother, an obstinate Auvergnat, very strict on the point of discipline and highly esteemed by his chiefs, had been in great trouble because of her, having even been threatened with discharge; and if now she was tolerated on
account of him, he only kept her with him through an obstinate family spirit, which, however, did not prevent him from beating her at times for her delinquencies until the life was almost out of her body. Séverine had quarrelled with Philomène, whom she shunned as much as possible from natural pride and had ceased to bow to her.

"Well," said Philomène, insolently, "I'll see you later, Pecqueux. Monsieur Roubaud has advice to offer you not intended for my ears."

"Oh! you needn't go," said the fireman, grinning.

"It's a joke."

"No, no. I must go take Madame Lebleu two eggs I promised her."

She had hurled forth this name expressly, knowing the sullen rivalry between the cashier's wife and the wife of the under station master, affecting to be on the best terms with the first in order to enrage the other. But she remained nevertheless, suddenly interested when she heard the fireman ask about the sub-préfet business.

"It's settled and you're satisfied. Isn't that about it, Monsieur Roubaud?"

"Entirely satisfied."

Pecqueux winked his eyes with a cunning air.

"Oh! you had no reason to be worried. Because when one has a big trump card in his sleeve—eh?—you know what I mean! My wife also has a great deal to be grateful to him for."

The under station master interrupted this allusion to President Grandmorin by saying in a hasty manner:

"And so you do not leave until this evening?"

"No; the 'Lison' has just been repaired—they have finished adjusting the driving-rod. And I'm waiting for my engineer, who has been taking a holiday to himself. You know him, don't you? Jacques Lantier. He's from your district."

For an instant Roubaud did not answer, absent, his
mind wandering. Then, with a start of awakening, he said:

"Eh? Jacques Lantier, the engineer? Certainly I know him, though but slightly. It was here that we met, for he is my junior and I never saw him down at Plassans. Last autumn he did a slight service for my wife—a commission he executed for her at the house of her cousins at Dieppe. He is a capable young fellow according to report."

He spoke as chance directed, copiously. Suddenly he started off.

"Au revoir, Pecqueux. I have to take a glance on this side."

Then only Philomène went away, with her long step of a horse; while Pecqueux, motionless, with his hands in his pockets, smiling with enjoyment in the idleness of that merry morning, was astonished to observe that the under station master, after having contented himself with making the rounds of the shed, quickly returned. It did not take him long to give that glance. What was it that he could have come to spy out?

As Roubaud went back under the marquee nine o'clock was about striking. He walked to the end of it, near the post-office station, and looked without appearing to find what he sought; then, he returned, with the same impatient step. Successively, he questioned, with his eyes, the offices of the different branches of the service. At that hour, the dépôt was quiet and deserted; and he alone went hurriedly about there, with the air of being more and more weakened by the calmness, in that torment of a man, threatened with a catastrophe, who finishes by ardently wishing that it may come. His sang-froid was exhausted; he could not remain in one place. Now, his eyes no longer quitted the clock. Nine o'clock came, five minutes past nine. Usually, he did not go back to his private apartments for breakfast until ten o'clock, after the departure of the 9.50 train. And, sud-
denly, he went up-stairs, urged on by the thought that Séverine was waiting also up there.

In the corridor, at that precise minute, Madame Lebleu had opened her door to admit Philomène, who had come in neighborly fashion, without a bonnet, holding two eggs in her hand. They remained at the door and Roubaud was compelled to enter his apartments with their eyes fastened upon him. He had his key and made haste. Nevertheless, while the door was being rapidly opened and shut, they saw Séverine sitting motionless in a chair in the dining-room, her hands idle and her profile pale. And, drawing Philomène in and closing her door, Madame Lebleu related that she had already seen her that way that morning: without doubt, the sub-préfect matter had gone wrong. But no; Philomène explained that she had run up because she had news; and she repeated what she had heard the under station master himself say. Then, the two women lost themselves in conjectures. Thus it was at each of their meetings—gossip without end.

"I'll put my hand in the fire if they haven't been singed, my dear. They're staggered for sure."

"Ah! my good friend, if they would rid us of them now!"

The rivalry, more and more envenomed, between the Lebleus and the Roubauds, was born simply of a question of apartments. All the second floor, over the waiting-rooms, served to lodge the employés; and the central corridor, a regular hotel corridor, painted yellow and lighted from above, divided the story in two, with brown doors on a line to right and left. Only, the lodgings on the right had windows which opened on the court-yard of departure, planted with old elm trees, above which spread the admirable view of the line of Ingouville; while the lodgings on the left, with narrow, arched windows, looked directly out upon the marquee of the dépôt yard, the zinc roof and dirty skylights of which
barred the horizon. Nothing was more agreeable than the first, with the continual animation of the court-yard, the green of the trees and the vast country; and there was sufficient to make one die of ennui in the second, where one could scarcely see distinctly for the walled off sky, as if in prison. In front lived the chief station master, the under station master Moulin and the Lebleus; back were lodged the Roubauds, as well as the cash-taker Mlle. Guichon; without counting three rooms which were reserved for travelling inspectors. Now, it was notorious that the two under station masters had always lodged side by side. If the Lebleus were there it was because of the complaisance of the former under station master, replaced by Roubaud, who, a childless widower, had desired to be agreeable to Madame Lebleu by yielding up his lodgings to her. But ought not those lodgings to have returned to the Roubauds? Was it just to relegate them to the back when they had the right to be on the front? As long as the two households had lived in friendship Séverine had given way before her neighbor, who was older than she by twenty years, in ill health, and, besides, so enormous that she was all the time stifling. And war had really been declared only since the day when Philomène had angered the two women by abominable gossip.

"You know," resumed the latter, "that they are quite capable of having taken advantage of their trip to Paris to demand your expulsion. It has been affirmed to me that they have written a long letter to the Director urging their rights."

Madame Lebleu choked.

"The wretches! And I am quite sure that they are working to get the cash-taker on their side; for she has scarcely bowed to me in two weeks. She's a nice creature! But I've got my eye on her!"

She lowered her voice to affirm that Mlle. Guichon was carrying on a nightly flirtation with the chief sta-
tion master. Their doors were opposite each other. It was M. Dabadie, a widower and the father of a big girl still at boarding-school, who had brought there this thirty-year old blonde, already faded, silent and thin, but as supple as a serpent. She must have been instructress somewhere. And it was impossible to surprise her, so noiselessly she slipped through the narrowest clefts. For herself she did not count for much. But if she could be caught flirting with the chief station master, she would assume a decisive importance and the triumph would be in holding her by possessing her secret.

"Oh! I'll find out in the end," continued Madame Lebleu. "I don't want to let myself be eaten. Here we are, here we'll stay. The best people are on our side, are they not, my dear?"

The whole dépôt, in fact, was interested in this war of the two lodgings. Indeed, the corridor was ravaged by it; only the other under station master, Moulin, gave no heed to it, satisfied with being on the front and married to a timid and frail little woman, whom nobody ever saw, but who increased his family every twenty months.

"Well," concluded Philomène, "if they're staggered, it's not this blow that will put them permanently out-of-doors. Look out, for they know people who have influence."

She still held her two eggs; she offered them that morning's eggs which she had taken from under her hens. And the old lady gave vent to a confusion of thanks.

"How kind you are! You're spoiling me! Come and have a chat more frequently. You know that my husband is always in his counting-room; and I get so weary, nailed here because of my limbs. What would become of me if those wretches deprived me of my view?"

Then, when she had accompanied her to the door and was about re-opening it, she placed a finger upon her lips.
"Chut! let's listen."

Both of them, standing in the corridor, remained there for five full minutes, without a movement, holding their breath. They leaned their heads and stretched their ears toward the Roubauds' dining-room. But not a sound came from it; the silence of death reigned there. And, afraid of being surprised, they finally separated, giving each other a parting nod, without a word. The one went away on the tips of her toes, the other closed the door so softly that the click of the lock could not be heard.

At twenty minutes past nine Roubaud was again below, under the marquee. He was superintending the formation of the 9.50 omnibus; and, in spite of the effort of his will, he gesticulated too much, kept moving his feet and incessantly turned his head to inspect the quay from one end to the other with a glance. Nothing arrived and his hands began to tremble.

Then, suddenly, as he was still searching the dépôt yard with a backward glance, he heard beside him the voice of a telegraph employé, saying, breathlessly:

"Monsieur Roubaud, do you know where are Monsieur the chief station master and Monsieur the commissary of surveillance? I have dispatches for them and have been running around here for ten minutes."

He had turned about with such a stiffening of his entire being that not a muscle of his face moved. His eyes fixed themselves upon the dispatches which the employé held. This time, the excitement of the latter gave him certainty—at last the catastrophe had come.

"Monsieur Dabadie passed here a little while ago," said he, tranquilly.

And never had he felt himself so cold, of such clear intelligence, altogether banded for the defense. Now he was sure of himself.

"Ah!" resumed he, "here comes Monsieur Dabadie now."
In fact, the chief station master was returning from the fast freight dépôt. As soon as he had run through the dispatch, he exclaimed:

"There has been an assassination on the line! The Rouen inspector telegraphs me to that effect!"

"What?" demanded Roubaud. "An assassination among our personnel?"

"No, no; the victim was a traveller in a coupé. The corpse was thrown out near the exit of the Malaunay tunnel, at post 153. And the victim is one of our administrators, President Grandmorin!"

In his turn, the under station master exclaimed:

"The President! Ah! my poor wife will be inconsolable!"

The cry was so natural, so full of pity, that M. Dabadie paused for an instant.

"You knew him—that’s so. A very fine man, was he not?"

Then, returning to the other telegram, addressed to the commissary of surveillance:

"This must be from the Judge of Inquiry, doubtless concerning some formality. And as it is but twenty-five minutes past nine, naturally Monsieur Cauche is not yet here. Let some one go quickly to the Café du Commerce upon the Cours Napoléon. He’ll be found there without the slightest doubt."

Five minutes later M. Cauche arrived, brought by one of the dépôt hands. A former officer, considering his position as a retirement, he never appeared at the dépôt before ten o’clock, when he idled around there for a moment and then returned to the café. This tragedy, which fell upon him between two games of piquet, had at first astonished him, for ordinarily the matters which passed through his hands were not very important. But the dispatch was, indeed, from the Rouen Judge of Inquiry; and, if it had arrived twelve hours after the discovery of the body, it was because that judge had, in
the first place, telegraphed to Paris, to the chief station master, to learn in what condition the victim had set out; only after being also informed of the number of the train and that of the car had he sent to the commissary of surveillance the order to examine the coupé attached to carriage 293, if that carriage was yet at Havre. Instantly, the ill-humor M. Cauche had displayed at having been uselessly bothered without doubt, as he thought, vanished and gave place to an attitude of extreme importance, proportioned to the exceptional gravity the matter in hand had assumed.

"But," cried he, suddenly uneasy, from fear of seeing the examination escape him, "the carriage cannot be here any longer—it must have gone out again this morning."

It was Roubaud who assured him, with his calm air. "No, no, excuse me. There was a coupé engaged for this evening—the carriage is there, under the shelter shed."

And he led the way, the commissary and the chief station master following him. Meanwhile the news must have spread, for the dépôt hands had stealthily quitte work and were also following; while at the doors of the offices of the different services employés showed themselves and finished by approaching, one by one. Soon a crowd had gathered.

As they arrived in front of the carriage, M. Dabadie made this observation aloud:

"Why, last evening, this car was visited. If any traces had remained they would have been mentioned in the report."

"We shall soon see," said M. Cauche.

He opened the door and climbed into the coupé and, at the same instant, broke forth in exclamations, forgetting himself and swearing.

"Ah! nom de Dieu! it looks as if a hog had been killed here!"
A little breath of fear ran among those present, heads were thrust forward and M. Dabadie, one of the first, wishing to see, got upon the steps; while, behind him, Roubaud, to do like the others, craned his neck.

In the interior, the coupé showed no disorder. The windows had remained closed and everything seemed in place. But a frightful odor escaped from the open door; and there, in the middle of one of the cushions, a pool of black blood had coagulated, a pool so deep and wide that a stream had started from it as from a spring, flowing upon the carpet. Clots remained hanging to the cloth. And nothing more, nothing but this vile smelling blood.

M. Dabadie burst into a rage.
"Where are the men who made the visit last evening? Bring them to me!"

They were on the spot and came forward, stammering excuses: Could one make out anything in the night? — and yet they had passed their hands everywhere. They swore they had smelt nothing the night before.

Meanwhile M. Gauche, standing in the carriage, was taking notes in pencil for his report. He called Roubaud, with whom he associated, both smoking cigarettes along the quay in hours of idleness.

"Monsieur Roubaud, get in and help me."

And, when the under station master had stepped over the blood on the carpet to prevent walking in it:

"Look under the other cushion and see if anything has slipped there."

He raised the cushion and searched with prudent hands, his glances merely those of curiosity.

"There is nothing."

But a stain upon the wadded cloth of the back attracted his attention; and he pointed it out to the commissary. Was it not the bloody imprint of a finger? No. They finally agreed that it was a splash. The crowd had come nearer to follow this examination,
scenting crime, pressing behind the chief station master, whom the repugnance of a delicate man had kept upon the step.

Suddenly the latter made this remark:

"Say now, Monsieur Roubaud, you were on the train. Did you not return by the express last evening? You can, perhaps, give us some information!"

"Ha! that's so!" cried the commissary. "Did you notice anything?"

For three or four seconds Roubaud remained mute. Just then he was bending down, examining the carpet. But he arose almost immediately, answering in his natural voice, a trifle thick:

"Certainly, I will tell you. My wife was with me. If what I know is to figure in the report, I would prefer to have her come down in order to correct my recollections by hers."

This appeared very reasonable to M. Cauche, and Pecqueux, who had just arrived, offered to go in search of Madame Roubaud. He went off with great strides and there was a moment of waiting. Philomène, who had run up with the fireman, followed him with her eyes, irritated because he had charged himself with this commission. But, having caught sight of Madame Lebleu, who was hastening along with all the swiftness of her poor swollen limbs, she sprang forward to aid her: and the two women raised their hands toward heaven, uttering exclamations, excited by the discovery of so abominable a crime. Although as yet absolutely nothing was known, already versions were circulating around them amid the wildness of gestures and visages. Dominating the buzz of voices, Philomène herself, who had the information from no one, affirmed on her word of honor that Madame Roubaud had seen the assassin. And there was silence when Pecqueux reappeared, accompanied by Séverine.

"Look at her now!" murmured Madame Lebleu.
“Who would call her the wife of an under station master, with her air of a princess! This morning, before day, she was already thus, combed and corseted, as if she were going to make a round of visits!”

It was with short, regular steps that Séverine advanced. There was a whole long end of the quay to follow, beneath eyes which were watching her coming; and she did not weaken; she simply pressed her handkerchief over her eyelids in the heavy grief she had just experienced on learning the name of the victim. Clad in a very elegant plain black dress, she seemed to be in mourning for her protector. Her thick, dark locks glistened in the sunlight, for she had not even taken time to cover her head in spite of the cold. Her soft blue eyes, full of anguish and drowned in tears, made her a very touching sight.

“Sure enough she has reason to weep,” said Philomène, in an undertone. “They’re done for now, since somebody has killed their good Providence.”

When Séverine was there, in the midst of all that crowd, in front of the open door of the coupé, M. Cauche and Roubaud got out of it; and immediately the latter commenced to tell what he knew.

“Yesterday morning, as soon as we reached Paris, we went to see Monsieur Grandmorin, did we not, my dear? It must have been a quarter past eleven, mustn’t it?”

He looked at her fixedly and she repeated, in a docile voice:

“Yes, a quarter past eleven.”

But her eyes fell upon the cushion black with blood and she had a spasm; great sobs leaped from her throat, and the chief station master, moved, hastily intervened.

“Madame, if you cannot bear this spectacle—we fully understand your grief—”

“Oh! just a couple of words,” interrupted the commissary. “Afterwards we’ll have Madame reconducted back to her apartments.”
Roubaud hastened to continue.

"It was then, after having chatted of different things, that M. Grandmorin announced to us his intention of leaving on the morrow to go to his sister's at Doinville. I see him yet, seated at his desk. I was here—my wife there. Was it not so, my dear, that he said to us he would leave on the morrow?"

"Yes, on the morrow."

M. Cauche, who was continuing to take rapid notes in pencil, raised his head.

"How! On the morrow? But since he departed in the evening!"

"Wait a bit!" replied the under station master. "But when he learned that we were to return in the evening he for an instant entertained the idea of taking the express with us, if my wife would follow him to Doinville to spend a few days at his sister's, as she has already done. But my wife, who had a great deal to do here, refused. Is it not so that you refused?"

"I refused—yes."

"And he was very kind. He occupied himself with me and accompanied us to the door of his study. Did he not, my dear?"

"Yes, to the door."

"In the evening we departed. Before installing ourselves in our compartment, I chatted with M. Vandorpe, the chief station master. And I saw nothing at all. I was greatly annoyed because I believed we were alone and there was a lady in a corner whom I had not noticed; and more so because two other persons, a family, got in, besides, at the last moment. Until we got to Rouen there was nothing particular—I saw nothing. But at Rouen, as we had left the compartment to stretch our limbs, what was our surprise to perceive, three or four cars away from ours, M. Grandmorin standing at the door of a coupé! "What, Monsieur the President, you here? Ah! we had no suspicion
that we were travelling with you!" And he explained to us that he had received a dispatch. Then the whistle blew and we got quickly back into our compartment, which, to our great delight was empty, all our travelling companions having stopped at Rouen. And that's all I have to tell, isn't it, my dear?"

"Yes, that's all."

This narrative, simple as it was, had made a strong impression upon its hearers. All had waited to understand, with eager faces. The commissary, ceasing to write, expressed the general surprise when he demanded: "And you, are sure that there was no one in the coupé with M. Grandmorin?"

"Oh! yes, absolutely sure."

A shiver ran through the crowd. This mystery which posed itself sent forth a little chill of fear which each one felt. If the traveller was alone, by whom could he have been assassinated and thrown from the coupé three leagues from there, before another stoppage of the train?

In the silence Philomène's evil voice was heard:

"It's queer all the same!"

And feeling himself stared at, Roubaud looked at her, with a toss of the chin, as if to say that he also thought it queer. Beside her he saw Pecqueux and Madame Lebleu, who also tossed their heads. All eyes were turned in his direction—something else was expected; they were searching upon his person for some forgotten detail which would throw light on the case. There was no accusation in these ardently curious looks; and he believed, nevertheless, that he saw a vague suspicion peeping through, that doubt which the smallest fact sometimes changes into certainty.

"Extraordinary!" murmured M. Cauche.

"Altogether extraordinary!" repeated M. Dabadie.

Then Roubaud took a decision.

"What I'm entirely sure of, besides, is that the
express, which goes without a stop from Rouen to Bar-
entin, travelled with the regulation speed, without any-
thing abnormal that I could see. I say this because,
finding ourselves alone, I had lowered the window to
smoke a cigarette; and I cast glances outside, clearly
hearing all the noises of the train. Even at Barentin,
having recognized upon the quay M. Bessière, the sta-
tion master, my successor, I called to him and we
exchanged a few words while, mounted upon the step,
he shook my hand. Is it not so, my dear? He can be
questioned. M. Bessière will corroborate me.”

Séverine, still motionless and pale, her visage drowned
in trouble, confirmed once again her husband’s declara-
tion.

“Yes; he will tell all about it.”

From that moment all accusation became impossible,
if the Roubauds, having got into their compartment
again at Rouen, had been greeted there, at Barentin, by
a friend. The shadow of suspicion which the under
station master had believed he saw passing in the eyes
had gone; and the astonishment of each one had
increased. The case had taken a turn more and more
mysterious.

“Think,” said the commissary. “Are you entirely cer-
tain that no one, at Rouen, could have climbed into the
coupé after you had quitted M. Grandmorin?”

Evidently Roubaud had not foreseen this question,
for, for the first time, he was troubled, not having, with-
out doubt, the answer prepared in advance. He looked
at his wife, hesitating.

“Oh! no, I believe not. They had closed the doors
and whistled; we had only just the time to regain our
carriage. And, besides, as the coupé was reserved, no one
could get into it, it seems to me.”

But the black eyes of his wife had enlarged, grown so
big that he was frightened off from being affirmative.

“After all, I don’t know. Yes, perhaps some one
might have got in. There was a regular crush——”
And, in proportion as he talked, his voice again grew clear, all this new history was born, affirmed itself.

"You know, because of the fêtes at Havre, the crowd was enormous. We had been obliged to defend our compartment against passengers of the second and even the third class. Besides, the dépôt is very badly lighted; one could see nothing; people pushed and shouted in the confusion of the departure. Ma foi! yes, it is quite possible that, not knowing where to stow himself, or even profiting by the overcrowding, some one may have introduced himself by force into the coupé at the last second."

And interrupting himself:

"Eh, my dear?—that's what must have happened."

Séverine, with a broken air, her handkerchief over her swollen eyes, repeated:

"That's what happened, certainly."

From that time the scent was given; and, without saying so, the commissary of surveillance and the chief station master exchanged a look, with a knowing air. A long movement had agitated the crowd, who felt that the examination was finished and who were tormented by a need of making comments. Immediately suppositions were circulated, each one had a story. For an instant the service of the dépôt had been suspended; the entire personnel was there, possessed by this drama; and it was a surprise to see the 9.30 train enter beneath the marquee. Men ran, the doors were opened and the flood of passengers flowed away. But almost all the curious had remained around the commissary, who, with the scrupulousness of a methodical man, had made a final visit to the blood-stained car.

Pecqueux, gesticulating between Madame Lebleu and Philomène, preceived at this moment his engineer, Jacques Lantier, who had just got off the train and who, standing motionless, was looking at the assemblage from a distance. He beckoned violently to him, but Jacques did not stir. Finally, he walked forward slowly.
"What's up?" demanded he of his fireman.

He knew well enough, and listened with an inattentive ear to the news of the assassination and the suppositions that were being made. What surprised and moved him strangely was falling in the midst of this examination and again finding that coupé which he had but caught a glimpse of in the darkness, rushing along at full speed. He craned his neck and looked at the pool of blood coagulated upon the cushion; and he again saw the scene of the murder, again saw, especially, the corpse stretched out at the side of the track down there, with its throat open. Then, as he turned away his eyes, he noticed the Roubauds, while Pecqueux continued to tell him the story—in what manner those people were mixed up in the business—their departure from Paris in the same train as the victim, the last words they had exchanged together at Rouen. He knew the man from shaking hands with him occasionally since he had been doing duty on the express; the wife he had seen from time to time, but had kept away from her, as from the rest, in his unwholesome fear. But at that minute, weeping and pale as she was, with the terrified sweetness of her blue eyes beneath the black locks of her hair, she struck him. He could not stop looking at her, and he grew absent; bewildered, he asked himself why the Roubauds and he were there, how circumstances had continued to re-unite them in front of that car of the crime, they who had returned from Paris the night before, he that very instant come back from Barentin.

"Oh! I know, I know," said he aloud, interrupting the fireman. "I was down there at the exit of the tunnel last night and I thought I saw something at the moment the train passed."

This created a great excitement and everybody gathered around him. And he at first trembled, astonished and upset by what he had just said. Why had he spoken, after having so formally promised himself to be
silent? Some very good reasons had advised him to keep a still tongue! And the words had unconsciously issued from his lips while he was looking at that woman. She had suddenly removed her handkerchief to fix upon him her tearful eyes, which had grown even larger than before.

But the commissary had quickly approached, with the chief station master.

"Eh? what did you see?"

And Jacques, beneath Séverine’s motionless glance, told what he had seen: the lighted coupé, passing in the night at full speed, and the fleeing profiles of the two men, one thrown back, the other with the knife in his grasp. Beside his wife, Roubaud listened, also fixing upon him his big, keen eyes.

"Then," demanded the commissary, "you would recognize the assassin?"

"Oh! no, I think not."

"Did he wear an overcoat or a blouse?"

"I can affirm nothing. Remember, the train was going at the speed of eighty kilomètres!"

Séverine involuntarily exchanged a glance with Roubaud, who had the strength to say:

"It would, indeed, have required good eyes."

"No matter," concluded M. Cauche, "this is an important statement. The Judge of Inquiry will aid you to see clearly through it all. Monsieur Lantier and Monsieur Roubaud, give me your exact names for the summonses."

It was over; the group of the curious melted away gradually and the service of the dépôt resumed its activity. Roubaud, particularly, was obliged to hasten to occupy himself with the 9.50 omnibus, into which travellers were already mounting. He had given Jacques a grasp of the hand more vigorous than usual; and the latter, left alone with Séverine, behind Madame Lebleu, Pecqueux and Philomène, who went away whispering,
found himself forced to accompany the young wife beneath the marquee as far as the employé's stairway, having nothing to say to her, but still kept beside her as if a bond had bound them together. Now the gayety of the day had increased, the bright sun, conqueror of the morning mists, had climbed into the grand limpidity of the sky, while the sea breeze, gaining strength with the rising tide, had brought its salty coolness. And, as he quitted her at last, with a commonplace remark, he again encountered her great eyes, the terrified and suppliant sweetness of which had so deeply moved him.

But there was a slight whistle. It was Roubaud, who was giving the signal of departure. The engine responded with a prolonged hiss, and the 9.50 train started, rolled more rapidly and disappeared in the distance, amid the golden dust of the sunlight.
CHAPTER IV.

THE JUDGE OF INQUIRY.

THAT day, in the second week of March, M. Denizet, the Judge of Inquiry, had summoned anew to his office, in the Palais de Justice of Rouen, certain important witnesses in the Grandmorin case.

For three weeks this case had made an enormous noise. It had upset Rouen, it had excited Paris, and the opposition journals, in the violent campaign they were making against the Empire, had taken it as an engine of war. The approach of the general elections, the preoccupation of which dominated all shades of politics, had enfevered the struggle. There had been, in the Chamber, some very stormy sessions; that at which they had sharply discussed the validation of the powers of two deputies attached to the person of the Emperor; that also at which they had fought furiously against the financial administration of the Préfect of the Seine, demanding the election of a municipal council. And the Grandmorin business had come just in time to continue the agitation; the most extraordinary stories were in circulation and every morning the newspapers were filled with new hypotheses injurious to the government. On one side, it was given out that the victim, a familiar of the Tuileries, a former magistrate, commander of the Legion of Honor and rich to the extent of millions, had been a votary of the worst debauches; on the other, the examination having amounted to nothing up to that period, they had commenced to accuse the police and the magistracy of complaisance—they joked about that legendary assassin, who was not
to be found. If there was a great deal of truth in these attacks, it only made them harder to bear.

Hence, M. Denizet felt all the heavy responsibility which was weighing upon him. He was excited also, the more so because he was ambitious and had eagerly awaited a case of this importance to bring to light the high qualities of perspicuity and energy which he accorded himself. Son of a large Norman live stock raiser, he had studied law at Caen and had been very late in entering the magistracy, where his rustic origin, aggravated by his father’s failure, had rendered his advancement difficult. Substitute at Bernay, Dieppe and Havre, it had taken him ten years to become Procureur Impérial at Pont Audemer. Then, sent to Rouen as substitute, at past fifty he had been Judge of Inquiry there for the last eighteen months. Without fortune, ravaged by needs which his small salary could not satisfy, he lived in that ill-paid dependency of the magistracy, accepted only by mediocrities and in which intelligent men devoured while waiting to sell themselves. He possessed a very bright and keen intelligence, was honest, liked his profession and was intoxicated with his omnipotence, which, in his judicial office, made him absolute master of the liberty of others. His interest alone corrected his passion; he had such a burning desire to be decorated and transferred to Paris that, after having allowed himself to be carried away, on the first day of the examination, he was now advancing with an extreme prudence, divining quicksands in every direction in the depths of which his future might sink.

It must be admitted that M. Denizet had been forewarned, for, at the commencement of his investigation, a friend had advised him to go to Paris to the Ministry of Justice. There he had a long talk with the secrétaire général, M. Camy-Lamotte, an important personage, having power over the personnel, charged with the nominations and in constant relations with the Tuil-
eries. He was a handsome man, had started out like himself as substitute, but his relations and his wife had caused him to be made deputy and grand officer of the Legion of Honor. The case had fallen naturally into his hands, the Procureur Impérial of Rouen, uneasy about this dubious tragedy of which a former magistrate was the victim, having taken the precaution to refer it to the ministry, who, in their turn, had passed it over to their secrétaire général. And here there had been a chance hit. M. Camy-Lamotte had been a former condisciple of President Grandmorin; several years his junior, he had remained on such a close footing of friendship with him that he knew all about him, even his vices. Hence he spoke of his friend's tragic death with deep affliction and talked to M. Denizet only of his ardent desire to get hold of the assassin. But he did not conceal that the Tuileries was grieved at all this disproportionate noise and permitted himself to recommend him to use a great deal of tact. In short, the Judge of Inquiry had comprehended that he would do well to go slowly and risk nothing without previous approbation. Besides, he returned to Rouen with the certainty that, on his side, the secrétaire général had sent out agents, himself desirous of examining into the affair. He wished to ascertain the truth in order to hide it the more effectually should such a step be found necessary.

Meanwhile days passed and M. Denizet, despite his efforts of patience, grew irritated at the pleasantries of the press. Then, the police official reappeared, his nose in the wind like a good dog. He was carried away by the need of finding the true scent, by the glory of being the first to smell it out, ready to abandon it if ordered to do so. And, while awaiting from the ministry a letter, a bit of advice or a simple sign, which did not come, he had actively resumed his investigation. Of the two or three arrests already made he had been able to keep up none. But, suddenly, the opening of
President Grandmorin's will reawoke in him a suspicion he had entertained from the very first: the possible culpability of the Roubauds. This will, encumbered with strange legacies, contained one by which Séverine was made legatee of the house situated at the place known as the Croix-de-Maufras. From that time the motive of the murder, vainly sought for until then, was found: the Roubauds, aware of the legacy, had assassinated their benefactor in order to enter into the immediate enjoyment of it. This haunted him the more because M. Camy-Lamotte had spoken singularly of Mme. Roubaud as having known her in the past at the President's when she was a young girl. But what unlikelihood, what material and moral impossibilities! Since he had directed his searches in that quarter, he had run at every step against facts which upset his conception of a judicial inquiry classically conducted. No light appeared; the grand central brightness, the first cause, illuminating all, was lacking.

Another scent existed also, which M. Denizet had not lost sight of, the scent furnished by Roubaud himself—that of the man, who, amid the crush of the departure, might have climbed into the coupé. This was the famous unfindable legendary assassin about whom all the opposition journals were sneering. The efforts of the Judge of Inquiry had at first been used with regard to the description of this man at Rouen where he had started and at Barentin where he must have quitted the train; but nothing precise had resulted; certain witnesses even denied the possibility of a reserved coupé being taken by assault; others gave the most contradictory information. And the scent had seemed worthless when the Judge, in questioning the barrière guard, Misard, fell accidentally upon the dramatic adventure of Cabucbe and Louisette, that girl who, after her experience with the President, had gone to die at her good friend's. This was a stroke of thunder for him and in a
block the classical act of accusation formulated itself in his brain. Everything was there, threats of death made by the quarryman against the victim, deplorable antecedents, an awkwardly invoked alibi, impossible to prove. Secretly, in a minute of energetic inspiration, he had, the day before, caused Cabuche to be carried away from the little hovel he occupied in the depths of the woods, a sort of hidden den in which a pair of pantaloons stained with blood had been found. And, while still defending himself against the conviction which had taken possession of him, while promising himself not to lose sight of the hypothesis of the Roubauds, he exulted at the idea that he alone had had a sharp enough nose to discover the real assassin. It was with the aim of making himself certain that he had summoned, that day, to his office several witnesses already heard on the morrow of the crime.

The Judge of Inquiry's office was situated on the side of the Rue Jeanne d'Arc, in the dilapidated old building clinging to the flank of the former palace of the Ducs de Normandie, which it dishonored. This large, dull apartment, on the ground floor, received a light so wan that, in winter, a lamp was necessary at three o'clock in the afternoon. Hung with faded old green paper, its only articles of furniture were two fauteuils, four chairs, the Judge's desk and the register's little table; while upon the cold mantelpiece two bronze cups flanked a clock of black marble. Behind the desk, a door led to a second room, in which the Judge sometimes hid the persons he wished to keep at his disposal; while the entrance door opened directly upon the broad corridor, furnished with benches, where the witnesses waited.

At half-past one, although two o'clock was the hour named in the summons, the Roubauds were there. They had arrived from Havre and had scarcely taken time to breakfast in a little restaurant of the Grande Rue.
Both clad in black, he in a frock coat and she in a silk dress like a lady, they maintained the somewhat weary and troubled gravity of a family who have lost a relative. She was seated upon a bench, motionless and speechless, while he, standing with his hands behind him, walked with slow steps in front of her. But at each return their glances met and their hidden anxiety passed like a shadow over their mute faces. Though it had filled them with joy, the legacy of the Croix-de-Maufras had revived their fears; for the President's family, his daughter especially, incensed by the strange donations, so numerous that they reached half the total fortune, spoke of attacking the will; and Madame de Lachesnaye, urged on by her husband, showed herself particularly hard against her old friend Séverine, whom she loaded with the gravest suspicions. Besides, the idea of a proof, of which Roubaud had not at first thought, now haunted him with a continuous fear: the letter which he had made his wife write in order to decide Grandmorin to set out; that letter would be found, if the President had not destroyed it, and the writing might be recognized. Fortunately, days had passed and nothing had yet appeared; the letter must have been torn up. Each new summons to the Judge of Inquiry's office was none the less a cause of cold sweats for the family, beneath their correct attitude of heirs and witnesses.

Two o'clock struck and Jacques made his appearance in his turn. He had come from Paris. Immediately, Roubaud advanced with extended hand, very expansive.

"Ah! you also have been put to trouble. Oh! how tedious is this sad business which never ends!"

Jacques, on noticing Séverine, who was yet sitting motionless, came to a dead stop. For three weeks past, every other day, on each of his trips to Havre, the under station master had overwhelmed him with attentions. Once even he had been forced to accept an invitation to
dinner. And, beside the young wife, he again felt himself quivering, in a growing trouble. Was he going to fall in love with her, too? His heart thumped and his hands burned at the mere sight of the white line of her neck around the slope of her corsage. Hence he firmly resolved to avoid her for the future.

"And," resumed Roubaud, "what do they say about the case in Paris? Nothing new, eh? Now, see here, nothing is known, nothing ever will be known. Come and say bonjour to my wife."

He drew him along; Jacques was compelled to approach and bow to Séverine, embarrassed and smiling with the air of a timid child. He strove to talk about indifferent things, beneath the eyes of the husband and wife, which were fixed upon him as if endeavoring to read beyond even his thoughts, into the vague dreams which he himself hesitated to grapple with. Why was he so cold? Why did he appear to seek to shun them? Had his recollections awakened? Was it to confront them with him that they had been summoned? He was the only witness they feared; they would like to subdue him, to bind him to them by the bonds of a fraternity so close that he would no longer have the courage to speak against them.

The under station master, in torture, returned to the case.

"So you have no suspicion for what reason we have been summoned? Eli! perhaps there is something new?"

Jacques made a gesture of indifference.

"There was a rumor in circulation awhile ago, at the dépôt, when I arrived. An arrest was spoken of."

The Roubauds were astonished, greatly agitated and greatly perplexed. What! an arrest? No one had breathed a word to them about it. An arrest made, or an arrest to make? They overwhelmed him with questions, but he knew nothing further in regard to the matter.
At that moment a sound of footsteps in the corridor made Séverine turn.

"Here are Berthe and her husband," murmured she.

It was, indeed, the Lachesnayes. They passed the Roubauds very stiffly; the young wife did not even bestow a glance upon her former comrade, and an usher introduced them at once into the office of the Judge of Inquiry.

"Well, we must arm ourselves with patience," said Roubaud. "We are here for two good hours. Sit down!"

He placed himself on the left of Séverine and, with a motion of his hand, invited Jacques to sit on the other side, beside her. The latter remained standing for an instant longer. Then, as she looked at him with her soft and fearful air, he let himself sink upon the bench. She was very frail between them; he felt that she was submissively tender; and the slight warmth which emanated from this woman slowly benumbed his entire being.

In M. Denizet’s office the examination was about to commence. Already the inquest had furnished the matter for an enormous docket, many bundles of papers clothed with blue shirts. An effort had been made to follow the victim from the time of his departure from Paris. M. Vandorpe, the chief station master, had deposed as to the departure of the 6.30 express, the carriage 293 added at the last moment, the few words exchanged with Roubaud, who had got into his compartment a little before the arrival of President Grandmorin and, finally, as to the installation of the latter in his coupé, where he was certainly alone. Then, the conductor of the train, Henri Dauvergne, interrogated as to what had passed at Rouen, during the stop of ten minutes, had been unable to affirm anything. He had seen the Roubauds talking in front of the coupé and he believed that they had returned to their compartment,
the door of which was closed by a superintendent; but this remained vague amid the pushing of the crowd and the semi-darkness of the dépôt. As to pronouncing himself if a man, the famous unfindable assassin, had been able to throw himself into the coupé at the moment of starting, he thought the matter but little likely, while admitting the possibility; for, to his knowledge, such a thing had been done twice. Other employés of the Rouen personnel, questioned also upon the same points, instead of bringing in any light, had not done much except to tangle up matters by their contradictory responses. However, one fact was proved—the grasp of the hand given by Roubaud, from the interior of the carriage, to the station master at Barentin, who had climbed upon the step: this station master, M. Bessière, had formally recognized it as exact, and had added that his colleague was alone with his wife, who, lying in a half-recumbent position, appeared to be sleeping tranquilly. In addition, they had gone as far as to hunt up the travellers who had left Paris in the same compartment as the Roubauds. The big lady and the big gentleman, who had arrived late, at the last minute, bourgeoises of Petit-Couronne, had declared that, having fallen asleep immediately, they could not say anything; and as to the woman in black, mute in her corner, she had vanished like a shadow; it had been absolutely impossible to find her. Finally, there were other witnesses still, the small fry, those who had served to establish the identity of the travellers who got out that evening at Barentin: the tickets had been counted and all the passengers who left the train there had been discovered, except one, a tall fellow with his head enveloped in a blue handkerchief, who, some said, wore a paletot and others a blouse. In regard to this man alone, who had disappeared, vanished like a dream, the docket contained three hundred and ten depositions, of such confusion that each piece of testimony was upset by another.
And the docket was further complicated by judicial pieces: the procès-verbal of identification drawn up by the register whom the Procureur Impérial and the Judge of Inquiry had taken to the theatre of the crime, a very voluminous description of the spot beside the track where the victim lay, of the position of the body, of the costume and of the objects found in the pockets which had aided in establishing the identity; the procès-verbal of the physician, who was also brought there, a paper in which, in scientific terms, was described at length the wound of the throat, the sole wound, a frightful gash made with a cutting instrument, a knife without doubt; other procès-verbaux still, other documents relating to the transportation of the corpse to the hospital at Rouen, to the time it had remained there before its remarkably prompt decomposition had forced the authorities to give it up to the family. But from this new mass of papers only two or three important points stood out. First, in the pockets they had found neither the watch nor a little wallet reported to have contained ten bills of a thousand francs each, a sum due by President Grandmorin to his sister, Madame Bonnehon, and which the latter expected. It would therefore have seemed that the motive of the crime was robbery, if a ring, ornamented with a large brilliant, had not remained on the finger. From this again arose a whole series of hypotheses. Unfortunately, they had not the numbers of the bank bills; but the watch was known, a very heavy, self-winding watch, bearing upon the case the two initials of the President interlaced and in the interior a mark of fabrication, the number 2516. Finally, the weapon, the knife the assassin had used, had given occasion for considerable searches along the road, among the surrounding bushes, everywhere it might have been thrown; but they had proved useless—the assassin must have hidden the knife in the same hole as the bills and watch. They had picked up only, about a hundred mètres before the
station of Barentin was reached, the victim's travelling wrap, abandoned, cast there like a compromising object, and it figured among the articles in evidence.

When the Lachesnayes entered, M. Denizet, standing before his desk, was re-reading one of the first examinations which his register had taken from the docket. He was a little and fairly stout man, entirely shaved and turning gray. His thick cheeks, square chin and large nose had a pale immobility, which was further augmented by his heavy eyelids, half falling over his big bright eyes. But all the sagacity, all the address which he believed he had taken refuge in his mouth, an active mouth, playing its sentiments to the town, of an extreme mobility and which thinned itself down in the minutes when he grew very shrewd. His shrewdness was against him, for the most part; he was too perspicacious; he tricked too much with the simple and solid truth, after a professional ideal, having made of his function a type of moral anatomist, gifted with second sight, extremely spiritual. But he was not by any means a fool.

Immediately he did the agreeable toward Madame de Lachesnaye, for he was still a fashionable magistrate, frequenting the society of Rouen and the environs.

"Madame, be kind enough to take a seat."

And he himself advanced a chair to the young woman, a puny blonde, with a disagreeable and ugly air in her mourning attire. But he was simply polite and somewhat haughty in bearing toward M. de Lachesnaye, who was also a blonde and puny-looking; for this little man, counsellor at the court from the age of thirty-six, and decorated, thanks to the influence of his father-in-law and to the services his father, also a magistrate, had rendered in the past in mixed commissions, represented in his eyes the magistracy of favor, the rich magistracy, the mediocrities who install themselves, certain of a rapid way from their relationship and their fortune; while
he, poor, without protection, was reduced to offering the eternal spine of the solicitor, beneath the stone of advancement which was incessantly falling back. Hence he was not sorry to make him feel, in this office, his omnipotence, the absolute power he possessed over the liberty of all, to the point of changing by a word a witness into an accused and proceeding to his immediate arrest, if the fancy so to do seized upon him.

"Madame," resumed he, "you will pardon me for having again to torture you with this sad history. I know that you desire as ardently as we to see the light break forth and the guilty party expiate his crime."

With a sign he notified the register, a tall, yellow man, with a long face, and the examination began.

But, at the first questions put to his wife, M. de Lachesnaye, who had seated himself on seeing that he was not asked to do so, endeavored to substitute himself for her. He proceeded to exhale all his bitterness against his father-in-law's will. Had this been understood?—legacies so numerous, so important, that they reached almost half the fortune, a fortune of three million, seven hundred thousand francs! And to persons whom they did not know for the most part, to women of every class! Even a little vendor of violets, installed beneath a doorway of the Rue du Rocher, was included. It could not be accepted; he was waiting until the criminal investigation should be finished in order to see if there was not a way to break this immoral will.

While he was going on thus, with set teeth, showing the fool that he was, the provincial with obstinate passions, plunged in avarice, M. Denizet was looking at him with his half-concealed big bright eyes, and his shrewd mouth expressed a jealous disdain for this imbecile whom two millions did not satisfy, and whom he would see, without doubt, some day beneath the supreme purple, thanks to all this money.

"I believe, monsieur, that you will be wrong," said he
at last. "The will could be attacked only in the event that the total amount of the legacies exceeded half the fortune, and such is not the case."

Then, turning toward his register:

"Say, now, Laurent, you haven't written down all that, I hope?"

With a faint smile the latter reassured him, like a man who knows how to understand.

"But," resumed M. de Lachesnaye, more bitterly, "no one imagines, I hope, that I am going to leave the Croix-de-Maufras property to those Roubauds. Such a gift to the daughter of a servant! And why, by what title? Besides, if it is proved that they have had a hand in the crime—"

M. Denizet returned to the case.

"Really, do you believe that?"

"Dame! if they had a knowledge of the will, their interest in the death of our poor father is demonstrated. Notice, besides, that they were the last to talk with him. All this seems very suspicious."

Made impatient, disturbed in his new hypothesis, the Judge turned toward Berthe.

"And you, madame, do you think your former friend capable of such a crime?"

Before answering she looked at her husband. In a few months of housekeeping their mutual ill grace and meanness had been intercommunicated and exaggerated. They were spoiling each other. It was he who had worked her up against Séverine to such a point that, in order to keep the house, she would have had her arrested immediately.

"Mon Dieu, monsieur," said she at last, "the person of whom you speak while little had very evil instincts."

"What's that? Do you accuse her of having badly conducted herself at Doinville?"

"Oh! no, monsieur! In that case my father would have sent her off."
In this cry revolted the prudery of the honest bourgeois, who never would have a fault with which to reproach herself and who gloried in being one of the most incontestably virtuous women of Rouen, bowed to and received everywhere.

"Only," continued she, "when there are habits of folly and dissipation—Well, monsieur, many things which I would not have believed possible appear certain to me to-day."

Again M. Denizet made a movement of impatience. He was no longer on that scent at all, and whoever stuck to it became his adversary and seemed to him to attack the reliability of his intelligence.

"You see, however, we must reason," cried he. "People such as the Roubauds do not kill a man like your father in order to inherit quicker; or, at least, there would be indications of their haste and I would find traces of that eagerness to enter into the enjoyment of the legacy. No, the motive is not sufficient; another must be discovered, and there is nothing, you bring nothing yourselves. Besides, review the facts; do you not note material impossibilities? No one saw the Roubauds get into the coupé; an employé even believes he can affirm that they returned to their compartment. And, since they were there for sure, at Barentin, it would be necessary to admit a coming and going from their carriage to that of the President, which were separated by three other carriages, and that too during the few minutes of the passage when the train was dashing along at full speed. Is such a thing likely? I have questioned engineers and conductors, all of whom have told me that long habit alone could give sufficient coolness and energy. At all events the wife could not have done it; the husband must have taken the risk without her. And to do what? To kill a protector who had just extricated them from a grave embarrassment. No, no, decidedly the hypothesis will not stand; a search
must be made elsewhere. Ah! a man who got in at Rouen and got out at the next station, who had recently uttered threats of death against the victim."

In his excitement he had reached his new system, and he was about to say too much on the subject when the door was partially opened and the head of the usher thrust in. But, before the latter had spoken a word, a gloved hand threw the door wide open and a blonde lady entered, clad in very elegant mourning, still handsome at past fifty, of the strong and opulent beauty of a goddess grown old.

"It is I, my dear Judge. I am late and you will excuse me, will you not? The roads are impracticable and the three leagues from Doinville to Rouen count for fully six to-day."

M. Denizet had gallantly arisen.

"Has your health been good, madame, since last Sunday?"

"Very good. And you, my dear Judge, have you recovered from the fright my coachman caused you. He told me that he nearly upset as he was taking you back, scarcely two kilomètres from the château."

"Oh! a mere jolt—I had already forgotten it. Sit down and, as I said a little while ago to Madame de Lachesnaye, pardon me for awakening your grief with this deplorable case."

"Mon Dieu! since it is necessary—Bonjour, Berthe! Bonjour, Lachesnaye!"

It was Madame Bonnehon, the victim’s sister. Widow, since the age of thirty, of a manufacturer who had brought her a large fortune, already very rich herself, having received the domain of Doinville in the division with her brother, she had led an amiable existence, filled, people said, with heart strokes, but apparently so frank and so correct that she had remained the arbiter of Rouennaise society. Through occasion and taste she had affected the magistracy, receiving at the château for
twenty-five years past all the judiciary, all those gentry of the Palais; whose carriages brought them from Rouen and took them back there, in a continual fête. At present she had not yet calmed down; rumor attributed to her a maternal tenderness for a young substitute, the son of a counsellor at the court, M. Chaumette: she worked for the advancement of the son, overwhelming the father with invitations and attentions. And she had preserved a good friend of old times, a counsellor also and a bachelor, M. Desbazeilles, the literary glory of the court of Rouen, whose finely turned sonnets were quoted. For years he had had his chamber at Doinville. Now, although he had passed the sixties, he still came there to dine in his quality of an old comrade, whose rheumatism confined him to his recollections. She thus preserved her royalty by her agreeable ways, in spite of threatening old age, and no one thought of disputing it with her. She had been menaced with a rival the past winter only in Madame Lebouq, the wife of another counsellor, a tall brunette of thirty-four, really quite attractive, whom the magistracy had commenced to frequent a great deal. This had given a touch of melancholy to her habitual gaiety.

"So, madame, if you will permit it," resumed M. Denizet, "I will put a few questions to you."

The examination of the Lachesnayes was over, but he did not dismiss them: his dull, formal office was turned into a fashionable salon. The phlegmatic register again prepared to write.

"A witness has spoken of a dispatch which your brother received, summoning him immediately to Doinville. We have found no trace of that dispatch. Had you written to him, madame?"

Madame Bonnehon, smiling and wholly at ease, replied in the tone of a friendly chat:

"I had not written to my brother. I was expecting him and knew that he would come, but there was no
fixed date. It was his custom to come in that way and nearly always by a night train. As he inhabited an isolated pavilion in the park, opening upon a deserted lane, we did not even hear him arrive. He hired a carriage at Barentin and did not show himself until the next day, sometimes very late, like a neighbor on a visit, installed in his abode for a long while. If I expected him this time, it was because he was to bring the sum of ten thousand francs, a settlement of an account between us. He certainly had the ten thousand francs with him. That is why I have always believed that he was murdered merely for the purpose of robbery.”

The Judge let a brief silence reign; then, looking her in the face:

“What do you think of Madame Roubaud and her husband?”

She made a brisk movement of protestation.

“Ah! no, my dear Monsieur Denizet, don’t make another mistake in regard to those good people. Séverine was a nice little girl, very mild, very docile even, and delicious with that, which was no damage. I think, since you want me to repeat it, that she and her husband are incapable of a bad action.”

He nodded his head approvingly, glancing triumphantly towards Madame de Lachesnaye. The latter, piqued, permitted herself to intervene.

“Aunt, I think you are very easy.”

Then, Madame Bonnehon consoled herself with her ordinary freedom of speech.

“Do stop, Berthe, we shall never agree on that point. She was gay, she loved to laugh and she was quite right. I know perfectly well what you and your husband think. But the fact is that interest must have troubled your heads to make you so greatly astonished at that legacy of the Croix-de-Maufras left by your father to the good Séverine. He had reared her, he had given her a marriage-portion and it was altogether natural that he should
put her in his will. Did he not consider her somewhat as his daughter, eh? Ah! my dear, money counts for very little in the sum of happiness!"

She, having always been very rich, showed an absolute disinterestedness. By a refinement of a handsome and adored woman, she even affected to consider that the sole reason of living lay in beauty and love.

"It was Roubaud who spoke of the dispatch," dryly remarked M. de Lachesnaye. "If there had been no dispatch, the President could not have told him that he had received one. Why did Roubaud lie?"

"But," cried M. Denizet, growing excited, "the President himself might have invented the dispatch to explain his sudden departure to the Roubauds. According to their own testimony, he was not to have departed until the morrow; and, as he found himself in the same train with them, he had need of some reason, if he did not wish to give them the true one, of which, for that matter, we are all of us in ignorance. But the circumstance has no importance, it leads to nothing."

There was silence again. When the Judge continued, he was very calm and showed himself full of precautions.

"Now, madame, I come to a particularly delicate subject and I beg you to excuse the nature of my questions. No one respects your brother's memory more than I do. Rumors were current, were they not, that he had love affairs?"

Mme. Bonnebon had resumed smiling, with her infinite toleration.

"Oh! my dear monsieur, at his age! My brother was early a widower, and I never believed I had the right to think wrong what he himself thought right. He therefore lived according to his liking and I did not interfere at all with his existence. What I know is that he maintained his position and that he remained to the last a man of the best society."

Berthe, shocked that they should speak of her father's
love affairs before her, had lowered her eyes, while her husband, as embarrassed as she, had planted himself at the window, turning his back.

"Pardon me if I persist," said M. Denizet. "Was there not an affair with a young chambermaid at your house?"

"Ah! yes, Louisette. But, my dear monsieur, she was a vicious little creature who, at fourteen years of age, associated with a party who had been in the hands of justice. An effort was made to use her death against my brother. It was an indignity; I will tell you all about it."

Without doubt, she was sincere. Although she was well posted as to the President's habits and had not been surprised by his tragic death, she felt the necessity of defending the high situation of the family. Besides, if she believed him altogether capable of having been mixed up in the unfortunate Louisette affair, she was also convinced of the girl's precocious wickedness.

"Picture to yourself a gamine, oh! so little, so delicate, as blonde and rosy as a small angel, and gentle with that, oh! so gentle. Well, she was not fourteen when she was the good friend of a species of brute, a quarryman by the name of Cabuche, who had just spent five years in prison for having killed a man in a cabaret. This fellow lived in the savage state upon the border of the forest of Bécourt, where his father, dead of trouble, had left him a hovel built of mud and tree trunks. He persisted in working there a bit of the abandoned quarries, which in the past, I believe, furnished half the stone used in the construction of Rouen. And it was in the depths of this den that this girl went to seek her terror of whom all the district entertained such strong fear that he lived absolutely alone, like one stricken with the plague. Often they were met together, prowling about the woods hand in hand, she so delicate, he enormous and bestial. In short, it was something
incredible. Naturally, I knew nothing of all this until later. I had taken Louisette into my house almost from charity, to do a good action. Her family, those Misards, whom I knew to be poor, had been very careful not to tell me that they had soundly beaten the child without being able to prevent her from running to Cabuiche's hovel whenever a door was left open. And it was then that the accident happened. My brother had no special servants at Doinville. Louisette and another woman did the housework of the isolated pavilion he occupied. One morning, when she had gone there alone, she disappeared. To my mind, she had long premeditated her flight; perhaps Cabuuche was waiting for her and took her away. But the frightful part of it was that, five days afterwards, the report of Louisette's death was circulated, with horrible details concerning my brother, under circumstances so monstrous that it was said the terrified child had gone to Cabuuche's den, there to die of brain fever. What had occurred? So many versions were afloat that it is difficult to tell. I believe, for my part, that Louisette, who really died of a wretched fever, for a physician attested it, succumbed to some imprudence—nights spent in the open air or wanderings among the marshes. You do not think, my dear monsieur, that my brother was the cause of that gamine's death, do you? It is odious, it is impossible."

During this recital, M. Denizet had listened attentively, without either approving or disapproving. And Madame Bonnemhon experienced a slight embarrassment in finishing; then, making her decision, she said:

"Mon Dieu! I do not say that my brother might not have joked with her. He liked youth; he was very gay beneath his rigid appearance. Well, say that he might have kissed her."

At these words, there was a modest revolt on the part of the Lachesnayes. "Oh! aunt, aunt!"

But she shrugged her shoulders: why lie to justice?
"He kissed her, tickled her, perhaps. There was no crime in that. And what makes me admit this is that the invention did not come from the quarryman. Louisette must have been the liar, the vicious creature who made things out worse than they were in order, perhaps, to induce Cabucche to give her shelter, so that the latter, a brute, as I have told you, came in good faith to imagine that my brother had killed his friend. He was really wild with rage; he repeated in all the cabarets that if the President fell into his hands he would stick him like a pig."

The Judge, silent until then, briskly interrupted her.

"He said that, eh? Are there witnesses to affirm it?"

"Oh! my dear monsieur, you will find as many of them as you want. Well, it was a very sad affair and annoyed us greatly. Fortunately, my brother's situation placed him above all suspicion."

Madame Bonnehon had comprehended what new scent M. Denizet was following; and she was very uneasy about it; she preferred not to entangle herself further by questioning him in her turn. He had arisen; he said he would not longer abuse the painful complaisance of the family. By his order the register read the examinations before procuring the signatures of the witnesses. These examinations were perfectly correct, and so stripped of useless and compromising words that Madame Bonnehon, pen in hand, cast a surprised glance of benevolence at the wan and bony Laurent, whom she had not before noticed.

Then, as the Judge accompanied her, as well as her nephew and niece, to the door, she grasped his hands.

"I shall see you soon, shall I not? You know that you are always expected at Doinville. And, thank you, you are one of the last faithful to me."

Her smile was veiled with melancholy, while her lean niece, who had been the first to go out, had made but a slight bow.
When he was alone, M. Denizet breathed for a minute. He had stopped where he stood and was reflecting. The affair was growing clear to him; there had certainly been violence on the part of Grandmorin, whose reputation was well-known. This rendered his task delicate and he promised himself to redouble prudence until the advice which he expected from the ministry should arrive. But he was none the less triumphant. At last he had his hands on the guilty man.

When he had resumed his place at the desk, he rang for the usher.

"Bring in Jacques Lantier."

On the bench in the corridor the Roubauds were yet waiting, their faces looking as if patience had had a soporific effect and occasionally stirred by a nervous twitch. And the usher's voice, summoning Jacques, seemed to awaken them with a slight start. They followed him with their wide-open eyes and watched him vanish into the Judge's office. Then they fell back into their waiting attitude, silent and paler than before.

For three weeks past all this business had haunted Jacques and made him uneasy, as if it might finish by turning against him. This was unreasonable, for he had nothing to reproach himself with, not even with having kept silent; but, nevertheless, he entered the Judge's apartment with the little quiver of a guilty man who fears to see his crime discovered; and he defended himself against the questions, he kept a watch on himself lest he might say too much. He also might have killed: could not that be read in his eyes? Nothing was more disagreeable to him than these judicial citations; he experienced a sort of anger because of them, ardently desiring, as he said, not to be further tormented with matters which did not concern him.

But, that day, M. Denizet insisted only upon the
description of the assassin. Jacques, being the sole witness who had caught a glimpse of the latter, alone could give precise information. But he adhered to his first deposition; he repeated that the scene of the murder had been to him but a vision of scarcely a second, a picture so rapid that it remained shapeless and abstract in his memory. It was only a man slaughtering another and nothing more. For half an hour, the Judge, with slow persistency, harassed him, putting the same questions to him in every sense imaginable: was he tall, was he little, had he a beard, was his hair long or short? What sort of clothes did he wear? To what class did he seem to belong? And Jacques, troubled, constantly made but vague responses.

"Well," suddenly demanded M. Denizet, looking him straight in the eyes, "if he were shown to you, would you recognize him?"

His eyelids slightly quivered and anguish seized upon him beneath that look which was searching his very brains.

"Recognize him?—yes—perhaps."

But instantly his strange fear of an unconscious complicity threw him back upon his evasive system.

"That is no, I think not; I would never dare to affirm. Reflect now, the train was going at the speed of eighty kilomètres an hour!"

With a look of discouragement, the Judge was about to send him into the adjoining room to keep him at his disposal, when he took a second thought.

"Remain; sit down."

And, again ringing for the usher, he said:

"Bring in Monsieur and Madame Roubaud."

At the door, on perceiving Jacques, their eyes were dulled by a roll of uneasiness. Had he spoken? Was he kept there to be confronted with them? All their assurance left them on finding him there; and it was with a somewhat hollow voice that they answered at
first. But the Judge had simply resumed their first examination; they had only to repeat the same phrases, almost identical, while he listened to them with his head down, not even looking at them.

Then, all at once, he turned toward Séverine.

"Madame, you said to the commissary of surveillance, whose procès-verbal I have here, that, in your opinion, a man had got into the coupé at Rouen as the train was starting off."

She was frightened. Why had he recalled that? Was it a trap? Was he going, by comparing her declarations, to make her give the lie to herself? Hence, with a glance, she consulted her husband, who prudently intervened.

"I do not think, monsieur, that my wife showed herself so affirmative."

"Pardon. As you admitted the possibility of such a thing, madame said: 'That's certainly what happened.' Now, madame, I wish to know if you had special motives for speaking thus."

She grew thoroughly troubled, convinced that, if she did not use great care, he would, from answer to answer, lead her to a confession. However, she could not remain silent.

"Oh! no, monsieur, no motive. I said that by virtue of simple reasoning, because, in fact, it is difficult to explain matters in any other way."

"Then, you did not see the man; you can tell us nothing about him?"

"No, no, monsieur, nothing."

M. Denizet seemed to abandon this point of the examination. But he returned to it immediately with Roubaud.

"And how happens it that you did not see the man, if he really got into the coupé, for it is stated in your deposition that you were still chatting with the victim when the whistle was blown to start!"
This persistence finished by terrifying the under station master, in his anxiety to know what course to take—drop the invention of the man or stick to it. If there were proofs against him, the hypothesis of the unknown assassin could scarcely be sustained and might even aggravate his case. He waited to understand; he answered by long, confused explanations.

"It is truly deplorable," resumed M. Denizet, "that your recollections have so little clearness, for you might aid us to put an end to suspicions which have wandered to different persons."

This appeared so direct to Roubaud that he felt an irresistible need to prove his innocence. He saw himself discovered and instantly decided upon his course.

"Such a case of conscience is involved there! One hesitates, you comprehend—nothing is more natural. When I admit to you that I believe I saw the man—"

The Judge gave a triumphant look, believing that he owed this commencement of frankness to his shrewdness. Experience had taught him the strange difficulty certain witnesses have in confessing what they know, and he flattered himself that he was able to draw them out in spite of themselves.

"Speak. What is he like? Little, tall, somewhat about your height?"

"Oh! no, no; a great deal taller. At least, such was my impression, for it was a mere impression—an individual I am almost sure I came in contact with as I was running back to my carriage."

"Wait," said M. Denizet.

And, turning toward Jacques, he demanded of him:

"The man you caught a glimpse of, with the knife in his hand—was he much taller than M. Roubaud?"

The engineer, who was growing impatient, for he had begun to fear that he would be unable to take the five o'clock train, raised his eyes and examined Roubaud; and he seemed never to have looked at him; he was
astonished to find him short, powerful, and with a singular profile, seen elsewhere, dreamed, perhaps.

"No," murmured he, "not taller; about the same height."

But the under station master protested with vivacity.

"Oh! much taller—a head, at least."

Jacques stood with his eyes wide open upon him; and, beneath that glance, in which he read a growing surprise, he shook himself as if to escape from his own resemblance; while his wife also, frozen with terror, followed the confused labor of memory, expressed upon the young man's visage. Clearly the latter had at first been astonished by certain analogies between Roubaud and the assassin; then he suddenly acquired the certainty that Roubaud was the assassin, as the report had run; now, he seemed to be wholly overcome by that discovery, his face vacant; it was impossible to tell what he was going to do—he did not know himself. If he should speak, the pair would be lost. Roubaud's eyes had encountered his and the looks of both seemed to be penetrating to their very souls. There was silence.

"So, you are not of accord," resumed M. Denizet. "If you found him shorter, it was because, without doubt, he was bent over in the struggle with his victim."

He also was looking at the two men. He had not thought of thus utilizing this confrontation; but, by the instinct of his profession, he felt, at that minute, that the truth was passing in the air. His confidence in the Cabuche scent even was shaken. Were the Lachesnayes right? Were the guilty ones, against all likelihood, this honest employé and his gentle young wife?

"Had the man his full beard like you?" he demanded of Roubaud.

The latter had the strength to reply, without a tremble in his voice:

"His full beard? No, no. No beard at all, I believe."

Jacques comprehended that the same question was
about to be put to him. What should he say?—for he would have sworn that the man wore his full beard. In verity he was not interested in these people, so why not tell the truth? But as he turned his eyes away from the husband, he met the glance of the wife; and he read in that glance such an ardent supplication that he was upset by it. His old shiver again took possession of him: did he love her, could he love her with real love without a monstrous desire of destruction? And, at that moment, by a singular counterstroke of his trouble, it seemed to him that his memory grew obscured; he no longer saw the assassin in Roubaud. The vision again became vague; doubt seized upon him to such a point that he would have mortally repented had he spoken.

M. Denizet put the question:
"Did the man wear his full beard like M. Roubaud?"

And he answered in good faith:
"Monsieur, in truth I cannot say. It all passed too quickly. I know nothing. I can affirm nothing."

But M. Denizet persisted, for he desired to get done with the suspicion against the under station master. He urged the latter, he urged the engineer and succeeded in obtaining from the first a complete description of the assassin—tall, strong, beardless, and clad in a blouse, in everything the reverse of his own description; while he drew from the second only evasive monosyllables, which gave strength to the affirmations of the other. And the Judge returned to his first conviction: he was on the right scent; the portrait which the witness had drawn of the assassin was so exact that each new feature added to the certitude. It was this family, unjustly suspected, who, by their overwhelming deposition, would bring the head of the guilty man to the guillotine.

"Go in there," said he to the Roubauds and Jacques, showing them to the adjoining room when they had signed their examinations. "Wait until I summon you."
Immediately he gave the order for the prisoner to be brought; and he was so delighted that he joyously said to his register:

"Laurent, we have him!"

But the door had opened; two gendarmes had appeared, conducting a tall fellow of from twenty-five to thirty years of age. They withdrew at a sign from the Judge and Cabuche stood alone in the centre of the office, frightened, with the wild look of a tracked beast. He was a man with a powerful neck and enormous hands; he was blonde, with a very white skin and a thin beard, scarcely a yellow down, curly and silky. His massive face and low forehead indicated the violence of an ignorant creature, altogether given over to immediate sensations; but there was something like a need of tender submission in his large dog's mouth and square nose. Roughly seized early in the morning in the depths of his den, torn from his forest and exasperated by accusations which he did not understand, he already had, with his fright and torn blouse, the suspicious air of an accused, that air of a sullen robber which the prison gives to the most honest man. The night was falling and the room was dark, and he had shrunk back into the gloom when the usher brought a large lamp, with a bare globe, the bright light of which illuminated his visage. Then, revealed, he stood motionless.

Instantly M. Denizet had fixed upon him his big bright eyes, with their heavy eyelids. And he did not speak, it was a mute engagement, the first trial of his power, before the war of the savage, the war of tricks, traps and moral tortures. This man was the guilty one and everything was lawful against him; he had no longer any right but that of confessing his crime.

The examination began very slowly.

"Do you know of what crime you are accused?"

Cabuche, his voice thickened by powerless anger, growled out:
“I wasn’t told, but I guess. It’s been talked about enough!”

“Were you acquainted with Monsieur Grandmorin?”

“Yes, yes, I was too well acquainted with him!”

“A girl named Louisette, whose lover you were, was chambermaid at Madame Bonnehon’s.”

A fit of rage seized upon the quarryman. In his anger, he saw red.

“Nom de Dieu! whoever say that are cursed liars, I wasn’t Louisette’s lover.”

With curiosity the Judge had watched him get angry. And, giving another turn to the examination, he said:

“You are very violent; you have served five years in prison for having killed a man in a quarrel.”

Cabuche hung his head. That imprisonment was his shame. He murmured:

“He struck me first. But I only served four years; they took one off.”

“Then,” resumed M. Denizet, “you claim that you were not the lover of the girl Louisette?”

Again he clenched his fists. Then, he said in a low, broken voice:

“See here now, she was a child, not yet fourteen years old, when I came back from down there. Then everybody shunned me and threw stones at me. And she, in the forest where I always met her, she approached me, she talked to me, she was kind, oh! so kind! We got to be friends like that. We held each other by the hand as we walked about. It was so good, so good at that time. Very sure she grew and I thought of her. I can’t say the contrary, for I was like a madman, I loved her so. She also loved me very much, and what you say would have happened at last, but they separated her from me, putting her with that lady at Doinville. Then, one evening, on returning from the quarry, I found her in front of my door, half-crazy and so ill that she was burning with fever. She had not dared to go back to her
parents; she had come to die at my hut. Ah! nom de Dieu! the pig! I should have stuck him at once!"

The Judge pinched his thin lips, astonished at the sincere accent of this man. Decidedly, he would have to play a careful game; he had to deal with a much stronger party than he had believed.

"Oh! I know the horrible story which you and that girl invented. But notice that the whole life of Monsieur Grandmorin put him above your accusations."

Bewildered, his eyes round and his hands trembling, the quarryman stammered:

"Eh? What is it we invented? The others have lied and we are accused of it!"

"Oh! don't play the innocent. I have already questioned Misard, the man who married Louisette's mother. I will confront him with you, if necessary. You shall see what he thinks of your story. And be careful about your answers. We have witnesses who know all; the best thing you can do is to tell the truth."

This was his ordinary method of intimidation, even when he knew nothing and had no witnesses.

"Do you deny that, publicly, you have cried everywhere that you would stick Monsieur Grandmorin?"

"Ah! yes, I said that. And I meant what I said, for my hand was itching devilishly to get at him!"

Surprise stopped M. Denizet short. He had expected a system of complete denial. What! the accused confessed the threats. What trick did that hide? Fearing that he had gone too quickly to work, he thought for an instant; then he looked closely at him, as he put this sudden question to him:

"What did you do during the night from the 14th to the 15th of February?"

"I went to bed that night toward six o'clock. I was a trifle sick, and my cousin Louis did me the favor of hauling a load of stones for me to Doinville."

"Yes, your cousin was seen, with the wagon, crossing
the track at the passage at the grade. But your cousin on being questioned could answer only one thing: that you quitted him at noon and that he did not see you again. Prove to me that you went to bed at six o'clock."

"That's stupid! I can't prove that. I live all alone in a hut on the border of the forest. I was there, I say so and that's all."

Then, M. Denizet resolved to strike the great blow of the affirmation which makes the criminal change. His face grew motionless in a tension of will, while his mouth played the scene.

"I will tell you what you did on the evening of the 14th of February. At three o'clock you took, at Barentin, the train for Rouen, with what intention justice has not yet been able to establish. You returned by the train from Paris which stops at 9.03; and you were upon the quay, in the midst of the crowd, when you perceived Monsieur Grandmorin in his coupé. Notice that I admit there was no premeditation, that the idea of the crime came to you only then. You got in, thanks to the crush, and waited until the Malaunay tunnel was reached; but you wrongly calculated the time, for the train was leaving the tunnel when you struck the blow. You threw the corpse out and left the train at Barentin, after having also rid yourself of the traveling wrap. That is what you did."

He watched for the slightest waves upon Cabuche's rosy face, and he was irritated when the latter, very attentive at first, finished by bursting into a hearty laugh.

"What's that you're telling? If I'd struck the blow, I'd say so!"

Then he added, tranquilly:

"I didn't strike the blow, but I ought to have done so. Nom de Dieu! yes, I regret it."

And M. Denizet could draw nothing else from him. Vainly he resumed his questions, returned ten times to the same points, using different tactics. No, always
no! It was not he! He shrugged his shoulders, thinking all this stupid. On arresting him, they had searched the hovel without discovering either weapon, the ten bank notes or the watch; but they had seized a pair of pantaloons stained with a few specks of blood, an overwhelming proof. He had burst out laughing anew: another fine story—a rabbit, caught in a trap, which had bloodied his legs! And, in his fixed idea of the crime, it was the Judge who lost his foothold by too much professional finesse, complicating matters, going beyond the simple truth. This ignorant man, incapable of fighting with tricks, of an invincible force when he said no, gradually angered him; for he admitted only his culpability and each new denial exasperated him further as if it were a persistence in savagery and falsehood. He would force him to trip himself.

"So you deny?"

"Very sure, since I didn't do it. If I had done it, I should be only too proud to say so!"

With a sudden movement, M. Denizet arose; he opened the door of the small adjoining room. And, when he had recalled Jacques, he said:

"Do you recognize this man?"

"I know him," answered the surprised engineer. "I used to see him at the Misards'."

"No, no. Do you recognize him as the man in the railway carriage—the assassin?"

Jacques at once became circumspect. Besides, he did not recognize him. The other had seemed to him shorter and darker. He was about to declare this, when he thought that it would be advancing too far. And he remained evasive.

"I do not know, I cannot say. I assure you, monsieur, that I cannot say."

M. Denizet, without waiting, summoned the Roubauds in their turn. And he put the question to them:

"Do you recognize this man?"
Cabuche was still smiling. He was not astonished; he addressed a little nod to Séverine, whom he had known as a young girl, when she lived at the Croix-de-Maufras. But she and her husband were alarmed at seeing him there. They understood: he was the man who had been arrested of whom Jacques had spoken to them, the accused who had been the cause of their new examination. And Rouband was stupefied, frightened at the resemblance this fellow bore to the imaginary assassin whose description he had invented—the opposite of his. This was purely fortuitous, but he was so troubled by it that he hesitated to answer.

"Come, do you recognize him?"

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur the Judge, I repeat to you that it was simply an impression—an individual who ran against me. Without doubt, this man is tall like the other, and he is blonde and he has no beard—"

"But do you recognize him?"

The under station master, oppressed, was all of a tremble from a confused internal struggle. The instinct of preservation carried the day.

"I cannot affirm. But he is certainly like him, very much like him."

This time Cabuche commenced to swear. These stories had at last disgusted him! Since he was not the man, he wished to go away. And, beneath the flow of blood, which had mounted to his brain, he beat with his fists, he became so terrible that the gendarmes were summoned back and took him off. But, in the face of this violence, of this leap of the attacked animal which threw itself forward, M. Denizet triumphed; his conviction was made and he let it be seen.

"Did you notice his eyes? It is by their eyes I recognize them. Ah! his account is all right—we have him!"

The Roubauds, motionless, looked at each other. So it was over, they were saved since justice held the guilty man. They were somewhat bewildered and their con-
sciences pricked them because of the rôle which circumstances had forced them to play. But joy inundated them, carried away their scruples, and they smiled upon Jacques; they were waiting, relieved and greatly in need of the open air, for the Judge to dismiss them all three, when the usher brought a letter to the latter.

M. Denizet quickly sat down at his desk to read it attentively, forgetting the three witnesses. It was the letter from the ministry, the advice which he should have had the patience to await, before pushing the case forward anew. And what he read must have abated his triumph, for his visage gradually assumed an icy look and resumed its dull immobility. At one moment, he raised his head and cast an oblique glance at the Roubauds, as if their remembrance had been brought back to him by one of the phrases. The latter, losing their brief joy, again seized upon by their uneasiness, felt themselves once more in danger. Why had he looked at them? Had the three lines of writing, that awkward note, the fear of which haunted them, been found in Paris? Séverine knew M. Camy-Lamotte from having often seen him at the President's, and she was aware that he was charged with putting in order the papers of the deceased. A bitter regret tortured Roubaud because he had not thought of sending his wife to Paris, where she would have made useful visits and would have at least secured the protection of the secrétaire général in case the Compagnie, weary of the evil reports, should think of discharging him. And both of them kept their eyes fixed on the Judge, feeling their inquiétude grow in proportion as they saw him become gloomy, visibly disconcerted by that letter, which deranged all his good work of the day.

Finally M. Denizet laid down the letter and remained for a moment absorbed, his eyes open upon the Roubauds and upon Jacques. Then, resigning himself, speaking aloud to himself, he said:
Well, they will see, they will take back all that—You can withdraw."

But, as the three were going out, he could not resist the need of knowing, of throwing light upon the grave point which destroyed his new system, although he had been recommended not to do anything further without a previous understanding.

“No; remain a bit; I have a question to ask you.”

The Roubauds stopped in the corridor. The doors were open, and they could not depart: something kept them there—their anguish at what was taking place in the Judge's office, the physical impossibility of going away until they had learned from Jacques what was the additional question which had been put to him. They returned, they walked back and forth with weary limbs, and they again found themselves side by side upon the bench, where they had waited for hours already.

When the engineer reappeared, Roubaud arose.

“We were waiting for you, we will return to the dépôt together.—Well?”

But Jacques turned away his head as if he wished to avoid the look Séverine had fixed upon him.

“He is undecided, he is at sea,” said he, at last. “He asked me if there were not two engaged in the murder. And, as I had spoken at Havre of a dark mass weighing upon the old man's legs, he questioned me about it. He seemed to think that it was only the wrap. Then he sent for the wrap and I was forced to make a statement. Mon Dieu! yes, it was the wrap, perhaps.”

The Roubauds trembled. He was upon their track; a word from this young man might destroy them. He surely knew and would end by speaking. And all three, the wife between the two men, had silently quitted the Palais de Justice, when the under station master said:

“Àpropos, comrade, my wife is about to be forced to go spend a day in Paris on business. Will you be kind enough to pilot her should she have need of any one?”
CHAPTER V.
SÉVERINE IN PARIS.

At 11.15, the precise hour, the post of the Pont de l'Europe signaled, with the two regulation horn blasts, the Havre express, which was emerging from the tunnel of the Batignolles; and soon the train entered the dépôt yard, smoking and trickling, soaked by a beating rain which had been pouring down in a deluge since it left Rouen.

The dépôt hands had not yet turned the knobs of the car doors when one of them opened and Séverine sprang briskly out upon the quay, before the train had fairly stopped. Her carriage was an end one and she was forced to hasten in order to reach the engine, amid the sudden flow of passengers from the compartments and a tangle of children and bundles. Jacques was there, standing upon the platform, waiting to enter the dépôt, while Pecqueux was wiping the brasses with a rag.

"Then, it's understood," said she, raised on the tips of her toes. "I will be in the Rue Cardinet at three o'clock and you will be so obliging as to present me to your chief that I may thank him."

It was a pretext invented by Roubaud, this thanking the chief of the dépôt of the Batignolles for a slight service rendered. In that way she would find herself confided to the good offices of the engineer, could draw the bonds closer and act upon him.

But Jacques, black with coal dust, soaked with water and exhausted by his struggle against the rain and the wind, looked at her with his hard eyes and made no answer. He had not been able to refuse the husband's
request on quitting Havre; and the idea of being alone with her upset him, for he realized now that she had a fascination for him.

"That's it, isn't it?" resumed she, smiling, with her soft, caressing look, despite the surprise and the slight repugnance she experienced at finding him so dirty, scarcely recognizable. "That's it, isn't it? I count upon you."

As she had raised herself higher up still and placed her gloved hand upon an iron bar, Pecqueux obligingly warned her.

"Take care, you will soil yourself!"

Then Jacques was compelled to reply. He did so in a peevish tone.

"Yes, in the Rue Cardinet, that is if this cursed rain don't melt me. What dog's weather!"

She was touched by the pitiful condition in which he was; she added, as if he had suffered solely for her:

"Oh! how badly off you were while I was so comfortable! I thought of you and the deluge filled me with despair—and I was so well satisfied too at the idea that you were bringing me to Paris this morning and that you would take me back this evening in the express!"

But this gentle, tender familiarity seemed only to trouble him the more. He appeared relieved when a voice shouted: "Back the engine!" With a prompt hand he blew the whistle, while the fireman set aside the young woman.

"At three o'clock!"

"Yes, at three o'clock!"

And, as the engine again began moving, Séverine quitted the quay—the last to do so. Outside, in the Rue d'Amsterdam, as she was about to open her umbrella, she was pleased to see that it was no longer raining. She went down as far as the Place du Havre, consulted herself and decided that the best thing she could do would be to breakfast immediately. It was
twenty-five minutes past eleven o'clock; she entered a restaurant at the corner of the Rue Saint-Lazare, where she ordered a plate of eggs and a cutlet. Then, while eating very slowly, she fell back into the reflections which had haunted her for weeks, her face pale and disturbed, shorn of its docile and seductive smile.

It was on the previous day, two days after their examination at Rouen, that Roubaud, judging waiting to be dangerous, had resolved to send her to make a visit to M. Camy-Lamotte, not at the ministry, but in the Rue du Rocher, where he occupied a hôtel in the immediate vicinity of the Hôtel Grandmorin. She knew she would find him there at one o'clock and did not hasten. She was preparing what she should say and trying to foresee his answers in order that nothing might trouble her. The previous day a new cause of uneasiness had hastened her journey: they had learned from the gossip of the dépôt that Madame Lebleu and Philomène were relating everywhere that the Compagnie was on the point of discharging Roubaud, who was deemed compromising; and the worst of it was that M. Dabadie, questioned directly, had not said no, which gave a great deal of weight to the news. It immediately became very urgent that she should go to Paris to plead their cause and especially to demand the protection of the powerful personage, as in the past they had done with the President. But beneath this demand, which would serve at least to explain the visit, there was a more imperious motive, an itching and insatiable need of knowing, that need which drives the criminal to betray himself rather than remain in ignorance. The uncertainty was killing them now that they felt themselves discovered, since Jacques had told them the suspicion the accusation of which seemed to be a second assassin. They were wearing themselves out with conjectures—the letter found, the facts re-established; they were in hourly expectation of domiciliary visits, of an arrest; and their torture had
become so aggravated, the slightest facts around them assumed airs of such disturbing menace that they had at last come to prefer the catastrophe to these continual alarms. They desired to be certain and suffer no longer.

Séverine finished her cutlet so absorbed that she awoke with a start, astonished at the public place in which she found herself. Everything tasted bitter to her; she was unable to swallow any more and had not even the heart to take a cup of coffee. But vainly did she eat slowly, it was scarcely a quarter past twelve when she quitted the restaurant. Yet three-quarters of an hour to kill! She who adored Paris, who loved so much to freely course the streets, the rare times she came to the city, felt herself lost and timid there in her impatience to finish and hide herself. The sidewalks were already drying and a warm wind had swept away the clouds. She went down the Rue Tronchet and found herself at the flower-market of the Madeleine, one of those markets of March, blooming with cowslips and azaleas in the warm days of the closing winter. For half an hour she walked amid this hasty spring, again seized upon by vague dreams, thinking of Jacques as of an enemy she must disarm. It seemed to her that her visit to the Rue du Rocher was made, that everything was going well in that direction and that it only remained for her to obtain the silence of this young man; and it was a complicated enterprise in which she lost herself, her brain busy with romantic plans. But all this was without fatigue, without fright, of a soothing gentleness. Then, suddenly, she saw what time it was by the clock of a kiosque: ten minutes past one. Her errand was not done; she fell back into the anguish of the real and hastened to go towards the Rue du Rocher.

The hôtel of M. Camy-Lamotte stood at the corner of that street and the Rue de Naples; and Séverine was forced to pass in front of the Hôtel Grandmorin, which was silent and empty, with closed blinds. She raised
her eyes and hastened her steps. The remembrance of her last visit had returned to her and that vast mansion loomed up, a terrible sight. And, as, at a short distance away, she wheeled about with an instinctive movement, looking behind like a person pursued by the loud noise of the crowd, she saw, upon the opposite sidewalk, the Rouen Judge of Inquiry, M. Denizet, who was also passing up the street. She was filled with terror at the sight. Had he noticed her looking at the mansion? But he was walking tranquilly along; she let him pass her and followed him in great trouble. And she received another blow on her heart when she saw him ring the bell at M. Camy-Lamotte's hôtel, corner of the Rue de Naples.

Her terror increased. Never would she dare to enter now. She turned around, threaded the Rue d'Edimbourg and went down as far as the Pont de l'Europe. There only she believed herself in safety. And no longer knowing either where to go or what to do, in her bewilderment she stood motionless against one of the balustrades, looking beneath her, across the metallic framework, at the vast yard of the dépôt where trains were continually manoeuvring. She followed them with her frightened eyes; she thought that surely the Judge's errand concerned the case, that the two men were talking of her and that at that very minute her fate was being decided. Then, invaded by despair, she was tormented by the desire to throw herself at once beneath a train rather than return to the Rue du Rocher. One came out from the marquee of the great lines; she watched it approach; then it passed beneath her, blowing into her face a warm whirlwind of white vapor. Then the foolish inutility of her journey and the frightful anguish she would take back with her, if she had not the strength to go seek a certainty, presented themselves so vividly to her mind that she gave herself five minutes longer to recover her courage. Engines whistled; she watched one, a small one, dismembering a train of
the suburbs; and, her glances having been lifted towards the left, she recognized, above the mail court, away up in the house of the Impasse d'Amsterdam, the window of Mère Victoire, that window at which she again saw herself leaning with her husband before the abominable scene which had caused their misfortune. This brought up the danger of her situation, in a burst of suffering so sharp that she felt herself ready to face everything to be done with it all. Horn blasts and prolonged roars deafened her, while thick smoke barred the horizon, flying over the broad, clear sky of Paris. And she again started for the Rue du Rocher, going there like one about to commit suicide and hastening her pace in the sudden fear of no longer finding any one at the hotel.

When Séverine had pulled the bell, a new terror froze her. But already a valet had seated her in an antechamber, after having taken her name. And, through the partly open doors, she heard very distinctly the animated conversation of two voices. Profound, absolute silence succeeded. She could hear nothing but the dull throb of her temples; she said to herself that the Judge was still in conference, that she would be made to wait for a long while without doubt; and this waiting had grown intolerable to her. Then, suddenly, she had a surprise: the valet summoned and introduced her. Certainly the Judge had not gone. She felt convinced that he was there, hidden behind a door.

It was a vast work office, with dark furniture, garnished with a thick carpet and heavy portières, so severe and so protected that not a sound from without penetrated there. Nevertheless there were flowers—pale roses—in a bronze basket. And this indicated, like a hidden grace, a taste for amiable life behind this severity. The master of the mansion was standing there, very correctly wrapped in his coat, severe also, with his thin face which his grayish side whiskers enlarged somewhat, but of the elegance of a former beau who had
remained slender, of a distinction which shone through the assumed stiffness of official bearing. In the half-light of the apartment he had a very grand air.

Séverine, on entering, was oppressed by the warm atmosphere, stifled beneath the hangings; and she saw only M. Camy-Lamotte, who was watching her approach. He did not make a gesture to invite her to seat herself; he had resolved not to open his mouth the first, but to wait until she had explained the motive of her visit. This prolonged the silence; and, through the effect of a violent reaction, she suddenly found herself mistress of herself in her peril, very calm and very prudent.

"Monsieur," said she, "you will excuse me if I have dared to come to recall myself to your kindness. You know the irreparable loss I have suffered, and, in the abandonment in which I now find myself, I have dared to think of you to defend us, to continue for us a little of the protection of your friend, of the protector I so deeply regret."

M. Camy-Lamotte could then but motion her to a seat, for this was said in a perfect tone, without the exaggeration of either humility or trouble, with the innate art of feminine hypocrisy. But still he did not speak; he had seated himself, still waiting. She continued, seeing that she must come to the point.

"I permit myself to refresh your memory by reminding you that I have had the honor of seeing you at Doinville. Ah! that was a happy time for me! Now, evil days have come and I have only you, monsieur. I implore you in the name of him whom we have lost. You who loved him finish his good work, replace him so far as I am concerned."

He listened to her, he looked at her, and all his suspicions were shaken, so natural did she seem to him, so charming in her regrets and supplications. The note discovered by him among Grandmorin's papers, those two unsigned lines, he had thought could have come
from nobody but her, whose complaisances for the President were known to him; and, awhile before, the simple announcement of her visit had sufficed to convince him. He had interrupted his interview with the Judge only to confirm his certainty. But how believe her guilty on seeing her in this way, so quiet and so gentle?

Still he wished to have his mind clear on the subject. And, while preserving his air of severity, he said:

"Explain yourself, madame. I remember perfectly and ask nothing better than to be useful to you, if there is no obstacle in the way."

Then, very clearly, Séverine told how her husband was menaced with a discharge. There was a great deal of jealousy in regard to him, because of his merit and the high protection which until then had covered him. Now that he was believed to be without defence, his enemies hoped to triumph and had redoubled their efforts. And she named no one, for that matter; she spoke in measured terms, despite the imminence of the peril. That she had decided thus to make the journey to Paris she must have been thoroughly convinced of the necessity of the quickest action. Perhaps on the morrow there would no longer be time: it was immediately that she demanded aid and succor. All this with such an abundance of logical facts and good reasons that it, in truth, seemed impossible that she had disturbed herself with another aim.

M. Camy-Lamotte had studied her even to the almost imperceptible little quivers of her lips; and he struck the first blow.

"But why should the Compagnie discharge your husband? It has nothing grave to reproach him with."

She also had not taken her eyes from him, spying out the slightest wrinkles of his visage, asking herself if he had found the letter; and, despite the innocence of the question, it suddenly gave her the conviction that the
letter was there, in some article of furniture of the office: he knew, for he had set a trap for her, desiring to see if she would dare to speak of the true reasons of the discharge. Besides, he had accentuated his tone too much, and she had felt herself searched even to her soul by his wan eyes of a fatigued man.

Bravely she walked to the peril.

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, it is, indeed, monstrous, but we are suspected of having killed our benefactor because of that unfortunate will. We have had no trouble to prove our innocence. But something of those abominable accusations yet linger and the Compagnie, doubtless, is afraid of the scandal."

He was again surprised, confounded by this frankness, especially by the sincerity of the accent. Besides, having judged her, at the first glance, of a mediocre face, he had begun to find her extremely fascinating, with the complaisant submission of her blue eyes beneath the dark energy of her hair. And he thought of his friend Grandmorin, seized upon by a jealous admiration: how the devil had that man, his elder by ten years, been able to charm women up to the day of his death, when he had long since been forced to renounce such playthings? She was truly very charming, very fine; and he showed the smile of the amateur, to-day disinterested, beneath his cold, grand air of a functionary with such a deplorable case on his hands.

But Séverine, with the bravado of a woman who feels her strength, committed the error of adding:

"People such as we are do not kill for money. There should have been another motive and there was none."

He looked at her and saw the corners of her mouth tremble. It was she. From that instant his conviction was absolute. And she herself immediately comprehended that she had betrayed herself by the way in which he had ceased to smile and the nervous pinching of his chin. She felt a weakness come upon her because
of it, as if all her being had abandoned her. Nevertheless, she remained with her bust erect upon her chair and heard her voice continue to talk in the same equal tone, saying what was requisite to be said. The conversation went on, but now they had nothing to impart to each other; and, beneath the words, whatever they might be, both of them no longer spoke save of things which they did not say. He had the letter; it was she who had written it. All this was evident even when they were silent.

"Madame," resumed he, finally, "I do not refuse to intercede with the Compagnie if really you are worthy of interest. This very evening I expect the chief manager for another matter. But I shall need a few notes. Write down for me the name, age and services of your husband; in fact, all that can post me in regard to your situation."

And he pushed a little stand in front of her, ceasing to look at her in order not to frighten her too much. She trembled: he wanted a page of her writing to compare it with the letter. For an instant she searched desperately for a pretext, resolved not to write. Then, she reflected: what was the good since he knew? He would still have a few lines of her writing. Without any apparent trouble, with the most ordinary air in the world, she wrote what he had asked for; while, standing behind her, he perfectly recognized the writing, though it was higher and less shaky than that of the letter. And he finished by thinking the weak little woman very brave; he smiled again, now that she could not see him, with his smile of a man whom charm alone yet touches, in his experienced indifference to everything.

"Well, madame, give me that; I will inform myself and act for the best."

"I am very grateful to you, monsieur. Then, you will obtain the retention of my husband and I can consider the matter as settled?"
"Ah! no, indeed! I pledge myself to nothing. It is necessary for me to see and reflect."

In fact, he was hesitating; he knew not what course he would take in regard to the couple. And since she had felt herself at his mercy she had had but one anguish: that hesitation—the alternative of being saved or ruined by him, without being able to divine the reasons which would decide him.

"Oh! monsieur, think of our torment. You will not let me go without having given me a certainty?"

"Mon Dieu! madame, yes. I can do nothing in that way. Wait."

He was edging her toward the door. She was going away hopeless and upset, upon the point of confessing everything aloud in the immediate need of forcing him to say clearly what he counted upon doing with them. To remain a minute longer, hoping to find a turn, she exclaimed:

"I forgot something. I wanted to ask your advice in regard to that unfortunate will. Do you think we ought to refuse the legacy?"

"The law is on your side," he answered, prudently. "It is a matter of judgment and circumstance."

She was upon the threshold; she made a last effort.

"Monsieur, I beg of you not to let me depart thus; tell me if there is any hope."

With a movement of abandonment, she had taken his hand. He freed himself. But she looked at him with her handsome eyes so ardent with prayer that he was moved.

"Well, return at five o'clock. Perhaps I shall have something to say to you."

She departed; she quitted the hôtel in greater anguish than she had entered it. The situation had defined itself, and her fate hung in suspense, beneath the menace of an arrest, perhaps immediate. How was she to exist until five o'clock? The thought of Jacques, whom she had
forgotten, awakened in her all at once: there was another who could ruin her if she were arrested! Although it was scarcely a quarter past two o'clock, she hastened to pass up the Rue du Rocher toward the Rue Cardinet.

M. Camy-Lamotte, left alone, had paused in front of his desk. Summoned almost daily to the Tuileries, he knew how much this Grandmorin case irritated and disturbed the high powers. The opposition journals continued to make capital of it and this, added to the approach of the general elections, had caused the formal desire to be expressed to the secrétaire général to get it over as speedily as possible, no matter how.

Still thoughtful, M. Camy-Lamotte opened the door of the adjoining room in which M. Denizet was waiting. And the latter, who had listened, exclaimed as he entered:

"I told you that it was a mistake to suspect those people. That woman evidently thinks only of saving her husband from a possible discharge. She did not utter a suspicious word."

"Then," said M. Camy-Lamotte, "you persist in seeing the culprit in that Cabuche?"

M. Denizet gave a start of astonishment.

"Oh! certainly. Everything is against him. I have enumerated the proofs to you and not one is missing. I have searched to discover if there was an accomplice, a woman, in the coupé, as you gave me to understand. That seemed to accord with the deposition of an engineer, a man who caught a glimpse of the scene of the murder; but, closely questioned by me, that man did not persist in his first declaration, and he even recognized the traveling wrap as being the black mass of which he had spoken. Oh! yes, surely Cabuche is the guilty man. If we haven't him, we haven't anybody."

Until then the secrétaire général had waited to inform him of the written proof he possessed; and, now that his conviction was made, he hastened still less to establish
the truth. What was the good of ruining the Judge’s false scent, if the true scent would lead to greater embarrassments? All this was to be examined into first.

“Mon Dieu!” resumed he, with his fatigued smile, “I am content to admit that you are on the right track. I have summoned you here only to study certain grave points with you. This case is exceptional and has become wholly political. We will, therefore, perhaps, find ourselves forced to act as government men. See now, in all frankness, according to your examinations, that girl, Cabuche’s friend, had been ill-treated, eh?”

“Dame! I believe that the President ill-treated her and that will surely be brought out at the trial. Besides, if the defence is entrusted to a lawyer of the opposition, a lot of deplorable stories may be expected, for such stories are not lacking down in our district.”

M. Denizet had understood why he had been summoned, not to the Ministry of Justice, but to the private dwelling of the secrétaire général.

“In fine,” concluded he, “if this affair does not trip up, we are going to have a very objectionable case.”

M. Camy-Lamotte contented himself with nodding his head. He was calculating the results of the other trial, that of the Roubauds. As sure as fate, if the husband went to the assizes, he would tell everything, his wife’s story and the jealous rage which must have driven him to the murder. Besides, did they know on what they might come with a man like the President? Perhaps they would fall upon unforeseen abominations. No, decidedly, the case of the Roubauds, the real culprits, was to be avoided. It was a thing resolved upon—he set it aside absolutely. Were it necessary to keep a case he would have inclined to retain that of the innocent Cabuche.

“I give in to your system,” said he at last to M. Denizet. “There are, in truth, strong presumptions against the quarryman, if he had a legitimate vengeance to exe-
cute. But how sad all this is, Mon Dieu! and what mud will have to be stirred up! I well know that justice ought to be indifferent to consequences and that, rising above interests—"

He did not finish in words, but terminated with a gesture, while the Judge, silent in his turn, waited with a mournful air for the orders which he felt were coming. From the moment the truth of his theory was accepted and the creation of his intelligence acknowledged, he was ready to make to the governmental necessities the sacrifice of the idea of justice. But the secrétaire général, despite his habitual address in this sort of transactions, hastened a trifle, spoke too quickly, like a master accustomed to be obeyed.

"Well, no further proceedings are desired. Arrange matters so that the case may be thus disposed of."

"Pardon, monsieur," declared M. Denizet, "I am no longer the master of the case. It depends upon my conscience."

Instantly M. Camy-Lamotte smiled, becoming correct again, with that disabused and polite air which seemed to be mocking people.

"Without doubt. Hence it is to your conscience that I address myself. I will let you take the decision which it shall dictate to you, certain that you will equitably weigh the for and against, with a view to the triumph of wholesome doctrines and public morality. You know better than I that it is sometimes heroic to accept one evil if one does not wish to fall into a worse one. In fine, we appeal in you only to the good citizen and the honest man. No one thinks of trammeling your independence, and that is why I repeat that you are the absolute master of the case, which, for that matter, is the intent of the law."

Jealous of that limitless power, especially when he was about to make an ill use of it, the Judge received each of these phrases with a satisfied nod of the head.
"Besides," continued the other, with a redoubling of kindness, the exaggeration of which became ironical, "we know to whom we are addressing ourselves. For a long while we have been following your efforts, and I can permit myself to say to you that we would already have brought you to Paris, had there been a vacancy."

M. Denizet made a movement. What? If he rendered the service demanded, they would not crown his great ambition, his dream of a position in Paris! But M. Camy-Lamotte, having instantly understood, added:

"Your place here is marked out—it is a question of time. But, since I have commenced to be indiscreet, I am happy to announce to you that you have been named for the cross on the 15th of next August."

For an instant the Judge consulted himself. He would have preferred the advancement, for he calculated that it would bring him an augmentation of about a hundred and sixty-six francs a month; and, in the decent poverty in which he lived, that would be very desirable. But the cross, however, was agreeable to take. Besides, he had a promise. And he who would not have sold himself yielded at once to a simple hope, to the vague engagement which the administration had taken to favor him.

"I am greatly touched," murmured he; "be kind enough to say so to Monsieur the Minister."

He had arisen, feeling that all they could now add would only embarrass them.

"Then," concluded he, "I will finish up my investigation, keeping your scruples in view. Naturally, if we have not facts absolutely proved against Cabuche, it would be better not to risk the needless scandal of a trial. We will release and continue to watch him."

The secrétaire général, upon the threshold, became amiability itself.

"Monsieur Denizet, we trust ourselves wholly to your tact and your lofty honesty."
When he was again alone, M. Camy-Lamotte had the curiosity, useless now, however, to compare the page written by Séverine with the unsigned letter. The resemblance was complete. He folded the paper and carefully locked it up, for though he had not breathed a word of it to the Judge of Inquiry, he deemed that such a weapon was good to keep. And, as the profile of that little woman, so frail and so strong in her nervous resistance, came back to his mind, he gave an indulgent and mocking shrug of the shoulders. Ah! those creatures, what they can do when they are determined!

Séverine, at twenty minutes to three o'clock, was in advance at the Rue Cardinet, at the rendezvous which she had appointed with Jacques. He lived there, at the top of a tall house, in a small chamber, to which he climbed for scarcely more than to sleep at night; and, besides, twice a week he did not sleep there, the two nights he spent at Havre between the evening and the morning express. That day, however, soaked with water and broken by fatigue, he had come in to throw himself upon his bed. Hence Séverine would, perhaps, have vainly waited for him, if a quarrel in an adjoining household—a husband who was beating his screaming wife—had not awakened him. He washed and dressed himself in a very ill humor, having recognized her below, on the pavement, as he was looking out of the window of his mansard.

"You at last!" cried she, when she saw him emerge from the porte cochère. "I was afraid I had made a mistake. You told me at the corner of the Rue Saussure."

And, without awaiting his answer, raising her eyes to the house:

"So you live there?"

"Oh! I do not live, I merely perch there," responded he. "Let us hasten, for I fear the chief has already gone out."

In truth, when they presented themselves at the little
house which the latter occupied, back of the dépôt, within the enclosure of the dépôt yard, they did not find him; and vainly they went from shed to shed: everywhere they were told to return about half past four if they wanted to be certain to meet him at the repair shops.

"Very well, we will return," declared Séverine.

Then, when she found herself outside, alone in company with Jacques, she said:

"If you are at liberty, it won't make any difference to you if I spend the time I have to wait in your society, will it?"

He could not refuse, and besides, despite the secret uneasiness she caused him, she was exerting upon him a growing charm, so strong that the voluntary disagreeableness in which he had promised himself to shut himself up was being melted away by her gentle looks. She, with her long, tender and timid face, ought to love like a faithful dog, which one has not even the courage to beat.

"Without doubt, I will not quit you," answered he in a tone less rough. "But we have more than an hour to get rid of. Will you go to a café?"

She smiled upon him, delighted to find him cordial at last. But she exclaimed briskly:

"Oh! no, no! I don't want to shut myself up. I prefer to walk through the streets, wherever you will, on your arm."

And she pleasantly took his arm herself. Now that he was no longer black from the trip, she found him distinguished looking, with his dress of an employé at ease, his bourgeois air which was heightened by a sort of free pride, the habit of the open air and of danger braved each day. Never had she so well remarked that he was a handsome fellow, with his round and regular visage and his moustache very brown upon his white skin; and only his fleeting eyes, his eyes sown with points of gold,
which turned away from her, continued to fill her with distrust. If he avoided looking her in the face, was it because he did not want to pledge himself, but desired to remain free to act according to his wish, even against her? From that moment, in the uncertainty in which she still was, again seized upon by a chill every time she thought of that office in the Rue du Rocher where her fate was being decided, she had but a single aim—to feel that the man on whose arm she was hanging belonged to her, wholly to her, to cause him, when he raised his head, to leave his eyes deeply plunged in hers. Then, he would belong to her. She did not love him; she had not even thought of such a thing. She was simply striving to make him her slave that she might no longer fear him.

For some minutes they walked on without speaking, in the constant flow of passers-by who encumber this populous quarter. Sometimes they were forced to step off the pavement; and they traversed the carriage-way, amid the vehicles. Then, they found themselves before the square of the Batignolles, deserted at this time of the year. The sky, however, washed by the deluge of the morning, was of a very soft blue; and, beneath the warm sun of March, the lilacs were budding.

"Shall we go in?" demanded Séverine. "All these people stun me."

Of his own accord Jacques was about to enter, unconscious of the need of having her more to himself, far from the crowd.

"Here or elsewhere," said he. "Let us go in."

Slowly they continued to walk along the grass-plots, between the leafless trees. Some women were walking infants and there were people who were crossing the garden by way of a short cut, hastening their steps. They passed over the river and climbed among the rocks; then, they returned, having nothing more to do, when they came among some clumps of fir trees, the persistent dark green foliage of which was shining in the sun. And
a bench was there, in that solitary corner, hidden from all eyes; they sat down, without even speaking this time, as if brought to that place by an understanding.

"It's beautiful weather to-day all the same," said she, after a period of silence.

"Yes," answered he. "The sun has reappeared."

But their thoughts were not on the weather. He, who fled from women, was thinking of the events which had drawn him to this one. She was there, she touched him, she threatened to invade his existence, and because of this he experienced a continual surprise. Since the last examination at Rouen, he had no longer doubted that this woman was the accomplice in the murder of the Croix-de-Maufras. How?—in consequence of what circumstances?—urged on by what passion or what interest? He had put these questions to himself without being able clearly to resolve them. Nevertheless, he had finished by arranging a story: the husband, grasping and violent, in haste to enter into the possession of the legacy; perhaps the fear lest the will might be altered to their disadvantage; perhaps the calculation to bind his wife to him by a bloody bond. And he clung to this story, the obscure corners of which attracted him, though he did not seek to throw any light upon them. The idea that it was his duty to tell everything to justice had also haunted him. It was this very idea which had preoccupied him since he had seated himself upon that bench, so close to her that he felt the warmth of her body.

"In March," resumed he, "it is astonishing thus to be able to remain out-of-doors as in summer."

"Oh!" said she, "as soon as the sun is high in the heavens it is very agreeable."

And on her side she was reflecting that this young fellow would have had to have been very stupid, indeed, not to have divined their guilt. They had paid too much attention to him and she herself was pressing too
closely against him at that very moment. Hence, in the silence broken by empty words, she followed the reflections he was making. Their eyes having met, she had read that he had arrived at asking himself if it was not she whom he had seen, pressing with all her weight on the legs of the victim like a black mass. What was she to do, what was she to say in order to bind him with an indestructible bond?

"This morning," added she, "it was very cold at Havre."

"Without counting," said he, "all the water we received."

And, at that instant, Séverine had a sudden inspiration. She did not reason; she did not discuss; it came to her, like an instinctive impulsion, from the obscure depths of her intelligence and heart; for, if she had discussed, she would have said nothing. But she felt that she had hit on a very good plan and that by speaking she would conquer him.

Gently she took his hand and gazed at him. The clumps of green trees hid them from the passers-by in the adjoining streets; they heard only a distant roll of vehicles, deadened in that sunny solitude of the square; while a single child, at the turn of a path, was playing in silence—filling a little bucket with sand with a shovel. And, without transition, with all her soul, she said in a low voice:

"You believe me guilty, do you not?"

"Yes," answered he, in the same low and moved voice.

Then, she grasped his hand, which she had kept, with a closer pressure; and she did not continue at once; she felt their excitement uniting them.

"You are wrong; I am not guilty."

And she said this, not to convince him, but solely to warn him that she must appear innocent in the eyes of others. It was the confession of a woman who said no,
with the desire that it should be no always, no matter what took place.

"I am not guilty. You will no longer give me pain by believing that I am guilty, will you?"

And she was very happy on perceiving that he left his eyes deeply plunged in hers. Without doubt, she was making a great sacrifice, but the indissoluble bond was established between them: she defied him to speak now; the confession had united them.

"You will no longer pain me, you believe me?"

"Yes, I believe you," he responded, smiling.

Why had he forced her to talk of that frightful thing? Later, she would tell him all, if she felt the need of it. This way of tranquillizing herself by confessing to him, without saying anything, touched him greatly, like a mark of infinite tenderness. She was so trusting, so fragile, with her soft periwinkle eyes! And, above all, what delighted him, while their hands remained linked and their glances were fixed on each other, was not to feel within him his uneasiness, that frightful quiver which agitated him when near a woman.

"You know I am your friend and that you have nothing to fear from me," murmured he in her ear. "I don't want to know your affairs—that will be as you please. Do you understand me? Dispose of me as you will."

The idea that she had killed, become a certainty, showed her to him under an entirely different aspect. Perhaps she had not only aided, but struck. He was convinced of it without any proof whatever. And from that time she seemed to be sacred to him, a being apart.

Now they were chatting gayly. She laughed frankly in her joy at being saved. She did not love this young fellow, of that she believed she was sure; and she was already thinking of how she was to avoid her obligations to him. He had a gentle air and would not torment her; everything would arrange itself very well.
"It's understood—we are comrades. Now, let go my hand and don't look at me that way any longer—you'll ruin your eyes!"

The sun was sinking, drowning itself at the horizon in violetish vapors and the rays had gone from the grass-plots, dying away in golden dust at the green tops of the firs. There was a sudden stoppage in the continuous roll of vehicles. They heard a neighboring clock strike five.

"Ah! mon Dieu!" cried Séverine. "Five o'clock and I have an appointment at the Rue du Rocher!"

Her joy vanished; she was again a prey to the anguish of the unknown which awaited her at M. Camy-Lamotte's, remembering that she was not saved yet. She grew very pale and her lips trembled.

"But the chief of the dépôt whom you were to see?" said Jacques, who had arisen from the bench to take her again on his arm.

"Oh! I will see him another time. Listen, my friend, I have no further need of you; let me attend to my errand quickly. And thank you with all my heart!"

She again grasped his hands; she was in haste.

"Good-bye until we meet presently at the train."

"Good-bye until then."

Already she was going away with a rapid step; she disappeared among the groves of the square; while he went slowly toward the Rue Cardinet.

M. Camy-Lamotte had just had, at his residence, a long conference with the chief manager of the Compagnie de l'Ouest. Summoned there under the pretext of another matter of business, the latter had been led gradually to confess how greatly this Grandmorin investigation was annoying the Compagnie. In the first place the newspapers were complaining of the lack of safety for travelers in first-class carriages. Then, all the personnel was mixed up in the affair and several employés were suspected, without counting Roubaud, the
most compromised of all, who might be arrested at any moment. Finally, the wretched rumors in circulation in regard to the President, a member of the Conseil d'Administration, seemed to reflect on the entire council.

When M. Camy-Lamotte had learned from his visitor that the Compagnie had that very morning resolved upon the discharge of Roubaud, he strongly opposed that measure. No, no, nothing could be more maladroit! It would redouble the noise in the journals, if they took the notion to pose the under station master as a political victim. Everything would crack in the most disastrous fashion from bottom to top and God knew what disagreeable discoveries might be made for all parties concerned! The scandal had lasted too long and silence should be obtained, as speedily as possible. And the chief manager, convinced, had promised to retain Roubaud, had agreed not even to remove him from Havre. It was finished, the matter would be settled.

When Séverine, out of breath, her heart beating wildly, again found herself in the severe office of the Rue du Rocher, before M. Camy-Lamotte, the latter contemplated her for an instant in silence, interested by the extraordinary effort she was making to appear calm. Decidedly, she had his sympathy, this delicate criminal, with her periwinkle eyes.

"Well, madame—"

And he paused in order to enjoy her anxiety for a few seconds longer. But her look was so eager, he felt that she had such a need to know, that he took pity on her.

"Well, madame, I have seen the chief manager and settled that your husband shall not be discharged. The matter is arranged."

Then, she weakened beneath the too powerful flood of joy which inundated her. Her eyes filled with tears, and she said nothing, she smiled.
He repeated, emphasizing the phrase in order to give to her all its signification:

“The matter is arranged. You can return tranquil to Havre.”

She understood perfectly. He wished to say that they would not be arrested, that they were pardoned. This was not only the position maintained—it was the frightful drama forgotten, buried. With an instinctive caressing movement, like a pretty domestic animal which thanks and flatters, she bent over his hands, kissed them and held them against her cheeks. And, this time, he did not withdraw them, greatly moved himself by the tender charm of this gratitude.

“Only,” resumed he, striving to resume his severity, “remember and conduct yourselves well.”

“Oh! monsieur!”

But he desired to keep them at his mercy, the wife and the husband. He made allusion to the letter.

“Remember that the docket remains there and that, at the slightest fault, all may be resumed. Above all, advise your husband to no longer meddle with politics. In regard to that we shall be pitiless. I know that he is already compromised; I have been told of a deplorable quarrel with the sub-préfect. In short, he passes for a republican and that is detestable! Let him be wise, or we shall simply suppress him.”

She was standing, being in haste now to get out of doors in order to give space to the joy which was choking her.

“Monsieur, we will obey you, we will be what you please. No matter when, no matter where, you will have but to command: I belong to you.”

He had resumed smiling, with his weary air, with the point of disdain of a man who has long since drunk of all things to the dregs.

“Oh! I shall not abuse my privileges, madame; I no longer abuse anything.”
And he himself opened the door of the office. Upon the landing, she turned about twice, with her radiant visage which thanked him again.

In the Rue du Rocher, Séverine walked wildly. She saw that she was going up the street without reason; and she redescended the declivity, crossing the street for nothing, at the risk of being crushed by the passing vehicles. She felt a need of movement, of gestures and of cries. Already she had comprehended why they had pardoned them, and she surprised herself saying internally:

“Parbleu! they are afraid! There is no danger that they will stir up those things. I've been very stupid to torture myself, that's evident. Ah! what luck! Saved! saved for good this time! But no matter, I'll frighten my husband in order that he may behave himself. Saved! saved! What luck!”

As she came out into the Rue Saint-Lazare, she saw, by a jeweler's clock, that it was twenty minutes to six.

“Ah! I'll treat myself to a good dinner. I have the time.”

Opposite the dépôt, she chose the most luxurious restaurant; and, installed alone at a very white little table, in front of the unground glass of the window, greatly amused by the activity of the street, she ordered an excellent dinner—oysters, filets de sole and a cut of roast chicken. It was the least she could do to make up for her bad breakfast. She was dying of hunger, ate greedily, found the brown bread exquisite and went so far as to indulge in a luxury—fritters soufflés. Then, her coffee drunk, she hastened away, for she had only a few minutes left in which to take the express.

Jacques, on quitting her, after having sought his apartment to resume his working clothes, had gone at once to the dépôt, where he usually arrived only half an hour before the departure of his engine. He had got into the habit of leaving to Pecqueux the duty of
examination, although the fireman was almost always drunk. But that day, in the tender excitement in which he was, an unconscious scruple had taken possession of him—he wished to assure himself personally that all the parts were in good working order; the more so as in the morning, while coming from Havre, he had thought he noticed a greater expenditure of power than was necessary.

In the vast closed shed, black with smoke and lighted by lofty, dusty windows, among the other engines not in use, that of Jacques was already at the head of a track, as it was to be the first to leave. A fireman of the dépôt had just charged the fire-box and was about starting the fire. Like the other engines of the Compagnie de l'Ouest, besides the number which designated it, number 214, it bore the name of a dépôt, that of Lison, a station of Cotentin. But Jacques, through tenderness, had made it the name of a woman, the Lison, as he said, with a caressing softness.

While the fire was roaring and the Lison gradually getting up steam, Jacques walked around it, inspecting each of its pieces, striving to discover why, that morning, it had consumed more grease than usual; but there was something else also, something vague and deep, which he had not before experienced—a distrust in regard to his engine, as if he suspected it and wished to assure himself that it would not behave itself badly en route.

But Pecqueux was not on hand, and Jacques got angry when at last he appeared, his tongue thick in consequence of a breakfast he had taken with a friend. Ordinarily the two men got along together very well. Jacques covered his fireman's vices, letting him sleep an hour when he was too drunk. Pecqueux, puzzled at being so roughly received, looked at Jacques with redoubled surprise when he heard him growl out his doubts concerning the engine.
"But she runs like a fairy!"
"No, no, I am not easy."

And, despite the good condition of each piece, he continued to shake his head. The reason was that, in his heart, the Lison was no longer alone. Another tenderness had sprung up there—tenderness for that slender and frail creature whom he constantly saw seated beside him on the bench of the square, with her cajoling weakness, who needed to be loved and protected. Never, when he had been delayed and was driving his engine along at a speed of eighty kilomètres, had he thought of the dangers to which the passengers might be subjected. And, behold, the simple idea of taking back to Havre that woman, almost detested in the morning and brought with ennui, tortured him with uneasiness, with the fear of an accident, in which he imagined her hurt by his fault and dying in his arms.

The train was about to start; only five minutes remained, and Jacques leaned out of the engine, surprised at not seeing Séverine amid the crush of passengers. He was very certain that she would not get in without having first come to see him. At last she appeared, late, almost running. And, in fact, she passed along the entire train, pausing only at the engine, her face animated and exultant with joy.

She got on the tips of her toes and raised her smiling visage.

"Don't worry yourself; I'm here!"

He also smiled, delighted that she had come.

"Good, good! That's all right!"

But she raised herself yet higher and resumed in a lower voice:

"My friend, I am happy, very happy. A great stroke of luck has come to me—all I desired."

And he understood perfectly, experiencing a great pleasure. Then, as she was starting off again on a run, she turned to add in a joking manner:
“Say, now, don’t break my bones!”
He protested in a gay voice.
“Oui! have no fear of that!”

But the doors were being closed, Séverine had only
time enough to get in her compartment; and Jacques,
at the signal of the chief conductor, blew the whistle,
then opened the regulator. They were off. It was the
same departure as that of the tragic train of February,
at the same hour, amid the same activity of the dépôt,
in the same noises, the same smoke. Only, it was still
light, a clear twilight of an infinite softness. With her
face at the window, Séverine was looking out.

The night fell; Jacques redoubled his prudence. He
had rarely found the Lison so obedient, but he did not
relax his severity—he treated the engine like a con-
quered animal which must always be distrusted. Behind
him, in the train going at full speed, he saw a gentle
face, smiling and trusting, and a slight shiver passed
over him as he peered through the darkness in quest
of red signals. The Lison, panting and smoking, shot
along and did not stop until Rouen was reached; from
thence it departed, calmed a trifle, climbing with more
slowness the up-grade which goes as far as Malaunay.

The moon had risen, very clear, with a white light,
which permitted Jacques to distinguish the smallest
bushes and even the very stones in their rapid flight.
As, at the exit of the Malaunay tunnel, he cast a glance
to the right, uneasy at the shadow of a tall tree, baring
the track, he recognized the out-of-the-way corner from
whence he had witnessed the murder. Afterwards, at
the Croix-de-Maufras, beneath the motionless moon,
came the sudden vision of the house planted sidewise,
in its abandonment and its distress, the shutters ete-
rrnally closed, of a frightful melancholy. And, without
knowing why, this time again, more than on the prece-
ding occasions, Jacques had a heavy heart, as if he were
passing before his ill-fortune.
But, immediately, his eyes bore away another image. Beside the house of the Misards, against the barrière of the passage at grade, Flore was standing. Now, at each trip, he saw her at that place, waiting and watching for him. She did not move, she simply turned her head to follow him longer in the flash which was bearing him away. Her tall silhouette stood out in black upon the white light; her golden hair alone was illuminated.

And Jacques, having pushed the Lison to make it climb the up-grade of Motteville, let it blow a little along the plateau of Bolbec, then finally launched it, from Saint-Romain to Harfleur, upon the steepest declivity of the line: And he was broken with fatigue at Havre, when, beneath the marquee, full of the din and smoke of the arrival, Séverine, before going up to her apartments, ran to say to him with her gay and tender air:

"Thanks! Good-bye until to-morrow!"
CHAPTER VI.

AT THE ROUVAUDS'.

A MONTH passed and a great calm had settled down anew upon the lodgings which the Roubauds occupied on the second floor of the railway dépôt, over the waiting-rooms. With them and with their neighbors of the corridor, among that little world of employés, life had resumed its monotonous flow. And it seemed as if nothing violent or abnormal had happened.

The noisy and scandalous Grandmorin case, gradually forgotten, was about to be abandoned because of the apparent inability of justice to discover the guilty party. After lingering over it for two weeks longer, the Judge of Inquiry, Denizet, had ordered a stoppage of proceedings against Cabuche on the ground that sufficient proof did not exist to convict him. Only a few jokes reappeared from time to time concerning the legendary, unknown assassin in the journals of the opposition, agitated by the approach of the general elections.

What had completed the restoration of calmness for the Roubauds was the fortunate way in which that other difficulty, the proposed breaking of President Grandmorin's will, had been settled. By the advice of Madame Bonnehon, the Lachesnayes had finally consented not to attack the will, afraid of reviving the scandal and very uncertain, besides, as to the result of a lawsuit. And, put in possession of their legacy, the Roubauds, for a week past, had found themselves owners of the Croix-de-Maufras property, the house and the garden, valued at about 40,000 francs. At once they had
decided to sell that house of vice and blood, which haunted them like an incubus and in which they would not have dared to sleep, afraid of the spectres of the past; and to sell it as it stood, with the furniture, without repairing it and without even removing the dust. But as it would bring too little at public auction, they had resolved to await a special purchaser and had contented themselves with putting up on the front of the property an immense bill, easily read from the constantly passing trains. Roubaud having absolutely refused to go there to make certain necessary arrangements, Séverine had gone one afternoon; and she had left the keys with the Misards, instructing them to show the property should any prospective buyers present themselves. The purchaser could have installed himself there in a couple of hours, for everything was at hand even to the linen in the bureaus.

And from that time nothing further disturbed the Roubauds; they let each day slip by in the drowsy waiting for the morrow. The Croix-de-Maufras house would eventually be sold, they would invest the money and all would go well. Besides, they forgot themselves; they lived as if they would remain forever in the three rooms they occupied. Even, in front of their windows, the marquee of the dépôt, that slope of zinc which barred their view like a prison wall, instead of exasperating them, as in the past, seemed to tranquillize them, augmenting the sensation of infinite repose, of solacing peace in which they were slumbering. At least, they were not seen by the neighbors, they had not always before them the eyes of spies, prying into their private affairs; and they complained only, spring having come, of the stifling heat, of the blinding reflections from the zinc, warmed by the first sunlight. After the frightful shock, which, for nearly two months, had made them live in a continual quiver, they stupidly enjoyed this reaction of invading torpor. They asked no longer
to stir, happy to be simply without either trembling or suffering. Never had Roubaud shown himself an employé so exact, so conscientious; he bore his hard servitude with a sort of satisfaction, as if he had found forgetfulness in his fatigue, a recommencement of normal life. On her side, Séverine, almost always alone, appeared to have been seized upon by the zeal of a good housekeeper. Formerly she had sat and embroidered, detesting housework, which an old woman, Mère Simon, had done for her from nine o’clock until noon. But, since she had recovered her tranquillity at home, certain of remaining there, ideas of cleaning and arrangement had occupied her. When alone together, at meals and at night, Roubaud and his wife never mentioned the Grandmorin affair, which they had reason to believe was dead and buried.

For Séverine especially existence had thus again become very agreeable. Her idleness resumed possession of her and once more she abandoned the household cares to Mère Simon, like a young lady destined only for fine needlework. She arose very late, delighted to remain alone in bed, soothed by the departure and arrival of the trains, which exactly marked for her the passage of time like a clock. Until breakfast she went from one room to another, chatting with Mère Simon, her hands lying idle at her sides. Then, she spent the long afternoons seated at the salle-à-manger window, her work for the most part fallen upon her knees, happy in doing nothing. The weeks when her husband came up to bed at dawn, she heard him snore until evening; and, for that matter, they had become for her delicious weeks, those in which she lived as before her marriage, taking up the whole extent of the bed and afterwards amusing herself as she liked, free for the entire day. She very rarely went out; she saw of Havre only the smoke of the neighboring manufactories, the heavy black whirlwinds of which stained the sky above the zinc roof which cut the hori-
zon a few mètres from her eyes. The city was there, behind that eternal wall; she felt it always present and her ennui at not seeing it had in the long run softened down. Sometimes she talked of herself as a recluse in the depths of a wood.

It seemed that the same somnolence had gained the other families of employés, neighbors of the Roubauds. That corridor where usually blew such a terrible wind of gossip had gone to sleep also. When Philomène went to visit Madame Lebleu scarcely a slight murmur of voices was heard. Surprised at seeing how things had turned out, they now spoke of the under station master only with disdainful commiseration; he was a blemished man who would never wash himself of certain suspicions.

But, at the Roubauds', one disturbing thing remained—a part of the salle-à-manger floor at which they could not glance without again being troubled by uneasiness. It was to the left of the window, a bit of oak plank which they had removed, then replaced, in order to hide beneath it the watch and the 10,000 francs taken from the corpse of Grandmorin, without counting about 300 francs in gold in a porte-monnaie. Roubaud had torn the watch and money from the dead man's pockets only to make people believe in a robbery. He was not a thief; he would have died of hunger beside them, as he said, rather than profit by a centime of the cash or sell the watch. No, no, that old wretch's money, stained with mud and blood, was not the money for an honest man to touch! And he did not even think of the Croix-de-Maufras house which he had accepted as a gift; the fact of the searched victim and those notes taken in the abomination of murder alone revolted him, awakened his conscience, with a movement of recoil and of fear. Nevertheless, the wish had not come to him to burn them and then go cast the watch and porte-monnaie into the sea. If simple prudence had advised him to do so,
a secret instinct within him had protested against that destruction. He had an unconscious respect; never would he have resigned himself to annihilate such a sum. The first night he had buried it beneath his pillow, not judging any corner safe enough. The succeeding days he had drawn on his ingenuity to discover hiding-places and changed them each morning, agitated at the slightest noise, afraid of a judicial search. Never had he made such an expenditure of ingenuity. Then, all his resources exhausted, he had hidden the money and watch under the floor, and, now, nothing in the world could have tempted him to look there: it was a charnel-house, a hole of fear and death where spectres awaited him. While walking, he even avoided putting his feet on that plank of the floor, for the sensation was disagreeable to him, he imagined he received a slight shock in his legs. Séverine, in the afternoons, when she sat at the window, drew back her chair so as not to be just over the corpse which they kept thus beneath their floor. They did not speak of it to each other, striving to believe that they were getting used to it; but at last they were irritated by finding it, by feeling it every hour, more and more importunate, under the soles of their shoes. And this uneasiness was the more singular because they suffered nothing from the knife, the fine new knife bought by the wife which the husband had planted in the old man's throat. Simply washed, it lay in the depths of a drawer and was sometimes employed by Mère Simon to cut bread.

Besides, Roubaud had introduced another cause of trouble, gradually increasing, in forcing Jacques to visit them. His service brought the engineer to Havre three times a week: Monday, from 10.35 in the morning until 6.20 in the evening; Thursday and Saturday, from 11.05 in the evening to 6.40 in the morning. And the first Monday after Séverine's journey the under station master had shown himself very persistent.
“See now, comrade, you cannot refuse to eat a bit with us. You have been very kind to my wife and I owe you some acknowledgment.”

Twice in a month Jacques had thus accepted an invitation to breakfast. It seemed that Roubaud, annoyed by the silence which now reigned when he ate with his wife, felt a relief as soon as he could put a guest between them. Instantly he recovered his stories, he chatted and joked.

“Come as often as possible. You see that you don’t bother us.”

One night, a Thursday, as Jacques, cleaned up, was going to seek his bed, he met the under station master idling around the dépôt yard; and, despite the late hour, the latter induced the young man to accompany him to the dépôt and then drew him to his apartments. Séverine, still up, was reading. They had a pony glass together; they even played cards until past midnight.

And, for the future, the Monday breakfasts and the little parties of Thursday and Saturday nights became the custom. It was Roubaud himself, when his comrade missed a day, who watched for him to bring him back, reproaching him with his negligence. He was growing more and more gloomy; he was truly gay only with his new friend. This young fellow, who had so cruelly disturbed him at first, whom he should now have held in execration as the witness, the living evocation of the frightful things which he wished to forget, had, on the contrary, become necessary to him, perhaps for the very reason that he knew and had not spoken.

Séverine also received him gayly, uttering a slight cry when he entered, like a woman whom a pleasure awakes. She dropped everything—her embroidery, her book—and escaped in words and laughter from the gray somnolence in which she passed her days.

“Ah! how nice in you to have come! I heard the express and thought of you!”
When he breakfasted, it was a fête. She already knew his tastes and went out herself to get him fresh eggs: all this very properly, like a good housekeeper who receives the friend of the family, without showing anything but the wish to be amiable and the need of pleasing herself.

But when, at the end of a month, he was there, installed, the separation between the Roubauds was aggravated. The wife avoided her husband as much as possible and the latter made no effort to prevent her. Since the crime, without knowing why, she had felt a great repugnance for him. One evening, while the candle was yet burning, she uttered a shriek, having thought that in his ruddy face she saw the convulsed look of the assassin. Thenceforth she trembled every time she thought of the murder, imagining that she saw him standing over her with a knife in his hand. It was foolish, but her heart thumped with fear. It seemed that the frightful crisis, the blood spilled had produced indifference between them. And Jacques certainly was aiding in consummating this divorce by drawing them with his presence from the evil spell under which they were. He was delivering them the one from the other.

Roubaud meanwhile lived without remorse. He had only entertained fears of the consequences before the Grandmorin affair was hushed up; and his great uneasiness had been lest he might lose his place. At this hour he regretted nothing. Perhaps, however, if he had had the affair to go over again, he would not have mixed up his wife in it; for women get frightened immediately and Séverine was escaping from him because he had put too heavy a weight on her shoulders. He would have remained the master by not descending with her into the terrible and quarrelsome comradeship of crime. But things were thus and must be accepted, the more so as he had to make a veritable effort to replace himself in the state of mind in which he was when, after the con-
fession, he had judged the murder necessary to his life. If he had not killed the man, it had then seemed to him that he would have been unable to live. To-day, when his jealousy was dead, the necessity of the murder no longer appeared to him so evident. He even came to ask himself if, in his case, it had really been worth while to kill at all.

But one evening Roubaud’s fierce jealousy of the past was reawakened. He had gone to hunt up Jacques in the dépôt yard, and, as he was taking him to his apartments to indulge in a pony glass, he met the chief conductor, Henri Dauvergne, coming down the stairway. The latter seemed troubled and explained that he had been to see Madame Roubaud on an errand with which his sisters had charged him. The truth was that, for some time, he had been terribly smitten with Séverine.

At the door the under station master violently apostrophized his wife.

“What was that man here for? You know I don’t like him!”

“He came to see about an embroidery pattern.”

“Embroidery the devil! And do you believe me stupid enough not to know that he came here to flirt with you. Look out!”

He was rushing at her with clenched fists, and she recoiled, as white as a sheet, astonished at this outburst amid the calm indifference in which they lived. But he had already quieted down; he addressed his companion.

“It’s true; there are fellows who rush into a family with the air of believing that the wife will instantly throw herself at their heads and that the husband, greatly honored, will close his eyes! As for me, such a thing makes my blood boil. Now, look here, in such a case I’d strangle my wife—oh! at once! And let that young gentleman keep away from here, or I’ll settle his hash!”

Jacques, much embarrassed by the scene, knew not
what countenance to assume. Was this exaggeration of anger meant for him? Did the husband wish to give him a warning? He reassured himself when the latter resumed, with a gay air:

"How stupid I am! I know well enough that you'd put him out-of-doors yourself. Come, give us some glasses and drink with us."

He tapped Jacques on the shoulder, and Séverine, also recovered, smiled upon the two men. Then, they drank together and passed a very pleasant hour.

It was thus that Roubaud brought his wife and his comrade into closer relationship, with an air of good friendship, without appearing to think of the possible consequences. This question of jealousy became the cause of a greater intimacy, of a secret tenderness, increased by confidences, between Jacques and Séverine; for the engineer, having seen her again on the day after the morrow, deplored the fact that she had been so roughly treated; while she, her eyes moist, confessed, by the involuntary overflow of her complaints, how little happiness she had found in her family. From that moment they had a subject of conversation for themselves alone, a complicity of friendship, in which they finished by understanding each other at a sign. At each visit he questioned her with a look to discover if she had had any new subject of sorrow. She responded in the same way, by a simple movement of her eyelids. Then, their hands sought each other behind the husband's back; they grew bolder, they corresponded with long pressures, telling themselves with the tips of their warm fingers the growing interest they took in the smallest facts of their existence. Rarely had they the fortune to meet for a minute without the presence of the husband. They always found him there, between them, in that melancholy salle-à-manger; and they did nothing to escape from him, not even having the thought of appointing a rendezvous in the depths of some remote corner of the
dépôt yard. It was, until then, a veritable affection, an overflow of lively sympathy, which scarcely embarrassed them, since a look, a grasp of the hand as yet sufficed them to understand each other even to the heart.

The first time that Jacques whispered in Séverine's ear that he would wait for her the following Thursday at midnight behind the engine house, she rebelled and violently withdrew her hand. It was her week of liberty, that of Roubaud's night service. But a great trouble had seized upon her at the thought of quitting her apartment to go meet Jacques so far away, through the darkness of the dépôt yard. She experienced a confusion such as she had never felt before; and she did not yield immediately; he was forced to supplicate her for nearly two weeks before she would consent, despite her own ardent desire for this nocturnal promenade. June was beginning, the evenings had grown hot, scarcely cooled by the sea breeze. Five times already he had waited for her, always hoping that she would come notwithstanding her refusal. That night she had said no again; but the night was moonless, a night of clouded sky, in which not a star shone. And as he was standing in the gloom, he at last saw her coming, clad in black, with a silent step. It was so dark that she might have passed him without recognizing him if he had not caught her in his arms, giving her a kiss. She gave a slight cry and quivered. Then, she laughed. They walked, conversing in very low tones. Before them extended a vast space occupied by the dépôt yard and its dependencies, all the ground comprised between the Rue Verte and the Rue François-Mazeline, each cut by the line with a passage at grade: a sort of immense, vague territory, encumbered with tracks, reservoirs, buildings of all kinds, the two huge shelter houses for the engines, the little dwelling of the Sauvagnats surrounded by a kitchen garden as large as one's hand, the repair shops, the shed where the engineers and firemen slept; and nothing was
easier than to hide one's self, to lose one's self as in the depths of a wood, among these deserted lanes, with inextricable windings. For an hour they enjoyed a delicious solitude there, relieving their hearts of the words of friendship piled up in them for so long; for she would listen to no talk but that of affection; she had immediately declared that their relations were to be altogether platonic, as she wished to retain a good opinion of herself. Then, he accompanied her as far as the Rue Verte, giving her there a farewell kiss. And she went home.

At the same hour, in the office of the under station masters, Roubaud had begun to doze in an old leather fauteuil, from which he arose twenty times in the night with aching limbs. Until nine o'clock he had to receive and dispatch the evening trains. Then, when the Paris express had arrived and been dismembered, he supped alone in the office, upon a corner of the table, on a sandwich brought from his apartments. The last train, an omnibus from Rouen, entered the dépôt yard half an hour after midnight. And the deserted quays fell into a deep silence; only a few gas burners were left alight and the entire dépôt fell asleep amid the quiver of the semi-darkness. Afraid lest fatigue might get the better of him toward dawn, Roubaud set his alarm clock at five in the morning, the hour when he had to be up to receive the first train from Paris. After a fight with some marauders, the Compagnie had provided him with a revolver, which he carried loaded in his pocket.

Every two weeks, Thursday and Saturday, Séverine rejoined Jacques; and, one night, as she spoke to him of the revolver with which her husband was armed, they grew uneasy because of it. Never, in fact, in his nightly rounds, for lately Roubaud had been seized upon by insomnia and went prowling about, did the under station master go as far as the engine shelter house. This none the less gave an appearance of danger to their
promenades which doubled the charm of them. They had found an adorable corner: it was behind the house of the Sauvagnats, a sort of alley between enormous piles of charcoal, which made of it the solitary street of a strange city, with grand square palaces of black marble. They found themselves absolutely hidden in this place, and there was at one end of it a little store-house for tools, in which they could take refuge if necessary.

One night in July, Jacques, in order to reach Havre at 11.05, the regulation time, was forced to drive the Lison as if the stifling heat had made the engine lazy. All the way from Rouen, on his left, a storm had accompanied him, following the valley of the Seine, with great sheets of dazzling lightning; and, from time to time, he had turned, filled with uneasiness, for Séverine was to meet him that evening. His fear was that this storm if it burst too soon would prevent her from coming out. Hence, when he had succeeded in entering the dépôt yard before the rain, he grew impatient at the passengers, who were very slow in getting out of the cars. Roubaud was on the quay, nailed for the night.

"Diable!" said he, laughing, "you are in great haste to get to bed. Sleep well!"

"Thank you!"

And Jacques, after having backed the train, blew the whistle and took his engine to the shelter house. Immediately Pecqueux set about extinguishing the fire. "I'm very hungry," said he, "and am going to break a crust. Are you that way, too?"

Jacques did not reply. In spite of his haste, he did not wish to quit the Lison before the fire was out and the boiler emptied. At last he said:

"Hurry, hurry."

Just then came a formidable blast of thunder and the sky seemed one mass of flame.

"Bougre!" exclaimed the fireman, simply.

The engineer made a movement of despair. It was
over, the more so as now a perfect deluge of rain was pouring down on the shed. A furious wind entered the open door.

Pecqueux finished the work on the engine.

"We’ll see better to-morrow. No need of doing more now."

Then, returning to his idea:

“I must have something to eat. It is raining too hard to go to bed."

The cantine adjoined the shelter house; while the Compagnie had hired a house on the Rue François-Mazeline where were installed the beds for the engineers and firemen who spent the night in Havre. In such a deluge one would have had time to get soaked to the bone before he reached there.

Jacques was compelled to decide to follow Pecqueux, who had taken his chief’s little basket as if to save him the trouble of carrying it. He knew that this basket yet contained two slices of cold veal, some bread and a bottle scarcely touched—which was what had caused him to get hungry. The rain redoubled and another thunder-clap shook the shed. When the two men went away, to the left, through the little door which led to the cantine, the Lison was already growing cold.

But before entering the cantine, Jacques wished to clean himself up. There was always at hand, in a room, hot water and buckets. He took a piece of soap from his basket; he washed his hands and face, black from the trip; and, as he had taken the precaution to carry with him an extra suit of clothes, he was able to change his attire from head to foot, as he did, for that matter, each evening when there was a rendezvous, on arriving at Havre. Already Pecqueux was waiting for him in the cantine, having washed only the end of his nose and the tips of his fingers.

This cantine consisted simply of a bare little room, painted yellow, in which were a furnace to warm the
food and a table fastened to the floor and covered with a sheet of zinc in guise of a cloth. Two benches completed the furniture. The men brought their food and ate upon paper, with the points of their knives. A large window lighted the room.

“What a wretched rain!” cried Jacques, planting himself at the window.

Pecqueux was seated on the bench at the table.

“So you’re not going to eat?”

“No, old man; finish my bread and meat if you have the heart to. I am not hungry.”

The other, without waiting to be asked again, threw himself upon the veal and finished the bottle. With his mouth full, he resumed, after a silence:

“What difference does the rain make, since we are under cover? However, if it continues, I must leave you and go yonder.”

He laughed, for he had confided to him how matters stood between himself and Philomène Sauvagnat in order that he might not be astonished at finding him away so often at night.

“Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu!” swore Jacques, on seeing the deluge resume with a new violence, after a lull.

Pecqueux, who held the last bit of meat on the point of his knife, again laughed good-humoredly.

“Say, had you occupation for this evening?”

Jacques briskly quitted the window.

“Why do you ask that?”

“Dame! it was an idea!”

He must know something; perhaps he had surprised a rendezvous. In each sleeping-room the beds were arranged in couples, that of the fireman beside that of the engineer. Hence it would not be astonishing if he had noticed the irregular conduct of his chief, until then perfectly correct.

“I am troubled with headache,” said the engineer,
taking the first idea that came to him. "It does me good to walk at night."

But already the fireman was protesting.

"Oh! you are free to do as you like, you know. What I said was in a joke. But if some day you should get in a tangle don't hesitate to call on me, because I'm good there for whatever you may want."

Without explaining himself more clearly, he permitted himself to take his hand and squeezed it crushingly, thus signifying his entire devotion. Then, he crumpled and threw away the greasy paper in which the meat had been wrapped and put the empty bottle back in the basket. And, as the rain persisted, although the thunderclaps had ceased, he said:

"Well, I'm off. I leave you to your affairs."

"Oh!" said Jacques, "since there is no let up, I'm going to stretch myself on the camp bed."

There was, beside the shelter house, a hall, provided with mattresses and protected by canvas, in which the men slept with all their clothes on when they had to wait but three or four hours at Havre. In fact, as soon as he had seen the fireman vanish amid the downpour, going towards the house of the Sauvagnats, he risked himself in his turn and ran to the hall. But he did not go to bed; he stood upon the threshold of the wide-open door, stifled by the dense heat which reigned there. Within, an engineer, stretched out on his back, was snoring with his mouth open.

Some minutes further passed and Jacques could not resign himself to losing his hope. Amid his exasperation against this imbecile deluge had sprung up a mad desire to go to the rendezvous notwithstanding the storm in order to have, at least, the joy of being there, even if he no longer counted upon the presence of Séverine. He finished by going out beneath the downpour, he arrived at their preferred corner and followed the black alley formed by the heaps of charcoal. And, as the big
drops, striking him in the face, blinded him, he hurried on as far as the tool store-house, where, once already, he had taken shelter with her. It seemed to him that he would be less alone there.

Jacques had entered the deep obscurity of this nook, when two slight arms enveloped him and a warm kiss was impressed upon his lips. Séverine was there.

"Mon Dieu! you came?"

"Yes; I saw the storm rising and hurried here before the rain. How late you are!"

And she sighed in a faint voice; never had he known her to cling with such entire surrender about his neck. They sat down upon some empty bags which were piled up there. It was so dark they could not see each other.

"You expected me?"

"Oh! yes, I expected you."

The rain came down with redoubled force upon the roof of the tool store-house and the last train from Paris, which had entered the dépôt yard, passed, roaring, hissing and shaking the ground.

When Jacques arose, he listened with surprise to the noise of the storm. Where was he? And, as his feet touched the handle of a hammer which he had felt on seating himself, he was overcome with happiness. Séverine was his and he had not seized that hammer to split her skull. He no longer experienced his desire to avenge very old offences of which he had lost the exact memory, that hatred amassed from male to male since the first deception. No, the possession of Séverine was a powerful charm; she had cured him because he saw her violent in her weakness, covered with the blood of a man like a cuirass of horror. She dominated him—he who had not dared.

Hours passed. The rain had long since ceased; a deep silence enveloped the dépôt yard, troubled only by a distant, indistinct sound, mounting from the sea. They were still sitting on the pile of bags when the report of a
pistol brought them trembling to their feet. The dawn was about to appear, a pale stain had whitened the sky above the mouth of the Seine. What was the meaning of that pistol shot? Their imprudence, the folly of having thus delayed, showed them, in a sudden burst of imagination, the husband pursuing them with his revolver.

"Don't go out! Wait; I'll see what's the matter."

Jacques, with prudence, had gone to the door. And there, in the yet thick darkness, he heard men approaching on a run; he recognized the voice of Roubaud, who was urging on the watchmen, shouting to them that the marauders were three in number and that he had plainly seen them stealing charcoal. For some weeks not a night had passed that he had not had in this way hallucinations of imaginary robbers. This time, under the sway of a sudden fright, he had fired at hazard in the darkness.

"Quick, quick! We mustn't remain here," whispered the young man. "They are going to search the tool house. Escape!"

In great excitement they kissed each other. Then, Séverine fled stealthily along the engine shelter house, protected by the vast wall; while he quietly hid himself among the piles of charcoal. And it was time, indeed, for Roubaud wished to search the tool house. He swore that the marauders must be there. The watchmen's lanterns danced along the ground. A quarrel broke out. All finished by resuming the road to the dépôt, irritated by this useless pursuit.

And, as Jacques, reassured, decided to go to his bed in the house on the Rue François-Mazeline, he was surprised to almost run against Pecqueux who was swearing like a trooper.

"What's up, old man?"

"Ah! nom de Dieu, don't speak of it! Those fools awakened Sauvagnat. He heard me talking to his sis-
ter, came down-stairs in his shirt and I made haste to jump out of the window. "Just listen!"

The cries and sobs of a woman being beaten arose, while the rough voice of a man was heard swearing at her.

"He's at it. Though she's thirty-two, he thrashes her as if she were a little girl. Well, I shan't mix myself up in it—he's her brother. Nom de Dieu! I believe he's settled her now!"

The cries had ceased and the two men went away. Ten minutes later they were fast asleep, side by side in their little dormitory.

Then, each night of rendezvous, Jacques and Séverine were very happy. They had not always around them that protection of the tempest. Starry skies and bright moons embarrassed them; but, when they met, they walked in the streaks of gloom and sought corners of obscurity. In August and September, the nights were so adorable and mild that they would have let themselves be surprised by the sun, had not the awakening of the dépôt yard and the distant whistling of engines separated them. Even the first cold nights of October did not displease them. She came in heavier garments, wrapped in a huge cloak in which she half disappeared. Then, they barricaded themselves in the tool house, which they had found a means of fastening on the inside, with the aid of an iron bar placed across the door. They were as if at home there; the hurricanes of November might tear the slates from the roof without touching them. Then, he proposed to change their place of meeting to her apartments, and, after having refused for a long while, she consented. From that time he joined her there after midnight on Thursdays and Saturdays. It was horribly dangerous: they dare not budge because of the neighbors, but they enjoyed it all the more for that reason. Often caprice for nocturnal promenades took them again out-of-doors into the dark
solitude of icy nights. Once in December, when it was freezing terribly they made an excursion to the tool house.

For four months already Jacques and Séverine had lived thus. Sometimes, when in her company, the engineer suddenly thought of what she had done, of that assassination confessed by a glance alone upon the bench in the square of the Batignolles; and he did not even desire to learn the details of it. She, on the contrary, seemed more and more tormented by the need of telling everything. But quickly, whenever she appeared on the point of speaking, he closed her mouth with a kiss and sealed up the confession there, seized upon by uneasiness. Why put that unknown between them? Who could affirm that it would not destroy their happiness?

Roubaud, since summer, had grown a trifle thin, and in proportion as his wife returned to her gayety, to the freshness of twenty, he aged, became more sombre. In four months, as she expressed it, he had greatly changed. He still cordially shook Jacques' hand, invited him and was happy only when he had him at his table. But this amusement no longer sufficed him; he often went out as soon as they were done eating, leaving his comrade with his wife, under the pretext that he was stifling and needed air. The truth was that he now frequented a little café of the Cours Napoléon, where he met M. Cauche, the commissary of surveillance. He drank but little—pony glasses of rum; but he had acquired a taste for gambling which was running into a passion. He was reanimated and forgot everything only when, cards in hand, he plunged into interminable games of piquet. M. Cauche, an immoderate player, had decided that the games should be made interesting and they had come to play for a hundred sous; and, from that moment, Roubaud had burned with that rage for gain which makes a man risk his situation, his very life, on a turn of the dice. His service had not yet suffered
from this; he escaped as soon as he was at liberty, and
did not go home until two or three o'clock in the morn-
ing when he was not on night duty. His wife did not
complain of this; she reproached him only for coming
back more disagreeable; for he was extraordinarily
unlucky and had finished by getting in debt.
One evening, a first quarrel broke out between Séverine,
and Roubaud. Without yet hating him, she had come
to bearing him with difficulty, for she felt him weighing
upon her life; she would have been so happy had he
not overwhelmed her with his presence. In their slow
disunion, to cure the uneasiness which had disorganized,
they had consoled themselves according to their individ-
ual liking. But what angered her particularly, what she
did not accept without revolt, was the embarrassment his
continual losses caused her. Since the hundred-sou
pieces had been going to the café of the Cours Napoléon,
she had sometimes not known how to pay her washer-
woman. She was deprived of little toilet articles and all
sorts of luxuries. And that evening it was in regard to
the necessary purchase of a pair of boots that they had
got into the quarrel. He, upon the point of going out,
not finding a table knife with which to cut himself a slice
of bread, had taken the big knife, the murder weapon,
which was lying in a drawer of the buffet. She looked
at him while he refused the ten francs for the boots, not
having them, not knowing where to get them; she obsti-
nately repeated her demand, forced him to repeat his
refusal, gradually growing exasperated; but, suddenly,
she pointed to the place in the floor where the spectres
were sleeping, she said there was money there and that
she wanted some of it. He turned very pale and drop-
ped the knife, which fell back into the drawer. For an
instant she believed that he was going to beat her, as he
had approached, growling that that money might rot,
that he would cut off his hand rather than touch it
again; and he clenched his fists, he threatened to knock
her down if, during his absence, she should take it into her head to raise the board and steal but a single centime. Never, never! It was dead and buried. But she herself had also grown pale, almost fainting at the thought of searching there. Want might come and they would both die of hunger beside that blood-stained money. In fact, they did not speak of it again, even on the days of great embarrassment. When they trod on that place, the burning sensation, which had increased, became so intolerable that they finished by making a turn to avoid it.

Then, other disputes arose on the subject of the Croix de-Maufras property. Why had they not sold the house? And they mutually accused each other of having done nothing that was required to hasten the sale. He still violently refused to have anything to do with it; while she, on the rare occasions when she had written to Misard, had received from him but vague answers: no purchaser had presented himself, the fruit had dropped off the trees and the vegetables had not grown for lack of being watered. Little by little the great calm into which the family had fallen after the crisis was troubled thus and seemed to be borne away by a terrible recommencement of excitement. All the germs of uneasiness—the hidden money and the introduction of Jacques—had developed and now were separating the husband and wife, irritating the one against the other, and, amid this increasing agitation, life was becoming a hell.

Besides, as if by a fatal coincidence, everything was spoiling in the same way around the Roubauds. A new squall of gossip and discussion was blowing in the corridor. Philomène had violently broken with Madame Lebleu in consequence of a calumny of the latter, who had accused her of having sold a chicken that had died of sickness. But the true reason of the rupture was a reconciliation between Philomène and Séverine. Pecqueux having one night recognized the latter on the arm of Jacques, she had silenced her scruples of the past and
shown herself amiable towards the fireman's friend; and Philomène, greatly flattered by this union with a lady who was without contest the beauty and the distinction of the dépôt, had turned against the cashier's wife, that old beggar, as she called her, capable of making mountains fight. She threw all the wrongs upon her shoulders; she now cried everywhere that the lodgings facing the street belonged to the Roubauds, that it was an abomination not to restore them. Things had thus begun to take a very bad turn for Madame Lebleu, the more so as her persistence in watching Mlle. Guichon, in order to surprise her flirting with the chief station master, also threatened to give her serious trouble: she had not surprised anybody, but had committed the error of letting herself be surprised with her ear glued to the key-holes; so M. Dabadie, exasperated, had said to the under station master Moulin that, if Roubaud still claimed the lodgings, he was ready to countersign the letter. And Moulin, though not usually given to chatter, having repeated this, they had nearly come to blows from door to door from one end of the corridor to the other, so greatly were the passions of the employés and their families stirred up by the intelligence.

Amid these growing shocks, Séverine had only one agreeable day, Friday. Since October she had had the tranquil audacity to invent a pretext—the first that came—a pain in her knee which necessitated treatment by a specialist, and each Friday she departed in the 6.40 morning express of which Jacques was engineer, spent the day with him in Paris and then returned in the 6.30 express. At first, she had felt herself obliged to give her husband the news of her knee: it was better, it was worse; afterwards, seeing that he did not even listen to her, she had squarely ceased to mention it to him. And sometimes she looked at him, she asked herself if he knew. How could that ferociously jealous man, that man who had killed, blinded by blood, in an imbecile
rage, have come to tolerate a rival? She could not believe it; she simply thought that he had grown stupid.

One icy night in the beginning of December Séverine had waited very late for her husband. The next day, a Friday, before dawn, she was to take the express; and on those evenings preceding her departure she habitually made a careful toilet and prepared her garments in order to be able to dress at once on getting out of bed. Finally she retired and finished by falling asleep toward one o'clock. Roubaud had not come home. Twice already he had not reappeared until daybreak, altogether devoted to his growing passion, no longer being able to tear himself from the café, a small room of which at the back was gradually changing into a veritable gaming saloon: écarté was now played there for large sums.

Séverine was in a deep sleep when, at three o'clock, a singular noise awoke her. At first she could not understand, believed she had been dreaming and went to sleep again. What she had heard consisted of hollow blows and the cracking of wood, as if a door were being forced. A crash, a more violent cracking, made her sit up in bed. And she was overcome by fear: somebody surely was breaking the lock on the corridor door. For a minute she dare not stir, listening with buzzing ears. Then, she had the courage to arise in order to see what was going on; she walked without noise, barefooted; she partly opened the door of her chamber, very softly, a prey to such a cold chill that she was ghastly pale; and the spectre she saw in the salle-à-manger nailed her with surprise and fright.

Roubaud, extended on the floor and raised upon his elbows, had just torn up the plank with the aid of a chisel. A candle, placed beside him, furnished him with light, projecting his enormous shadow as far as the ceiling. And, at that minute, his face bent over the hole which cut the floor with a black cleft, he was gazing into it with bulging eyes. Blood purpled his cheeks, he had
his assassin's visage. Brutally he plunged in his hand, but found nothing; then, all of a tremble, he drew the candle nearer. At the bottom of the hole appeared the porte-monnaie, the notes and the watch.

Séverine uttered an involuntary cry and Roubaud, terrified, turned. For a moment he did not recognize her, believing, without doubt, she was a spectre on seeing her all white with her looks of terror.

"What are you doing?" demanded she.

Then, comprehending, avoiding a reply, he uttered a hollow growl. He stared at her, embarrassed by her presence and desirous of sending her back to bed. But not a coherent word came to him.

"You refuse me boots," continued she, "and you take the money for yourself because you have lost."

This instantly enraged him. Was she going to spoil his life again, come between him and his pleasure, this woman for whom he cared no longer? Again he thrust in his hand, taking only the porte-monnaie, containing the 300 francs in gold. And, when with his heel he had pushed the plank back in its place, he came toward her, hissing out:

"You're a fool! I do what I like. Have I asked you what you are going to do presently in Paris?"

Then, with a furious shrugging of his shoulders, he returned to the café, leaving the candle on the floor.

Séverine picked it up and returned to bed, frozen to the heart; and she kept the light burning, being unable to go to sleep again, awaiting the hour of the express with her eyes wide open. It was certain now: there had been a progressive disorganization, like an infiltration of crime, which had decomposed that man and which had rotted away every bond between them. Roubaud knew.
CHAPTER VII.

THE BLOCKED TRAIN.

THAT Friday the travelers who were to take the 6.40 express at Havre uttered on awakening a cry of surprise: snow had fallen since midnight in flakes so thick and big that the streets were covered to a depth of thirty centimètres.

Already, beneath the covered shed, the Lison was panting and smoking, attached to a train of seven waggons, three of the second class and four of the first. When, toward half-past five o'clock, Jacques and Pecqueux had arrived at the shelter house to examine the engine, they had uttered a growl of uneasiness because of the persistent snow storm. And now at their post they were awaiting the starting whistle, their eyes in the distance, beyond the gaping mouth of the marquee, watching the silent and endless fall of the snowflakes stripe the darkness with a livid quiver.

The engineer muttered:

"The devil take me if we can see a signal!"

"We shall be lucky if we get through!" said the fireman.

Roubaud was upon the quay with his lantern, having returned at the precise moment to go on duty. At times his heavy eyelids closed with fatigue, though he did not cease his surveillance. Jacques having asked if he knew anything of the state of the road, he approached and shook his hand, replying that he had as yet received no dispatch; and as Séverine came down, wrapped in a huge cloak, he himself led her to a first-class compartment in which he installed her. No doubt he had sur-
prised the glance of uneasy tenderness, exchanged between the engineer and his wife; but he did not even take the trouble to say to the latter that it was imprudent to depart in such weather and that she would do better to put off her trip.

Passengers arrived, muffled up and loaded with valises, quite a crush in the terrible cold of the morning. The snow on their shoes did not even melt; and the doors were immediately closed, each one barricaded himself. The quay was deserted, ill-lighted by the dubious glimmer of a few gas-jets; while the headlight of the engine beamed alone, like a gigantic eye, spreading out afar in the obscurity its sheet of brightness.

But Roubaud raised his lantern, giving the signal. The chief conductor blew his whistle and Jacques answered. The train started. For a minute the under station master tranquilly gazed after it, watching it going away amid the tempest.

"Attention!" said Jacques to Pecqueux. "No jokes to-day!"

He had remarked that his companion seemed ready to fall with lassitude, the result surely of some jollification the night before.

"Oh! no danger, no danger!" stammered the fireman.

As soon as they had quitted the covered shed, the two men were in the snow. The wind was blowing from the east and hence the engine faced it; but, behind the shelter, Jacques and Pecqueux did not suffer from it too much at first, clad in heavy woolens, their eyes protected by spectacles. But, in the gloom, the brilliant illumination of the headlight seemed to be devoured by the wan masses which were falling. Instead of being lighted for two or three hundred metres, the road appeared beneath a sort of milky mist, in which things were not visible until very near at hand. And, in accordance with his fear, what raised the engineer's uneasiness to its height
was that he discovered at the very first post that he certainly should not see, at the regulation distance, the red signals, closing the way. From that time he advanced with an extreme prudence, powerless, however, to slacken the speed, for the wind opposed an enormous resistance and any delay would have become a great danger.

But, suddenly, amid the darkness, a sensation warned him that his fireman was not attending to his duty. The fire was going down. Pecqueux had stretched himself on the foot-chest, overcome by sleep.

"Cursed roysterer!" cried Jacques, furiously shaking him.

Pecqueux arose and excused himself in an unintelligible growl. He could scarcely stand, but force of habit made him instantly attend to his fire. And, while the door of the fire-box was open, a brilliant reflection, like the flaming tail of a comet, spread over the train and caused the falling snowflakes to assume the appearance of great drops of gold.

After Harfleur commenced the great up-grade of three leagues which extended as far as Saint-Romain, the worst of the entire line. As the train approached it the Lison's speed diminished greatly. With his foot Jacques again opened the door of the fire-box and the sleepy Pecqueux strengthened the fire in order to augment the pressure. Now the door was red hot, but the two men did not feel the glowing heat in the current of icy air which enveloped them. The pressure rose to ten atmospheres and the Lison put forth every effort of which it was capable. But, in spite of all, Jacques was not satisfied.

"Never will we be able to climb up," said he, "if the engine is not greased."

And he did what he had not done three times in his life: he took the oil can to grease the Lison while in motion. Getting out on the steps, he climbed upon the
apron, which he followed all along the boiler. But it was a highly perilous manœuvre: his feet slipped upon the narrow band of iron, moistened by the snow; and he was blinded, while the terrible wind threatened to sweep him away like a straw. The Lison, with this man clinging to its side, continued its panting course in the gloom, amid the immense white coating of the track, in which it opened a deep furrow. Having reached the front crossbar, Jacques squatted before the oil cup of the cylinder on the right; he had all the trouble in the world to fill it, holding on with one hand by the rod. Then, he had to crawl around like a creeping insect to grease the cylinder on the left. And when he returned, worn out, he was as pale as death, realizing the danger he had passed through.

Somewhat awakened, Pecqueux was again at his post, watching the left side of the line. Usually he had good eyes, better than those of his chief. But in this tempest everything had disappeared; scarcely could they, though so familiar with each kilomètre of the route, recognize the places through which they passed: the track was deeply covered with snow, the hedges, the houses themselves, seemed to have been swallowed up—they had before them only a level plain without limit, a chaos of vague whiteness, over which the Lison appeared to gallop at its will, seized upon by a fit of madness. And never had the two men felt so strongly the bond of fraternity which united them upon that engine speeding along, let loose amid every peril, on which they found themselves more alone, more abandoned by the world, than in a closed chamber, with the crushing responsibility of the human lives which they were drawing behind them. It certainly was not the moment for them to quarrel. The snow had redoubled, the curtain thickened at the horizon. They were still climbing the up-grade when the fireman thought he saw a red light sparkling in the distance. With a word he warned his chief. But
already he saw it no longer, his eyes had dreamed, as he sometimes said. And the engineer, who had seen nothing, stood with a thumping heart, troubled by this hallucination of another, losing confidence in himself. What he imagined he distinguished, beyond the pale multiplication of the flakes, were immense black forms, considerable masses, like gigantic bits of darkness, which seemed to displace themselves and come to meet the engine. Were they landslides, mountains barring the way, upon which the train would wreck itself? Then, possessed by fear, he pulled the rod of the whistle—he whistled long, desperately; and this lamentation lingered lugubriously amid the tempest. Then, he was greatly astonished to find that he had whistled apropos, for the train passed with great speed through the dépôt of Saint-Romain, which he had believed to be the two kilomètres distant.

Meanwhile the Lison, which had climbed the terrible up-grade, had begun to roll along more at ease and Jacques was able to breathe for a moment. From Saint-Romain to Bolbec the line ascends in an imperceptible fashion; all would go well, without doubt, to the other end of the plateau. When he reached Beuzeville, during the stop of three minutes, he called the chief station master, whom he perceived upon the quay, telling him his fears in face of the snow, the depth of which was constantly increasing. Never would he arrive at Rouen; the best course would be to double the drawing power by adding a second engine while they were at a dépôt where supplementary locomotives were always in readiness. But the chief station master answered that he had no order and did not think he ought to take the responsibility of such a measure upon himself. All he offered was to give five or six wooden shovels to clear the rails in case of need. And Pecqueux took the shovels, which he placed in a corner of the tender.

Upon the plateau, in truth, the Lison continued its pro-
gress at a good speed, but showed signs of giving out. Every minute the engineer was forced to open the door of the fire-box that the fireman might put on more coal. It was a quarter to eight o'clock; the day was dawning, but they could barely distinguish the pallor in the sky amid the immense whitish whirlwind which filled space from one end of the horizon to the other. This dubious light, in which nothing could yet be distinguished, added to the uneasiness of the two men. From prudence, Jacques almost constantly blew the whistle, which sounded like a signal of distress in the depths of the desert of snow.

They passed through Bolbec, then Yvetot, without difficulty. But at Motteville Jacques again conversed with the under station master, who could not give him precise information concerning the state of the road. No train had yet come in; a dispatch had simply announced that the omnibus from Paris was blocked at Rouen, in safety. And the Lison started off again, heavily and wearily descending the three leagues of gentle declivity leading to Barentin. Now the day had broken, very pale, and it seemed as if the livid light came from the snow itself, which was falling more densely, burying the ground beneath the débris of the sky. With the growing day the wind redoubled in violence; the snowflakes were driven about like balls and every instant the fireman was forced to shovel the snow from the coal in the tender, between the walls of the water holder. To the right and to the left the country appeared, to such an extent unrecognizable that the two men had the sensation of fleeing in a dream. And the engineer, his face cut by the gusts, began to suffer terribly from the cold.

When they stopped at Barentin, the chief station master, M. Bessière, approached the engine of his own accord to notify Jacques that considerable quantities of snow were reported in the direction of the Croix-de-Maufras.
I believe you can yet get by," added he; "but you will have trouble."

Then, the young man gave vent to an explosion of anger.

"God's thunder! I said that at Beuzeville! What difference would it have made to have given us another engine! Ah! we're going to get enough of it!"

The chief conductor made his appearance, half-frozen. He declared that he was incapable of distinguishing a signal from a telegraph post.

Meanwhile the passengers were already astonished at this prolonged stoppage amid the deep silence of the buried station, without an employé's shout or the opening of a door. Some windows were opened and heads appeared: a very stout lady, with two charming blonde young girls, her daughters without doubt, all three English sure as fate; and, further away, a young and very pretty woman, a brunette, whom an aged gentleman forced to come in; while two men, one young and one old, were talking from one carriage to another, their busts half out of the doors. But, as Jacques cast a glance behind, he saw only Séverine, who was also leaning out, gazing in his direction with an anxious air. Ah! the dear creature, how uneasy she must be!—and what trouble he felt at knowing her to be there, in this danger! He would have given all his blood to be in Paris and land her there, safe and sound.

"Come, now, start," said the chief station master. "It is useless to frighten the passengers."

He gave the signal himself. The chief conductor, having climbed back into the baggage car, blew his whistle; and once more the Lison moved off, after answering with a long shriek of complaint.

Jacques immediately realized that the state of the road had changed. It was no longer the plain, the infinite stretch of a thick carpet of snow, through which the engine had sailed like a steamboat, leaving a wake behind
it. They had entered the uneven district, the hills and the valleys, the enormous swell of which went as far as Malaunay, humping the ground; and the snow had accumulated there in an irregular fashion—the road was clear in places, while considerable masses had stopped certain passages. The wind, which had swept the elevated portions, had, on the contrary, filled up the cuts. There was thus a constant succession of obstacles to surmount, points of the road which were barred by veritable ramparts.

It was now full day, and the devastated country—the narrow gorges and the steep declivities—had assumed, beneath the covering of snow, the desolation of an ocean of ice, immobilized in the storm.

Never yet had Jacques felt himself penetrated by such cold. Beneath the thousand stings of the snow it seemed to him that his face was bleeding; and he no longer had feeling in his paralyzed hands, which had grown so numb that he trembled on perceiving that his fingers had lost the sensation of the little governing lever they held. When he raised his elbow to pull the whistle rod, his arm weighed on his shoulder like a dead arm. He could not have told whether his legs were supporting him or not amid the continual shocks of trepidation which were tearing him. An immense fatigue had seized upon him with the cold, the freezing sensation of which was reaching his brain, and his fear was that he might be entirely overcome. All the known stories of hallucinations were running through his head. Was not that a fallen tree down there, lying across the road? Had he not seen a red flag floating over that bush? Were not torpedoes exploding every minute amid the rattle of the wheels? He could not have told; he repeated to himself that he ought to stop the train, but could not make up his mind to do so. For several minutes this crisis tortured him; then, suddenly, the sight of Pecqueux, again fallen asleep on the chest, overcome by the annihilating cold from
which he himself was suffering, threw him into such a rage that it seemed to restore warmth to him.

"Ah! nom de Dieu!"

And he, usually so indulgent to the vices of this drunkard, awakened him with kicks, kept kicking until he was on his feet. The fireman, thoroughly benumbed, contented himself with muttering, as he again took up his shovel: "Good, good! That's all right!"

When the fire-box was charged, the pressure increased; and it was time, for the Lison had entered the depths of a cut in which snow a metre deep had to be pushed aside. The engine advanced with an extreme effort which shook it in every part. For an instant it was exhausted and seemed to be coming to a stop, like a ship which has grounded on a sand bank. Its load was increased by the heavy coating of snow which had gradually covered the roofs of the wagons. They moved along thus, black in the white furrow, with that white sheet spread over them; and the engine itself had borders of ermine upon its dark sides, where the flakes melted and trickled off like rain. But, once more, despite the weight, the Lison freed itself and passed.

But, further on, the cuts recommenced, and Jacques and Pecqueux stiffened themselves against the cold, standing at that post which, even dying, they could not desert. Again the engine slackened its speed. It was between two slopes and the stoppage was produced slowly, without a shock. The Lison seemed to be glued in, seized by all its wheels. It no longer stirred. The end had come—the snow held it powerless in its embrace.

"We're done for!" growled Jacques. "God's thunder!"

Some seconds longer he remained at his post, his hand on the lever, opening everything, to see if the obstacle would not yield. Then, hearing the Lison fume and pant in vain, he closed the regulator, swearing furiously.

The chief conductor leaned out of the baggage car door and Pecqueux, turning, shouted to him:
"We're stuck!"

Briskly the conductor leaped into the snow, in which he sank to the knees. He came to the engine and the three men held a council.

"We can but try to clear a space," the engineer finally said. "Fortunately we have shovels. Call your rear conductor and the four of us will free the wheels."

The rear conductor, who had also got off the train, was summoned. He reached them with great difficulty. But this stoppage in the open country, amid this white solitude, the sharp sound of voices discussing what was to be done and that employé making his way along the train with toilsome strides had made the passengers uneasy. Windows were opened. They shouted, they questioned; it was a vague and growing confusion.

"Where are we?"—"Why has the train stopped?"—"What's the matter!"—"Mon Dieu! is there an accident!"

The conductor felt the necessity of reassuring the people. As he advanced, the English lady, whose heavy red face was enframed by the charming visages of her two daughters, demanded of him, with a strong accent:

"Monsieur, is there any danger?"

"No, no, madame," answered he. "A little snow—that's all. We shall start off again immediately."

And the window was closed, amid the brisk chatter of the young girls, that music of English syllables, so delightful upon ruby lips. Both laughed, greatly amused.

But, further along, the aged gentleman called the conductor, while his very young wife risked behind him her pretty brunette head.

"Why were precautions not taken? It is insupportable! I am returning from London, my business summons me to Paris this morning, and I notify you that I will hold the company responsible for all delay!"

"Monsieur," the employé could but repeat, "we shall be off again in three minutes!"
The cold was terrible, the snow entered, and the heads disappeared, the windows were closed. But inside the carriages an agitation and anxiety were kept up, the hollow buzz of which was heard. Two windows alone remained open; and, leaning out, three compartments distant from each other, two passengers were conversing, an American of about forty and a young man living at Havre, both greatly interested in the work of clearing away the snow.

"In America, monsieur, everybody gets out and takes shovels."

"Oh! it's nothing; I was blocked twice last year. My affairs call me to Paris every week."

"And mine about every three weeks."

"What, from New York?"

"Yes, monsieur, from New York."

Jacques was directing the work. Having perceived Séverine at the door of the first wagon, in which she always rode in order to be nearer to him, he had supplicated her with a glance; and, understanding, she had retired that she might not remain in that glacial wind which was making her face smart. He, from that time, thinking of her, had worked with a great heart. But he had perceived that the cause of the stoppage—the caking of the snow—had not come from the wheels: the latter had cut the thickest layers; it was the ash-pit, placed between them, which had created the obstacle, rolling the snow and hardening it in enormous lumps. And an idea came to him.

"We must take off the ash-pit."

At first, the chief conductor opposed this. The engineer was under his orders; he would not authorize him to touch the engine. Then, he suffered himself to be convinced.

"You take the responsibility of it—all right!"

But it was a hard job. Stretched out under the engine, their backs in the melting snow, Jacques and
Pecqueux had to toil for nearly half an hour. Fortunately, in the tool-chest, they had some spare monkey wrenches. Finally, at the risk of burning and crushing themselves twenty times, they succeeded in detaching the ash-pit. But they were not done yet, it was necessary to remove it from underneath. Of an enormous weight, it got entangled in the wheels and cylinders. However, the four men pulled at it until they had dragged it off the track as far as a slope.

"Now, let us finish clearing away," said the conductor.

For nearly an hour the train had been in distress and the anguish of the passengers had increased. Each minute a window was opened, a voice demanded why they did not start. It was a panic—cries and tears, in a growing crisis of terror.

"No, no, it's cleared away enough," declared Jacques. "Get in; I charge myself with the rest."

He was again at his post with Pecqueux, and, when the two conductors had regained their places, he himself opened the escape valve. The jet of scalding steam melted the cakes which had still adhered to the rails. Then, with his hand on the lever, he backed the engine. Slowly he recoiled about 300 mètres to get purchase. And, having increased the fire, exceeding even the permitted pressure, he returned against the wall which barred the way, threw the Lison there with all its mass, with all the weight of the train it drew. But it was unable to pass; it stopped, smoking, vibrating all over with the shock. Then, twice he was compelled to repeat the manœuvre. At last, with a supreme effort, the engine passed and heavily the train followed it between the two walls of opened snow. It was free.

Jacques, blinded, took off his spectacles and wiped them. His heart was beating furiously, he no longer felt the cold. But, suddenly, he thought of a deep cut about 300 mètres from the Croix-de-Maufras; it opened in the direction of the wind, the snow must have accu-
mulated there in considerable quantities; and instantly he felt certain that there was the rock on which he would be shipwrecked. He leaned out. In the distance, after a final curve, he saw the cut, in a straight line like a long ditch, filled with snow.

Meanwhile, the Lison was moving at medium speed, having encountered no further obstacles. They had, as a precaution, left the front and back signal lights burning; and the white headlight shone in the day like the living eye of a Cyclops. The engine rolled, it approached the cut, with this eye wide open. It panted like a horse seized upon by fear; it advanced and finally was about to enter the cut. To right and left the slopes were covered, while the road at the bottom could not be distinguished. It was like the hollow of a torrent where the snow slept, level with the banks. The engine entered and rolled ahead for about fifty metres, going slower and slower. The snow it had pushed away made a bar in front of it, threatening to overwhelm it. For an instant it seemed conquered. But, with a last effort, it delivered itself and advanced thirty metres further. It was the end; cakes of snow fell back, covering the wheels; all the pieces of mechanism were invaded, bound one by one in chains of ice. And the Lison stopped definitively amid the terrible cold, motionless and dead.

"Here we are," said Jacques. "I expected it."

Immediately, he wished to back the engine and again try the manoeuvre. But this time the Lison did not budge. It refused to recoil as well as to advance; it was blocked in every part, glued to the ground, inert. Behind it, the train also seemed dead, buried in the thick coat to the doors. The snow was still falling thickly. And it was an engulfing in which engine and carriages were about to disappear, already half-covered, beneath the quivering silence of that white solitude. Nothing stirred; the snow was spreading its winding-sheet.
"Well, has it begun again?" demanded the chief conductor, leaning out of the baggage car.

"We're done for now!" cried Pecqueux.

This time, in fact, the position had become critical. The rear conductor ran to place the torpedoes for the protection of the back of the train; while the engineer blew the whistle rapidly as a signal of distress. But the snow deadened the air, the sound was lost and evidently did not even reach Barentin. What was to be done? They were only four; never could they clear away such heaps. A large force would have been required for that. Necessity ordained that they should hasten in search of help. And the worst of it was that a panic had again broken out among the passengers.

A door opened, the young brunette lady sprang out, terrified, believing an accident had happened; and her husband, the aged merchant, who followed her, cried:

"I will write to the ministry. It is an indignity!"

Sounds of women weeping and of furious male voices came from the carriages, the windows of which were opened violently. And only the two little English girls took the matter gayly, smiling with a tranquil air. As the chief conductor was striving to reassure the people, the younger of the twain demanded of him, with a slight Britannic accent:

"So, monsieur, it is here we stop, eh?"

Several men had got out, despite the thick coat in which they sank to the middle. The American thus found himself once more with the young man from Havre; they both had advanced toward the engine to see. They shook their heads.

"It will take four or five hours for them to get clear of this."

"At least; and twenty laborers will be required."

Jacques had persuaded the chief conductor to send the rear conductor to Barentin to ask for aid. Neither he nor Pecqueux could quit the engine. The employé
started and was soon lost sight of at the end of the cut. He had four kilomètres to go and would not get back before a couple of hours, perhaps. And Jacques, in despair, left his post for an instant and hastened to the first carriage, in which he had perceived Séverine, who had opened the window.

"Don't be afraid," said he, rapidly; "there is nothing for you to fear."

"I am not afraid," she answered, in the same manner. "But I have been very uneasy on your account."

They were consoled and smiled upon each other. But, as Jacques wheeled about, he was surprised to see, along the slope, Flore, then Misard, followed by two other men whom he did not at first recognize. They had heard the whistle of distress, and Misard, who was not on duty, had hastened to the spot with his two comrades whom he had been treating to white wine—the quarryman Gabuche, whose work had been stopped by the snow, and the switch-tender Ozil, who had come from Malaunay through the tunnel to make his court to Flore, whom he was yet pursuing in spite of the ill reception he had met with. She, out of curiosity, like a great vagabond girl, as brave and strong as a lad, had accompanied them. And, for her, for her father, it was an important event, an extraordinary adventure—this train stopping thus at their door. During the five years they had lived there, at each hour of the day and night, in clear weather and in the storms, how many trains had they seen pass at the top of their speed! All had seemed borne away by the wind which had brought them, never a single one had even slackened its pace; they had watched them flee and vanish before they had been able to learn anything about them. And now, in the snow, a train had landed at their door; they saw close at hand the unknown mass of people whom an accident had thrown upon the road. Those open doors, showing women wrapped in furs, those men who had got out in heavy overcoats, all this comfor-
table luxury, stranded amid this sea of ice, immobilized them with astonishment.

But Flore had recognized Séverine. She, who had watched Jacques' train as it went along, had noticed for several weeks the presence of this woman in the Friday morning express; the more so, as the latter, when she sped by the passage at grade, had put her face to the door to take a glance at her property at the Croix-de-Maufras. Flore's eyes had darkened on seeing her talking in an undertone with the engineer.

"Ah! Madame Roubaud!" cried Misard, who also had recognized her and who immediately assumed his obsequious air. "What a bit of bad luck! But you will not remain here; you must come to our house."

Jacques, after having grasped the hand of the garde-barrière, sustained his offer.

"He's right. We shall, perhaps, be here for hours. You will have time to die of cold."

Séverine refused, being well covered; she said. Besides, the 300 mètres in the snow frightened her a little. Then, approaching, Flore, who had been staring fixedly at her with her big eyes, said, finally:

"Come, madame; I will carry you!"

And before she had consented, she had seized her in her vigorous arms, she had lifted her like a little infant. Afterwards, she put her down on the other side of the road where her feet did not sink in the snow. The amazed passengers laughed. What a lass! If they had a dozen like her the clearing away would not take two hours.

Meanwhile Misard's proposition, the offer of the house of the garde-barrière, where they could take refuge, find fire, perhaps bread and wine, was passing from one carriage to another. The panic had calmed when the passengers had comprehended that they were in no immediate danger; but the situation was none the less lamentable for that: the stoves were growing cold; it was nine
o'clock—they would suffer from hunger and thirst if aid was long in coming, and they might be snow-bound for some time—who knew if they would not have to sleep there? Two parties had formed: those who, in despair, did not wish to quit the wagons and who had installed themselves there as if to die, enveloped in their wraps, stretched out upon the seats; and those who preferred to risk the walk through the snow, hoping to find something better at the garde-barrière's house, desirous above all of escaping from the incubus of that stranded train, dead with cold. A group gathered—the aged merchant and his young wife, the English lady with her two daughters, the young man from Havre, the American and about ten others—ready to start off.

Jacques, in a low voice, had persuaded Séverine to go, swearing that he would come and tell her the news if he could escape. And, as Flore was still looking at them with her sombre eyes, he spoke to her gently, like an old friend:

"Well, it's understood, you will guide these ladies and gentlemen. I will keep Misard and the others. We will go to work, we will do what we can while waiting."

Immediately, in fact, Cabuche, Ozil and Misard had taken shovels to join Pecqueux and the chief conductor, who had already attacked the snow. The little force strove to free the engine, shovelling beneath the wheels, casting the accumulation against the slope. No one spoke. And, when the little troupe of passengers started away, they gave a last glance toward the train, looking like a slender black line beneath the thick coat which was crushing it. Those who remained had closed the doors and windows.

Flore wished to take Séverine again in her arms, but the latter refused, persisting in walking like the rest. The 300 mètres were very toilsome to travel: in the cut they sank to the hips; and twice it was necessary to rescue the big English lady, half-submerged. Her
daughters still laughed, enchanted. The young wife of the old gentleman, having slipped, was forced to accept the hand of the young man from Havre; while the husband was declaiming against France to the American. When they emerged from the cut, the walking became more comfortable; but they were following a bank; the little troupe advanced in a line swept by the wind, carefully avoiding the edges, vague and dangerous beneath the snow. At last, they arrived, and Flore installed the passengers in the kitchen, where she could not even give a seat to each, for there were about twenty persons encumbering the apartment, which, fortunately, was large enough. All she could invent was to get boards and make two benches with the aid of the chairs she possessed. Afterwards she threw a fagot on the fire upon the hearth; then, she made a gesture as if to say that they could demand nothing further of her. She had not uttered a word; she stood staring at the people with her big greenish eyes and her wild, bold air of a great blonde savage. Two faces only were known to her from having seen them frequently at the doors of the carriages for months past: that of the American and that of the young man from Havre; and she examined them as one studies a buzzing insect, settled at last, which one had not been able to follow in its flight. As to the others, they appeared to her to be of a different race, inhabitants of an unknown land, fallen from the sky. All were lamenting at the idea of being blocked in this desert. And Flore, who, motionless, was listening to them, having encountered the glance of Séverine, seated upon a chair before the fire, made her a sign to pass into the adjoining chamber. "Mamma," announced she as she entered, "this is Madame Roubaud. Have you nothing to say to her." Phasie was in bed, with yellow face and swollen limbs, so ill that she had not been up for two weeks. "Ah! Madame Roubaud," she said. "Good, good!"
Flore told her of the accident, of the people she had brought and who were there; but she was not interested.

"Good, good!" she repeated, in the same weary voice. Then, she remembered and raised her head an instant to say:

"If madame wants to go see her house, you know the keys are hanging beside the cupboard."

But Séverine refused. A shriver ran through her at the thought of reentering the Croix-de-Maufras property in that snow storm, amid that livid light. No, no, she had nothing to see there; she preferred to remain where she was.

"Take a seat, madame," resumed Flore. "It is better here than in the other room. And, besides, we shall never find enough bread for all those people, while, if you are hungry, there will always be a piece for you."

She had pushed forward a chair; she continued to show herself obliging, making a visible effort to correct her habitual roughness. But she kept her eyes constantly upon the young woman as if she wished to read her, to get a decided answer to a question she had been asking herself for some time; and, beneath her eagerness, she felt a need of approaching her, of touching her, in order to know.

Séverine thanked her and installed herself beside the stove, preferring, in fact, to be alone with the sick woman, in that chamber, where she hoped that Jacques would find the means of rejoining her. Two hours passed; she had yielded to the great heat of the chamber and fallen asleep, when Flore, summoned every instant to the kitchen, reopened the door, saying in her hard voice:

"Come in since she is here!"

It was Jacques, who had escaped to bring good tidings. The man sent to Barentin had brought back a corps of laborers—thirty soldiers whom the railway administration had sent to the menaced points in provision of accidents; and all were at work with pickaxes and
shovels. But it would take a long while; they would not start off again before night.

"But you are not too badly off here; take patience," added he. Aunt Phasie, you will not let Madame Roubaud die of hunger, will you?"

Phasie, at the sight of her big boy, as she called him, had painfully sat up in bed; and she was looking at him, listening to him, reanimated and happy. When he came to her she said:

"Surely not, surely not! Ah! my big boy, you're here, it's you who have got caught in the snow! And that stupid wretch did not tell me!"

She turned toward her daughter, apostrophizing her:

"Be polite to those ladies and gentlemen, at least, that they may not say to the administration that we are savages."

Flore had remained planted between Jacques and Séverine. For an instant she seemed to hesitate, asking herself if she should not enter the room in spite of her mother. But she would see nothing—the presence of the latter would prevent the two others from betraying themselves; and she went out without a word, enveloping them with a long look.

"How, Aunt Phasie!" resumed Jacques, with an air of trouble, "wholly confined to your bed! Is it serious, then?"

She drew him to her, even forced him to sit down on the edge of the bed, and, without further heeding the young woman, who had discreetly withdrawn, she relieved herself, in a very low voice.

"Oh! yes, it's serious! Why, it's a miracle that you find me alive! I would not write to you because such things are not written. I nearly died; but now I'm getting better and I believe I'll escape this time again!"

He examined her, frightened at the progress of the malady, no longer finding in her anything of the handsome and healthy creature of the past.
"Still your cramps and dizziness, my poor Aunt Phasie?"

But she wrung his hand as if she would break it; she continued, further lowering her voice:

"Just think, I have caught him! You know how worried I was at not being able to find out in what he gave me his drug. I drank nothing, I ate nothing he touched and, all the same, every night my stomach was on fire. Well, he gave me his drug in the salt! One evening I saw him!"

Jacques, in his turn, tenderly wrung the hands of the sick woman and strove to calm her.

"See here now, is all this possible? To say such things one must be very sure. And, besides, this has lasted a long time—too long! It is rather a sickness the doctors don’t understand."

"A sickness!" resumed she, sneering;—"yes, a sickness he has put in my skin! As for the doctors, you are right: two of them came here, but could make nothing out of it and they did not even agree. I don’t want another to put his foot in this house. Do you understand, he gave it to me in the salt? I swear to you that I saw him do it! It was for my thousand francs, the thousand francs that papa left me. He tells himself that when he’s got me out of the way he’ll find them. That’s what I defy him to do: they are in a place where they will never, never be found by anybody! I can die tranquilly, for no one will ever have my thousand francs!"

"But, Aunt Phasie, in your place I would send for the gendarmes, if I was so certain as that."

She made a gesture of repugnance.

"Oh! no, not the gendarmes. This business concerns only us, it is between him and me. I know he wants to kill me and, naturally, don’t want him to do it. So I have but to defend myself and not to be so stupid as I was with the salt. Who’d believe it? Who’d believe that such a dwarf, a bit of a man one could put in one’s
pocket, would end by getting the better of a big woman like me, if he was let to go on, with his rat's teeth!"

A little chill had seized upon her. She breathed painfully before finishing.

"No matter; it won't be for this time. I'm getting better, I'll be on my feet again before two weeks. And then he'll have to be very sharp to catch me. Ah! yes, I'm curious to see what he'll do. If he finds the means to give me his drug once more, why, decidedly, he's the stronger and I'll die! But no one must interfere!"

Jacques thought that her sickness haunted her brain with these gloomy imaginings; and, in order to draw her from them, he was trying to joke when she began to tremble beneath the bed clothes.

"He's here," she whispered. "I feel him when he approaches."

In fact, some seconds afterwards, Misard entered. She had grown livid, a prey to involuntary terror, for, in her obstinacy to defend herself without aid, she had a growing fear of him which she did not avow. But Misard, who, at the door, had enveloped them with a quick glance, did not even seem afterwards to have seen them side by side; and he was already overwhelming Séverine with politeness.

"I thought that madame would, perhaps, like to profit by the occasion to take a look at her property. So I have escaped for an instant. Does madame desire that I shall accompany her?"

And, as the young woman again refused, he continued, in a doleful voice:

"Madame has, perhaps, been astonished because of the fruits. They were all worm-eaten and not worth gathering. Besides, there was a gale of wind which did much damage. Ah! it's sad that madame can't sell! A gentleman did present himself, but he demanded repairs. However, I am at madame's disposal, and madame can count that I will replace her here as if I were herself."
Then, he insisted upon serving her with bread and pears—pears from his own garden, which were not worm-eaten. She accepted.

On passing through the kitchen, Misard had announced to the passengers that the work of clearing away the snow was going forward, but that it would yet take four or five hours. Noon had struck, and there was a new lamentation, for great hunger had begun to develop itself. Flore had declared that she would not have bread for all. She had wine, however; she had brought up ten litres from the cellar and set them in a row on the table. But glasses were also lacking; they were forced to drink by groups—the English lady with her two daughters, the old gentleman with his young wife. The latter, however, had found in the young man from Havre a zealous, inventive servitor, who watched over her comfort. He disappeared, returning with some apples and a loaf of bread, discovered in the depths of the wood-house. At this Flore got angry, saying that the bread was for her sick mother. But already he had cut the loaf and was distributing it among the ladies, commencing with the young wife, who smiled upon him, flattered. Her husband did not frown; he was no longer even paying attention to her, occupied in praising to the American the commercial methods of New York. Never had the young English girls eaten apples with such enjoyment. Their mother, very weary, was half-dozing. Two women, overcome by waiting, were sitting on the floor in front of the hearth. Some of the men, who had gone out-of-doors to kill a quarter of an hour by smoking, returned shivering, nearly frozen. Gradually the uneasiness was augmenting—ill-satisfied hunger, fatigue doubled by vexation and impatience. It was turning into a camp of shipwrecked people, into the desolation of a band of civilized persons cast by the sea upon a desert isle.

And, as Misard’s comings and goings had left the door
open, Aunt Phasie, from her sick bed, was looking. So they were those people she had seen pass in a flash of lightning! To think that among these persons, so eager to hasten about their business, not one suspected the thing—that poison which had been put in her salt! Of the thousands and thousands who sped by in the trains not one had imagined that, in that little low house, a murderer was killing at his ease, noiselessly! And Aunt Phasie looked at them, one after another, those people fallen from the moon, reflecting that, when one is busy, it is not astonishing for one to walk amid improper things and know nothing about them.

"Are you going back?" demanded Misard of Jacques.
"Yes, yes," responded the latter; "I will follow you."
Misard went out, closing the door. And Phasie, retaining the young man by the hand, whispered in his ear:
"If I die, you will see what a face he makes when he don't find the hoard. That's what amuses me when I think about it. I shall go away satisfied all the same."
"And then, Aunt Phasie, your money will be lost to everybody. Don't you intend to leave it to your daughter?"
"To Flore?—that he may take it from her! Ah! no, no! Not even to you, my big boy, because you are too stupid also: something would happen. To no one—to the earth in which I will rejoin it!"

She had exhausted herself, and Jacques laid her down in bed again, calmed her, kissing her and promising to return soon. Then, as she seemed to have fallen asleep, he passed behind Séverine, who was still seated beside the stove; he raised a finger, smiling, to recommend her to be prudent; and, with a pretty, silent movement, she threw back her head, offering her lips, and he bent over, discreetly kissing her. They closed their eyes. When they reopened them, bewildered, Flore, who had opened the door, was standing before them, looking at them.
"Madame has no further need of bread?" demanded she, in a hoarse voice.

Séverine, confused, greatly troubled, stammered out vague words.

"No, no, thank you!"

For an instant Jacques fixed flaming eyes on Flore. He hesitated, his lips trembled as if he wished to speak; then, with a furious gesture of menace, he preferred to depart. The door banged roughly behind him.

Flore remained where she was, with her lofty stature of a virgin warrior, beneath a heavy casque of blonde hair. Her anguish, each Friday, on seeing this woman in his train, had not then deceived her. The certainty she had been seeking since she had had them there together she had found at last, absolute. Never would the man she loved love her: it was that slender woman, that nothing at all whom he had chosen. And her regret was so great at not having made sure of him before the other that she with difficulty restrained from sobbing. Where could she find him alone at this hour to throw herself upon his neck and cry: "Take me! I have been stupid because I did not know!" But, in her powerlessness, rage swelled in her against the frail creature who was there, embarrassed and stammering. With a squeeze of her hard fighter's arms she could stifle her like a little bird. Why did she not dare to do it? But she swore to be avenged, knowing things about her rival which would suffice to put her in prison, she whom they left free, while they punished many less guilty women. And, tortured by jealousy, swollen with anger, she set about removing the remains of the bread and pears, with her grand movements of a beautiful savage girl.

"Since madame wants no more of this I am going to give it to the others."

Three o'clock struck, then four. The time dragged along, immeasurable, amid the crushing of growing lassitude and irritation. Night was coming on, livid over the
vast white country; and every ten minutes the men who went out to see how the work was progressing in the distance returned to say that the engine did not yet seem to be freed. The two little English girls themselves were weeping now, worn out. In a corner, the pretty brunette wife had fallen asleep on the shoulder of the young man from Havre, which the aged husband did not even see amid the general abandon, destructive of propriety. The room was getting cold; they shivered without even thinking of putting wood on the fire; so the American went away, judging that he would be more comfortable stretched out upon the seat of a car. This was now the idea, the regret of all: they should have remained on the train; then, at least, they would not have been devoured by ignorance of what was going on. It was necessary to restrain the English lady, who also spoke of going to pass the night in her compartment. When a candle had been placed upon a corner of the table to light the people in the depths of that dark kitchen, the discouragement was immense, everything sank into a mournful despair.

At the train, meanwhile, the clearing off was being completed; and, while the force of soldiers, who had freed the engine, were opening the road in front of it, the engineer and fireman made ready to resume their post. Jacques, seeing that the snow had ceased falling at last, was again confident. The switch-tender Ozil had affirmed to him that beyond the tunnel, in the direction of Malaunay, the accumulations were much less. Again he questioned him.

"You came on foot through the tunnel; you were able to enter and quit it freely?"

"Of course. I’ll answer for it that you will pass."

Cabuche, who had toiled with the ardor of a good giant, had already drawn back, with his timid and wild air, which his recent struggles with justice had augmented; and Jacques was forced to call to him.
"See here now, comrade, hand us our shovels—there, against the slope. They will come in play in case of need."

And, when the quarryman had done him that service, he vigorously grasped his hand to show him that he esteemed him in spite of all, having seen him at work.

"You are a good fellow!"

This mark of friendship moved Cabuche in an extraordinary fashion.

"Thank you!" said he, simply, forcing back his tears.

Misard, who had patched up matters with him, after having made charges against him before the Judge of Inquiry, nodded approvingly, his lips puckered into a slight smile. He had not been working for some time, his hands in his pockets, enveloping the train with an eager look, having the air of waiting to see if he could not pick up lost objects beneath the wheels.

Finally, the chief conductor had decided with Jacques that they might try to start off again, when Pecqueux, squatted upon the track, called to the engineer:

"Come take a look. There is a cylinder which has received a tap."

Jacques approached and stooped in his turn. Already he had satisfied himself, on carefully examining the Lison, that it was wounded there. But this was all the damage apparent, which had reassured the engineer at first. He returned to his place, blew the whistle and opened the regulator. The engine was long in starting. At length it stirred, made a few turns of its wheels. It could go, it would make the trip.

Again Jacques blew the whistle, after Pecqueux had opened the purger. The two conductors were at their posts. Misard, Ozil and Cabuche climbed upon the step of the baggage car. And slowly the train emerged from the cut, between the soldiers armed with their shovels, who had ranged themselves to the right and to the left.
along the slope. Then, it stopped before the house of the garde-barrière to take up the passengers.

Flore was standing outside. Ozil and Cabuche rejoined her, while Misard bowed to the ladies and gentlemen as they quitted his dwelling and received pieces of silver from them. Deliverance had come at last! But they had waited too long; everybody was shivering with cold, hungry and exhausted. The English lady dragged away her two daughters, who were half-asleep; the young man from Havre got into the same compartment as the pretty brunette wife, now very languishing, placing himself at the disposal of her husband. For an instant, behind the panes of her chamber window, appeared Aunt Phasie, whom curiosity had drawn from her bed and who had dragged herself there to see. Her big, hollow sick woman's eyes watched that unknown crowd, those passers of the world in motion, whom she would never see again, brought by the storm and carried away by it.

Séverine was the last to come out. She turned her head, she smiled upon Jacques, who had leaned forward to follow her to her carriage. And Flore, who was waiting for them, grew paler yet at this tranquil exchange of their tenderness. With a sudden movement, she drew near to Ozil, whom she had repulsed until then, as if now, in her hatred, she felt the need of a protector.

The chief conductor gave the signal, the Lison responded with a plaintive whistle, and Jacques, this time, started off not to stop again until Rouen was reached. It was six o'clock; night had fallen from the dark sky over the white country; but a pale reflection, of a frightful melancholy, remained on the snow, illuminating the desolation of this ravaged district. And there, in that dubious light, the house of the Croix-de-Maufras loomed up sidewise, more dilapidated and all black amid the whiteness, with its bill, "For Sale," nailed upon its closed front.
CHAPTER VIII.

SÉVERINE SPEAKS.

At Paris, the train did not enter the dépôt yard until 10.40 in the evening. There had been a stop of twenty minutes at Rouen to give the passengers time to dine; and Séverine had hastened to send a dispatch to her husband, notifying him that she would not return to Havre until the express of the evening of the day after the morrow.

When they had quitted Mantes an idea had occurred to Pecqueux. His wife, Mère Victoire, had been in the hospital for a week with a grave sprain of the foot, the result of a fall; and he, having another bed in the city in which he could sleep, had thought of offering their chamber to Madame Roubaud: she would be much more comfortable there than in a hotel in the neighborhood, and could remain there until the day after the morrow evening as if at home. Jacques had immediately approved of the arrangement, the more so as he did not know where to take the young woman. And, beneath the marquee, amid the flood of disembarking passengers, when she came to the engine, he advised her to accept, offering her the key which the fireman had given him. But she hesitated, embarrassed by the gay smile of the latter.

"No, no; I have a cousin. She will put a mattress on the floor for me."

"Accept," said Pecqueux, with his jolly, good-natured air. "The bed is good and big—four could sleep in it."

Jacques looked at her so pressingly that she took the key. He leaned forward and whispered to her:
"I will call and see you."

Séverine had to go only a little way up the Rue d'Amsterdam and turn into the Impasse; but the snow was so slippery that she was compelled to walk with great caution. She found the door of the house still open, she climbed the stairway without even being seen by the concierge, who was plunged in a game of dominoes with a neighbor; and, on the fourth floor, she opened the door of the room, closing it so softly that no one surely could suspect her presence. As she had passed the landing of the third story, she had very distinctly heard laughter and singing in the apartments of the Dauverges: without doubt, it was one of the little receptions of the two sisters, who thus had music with their friends once a week. And now when Séverine had closed the door behind her, in the thick darkness of the chamber, she yet distinguished, through the floor, the brisk gayety of all that youth.

For an instant the obscurity appeared to her complete; and she gave a start when the cuckoo clock, amid the blackness, began to strike eleven with loud strokes, in a tone which she recognized. Then, her eyes became accustomed to the gloom and the two windows defined themselves in two pale squares, lighting the ceiling with the reflection from the snow. Already she had located herself and was looking for matches upon the buffet, in a corner where she recollected having seen them. But she had more trouble to find a candle; finally she discovered the stump of one at the bottom of a drawer; and, having lighted it, the room was illuminated, when she cast an uneasy and rapid glance about her as if to see if she was really alone. She recognized each object—the round table on which she had breakfasted with her husband, the bed draped with red cottonnade on the edge of which he had knocked her down with a blow of his fist. Nothing had been changed in the chamber since she was there ten months before.
Séverine slowly removed her hat. But, as she was about to take off her cloak also, she shivered. It was freezing in that chamber. Beside the stove, in a little box, were charcoal and small wood. Immediately, dressed as she was, the idea of kindling a fire came to her; and that amused her, was a change from the uneasiness which she had at first experienced. When the stove was roaring, she set about other preparations, arranged the chairs according to her liking, found clean sheets and completely remade the bed. But she was annoyed to find nothing either to eat or drink in the buffet. No doubt, Pecqueux had devoured everything even to the crumbs. It was the same way with the candles—there was only that stump. And, being very warm and animated now, she paused in the centre of the room, taking a look to assure herself that nothing was lacking.

Then, as she felt astonished that Jacques had not yet come, the sound of a whistle drew her to one of the windows. It was the 11.20 train, direct for Havre, which was starting. Below, the vast field and the cut which goes from the dépôt yard to the tunnel of the Batignolles were but one sheet of snow, in which could be distinguished only the fan of the rails with its black sticks. The engines and freight cars made white heaps and seemed asleep beneath a covering of ermine. And, between the immaculate skylights of the huge marquees and the framework of the Pont de l'Europe, bordered with guipure, the houses of the Rue de Rome opposite were visible despite the gloom, dirty and spotted with yellow amid all this white. The direct train for Havre appeared, crawling and sombre, with its headlight which cut the darkness with a bright flame; and she watched it disappear beneath the bridge, while the three rear lanterns made the snow look like blood. When she walked back into the chamber a slight quiver shot through her: was she, indeed, alone? She had seemed
to feel a hot breath on her neck, the touch of a brutal hand pass over her flesh. Her frightened eyes again made the tour of the room. No, nobody.

At what was Jacques amusing himself to be so late? Ten minutes more passed. A slight scraping, the sound of a finger nail scratching wood, disturbed her. Then, she understood, she ran and opened the door. It was he, with a bottle of malaga and a cake.

Shaken with laughter, she threw herself upon his neck.

"Oh! how nice you are! You thought of refreshment!"

But quickly he silenced her.

"Chut! chut!"

Then, she lowered her voice, believing that he was pursued by the concierge. No, he had had the luck, as he was about to ring, to see the door open for a lady and her daughter, who, without doubt, had come down from the Dauvergnes'; and he had been able to ascend without any one suspecting it.

"We must make no noise, we must speak softly."

"Yes, yes."

And she set the table with all sorts of precautions—two plates, two glasses, two knives, pausing with a desire to burst out laughing whenever an object, put down too quickly, gave forth a ringing sound.

He, who was watching her proceedings, amused also, resumed in a low tone:

"I thought you would be hungry."

"Why, I'm dying! We had such a bad dinner at Rouen!"

"Say now, shall I go down-stairs again and get a roast chicken?"

"No, no, the cake will answer."

Immediately they seated themselves side by side; the cake was divided and eaten joyously. She complained of being thirsty, she drank, one after the other, two
glasses of malaga, which made the blood mount to her cheeks. The stove was red hot behind them and they felt incommmoded by its glowing heat. Suddenly, in her turn, she cried in an undertone:

"Chut! chut!"

She motioned to him to listen; and, in the silence, they heard a hollow shaking, accompanied by the sound of music, come up from the Dauverges': the young ladies had organized a dance. Outside, beneath the windows, there was nothing to be distinguished now, amid the deadening of the snow, but a hollow roll, the departure of a train, together with faint whistle shrieks.

"The train for Auteuil," murmured he. "Ten minutes to twelve."

But she did not heed him. Seized upon by the past amid her happy excitement, she was living over again, in spite of herself, the hours she had spent there with her husband. Was not this that memorable breakfast continued by that cake, eaten upon the same table, in the midst of the same sounds? A growing fever disengaged itself from the surroundings, her remembrances were overflowing; never before had she felt such a burning need of telling all to Jacques. The facts were evoked, her husband was there; she turned her head, imagining that she saw his short hand passed over her shoulder to take up the knife. She closed her eyes in terror.

"Ah! the candle has burned out!"

She opened her eyes with a start. Jacques had thrown his arm about her and they remained for a long while without speaking. The chamber was as black as ink, they could scarcely distinguish the pale squares of the two windows; and the ceiling was a blank, save for a ray from the stove, a round and bloody stain. They both stared at it with wide-open eyes. The sound of music had ceased; doors slammed, then the whole house fell into the heavy calm of sleep. Below, the train from Caen, which was coming in, shook the turning plates,
the deadened shocks of which, barely heard in the chamber, seemed as if very distant.

But Séverine was again burning with the need of confession. For so many long weeks it had tormented her! The round stain on the ceiling had enlarged, seemed to spread like a stain of blood. Her eyes become hallucinated by staring at it, the objects about her acquired voices, told the story aloud. She felt the words of it mount to her lips, with the nervous wave which was agitating her flesh. How good it would be no longer to hide anything!

"You do not know——"

Jacques, who had not taken his eyes from the bloody stain, perfectly understood what she was going to say. As she leaned against him he had followed in her palpitating form the rising flood of that obscure and terrible topic of which they both thought but never spoke. Until then he had silenced her, fearing the preliminary quiver of his old malady, trembling lest it might change their existence to talk of blood. But, this time, he was without strength even to bend his head and close her mouth with a kiss, such a delicious languor had taken possession of him. He believed that the time had come, that she would tell all. Hence he was relieved when she hesitated and then said:

"You do not know that my husband has his suspicions."

At the last second, without her wish to have it so, it was the recollection of the previous night at Havre which had come from her lips instead of the confession. "Oh! do you believe so?" murmured he, incredulously. "He gave me his hand again this morning."

"I assure you that he knows all. I have proofs."

She was silent. Then, after a quivering reverie: "Oh! I hate him, I hate him!"

Jacques was surprised. He had no ill-will whatever against Roubaud.
“Why?” demanded he.
She did not answer his question, she repeated:
“I hate him! Now, merely feeling that he is beside me is a torture. Ah! if I could, how gladly would I run away from him!”
Then, she said, softly:
“But you do not know——”
It was the confession which had returned, fatal, inevitable. And, this time, he was convinced that nothing in the world would retard it. They no longer heard even a breath in the house. Without, Paris beneath the snow had not the roll of a carriage, buried, draped with silence; and the last train for Havre, which had gone at 12.20, seemed to have borne away with it the final life of the dépôt yard. The stove no longer roared; but the live coals brightened still more the red stain on the ceiling, rounded up there like an eye of terror. It was so hot that a heavy, stifling mist seemed to be floating in the chamber.
“But you do not know——”
Then he spoke, also irresistibly impelled.
“Yes, yes, I know.”
“No, you suspect perhaps, but you cannot know.”
“I know he did it for the inheritance.”
She made a movement, gave a little, nervous, involuntary laugh.
“Ah! yes, the inheritance!”
And in a very low tone, so low that an insect of the night, striking the window panes, would have buzzed louder, she told of her childhood at President Grandmorin’s, finding a relief, a pleasure almost, in telling all.
“Just imagine, it was here, in this chamber, in February last—you remember, at the time of his affair with the sub-préfet. We had breakfasted very agreeably, over there, at that table. Naturally, he knew nothing—I had not told him the story. And apropos of a ring, an old gift, apropos of nothing, I don’t know how, he
understood everything. Ah! no, no, you cannot figure to yourself how he treated me!"

She quivered; he felt her little hands tighten upon his.

"With a blow of his fist he knocked me down on the floor. And then he dragged me by the hair. And then he raised his heel over my face as if he wished to crush it. No, as long as I live I shall remember that! Again the blows, mon Dieu! But I cannot repeat to you all the questions he asked me or what he forced me to relate to him! You see I am very frank, since I avow these things to you when nothing obliges me to tell. Well, never would I dare to give you even a simple idea of the awful questions to which I was forced to reply, for he would have killed me had I not answered, that's certain. Without doubt he loved me, he must have been overwhelmed with grief on learning all that; and I admit that I should have acted more honestly if I had told him before the marriage. But you must understand. It was old, it was forgotten. Only a real savage could have got so mad with jealousy. See now, are you going to esteem me less because you know this?"

Jacques had not stirred, inert, reflecting. He was greatly surprised, the suspicion of such a history had never occurred to him. How everything was complicating itself, when the will would have so well sufficed to explain matters! But he preferred things that way; the certainty that the couple had not killed for money relieved him of a contempt which had occasionally troubled his conscience, even in Séverine's society.

"Esteem you less—why? I don't care for your past. Those affairs don't concern me. You are Roubaud's wife—you may have been the wife of another."

There was silence. Then Jacques said:

"And the old man?"

In a whisper, all her being trembling, she confessed.

"Yes, we killed him!"
For an instant she remained stifled by a relaxed sensation of vertigo. Then she resumed, in the same undertone:

"He made me write to the President to set out by the express, at the same time with us, and not to show himself until he got to Rouen. I trembled in my corner, bewildered at the thought of the misfortune to which we were going. And there was, opposite to me, a woman in black who said nothing and who filled me with fear. I did not even see her, I imagined that she was reading clearly in our brains, that she knew perfectly well what we wished to do. It was thus that the two hours were passed, from Paris to Rouen. I did not say a word, I did not stir, to make it believed that I was asleep. At my side I felt my husband, motionless also, and what terrified me was the knowledge of the fearful things he was rolling in his head, without being able to divine exactly what he had resolved to do. Ah! what a journey, with that whirling flood of thoughts, amid whistle shrieks, jolts and the rumbling of wheels!"

Jacques kissed the thick, odorous fleece of her hair; then, he asked:

"But since you were not in the same compartment, how did you manage to kill him?"

"Wait, you will learn. It was my husband's plan. It is true that if it succeeded it was only by chance. At Rouen there was a stop of ten minutes. We got out, he forced me to walk to the President's coupé; we had the air of people who were stretching their legs. And there he affected surprise on seeing him at the door, as if he had not known he was in the train. Upon the quay there was a crush, a flood of people took the second-class cars by assault, because of a widely known fête which was to take place at Havre on the morrow. When they began to close the doors again, it was the President himself who asked us to get in with him. I stammered, I spoke of our valise; but he protested, he said that it
certainly would not be stolen from us, that we could return to our compartment at Barentin, since he would get out there. For an instant my husband, uneasy, seemed to wish to go get it. At that minute the conductor blew his whistle, and he made up his mind, pushed me into the coupé, got in himself, closing the door and window. How did it happen that we were not seen? That is what I cannot explain to myself yet. Many people were running, the employés had lost their heads; in short, not a witness was found who saw clearly. And the train slowly quitted the dépôt yard.”

Séverine was silent for several seconds, reliving the scene.

“Ah! the first moment in that coupé, when I felt the ground fleeing beneath us! I was stunned, I thought at first only of our valise: how were we to get it again? —and would it not betray us if we left it where it was? All this appeared to me stupid, impossible—a nightmare murder imagined by a child, which one must be crazy to put into execution. In two days we would be arrested, convicted. Hence I strove to reassure myself by saying internally that my husband would recoil, that this would not, could not be. But no, simply by seeing him talk with the President I comprehended that his resolution remained unalterable and ferocious. Nevertheless, he was very calm, he even spoke gayly, with his habitual air; and it must have been in his clear glance alone, fixed upon me at certain moments, that I read the obstinacy of his will. He would kill him a kilometre further on, two perhaps, at the exact point he had settled upon and of which I was ignorant: that was sure, that shone even in the tranquil looks with which he enveloped the other, the one who presently would be no more. I said nothing; I had a great internal trembling which I strove to hide by putting on a smile whenever I was looked at. Why did I not then think of stopping all that? It was only later, when I wished to comprehend, that I was astonished at not having shouted at the
door or pulled the alarm bell. At that moment I was as if paralyzed, I felt myself absolutely powerless. Without doubt, my husband seemed to me to have a right to do what he proposed; since I am telling you everything, I must confess that also: in spite of myself, in all my being, I was with him against the other on account of the past, you know, and because he was young while the other was old. But does one know? One does things which one never would believe one could do. And I would never have dared to kill a chicken! Ah! that sensation of a night of storm, ah! that dreadful darkness which was howling within me!"

And that frail, slender creature—Jacques found her now impenetrable, without limit, of that dark profundity of which she had spoken. He had grown excited at this tale of murder, whispered in the night.

"Tell me, did you aid him in killing the old man?"

"I was in a corner," continued she, without answering. "My husband separated me from the President, who was in the other corner. They were talking of the coming elections. At times I saw my husband lean forward, cast a glance without to assure himself where we were, as if seized upon by impatience. Each time I followed his glance, I also took account of the road run over. The night was pale, the black masses of the trees rushed by furiously. And always that rumbling of wheels, the like of which I had never heard before, a frightful tumult of enraged and groaning voices, lugubrious lamentations of animals howling at death! The train was going at the top of its speed. Suddenly there was light, the rebounding echo of the train entering the buildings of a dépôt. We were at Maromme, already two leagues and a half from Rouen. Malaunay was to come and then Barentin. Where was the thing going to be done? Would he wait until the last minute? I no longer had conception of either time or distance; I had abandoned myself like a falling stone to that deadening
drop across the darkness, when, on traversing Malaunay, all at once I understood: the thing would be done in the tunnel, a kilomètre from there. I turned toward my husband, our eyes met: yes, in the tunnel, two minutes from then. The train ran on, the Dieppe junction was passed, I saw the switch-tender at his post. Some hills are there on which I thought I distinctly saw men, with lifted arms, who loaded us with insults. Then, the engine gave a long whistle: it was the entrance of the tunnel. And, when the train plunged into it, oh! what a din beneath that low vault!—you know those sounds of rattling iron like the ringing of a hammer upon the anvil—as for me, in that second of terror, I transformed them into rolls of thunder.”

She shivered, she interrupted herself to say, in a changed, almost laughing voice:

“It’s stupid, isn’t it, for me to feel cold? Nevertheless, I am very warm and so well satisfied! And, besides, you know, there is no longer anything at all to fear: the case is settled, without counting that the high and mighty men of the government have still less desire than we to have matters explained. Oh! I have understood, I rest easy.’’

Then, she added, laughing altogether:

“Say now, you can pride yourself on having given us a pretty fear! And, come, tell me—it’s always puzzled me—what exactly did you see?”

“What I told the Judge, nothing more: a man who was slaughtering another. You were so queer with me that I finished by doubting. For an instant I had even recognized your husband. It was only later, however, that I became absolutely certain—”

She interrupted him, gayly.

“Yes, in the square, the day I told you no, you remember?—the first time we were alone together in Paris. How singular it was! I told you that we did not do it and I knew perfectly well that you understood
the contrary. Was it not as if I had related all to you? Oh! I have thought of it often."

And she resumed:

"The train was running through the tunnel. It is very long, a three minutes' passage. I thought we were in it an hour. The President had ceased talking because of the deafening din. And my husband, at that last moment, must have weakened, for he did not stir. I saw only, beneath the dancing light of the lamp, that his ears had grown violet. Would he wait until he was again in the open country? The thing became for me thenceforward so fated, so inevitable, that I had but one desire: no longer to suffer to that point from waiting, to be disembarrassed. Why did he not kill him, since it was necessary to do so? I would have taken the knife to make an end of it, so much was I exasperated by fear and suffering. He looked at me. I had, without doubt, that on my face. And, suddenly, he threw himself upon the President, who had turned toward the door, seizing him by the shoulders. The latter, frightened, freed himself with an instinctive push, extending his arm toward the alarm button just over his head. He touched it, was seized again by the other and thrown down on the seat with such a push that he lay there as if bent double. His mouth, open with stupor and terror, uttered confused cries, stifled amid the noise; while I distinctly heard my husband repeat the word: 'Pig! pig! pig!' in a hissing, angry voice. But the din fell, the train emerged from the tunnel, the pale country reappeared, with the fleeing black trees. I had remained in my corner, stiffened, glued against the covering of the back of the seat, as far away as possible. How long did the struggle last? Scarcely a few seconds. And it seemed to me that it would never end, that all the passengers now were listening to the cries, that the trees saw us. My husband, who held his knife open, could not strike, repulsed by kicks, stumbling over the moving floor of
the carriage. He nearly fell upon his knees, and the train sped on, bore us away with all its speed, while the engine whistled at the approach of the passage at grade of the Croix-de-Maufras. It was then that, how I was not afterwards able to remember, I cast myself on the legs of the struggling man. Yes, I let myself fall like a bundle, crushing his legs with all my weight that he might no longer move them. And I saw everything: the thud of the knife in the throat, the long tossing of the body, the death which came in three hiccoughs, with a sound like the running down of a broken clock. Oh! that quiver of agony, the echo of which I still have in my limbs!"

Jacques, greedy, wished to interrupt her to question her. But now she was in haste to finish.

"No, wait. As I arose, we were rapidly passing the Croix-de-Maufras. I distinctly perceived the closed front of the house, then the post of the garde-barrière. Still four kilomètres to go, five minutes at most before reaching Barentin. The body was doubled up upon the seat, the blood had flowed in a thick pool. And my husband, standing, stupefied, swayed by the jolts of the train, was looking at it as he wiped the knife with his handkerchief. This lasted a minute, without either of us doing anything for our safety. If we kept that body with us, if we remained there, all would, perhaps, be discovered during the stop at Barentin. But he had put back the knife into his pocket, he seemed to awake. I saw him search the corpse, take the watch, the money, all he found; and, having opened the door, he strove to push it out upon the road, without taking it in his arms for fear of blood. 'Help me, push with me!' I did not even try, I had no feeling in my limbs. "Nom de Dieu! will you push with me!" The head, which had gone out the first, hung down on the step, while the trunk, rolled in a ball, refused to pass. And the train sped on. Finally, beneath a stronger push, the corpse swayed, dis-
appeared amid the rumbling of the wheels. ‘Ah! the pig! so it’s over!’ Then, he picked up the traveling wrap, threw that out also. We two were alone, standing, with the pool of blood on the seat, upon which we dare not sit down. The door was still flapping, wide-open, and I did not understand at first when I saw my husband get out, disappear in his turn. He came back. ‘Come, quick, follow me, if you don’t want them to cut our heads off!’ I did not stir, he grew impatient. ‘Come now, nom de Dieu! Our compartment is empty, we will return to it!’ Our compartment empty! Had he gone there to see? The woman in black, she who did not speak, who was not seen, was it quite certain that she had not remained in a corner? ‘Will you come, or must I throw you out on the road like the other?’ He had got in again, was pushing me brutally, madly. And I found myself outside, on the step, clinging with both my hands to the brass rod. He, who had got out behind me, had carefully closed the door. ‘Go on now, go on!’ But I dare not, overcome by the giddiness of the journey, swept by the wind which was blowing a gale. My hair came down, I believed that my stiff fingers would let go of the rod. ‘Go on, nom de Dieu!’ He was still pushing me, I was forced to walk, letting go one hand after the other, gluing myself against the carriages, amid the whirl of my skirts, the flapping of which embarrassed my limbs. Already, in the distance, after a curve, we could see the lights of the Barentin station. The engine began to whistle. ‘Go on, nom de Dieu!’ Oh! that noise of hell, that violent trepidation in which I walked! It seemed to me that a hurricane had seized me, was rolling me like a straw to crush me against a wall. Behind me the country was flying, the trees followed me in a mad gallop, turning upon themselves, twisted, each uttering a brief complaint as it passed by. At the extremity of the wagon, when it was necessary for me to stride in order
to reach the step of the wagon succeeding and seize the other rod, I halted, shorn of courage. Never would I have the strength. 'Go on, nom de Dieu!' He was upon me, he was pushing me, and I shut my eyes, and I know not how I continued to advance, by the sole force of instinct, like an animal that has planted its claws and does not wish to fall. How also was it that we were not seen? We had passed before three carriages, one of which—a second-class—was absolutely crowded to overflowing. I remember faces ranged in a file, beneath the brightness of the lamp; I believe that I could recognize them if I met them: that of a big man with red side-whiskers, those especially of two young girls, who were bent forward, laughing. 'Go on, nom de Dieu! Go on, nom de Dieu!' And I know nothing more; the lights of Barentin drew nearer, the engine whistled; my last sensation was of being dragged, carried, pulled along by the hair. My husband must have grabbed me, opened the door and thrown me into the middle of the compartment. Breathless, I lay half-sainting in a corner when we stopped; and, without making a movement, I heard my husband exchange a few words with the head station master of Barentin. Then, when the train was off again, he sank upon the seat, worn out himself. Until Havre was reached we did not reopen our mouths. Oh! I hate him, I hate him for all those abominations he made me suffer!"

Séverine stopped and Jacques began to question her. "You flattened yourself out on his legs and you felt him die?"

In him the unknown had reawakened, a flood of ferocity invaded his head with a red vision. Curiosity as to the murder had again seized upon him. "And the knife—you felt the knife enter?"

"Yes, a hollow thud."

"Ah! a hollow thud. Not a tearing—are you sure of that?"
"Yes, yes, nothing but a thud."
"And afterwards he had a toss, eh?"
"Yes, three tosses, oh! from one end to the other of his long body, so that I followed them even to his feet."
"Tosses which stiffened him?"
"Yes; the first very strong, the two others weaker."
"And he died. What were your sensations on feeling him die thus, from a knife blow?"
"Oh! I don't know."
"You don't know! Why do you lie? Tell me, tell me, very frankly, what you experienced. Pain?"
"No, no, not pain!"
"Pleasure?"
"Pleasure! Ah! no, not pleasure!"
"What then? I pray you, tell me all! If you only knew.—Tell me what were your sensations."
"Mon Dieu! can one tell? It is frightful, it carries you away, oh! so far, so far! I lived more in that minute than in all my past life!"

On the ceiling the bloody reflection had vanished; and, the fire out, the chamber had commenced to grow icy in the great cold from outside. Not a voice mounted from Paris, covered with snow. For an instant snores came from the apartment of the woman who sold newspapers, adjoining. Then, everything was swallowed up in the black gulf of the sleeping house.

Jacques, who had kept his arm about Séverine, felt her yield all at once to an invincible slumber as if utterly prostrated. The journey, the prolonged wait at the Misards' and that night of excitement had overwhelmed her. She stammered an infantile bonsoir; she was already asleep, breathing regularly. The cuckoo clock struck three.

And, for nearly an hour longer, Jacques kept her upon his left arm, which gradually grew benumbed. Whenever he closed his eyes, an invisible hand seemed persistently to reopen them in the darkness. Now he could no
longer distinguish anything in the chamber, drowned in night, in which everything had foundered—the stove, the furniture, the walls; and he had to turn in order to find the two pale squares of the windows, motionless, of the unsubstantialness of a dream. Despite his crushing fatigue, a prodigious cerebral activity kept him vibrating, dividing without cessation the same skein of ideas. Each time that, by an effort of will, he believed himself gliding into sleep, the same haunting recommenced, the same pictures filed away, arousing the same sensations. And what unrolled itself thus, with mechanical regularity, while his fixed and wide-open eyes filled with darkness, was the murder, detail by detail. Constantly it was born again, identical, invading, maddening. The knife entered the throat with a dull thud, the body had three long tosses, the life went out in a flood of warm blood, a red flood which he imagined he felt flow over his hands. Twenty times, thirty times, the knife entered, the body tossed. This became terrible, stifled him, overflowed, broke up the night. Oh! to give such a knife stroke, satisfy that distant desire, know what one experiences, taste that minute in which one lives more than in a whole existence!

As his stifling augmented, Jacques thought that the weight of Séverine on his arm alone prevented him from sleeping. Gently taking her up, he carried her to the bed, upon which he placed her without awakening her. At first, relieved, he breathed easier, believing that sleep would come at last. But, in spite of his efforts, the invisible fingers reopened his eyelids; and, in the darkness, the murder reappeared in bloody strokes—the knife entered, the body tossed. A red rain striped the obscurity, the wound in the throat, of enormous size, gaped like a cut made by a hatchet. Then, he struggled no longer, but leaned back in his chair, a prey to that persistent vision. He heard within himself the labor of his brain, increased tenfold, a muttering of all his organ-
ization. This came from very far, from his youth. Nevertheless, he had believed himself cured, for this desire had been dead for months, with the possession of that woman; and behold never before had he felt it so intense, beneath the evocation of that murder, which awhile ago, leaning against him, she had whispered in his ear. He had put her aside, had avoided her touch, burned by the slightest contact with her. An insupportable heat mounted along his spine, as if the chair in which he was seated had changed into a brazier. Prickling sensations, points of fire shot through his breast. He grew afraid of his hands, clasped them at first upon his stomach and then placed them beneath him to crush them down, to imprison them, as if he dreaded some abomination on their part, an act he did not wish to do and which they would commit in spite of him.

Each time the cuckoo clock struck, Jacques counted the strokes. Four o'clock, five o'clock, six o'clock. He longed for day, he hoped that the dawn would drive away this nightmare. Hence, now, he turned toward the windows, watching the panes. But nothing was there save the vague reflection from the snow. At a quarter to five, only forty minutes behind time, he had heard the direct train from Havre arrive, which proved that the circulation had been re-established. And it was not until after seven that he saw the window panes whiten—a milky pallor, very slow in coming. At last, the chamber brightened with that confused light in which the furniture seemed to float. The stove reappeared, the wardrobe, the buffet. He still could not close his eyelids, his eyes, on the contrary, were irritated by a need of seeing. The first thing, before the light had fully declared itself, he had rather divined than perceived upon the table the knife he had used the previous evening to cut the cake. He no longer saw anything but that knife, a small knife with a pointed end. The growing day, all the white light from the two windows now
entered only to be reflected from that slender blade. And his terror of his hands made him plunge them further beneath his body, for he felt that they were agitated, rebellious, stronger than his will. Were they going to cease belonging to him?—hands which had come to him from another, hands bequeathed to him by some ancestor at the period when man, in the forest, strangled the beasts!

In order to see the knife no longer, Jacques turned toward Séverine. She was sleeping very calmly, breathing like an infant, in her great fatigue. Her heavy black locks, which were loosened, made her a sombre pillow; and, beneath her chin, between the curls, appeared her throat, of the delicacy of milk, scarcely touched with pink. He stared at her as if he did not know her; though he adored her and bore her image everywhere. But the sight of that white throat seized upon him wholly, with a sudden, inexorable fascination; and, within him, with a horror of which he was still conscious, he felt the imperious need growing of getting the knife on the table and plunging it up to the handle in that woman's flesh. He heard the dull thud of the blade as it entered; he saw the body toss three times, then death stiffen it beneath a red flood. Struggling, wishing to tear himself from this haunting, he lost each second a little of his will, as if submerged by the fixed idea, at that extreme border where, vanquished, one yields to the push of instinct. Everything became confused; his rebellious hands, triumphing over his effort to hide them, freed themselves, escaped. And he understood so well that, for the future, he was no longer their master and that they would brutally satisfy themselves if he continued to stare at Séverine, that, with all his remaining strength, he threw himself off his chair, rolling on the floor like a drunken man. When he got up he staggered, his only thought to take the knife and go kill another woman out in the street. This time
his desire tortured him too much, it was imperative that he should kill one. Although it was broad day now, the chamber appeared to him full of ruddy smoke, a dawn of icy mist in which everything was buried. He was quivering with excitement; he had taken the knife, hiding it in his sleeve, certain of killing a woman, the first he met on the sidewalk, when a rustle of garments, a prolonged sigh, which came from the bed, stopped him, nailed beside the table and turning pale.

It was Séverine, who was awakening.

“What! are you going out already?”

He did not answer, he did not look at her, hoping she would fall asleep again.

“Where are you going?”

“Only to attend to an affair of service,” stammered he. “Sleep, I will return.”

Then, she uttered confused words, again seized upon by torpor, her eyes already shut.

“Oh! I’m sleepy, I’m sleepy! Kiss me before you go.”

But he did not stir, for he knew that if he turned, with that knife in his hand, if he saw her again, it would be all over with the will which was stiffening him there, near her. In spite of himself his hand would raise, would plant the knife in her throat.

“Come and kiss me!”

Her voice died away, she fell asleep again very gently, with a caressing murmur. And he, bewildered, opened the door, fled.

It was eight o’clock when Jacques found himself upon the sidewalk of the Rue d’Amsterdam. The snow had not yet been cleared away, one scarcely heard the tread of the rare passers. Immediately he had perceived an old woman; but she was going up toward the Rue de Londres, he did not follow her. Men elbowed him, he went down in the direction of the Place du Havre, holding the knife, the point of which was out of
SÉVERINE SPEAKS.

sight up his sleeve. As a little girl of about fourteen came out of a house opposite, he crossed the street; and he arrived only in time to see her enter a bakery adjoining. His impatience was such that he did not wait, searching further, continuing to go down the street. Since he had quitted the chamber with that knife it had been no longer he who was acting, but the other, the one whom he had so frequently felt agitating himself in the depths of his being, that unknown come from very far, burning with the hereditary thirst for murder. He had killed in the past, he wished to kill again. And the things around Jacques seemed to be only portions of a dream, for he saw them through his fixed idea. His daily life was as if abolished, he walked like a somnambulist, without memory of the past, without looking forward to the future, a prey wholly to his need. From his body which was going along his personality was absent. Two women, who touched him as they passed ahead of him, made him hasten his steps; and he had overtaken them when a man stopped them. All three laughed and chatted. This man having deranged his plans, he followed another woman who passed, puny and dark, with a poor air beneath a thin shawl. She advanced with slow steps toward some task execrated without doubt, hard and meanly paid, for she was not in haste and her face was hopelessly sad. Neither did he hasten now that he had a victim, waiting to choose the spot where he could strike at his ease. Without doubt, she saw that the young fellow was following her and her eyes turned toward him with unspeakable sadness in her astonishment that he should find anything attractive about her. Already she had led him to the middle of the Rue du Havre; she had turned twice again, each time preventing him from planting in her throat the knife which he had drawn from his sleeve. She had poverty-stricken eyes, so imploring! Down there, when she left the sidewalk, he would strike. And, suddenly,
he made a turn, starting off in pursuit of another woman, who was walking in an opposite direction. This without reason, without will, because she had passed at that minute and it was thus.

Jacques, behind her, returned toward the dépôt. This woman, who was very brisk, walked with a little, resounding step; and she was adorably pretty, already fat, blonde, with beautiful eyes of gayety which laughed with enjoyment of life. She did not even remark that a man was following her; she was evidently in a hurry, for she swiftly mounted the steps of the Cour du Havre, climbed to the great hall along which she almost ran to throw herself toward the ticket grating of the line of the Ceinture. And, as she demanded a first-class ticket for Auteuil, Jacques also took one, accompanied her through the waiting-rooms, upon the quay, even to her compartment, in which he installed himself beside her. The train departed immediately. He thought:

"I have the time, I will kill her in a tunnel."

But, opposite them, an old lady, the only other person who had got in, had recognized the young woman.

"What! it's you! Where are you going at such an early hour?"

The other burst into a hearty laugh, with a gesture of comical despair.

"To think that one can do nothing without being seen! I hope you won't betray me. To-morrow is my husband's birthday, and, as soon as he went out to his business, I started off; I am going to Auteuil to visit a horticulturist's where there is an orchid which he madly desires to possess. A surprise, you understand."

The old lady nodded her head, with an air of softened benevolence.

"And is baby well?"

"The little one! Oh! a real charm! You know I weaned her a week ago. You ought to see her eat her soup. We are all too well—it's scandalous!"
SÉVERINE SPEAKS.

She laughed louder, showing her white teeth between the pure blood of her lips. And Jacques, who had placed himself on her right, the knife in his hand, hidden behind his thigh, thought that he would be in a very good position to strike. He had only to raise his arm and make a half-turn to have her at his hand. But, in the tunnel of the Batignolles, the idea of her hat strings stopped him.

"There is a knot there that will embarrass me," thought he. "I want to be sure."

The two women continued to chat gayly.

"So I see that you're happy."

"Happy! Ah! if I only could tell you! I'm in a dream. Two years ago I was nothing at all. You remember that it wasn't very amusing at my aunt's; and not a sou of dowry! When he came I trembled, so deeply did I fall in love with him. But he was so handsome, so rich. And he is mine, he is my husband and we have baby! I tell you that it's too much!"

On studying the knot of the hat strings, Jacques had discovered that there was below it, attached to a bit of black velvet, a big gold medallion; and he calculated everything.

"I will grab her neck with my left hand and thrust aside the medallion as I throw back her head, in order to have her throat bare."

The train stopped and was off again every minute. Short tunnels succeeded each other, at Courcelles, at Neuilly. Presently, a second would suffice.

"Did you go to the seaside this summer?" resumed the old lady.

"Yes, in Bretagne, six weeks, in the depths of a sequestered nook, a paradise. Then, we spent September in Poitou, at the house of my father-in-law, who owns large forests there."

"And shall you not install yourselves in the South for the winter?"
"Yes, we shall go to Cannes toward the 15th. The house is rented. A bit of delicious garden, the sea opposite. We have sent a person down there who is getting everything ready to receive us. It's not because we're either of us chilly, but the sunshine's so nice! Then, we shall return in March. The next year we will remain in Paris. In two years, when baby has grown to be a big girl, we shall travel. But I don't know all we're going to do! It's a continual fête!"

She was overflowing with such felicity that, yielding to her need of expansion, she turned toward Jacques, toward that unknown, to smile upon him. In this movement the knot of the hat strings was displaced, the medallion cast aside and the throat appeared, pink and white, with a slight dimple which the shadow gilded.

Jacques' fingers had tightened upon the handle of the knife, while he took an irrevocable resolution.

"It's there, in that place, that I will strike. Yes, presently, in the tunnel before reaching Passy."

But at the Trocadéro station an employé got in, who, being acquainted with him, began to talk to him of the service, of a theft of charcoal of which an engineer and his fireman had just been convicted. And, from that moment, everything became confused, he could never later exactly re-establish the facts. The laughter had continued, a radiance of such happiness that he seemed to be penetrated and made drowsy by it. Perhaps he went as far as Auteuil with the two women: only he did not remember that they got out there. He had finished by finding himself on the bank of the Seine, without knowing how he got there. But of what he kept the sensation very clearly was having thrown, from the top of the strand, the knife which had remained in his hand, the blade up his sleeve. Then he knew nothing further, stupefied, absent from his being, from which the other had gone also with the knife. He must have walked for
hours through the streets and squares at the hazard of his body. People and houses remained very indistinctly in his mind. Without doubt he had entered somewhere, to eat in the depths of a crowded hall, for he again plainly saw white plates. He had also the persistent impression of a red poster upon a closed shop. And after this all sank into a black gulf, into a void where there was neither time nor space, where he had lain inert for centuries perhaps.

When he returned to himself, Jacques was in his little chamber of the Rue Cardinet, fallen across his bed, with all his clothes on. Instinct had brought him back there like a worn out dog which drags itself to its kennel. But he did not remember either having climbed the stairway or having gone to sleep. He awoke from a slumber of lead, frightened at suddenly resuming possession of himself, as after a profound fainting fit. Perhaps he had slept three hours, perhaps three days. And, all at once, memory returned to him: the night spent in the chamber with Séverine, the confession of the murder, his departure like a carnivorous animal in quest of blood. He had no longer been in himself; he found himself again there with the stupor of the things which had been done outside of his will. Then, the recollection that the young woman was waiting for him put him on his feet with a bound. He looked at his watch, saw that it was already four o'clock; and, his head empty, very calm as after a strong bleeding, he hastened to return to the Impasse d'Amsterdam.

Until noon, Séverine had slept profoundly. Afterwards, awakened, surprised at not seeing Jacques still there, she had rekindled the fire in the stove; and, clad at last, dying of inanition, she had decided, toward two o'clock, to go eat something in a neighboring restaurant. When Jacques appeared, she had just come up-stairs again, after having done several errands.

"Oh! how uneasy I have been!"
And she clung about his neck, she looked him straight in the eyes.

"What has happened?"

He, exhausted, his flesh cold, reassured her tranquilly, without the slightest evidence of trouble.

"Why, nothing, a miserable task. When they get hold of you, they won't let you go."

Then, lowering her voice, she said, humbly, cajolingly:

"Think what I imagined! Oh! a wretched idea which gave me pain! Yes, I said to myself that, perhaps, after what I had confessed to you, you wanted nothing more to do with me. And I believed that you had gone away to return again never, never!"

Her tears began to flow, she burst into sobs.

"Ah! if you knew how much I need people to be kind to me! Only kindness can make me forget. Now that I have told you all my misfortunes, don't abandon me. Oh! I conjure you, don't abandon me!"

Jacques was greatly touched. He murmured:

"No, no, do not fear that."

And, overcome, he also wept, beneath the fatality of that abominable evil which had just resumed possession of him, of which he never would be cured. It was a shame, a despair without bounds.

"Be kind to me, too, oh! as kind as you can, for I have as much need of kindness as you!"

She quivered, wished to know what he meant.

"You have troubles; tell me what they are."

"No, no, not troubles, things which do not exist, sorrows which make me horribly unhappy, without it being even possible to talk of them."

They clung to each other, confounded the frightful melancholy of their pain. It was an infinite suffering, without possible forgetfulness, without pardon. They wept and they felt upon them the blind forces of life, made up of struggle and death.
“Come,” said Jacques, freeing himself the first, “it is
time to think of our departure. This evening you will be
in Havre.”
Séverine, sombre, her glances lost in space, murmured,
after a silence:
“If I were but free, if my husband were no longer
here! Ah! then how happy we would be together, how
quickly we would forget!”
He made a violent gesture, he thought aloud.
“Nevertheless, we cannot kill him!”
She stared at him fixedly and he gave a start, aston-
ished at having said that thing, of which he had never
thought. Since he wished to kill, why did he not kill
that embarrassing man? And, as he was quitting her at
last to hasten to the dépôt, she ran to him and kissed
him.
“Oh! be kind to me and I will be kinder to you, oh!
very much kinder! Farewell; we shall be happy yet!”
CHAPTER IX.

ROUBAUD'S DANGER.

At Havre, thenceforward Jacques and Séverine displayed great prudence, seized upon by uneasiness. Since Roubaud knew all, would he not watch them, surprise them, in order to take vengeance upon them in a flash? They recalled his jealous rage of the past, his brutalities of a former railway porter, striking with clenched fists. And, indeed, it seemed to them, on seeing him so dull, so mute, with his troubled eyes, that he must be meditating some ferocious trick, an ambushade, by which he would get them in his power. Hence, during the first month, they saw each other only with a thousand precautions, always on the alert.

Roubaud, meanwhile, had absented himself more and more. Perhaps he disappeared thus only to return unexpectedly and surprise them. But this fear was not realized. On the contrary, his absences were prolonged to such a point that he was never there, escaping as soon as he was free, returning only at the precise minute when the service claimed him. The weeks when he was on duty he found the means, at ten o'clock, of breakfasting in five minutes, then of not reappearing before half-past eleven o'clock; and, in the evening, at five o'clock, when his colleague came down to replace him, he went off frequently for the entire night. Scarcely did he take a few hours' sleep. It was the same thing the weeks of night duty; free then from five o'clock in the morning, eating and sleeping without, doubtless, at all events not returning until five o'clock in the evening. For a long while, in this disorder, he had preserved the
punctuality of a model employé, always present at the exact minute, so fatigued sometimes that he could hardly keep upon his legs, but doing so, however, conscientiously attending to his business. But now lapses had come. Twice already the other under station master, Moulin, had been forced to wait an hour for him. One morning even, after breakfast, learning that he had not reappeared, he had supplied his place, like a good fellow, in order to save him a reprimand. And all Roubaud's service had commenced thus to experience this slow disorganization. In the daytime he was no longer the active man, dispatching or receiving a train only after having personally seen to everything, noting the slightest facts in his report to the chief station master, hard to others and to himself. At night, he slept a sleep of lead in the big fauteuil in his office. Awakened, he seemed still drowsy, came and went upon the quay with his hands crossed behind his back, gave in a faint voice orders, the execution of which he did not verify. Everything went on notwithstanding through the acquired force of habit, except a collision due to a bit of negligence on his part, a passenger train sent upon a freight siding. His colleagues were merely amused, saying that he went on sprees.

The truth was that Roubaud at present lived on the second floor of the Café du Commerce, in the little out-of-the-way room, which had gradually become a gambling hell. It was related that women went there every night; but really only one could have been found there, the wife of a retired captain, herself an immoderate gambler. The under station master satisfied only the sad passion for gaming, awakened in him on the morrow of the murder by the hazard of a game of piquet, afterwards strengthened and changed into an imperious custom for the absolute distraction, the annihilation it procured for him. It had taken possession of him to the exclusion of all other desires, it held him now in his
entirety as the sole satisfaction with which he was contented. It was not that remorse had ever tormented him with the need of oblivion; but, in the shock by which his family relations had been wrecked, amid his ruined life, he had found the consolation, the benumbing of selfish happiness which he could taste alone; and everything had now sunk in the depths of that passion which was completing his disorganization. Liquor would not have given him lighter hours, hours passing more rapidly and free to such a point. He was released even from the care of life, it seemed to him that he was living with an extraordinary intensity, disinterestedly, without being further touched by those annoyances which in the past had made him almost burst with rage. And his health was very good, setting aside the fatigue of the nights thus spent; he was even getting fat—a heavy and yellow fat—his eyelids drooping over his weary eyes.

When he returned to his apartments, with the slowness of his sleepy movements, he felt only a supreme indifference for everything.

The night Roubaud had come home to get the 300 francs in gold from under the floor, he wished to pay M. Gauche, the commissary of surveillance, the aggregate of several successive losses. The latter, an old player, had plenty of sang-froid, which rendered him formidable. But he said he played only for pleasure, which did not prevent him from frequently shuffling the cards for the entire evening and gathering in all the money of the others. Rumors had circulated, he also was accused of being so inexact at his post that there was question of forcing him to resign. But the matter dragged; why exact more zeal when there was so little to be done? And he still contented himself with appearing for an instant on the quays of the dépôt, where everybody bowed to him.

Three weeks later Roubaud again owed nearly 400 francs to M. Gauche. He had explained that the inheri-
tance received by his wife had put them greatly at their ease; but he had added with a laugh that the latter kept the keys of the safe, which excused his slowness in paying his gambling debts. Then, one morning when he was alone, annoyed, he again raised the plank and took from the hiding-place a thousand-franc note. He trembled in every limb, he had not experienced such an emotion the night he took the gold pieces; without doubt, he had considered them but odd money, while the theft commenced with this note. An uneasiness pricked his flesh when he thought of those accursed funds which he had promised himself never to touch. In the past he had sworn rather to die of hunger and, nevertheless, he was taking them, and he could not have told how his scruples had vanished—a little each day, doubtless, in the slow fermentation of the murder. In the depths of the hole he had believed that he felt a dampness, something soft and nauseous of which he had a horror. Hurriedly he replaced the plank, renewing the oath to cut off his hand rather than take it up again. His wife had not seen him, he breathed, relieved, and drank a big glass of water to recover himself. Now, his heart beat with joy at the idea of his debt paid and of all that sum with which he would play.

But, when it was necessary to get the note changed, Roubaud's anguish recommenced. Formerly he was brave, he would have surrendered himself had he not committed the stupidity of mixing his wife up in the business; while at present the mere thought of the gendarmes gave him a cold sweat. It was in vain he knew that justice did not possess the numbers of the vanished notes and that, besides, the case was slumbering, forever buried in the pasteboard boxes of classification: a fear seized upon him as soon as he projected entering anywhere to demand change. For five days he kept the bill about him; and it was a continual habit, a need of feeling it, of displacing it, of not separating himself
from it at night. He constructed very complicated plans, always running against unforeseen fears. At first he had searched in the dépôt: why should a colleague, charged with receipts, not take it from him? Then, that having appeared to him extremely dangerous, he had thought of going to the other end of Havre, without his uniform cap, there to buy no matter what. But would not the dealer be astonished to see him present so large a sum when the object purchased was trifling? And he had decided to offer the note at the tobacco store of the Cours Napoléon, which he entered daily: was not that the easiest course? It was known that he had come into an inheritance, the cash-taker could not be surprised. He walked to the door, felt himself weaken and went down toward the Vauban basin to excite his courage. After a half hour's promenade, he returned without having yet decided. And, that very evening, at the Café du Commerce, as M. Cauche was there, a sudden fit of bravado made him draw the note from his pocket and ask the proprietress to change it for him; but she had not the money, she was compelled to send the waiter with it to the tobacco store. They even joked about the note, which seemed entirely new, although it was dated ten years back. The commissary of surveillance had taken it and turned it over, saying that for sure it had slept in the depths of some hiding-place.

Weeks elapsed, and the money Roubaud had in his hands finished exciting his passion. It was not that he played a heavy game, but ill-luck pursued him, so constant, so fierce, that the small losses of each day, added up, reached a large sum. Toward the close of the month he again found himself without a sou, already owing several louis on his word, sick from no longer daring to touch a card. However, he struggled, nearly taking to his bed. The idea of the nine notes which were slumbering there, beneath the floor of the salle-à-manger, was a con-
tinual nightmare to him: he saw them through the wood, he felt them warm his soles. To think that if he had so wished he could have taken another! But he had sworn firmly this time, he would rather have put his hand in the fire than search the hiding-place anew. And, one evening when Séverine had gone to sleep early, he raised the plank, yielding with rage, dismayed by such sorrow that his eyes filled with tears. What was the good of resisting thus? It would be only useless suffering, for he comprehended that he would now take the notes, one by one, to the last.

The next morning Séverine noticed by chance a fresh scratch on one of the sides of the plank. She stooped and found traces of a removal. Evidently her husband was continuing to take the money. And she was astonished at the fit of anger which came upon her, for usually she was not mercenary; without counting that she also believed herself resolved to die of hunger rather than touch those blood-stained notes. But were they not as much hers as his? Why did he dispose of them covertly, without even consulting her? Until dinner she was tormented by the need of a certainty, and she would, in her turn, have displaced the plank to see if she had not felt a little chill in her hair at the thought of searching there all alone. Would not the dead arise from that hole? This infantile fear made the salle-à-manger so disagreeable to her that she took her work and shut herself up in her chamber.

Then, in the evening, as they were eating together in silence the remains of a ragoût, a new irritation seized upon her on seeing Roubaud cast involuntary glances at the corner of the floor.

“You have again taken some of it, eh?” demanded she, suddenly.

He raised his head, astonished.

“Some of what?”

“Oh! don’t act the innocent, you understand me well
enough. But listen: I don't want you to take any of it again, because it is no more yours than mine and because it makes me sick to know that you are touching it."

Habitually he avoided quarrels. The life in common was no longer anything but the forced contact of two beings bound one to the other, passing whole days without exchanging a word, going and coming side by side as strangers for the future, indifferent and solitary. Hence he contented himself with shrugging his shoulders, refusing all explanation.

But she was greatly excited, she intended to finish with the question of that money hidden there, from which she had suffered since the period of the crime.

"I want you to answer me. Dare you tell me that you haven't touched it?"

"What difference does that make to you?"

"It makes so much difference that it gives me a turn. To-day again I was afraid, I could not stay here. Every time you meddle with it I have frightful dreams for three nights. We never speak of it. So, behave yourself and don't force me to mention it."

He looked at her with his big fixed eyes, he repeated, heavily:

"What difference does it make to you if I touch it, if I don't compel you to do so? It's my business, it concerns me."

She made a violent gesture, which she suppressed. Then, upset, with a visage expressive of suffering and disgust, she said:

"Ah! I don't understand you. You were an honest man, however. Yes, you would never have taken a sou from any one. And what you have done, that may be pardoned, for you were mad, as you had made me mad myself. But that money, ah! that abominable money, which should have ceased to exist for you and which you are stealing sou by sou for your pleasure! What has happened, how can you descend so low?"
He listened to her and, in a minute of lucidity, he also was astonished at having arrived at theft. The phases of the slow demoralization were effaced, he could not rebind what the murder had cut around him, neither could he explain how another existence, almost a new being, had commenced with his household destroyed, his wife estranged and hostile. But instantly the irreparable resumed possession of him, he made a gesture as if to disem-barrass himself of importunate reflections.

"When it's stupid at home," growled he, "one seeks amusement elsewhere. Since you don't love me any longer —"

"Oh! no, I don't love you any longer!"

He stared at her, struck the table with his fist, his face invaded by a flow of blood.

"Then, let me be! Do I prevent you from amusing yourself? Do I judge you? There are many things which an honest man would do in my place and which I do not do. First, I should have kicked you out-of-doors. After that I would not have stolen, perhaps."

She had grown ghastly pale, for she also had often thought that, when a man, a jealous man, is ravaged by an internal evil to the extent of tolerating another affection on the part of his wife, it is an indication of a spreading moral gangrene, killing the other scruples, disorganizing the entire conscience. But she struggled with herself, she refused to be responsible. And she cried out:

"I forbid you to touch the money!"

He had finished eating. Tranquilly he folded his napkin, then he arose, saying with a bantering air:

"We will divide, if that's what you want!"

Already he was stooping as if to raise the plank. She sprang forward, placed her foot upon it.

"No, no! You know that I'd rather die. Don't open that. No, no!—not before me!"

Séverine that evening had an appointment to meet
Jacques behind the freight dépôt, and when she returned home, the scene with her husband came back to her and she double-locked herself in her chamber. Roubaud was on night duty, she did not even fear that he would come in to go to bed, as that rarely happened. But, with the bed clothes drawn up to her chin and the lamp turned down, she was unable to sleep. Why had she refused to divide? And she did not find so brisk the revolt of her honesty at the idea of profiting by that money. Had she not accepted the legacy of the Croix-de-Maufras property? She might as well take the money also. Then, the chill returned. No, no, never! Ordinary money she would have taken; what she dare not touch, from fear of having her fingers burned by it, was that money stolen from a dead man, the abominable money of murder. She calmed herself anew, she reasoned: it was not to spend it that she would have taken it; on the contrary, she would have hidden it elsewhere, buried it in a spot known to herself alone, where it would have slept eternally; and, at that hour, it would be at least half of the sum saved from the hands of her husband. He would not triumph in keeping all, he would not gamble away what belonged to her. When the cuckoo clock struck three, she mortally regretted having refused the division. A thought came to her, confused, distant yet: to arise and search beneath the floor that nothing might be left for him. But such a chill froze her that she would not think of it. Take all, keep all, and he not daring even to complain! And this project, little by little, imposed itself upon her, while a will, stronger than her resistance, was growing up from the unconscious depths of her being. She would not, and she sprang suddenly from her bed, for she could not do otherwise. She turned up the wick of the lamp, she passed into the salle-à-manger.

From that time Séverine no longer trembled. Her terrors had fled, she proceeded coldly, with the slow and
precise movements of a somnambulist. She got the poker, which served to raise the plank. Then, when the hole was uncovered, as she could not see clearly, she brought the lamp. But a stupor nailed her, leaning, motionless: the hole was empty. Evidently, while she was at her rendezvous, Roubaud had returned, moved, before her, with the same desire: to take all, to keep all; and, at a stroke, he had pocketed the notes, not one remained. She knelt down, she saw in the depths only the watch and chain, the gold of which shone amid the dust of the joists. A cold rage held her there for an instant, stiffened, half-clad, repeating aloud twenty times:

"Thief! thief! thief!"

Then, with a furious movement, she grasped the watch, while a huge black spider, disturbed, fled along the plaster. With her heel she replaced the plank, and she went back to bed, placing the lamp on the night table. When she was warm, she looked at the watch, which she had kept in her closed fist, turned it over, examined it for a long while. Upon the case, the two initials of the President, interlaced, interested her. On the inside she read the number 2516, a mark of fabrication. It was a jewel very dangerous to keep, for justice knew this mark. But, in her anger at having been able to save only that, she was no longer afraid. She even felt that her nightmares were over now that there was no longer a corpse beneath the floor. At last she would walk tranquilly in her apartments, wherever she liked. She slipped the watch under her bolster, put out the lamp and went to sleep.

The next day, Jacques, who had leave of absence, was to wait until Roubaud had installed himself at the Café du Commerce, according to his custom, and then come up to breakfast with her. Sometimes, when they dare, they did this. And, that day, while she was eating, quivering yet, she spoke to him of the money, told him
how she had found the hiding-place empty. Her bitterness against her husband had not abated, the same cry returned incessantly:

"Thief! thief! thief!"

Then, she brought the watch, she insisted upon giving it to Jacques, in spite of the repugnance he displayed.

"Understand now, nobody will look for it in your apartment. If I keep it, he will take it from me again. And, do you see, I'd rather let him tear a strip of my flesh off. No, he has had too much. I didn't want that money. I had a horror of it, never would I have spent a sou of it. But had he the right to profit by it? Oh! I hate him!"

She wept, she insisted with so many supplications that the young man at last put the watch in his vest pocket.

An hour passed and Jacques was sitting beside Séverine, with his arm about her waist. Her head was on his shoulder and her right arm encircled his neck. They were in this position, when Roubaud, who had a key, entered the room. With a quick bound, Séverine was on her feet. But they were caught, it was useless to deny it. The husband had stopped short, unable to close his eyes to the sight, while Jacques remained seated, stupefied. Then, she did not even embarrass herself by any explanation whatever; she advanced and repeated, angrily:

"Thief! thief! thief!"

For a second Roubaud hesitated. Then, with that shrug of the shoulders with which he set aside everything now, he entered the bed-chamber, got a service note-book he had forgotten there. But she pursued him, overwhelmed him.

"You have searched, dare to say that you have not searched! And you have taken all, thief! thief! thief!"

Without a word, he crossed the salle-à-manger. At the door only he turned, enveloped her with his dull look.
“Let me be, won’t you!”

And he went away, the door did not even slam. He did not seem to have seen, he had made no allusion whatever to the presence of Jacques.

After a long silence, Séverine turned toward the engineer.

“Would you believe it!”

The latter, who had not said a word, arose at last. And he gave his opinion.

“The man is done for!”

As to this they both agreed. To their surprise had succeeded a disgust for the complaisant husband. When a man gets there, he is in the mud, he may roll in all the gutters.

From that day Séverine and Jacques had entire liberty. They made use of it without paying further attention to Roubaud. But, at present, when the husband no longer gave them uneasiness, their great annoyance was the espionnage of Madame Lebleu, the neighbor always on the watch. Certainly she suspected something. In vain Jacques deadened the sound of his footsteps, at each of his visits he saw the door opposite noiselessly come ajar, while, through the opening, an eye stared at him. This had become intolerable, he no longer dared to come up-stairs; for, if he risked himself, she was known to be there, an ear glued itself to the keyhole, so that it was impossible even for them to talk freely. And it was then that Séverine, exasperated at this new obstacle, resumed against the Lebleus her old campaign to get their lodgings. It was notorious that the under station master had always occupied them. But the superb view, the windows looking out upon the courtyard of departure and upon the heights of Ingouville, no longer tempted her. The sole reason of her desire, which she kept to herself, was that the lodgings had a second entrance, a door opening upon a private stairway. Jacques could come up and go down by this stair-
way without Madame Lebleu even suspecting his visits. In short, they would be free.

The battle was terrible. This question, which had already excited all the corridor, was envenomed from hour to hour. Madame Lebleu, threatened, defended herself desperately. But she was compelled to admit that she had received the lodgings from a former under station master, Roubaud's predecessor, who, being a bachelor, had yielded them to her through gallantry; there even existed somewhere a letter written by her husband, pledging himself to give them up should a new under station master claim them. As this letter had not yet been found, she denied its existence. In proportion as her cause grew desperate, she became more violent, more aggressive. But Madame Lebleu's great error, that which was to bring on her defeat, was still to irritate Mlle. Guichon, the cash-taker, by her persistent espionnage. Hence Mlle. Guichon, furious at being unable either to come in or go out without being watched, was now urging that she should be relegated to the apartments at the back: a suite of rooms would then separate them, she would, at least, no longer have her opposite to her, would no longer be compelled to pass her door. It had become evident that M. Dabadie, the chief station master, was taking part against the Lebleus more every day, which was a grave sign.

Quarrels further complicated the situation. Philomène, who now brought her fresh eggs to Séverine, showed herself very insolent every time she met Madame Lebleu. This intimacy between Séverine and Philomène had come to confidences, the latter had finished by executing the commissions of Jacques to the former when he dare not come to her himself. She arrived with her eggs, changed the meetings, told why he had been forced to be prudent the night before, spoke of the hour he had remained at her house, chatting. Jacques, sometimes, when an obstacle had stopped him, willingly forgot him-
self thus in Sauvagnat's little house. He followed his fireman Pecqueux there, as if, from a need of quieting himself, he feared to live a whole evening alone. Even when the fireman had disappeared, absent by leave among the sailors' taverns, he entered Philomène's dwelling, gave her a message to take, sat down, remained. And she, little by little mixed up in the affair, was softened, for until then she had known only brutal men. The small hands, the polished ways of this sad young fellow, who had such a gentle air, seemed to her delicacies the like of which she had never imagined existed. One day she grew confidential with him, complained of the fireman, a sullen one, she said, beneath his jovial air, very capable of an evil stroke the days when he was drunk. He remarked that she was neater than formerly, drinking less, keeping the house less dirty. Her brother, having one evening heard a man's voice, entered with hand uplifted to strike her; but, on recognizing Jacques, he simply treated to a bottle of cider. The engineer, well received, cured there of his quiver, appeared to be pleased there. Therefore Philomène showed a more and more lively friendship for Séverine, raging against Madame Lebleu, whom she everywhere called an old beggar.

Jacques every day became more sombre. Twice, when able to see Séverine, he had invented pretexts for not doing so; and if he delayed occasionally at the Sauvagnats', it was also to avoid her. Nevertheless his affection for her was constantly growing. But, when in her company now, the frightful malady resumed possession of him, such a vertigo that he drew away from her quickly, frozen, terrified at no longer being himself, at feeling the animal ready to bite. He had striven to fall back on the fatigue of long trips, soliciting supplementary tasks, passing twelve hours at a time standing on his engine, his body broken by trepidation, his lungs burnt by the wind. His comrades complained of the
hard trade of an engineer, which, they said, used up a man in twenty years; he would have liked to be used up immediately, he was never sufficiently overcome with lassitude, he was happy only when the Lison was bearing him away, no longer thinking, no longer having anything save eyes with which to see the signals. On arriving sleep struck him down before he even had time to wash up. But, with his awakening, returned the torment of the fixed idea. He had also striven to resume tenderness for the Lison, again spending hours in cleaning it, exacting from Pecqueux that the steel parts should shine like silver. The inspectors, who, en route, got up beside him, congratulated him. He tossed his head, remained dissatisfied, for he knew well that his engine, since the stoppage in the snow, had not been the same as before. He suffered on account of this. His tenderness grew discouraged: what was the good of loving, since he would kill all he should love?

Séverine had felt that he was changed, and she was grieved, believing that he had grown sad because of her, since he knew all. When he suddenly drew away from her was it not because he remembered and she filled him with horror? Never had she dared to turn the conversation again to those things. She repented of having spoken, surprised at the outburst of her confession, forgetting her former need of confidence. But she was more attached to him because he was ignorant of nothing. She lived only for Jacques.

Meanwhile their meetings continued without, while they were waiting until they could see each other tranquilly in the new apartments. The winter was ending, the month of February was very mild. They prolonged their promenades, walked for hours through the vague grounds of the dépôt yard; for he avoided stopping and, when she complained of fatigue and wanted to sit down, he exacted that it should be in some dark corner, in his terror of striking if he perceived a bit of her skin; as
long as he did not see he would, perhaps, resist. In Paris, whither she still followed him every Friday, he was equally careful. This weekly trip she now made without even giving an explanation to her husband. For the neighbors the old pretext, the malady of her knee, served; and she also said that she went to embrace her nurse, Mère Victoire, whose convalescence lingered at the hospital. Both of them yet found a great diversion in this journey, he very attentive that day to the good conduct of his engine, she delighted to see him less sombre, amused herself by the trip, although she had begun to know the slightest hills, the smallest groves of trees on the route. But, in the morning as in the evening, every time she passed the Croix-de-Maufras, she thrust forward her head, cast a prudent glance before showing herself, certain to find there Flore, standing in front of the barrière, presenting the flag and enveloping the train with her look of flame.

Since this girl, on the day of the snow storm, had seen them kissing, Jacques had warned Séverine to beware of her. He knew with what a fierce passion she pursued him from the depths of her youth, and he was aware that she was jealous, of a virile energy, of an unbridled and murderous animosity. On the other hand, she must know a great deal too much about things, for he remembered an allusion to the relations of the President with a young lady whom nobody suspected and whom he had married off. If she knew that, she had surely divined the crime: without doubt she would speak, write, avenge herself by a denunciation. But days, weeks had passed and nothing had happened, he never saw her save stiffly planted at her post at the side of the road, with her flag. From the most distant point at which she perceived the engine, he had upon him the sensation of her ardent eyes. She saw him despite the smoke, took entire possession of him, accompanied him in the lightning speed, amid the thunder of the wheels. And the train,
at the same time, was sounded, pierced, visited, from the first to the last wagon. Always she found the other, the rival, whom now she knew to be there every Friday. In vain the other advanced but a bit of her face, with an imperious need of seeing; she was observed, their glances crossed like swords. Already the train was flying and there was one who remained on the ground, powerless to follow it, enraged at the happiness which it was bearing away. She seemed to grow, Jacques thought her taller at every trip, uneasy henceforth that she had done nothing, asking himself what project was maturing in that big sombre girl, whose motionless apparition he could not shun.

An employé also, Henri Dauvergne, the chief conductor, embarrassed Séverine and Jacques. He had charge of that Friday train and he displayed an importunate amiability toward the young woman. Having perceived her friendship for the engineer, he had said to himself that his turn, perhaps, would come. At the departure from Havre, the mornings he was on duty, Roubaud chuckled, so marked had Henri’s attentions become: he reserved an entire compartment for her and installed her in it. One day even, Roubaud, who tranquilly continued to talk with Jacques, showed him, with a wink of the eye, the manoeuvres of the young man, as if to ask him if he would permit that. Besides, in the quarrels, he squarely accused his wife of having a fondness for both. She had imagined for an instant that Jacques believed this and that from thence came his sadness. Amid a crisis of sobs, she had protested her innocence, telling him to kill her if he suspected her. Then, he had joked, very pale, kissing her, responding that he knew she was well-behaved and that he hoped he should never kill anybody.

But the first evenings of March were frightful, they were compelled to interrupt their meetings; and the trips to Paris, the few hours of freedom, so long looked
forward to, were no longer sufficient for Séverine. She wished to have Jacques altogether to herself. Her execration for her husband increased, the daily life with that man threw her into a sickly, intolerable excitement. So docile, of the complaisance of a tender woman, she grew irritated as soon as there was question of him, was enraged by the slightest obstacle he opposed to her will. Then, it seemed as if the shadow of her black hair darkened the limpid blue of her eyes. She grew wild, she accused him of having spoiled her existence to such a point that life was thenceforth impossible side by side. Was it not he who had done everything? If nothing further existed of their family ties, if everything had gone wrong, was it not his fault? The heavy tranquillity in which she saw him, the indifferent glance with which he received her fits of rage, his round back, his corpulent stomach, all that dull fat which appeared indicative of happiness, put the finishing touch to her exasperation, she who suffered. To break with him, to go away, to recommence life elsewhere, she thought only of that. Oh! to begin anew, so to have it that, above all, the past was not, to recommence life before all those abominations, to find herself again such as she was at fifteen, and to love and be loved and to live as she had dreamed of living then! For a week she cherished a project of flight: she departed with Jacques, they hid themselves in Belgium, they installed themselves there like a laborious young family. But she did not even speak to him of it; immediately obstacles had arisen: the irregularity of the situation, the continual tremble in which they would be, above all the grief of leaving her husband her fortune, the money, the Croix-de-Maufras property. Rather than depart abandoning a sou, she preferred to die there. One day when he came upstairs, livid, saying that on crossing the track in front of a locomotive he had nearly been run over, she thought that if he were dead she would be free. She glared at
Roubaud's danger.

From that time Séverine's dream changed. Roubaud had been killed in an accident and she had departed with Jacques for America. But they were married, they had sold the Croix-de-Maufras property, realized the whole fortune. Behind them they had left no fear. If they had expatriated themselves, it was to be born again. In the foreign land there would be nothing of that she wished to forget, she could believe that life was new. Since she had deceived herself, she would resume at the commencement the experience of happiness. He would find an occupation; she herself would undertake something; it would be fortune, children without doubt, a new existence of toil and felicity. As soon as she was alone, in bed in the morning, embroidering during the day, she fell back into this imagination, corrected it, enlarged it, incessantly added happy details to it, finished by believing herself crowned with joy and wealth. She, who formerly had gone out so rarely, now had the passion to go see the steamers depart: she went down upon the pier, leaned on a rail, followed the smoke of the vessel until it was confounded with the mists of the sea; she divided herself, believed she was on the deck with Jacques, already far from France, en route for the dreamed of paradise.

One evening in the middle of March, the young man, having risked coming up to see her in her apartments, related to her that he had just brought from Paris, in his train, one of his old schoolmates, who was about to start for New York to put in the market a new invention, a machine for the manufacture of buttons; and, as he needed a partner, an engineer, he had offered to take him. Oh! a superb affair which required only an investment of about 30,000 francs, and in which there were, perhaps, millions to be made. He said this merely
for the sake of talking, adding, besides, that he had, of course, refused the offer. Nevertheless, he was a trifle heavy-hearted about it, for it was hard all the same to renounce fortune when it presented itself.

Séverine had listened to him, standing, her glances lost in space. Was not this the realization of her dream? "Ah!" murmured she at last, "we should depart to-morrow."

He raised his head, surprised.

"What!—we should depart?"

"Yes, if he were dead."

She had not named Roubaud, indicating him only with a movement of her chin. But he had understood, he made a vague gesture as if to say that, unfortunately, he was not dead.

"We would depart," resumed she, in her slow and deep voice, "we would be so happy there! I could get the 30,000 francs by selling the property; and I would still have enough left to install ourselves. You would make the investment pay. I would arrange a little house in which we would tenderly love each other. Oh! it would be good, it would be so good!"

And she added, in a very low tone:

"Far from all remembrance, nothing but new days before us."

He was invaded by a great delight, their hands united, clasped each other instinctively, and neither of them spoke any more, both absorbed in that hope. Then, she said:

"Nevertheless, you must see your friend again before his departure and tell him not to take a partner without first notifying you."

Once more he was astonished. "And why?"

"Mon Dieu! can one tell what is going to happen? The other day, with that locomotive—a second more and I would have been free. One is alive in the morning and dead at night!"
She looked at him fixedly, she repeated:
"Ah! if he were dead!"
"You don't want me to kill him, do you?" demanded he, striving to smile.

Three times she said no; but her eyes said yes, her eyes full of inexorable cruelty. Since he had killed another, why had some one not killed him? This had suddenly sprung up within her like a consequence, a necessary end. Kill him and go away, nothing so simple. He dead, everything would finish, she could recommence everything. Already she saw no other possible dénouement, her resolution was taken, absolute; while, with a slight shake of her head, she continued to say no, not having the courage of her violence.

He, leaning with his back against the buffet, still affected to smile. He caught sight of the knife which was lying there.

"If you want me to kill him, you must give me the knife. I already have the watch—they will make up a little museum for me!"

He laughed aloud. She responded, gravely:
"Take the knife!"

And, when he had put it in his pocket, as if to push the pleasantry to its limit, he kissed her.

"Well, now good-bye. I will see my friend at once and tell him to wait. Saturday, if it does not rain, meet me behind Sauvagnat's house. It's understood, eh? And rest easy, we will kill no one—it was only a joke."

Despite the late hour, Jacques went down toward the harbor to find, at the hotel where he was to sleep, his comrade who was to depart on the morrow. He spoke to him of a possible inheritance, demanded two weeks before giving him a definitive answer. Then, as he was returning toward the dépôt through the wide, gloomy avenues, he thought, he was astonished at what he had done. Had he then resolved to kill Roubaud, since he
was already disposing of his wife and his money? No, certainly, he had decided on nothing and he had taken this precaution, doubtless, in case he should decide to do the deed. But the remembrance of Séverine was evoked, the burning pressure of her hand, her fixed look which had said yes when her mouth said no. Evidently she wished him to kill the other. He was seized upon by a great trouble. What was he going to do?

When he had reached the Rue François-Mazeline and gone to bed beside Pecqueux, who was snoring, Jacques could not sleep. In spite of himself, his brain worked over this idea of murder, this canvas of a drama which he was arranging, of which he calculated the most remote consequences. He sought, he discussed the reasons for, the reasons against. In the aggregate, upon cold reflection, without the least excitement, all were in favor of the deed. Was not Roubaud the sole obstacle to his happiness? He dead, he would marry Séverine whom he adored; there would be no further concealment, he would have her wholly to himself. Then, there was the money, a fortune. He would quit his hard trade, become an employer in his turn, in that America, of which he had heard his comrades talk as of a country where engineers made money by the shovelful. His new existence there unfolded itself as in a dream: a wife who loved him passionately, millions to gain immediately, a broad life, unlimited ambition, whatever he wanted. And, to realize this dream there was nothing but a movement to make, nothing but a man to suppress, the insect, the plant, which embarrasses one's advance and which one crushes. He was not even interesting, that man, now fat and dull, plunged in that stupid love of gaming, in which his former energies had foundered. Why spare him? No circumstance, absolutely not a single one, pleaded in his favor. Everything condemned him, since, in answer to each question, the interest of others was that he should die. To hesitate would be imbecile and cowardly.
But Jacques, whose back was burning and who had stretched himself upon his stomach, turned with a bound, with the start of a thought, vague until then, suddenly so sharp that he had felt it like a point in his brain. He who from childhood had wished to kill, who was ravaged to the extent of torture by the horror of that fixed idea, why did he not kill Roubaud? Perhaps upon this chosen victim he would satisfy forever his need of murder; and, in that manner, he would not only make a good stroke, he would, besides, be cured. He was soaked in sweat, he saw himself, with the knife in his clutch, striking Roubaud in the throat as the latter had struck the President, and satisfied, glutted, in proportion as the wound bled upon his hands. He would kill him, he was resolved, since there was his cure, an adored wife, fortune. If he must kill, it was he whom he would kill, knowing, at least, that he had reason, interest and logic for the act. His decision made, as three o'clock in the morning was striking, Jacques tried to sleep. He had already lost consciousness, when a profound shock raised him, made him sit up in his bed, choking. Kill that man!—Mon Dieu! had he the right to do so? When a fly bothered him, he crushed it with a tap. One day when a cat had got entangled in his legs, he had broken its back with a kick, without wishing to do so, it is true. But this man, his like! He was forced to again have recourse to all his reasoning to prove to himself his right to commit the murder, the right of the strong whom the weak embarrass and are destroyed by them. It was he, at this hour, whom the wife of the other loved and she wished to be free to wed him, to bring him what she possessed. He would be simply removing the obstacle. Since the law of the strongest was the law of life, it should be obeyed, setting aside the scruples which men had invented in order to live together. Gradually his right grew to seem absolute to him, he felt his entire resolution born again: on the
morrow he would choose the spot and the hour, he would prepare for the act. The best course, without doubt, would be to stab Roubaud at night, in the dépôt yard, during one of his rounds, so as to give rise to the belief that marauders, surprised, had killed him. Down behind the piles of charcoal he knew a good place, if he could be lured there. Despite his effort to sleep, he was now arranging the scene, discussing where he should place himself, how he should strike in order to kill him instantly; and, secretly, invincibly, while he was descending to the smallest details, his repugnance had returned, an internal protestation which again set his whole being in revolt. No, no, he would not strike! The deed seemed to him monstrous, inexécutable, impossible. Yes, kill at need, in a transport of instinct! But kill because one so wished, through calculation and through interest, no, never, never—he could not do it!

The day was breaking when Jacques succeeded in getting to sleep, but his slumber was so light that the abominable debate went on confusedly within him. The days that followed were the most woeful of his existence. He avoided Séverine, he had sent word to her not to go to the Saturday rendezvous, fearing her eyes. But on Monday he was compelled to see her again; and, as he had dreaded, her big blue eyes, so soft, so deep, filled him with anguish. She did not speak of the deed, she did not make a gesture, did not utter a word to urge him on. But her eyes were full of the thing; they questioned him, they supplicated him. He knew not how to avoid either their impatience or their reproach, always he found them fixed upon his with astonishment that he could hesitate to be happy. When he was about to quit her, he kissed her with sudden force to make her understand that he was resolved to kill Roubaud. He was so, in fact, he was so until he reached the foot of the stairway, when the struggle of his conscience was resumed. When he saw her again, two days later, he
had the confused pallor, the furtive look of a coward who recoils before a necessary act. She burst into sobs, without saying anything, weeping upon his neck, horribly unhappy; and he, upset, overflowed with contempt for himself. He felt that this must end.

"Thursday, down there, eh?" he asked of her, in a low voice.

"Yes, on Thursday I will be there."

That Thursday the night was very dark, a starless sky, opaque and dull, charged with mists from the sea. As usual, Jacques, arrived first, standing behind the house of the Sauvagnats, watched for the coming of Séverine. But the darkness was so thick and she hastened along with a step so light that he gave a start, grazed by her without having seen her. Already she was clinging about his neck, uneasy at feeling him tremble. "I frightened you," murmured she.

"No, no, I was waiting for you. Let us walk, nobody can see us."

And, with their arms about each other's waists, they slowly promenaded the vague grounds. On this side of the dépôt yard the gas-jets were rare; certain dark spots lacked them altogether; while they multiplied in the distance, toward the dépôt, like bright sparks.

For a long while they went along thus, without a word. She had laid her head upon his shoulder, she raised it occasionally, kissing him on the chin; and, bending down, he returned that kiss upon her temple at the roots of her hair. The grave stroke of one o'clock in the morning sounded from the distant churches. If they did not speak, it was because they heard each other think. They thought only of that, they could no longer be together without being possessed by it. The debate continued, what was the good of speaking aloud useless words, since it was necessary to act. When she leaned against him for a caress she felt the knife, bulging out the pocket of his pantaloons. Was he then resolved?
But her thoughts overflowed, her lips opened, with a whisper barely distinct.

"Awhile ago, he came up-stairs, I knew not why. Then, I saw him take his revolver which he had forgotten. It's certain that he's going to make a round."

Silence succeeded, and twenty paces further on only he said, in his turn:

"Last night some marauders stole lead from here. He'll come presently, that's sure."

Then, a little quiver shot through her and both again became mute, walking with a slackened pace. A doubt had seized upon her: was it, indeed, the knife which swelled his pocket? Twice she stooped to ascertain the better. Then, as she was still uncertain, she let her hand fall and felt. It was the knife. But he, having understood, suddenly clasped her to his bosom and murmured in her ear:

"He will come, you shall be free!"

The murder was decided upon; it seemed to them that they were no longer walking, that a strange force was dragging them along the ground. Their senses had suddenly acquired an extreme sharpness, the sense of touch especially, for their hands, clasped in each other's, pained them, the slightest contact of their lips was like a finger nail scratch. They also heard the sounds they had not noticed before, the roll, the distant puffing of engines, deadened shocks, wandering steps, in the depths of the darkness. And they saw the night, they distinguished the black stains of things, as if a mist had been cleared from their eyelids: a bat passed, the rapid turns of which they were able to follow. They had stopped at the corner of a pile of charcoal, motionless, their ears and eyes on the watch, in a tension of all their beings. Now, they were whispering.

"Did you not hear, down there, a cry of challenge?"
"No, it was a car being put in a shelter house."
"But there, upon our left, some one is walking. The gravel scraped."
"No, no; rats running in the piles made the charcoal roll down."

Some minutes elapsed. Suddenly, she gave his hand a stronger pressure.
"There he is!"
"Where? I see nothing."
"He has turned the shed of the fast freight, he is coming straight toward us. Look! there's his shadow on the white wall!"

"Do you think so?—that dark point. Then, he is alone, eh?"
"Yes, alone, he is alone."

And, at this decisive moment, she cast herself wildly upon his neck, kissed him ardently. Ah! if she had dared, twenty times already she would have done the deed herself, in order to spare him the horror of it; but her hands had trembled, she had felt herself too weak, it needed the fist of a man. And that kiss was all she could give him of her courage. In the distance, an engine whistled, throwing to the night a plaint of melancholy distress; they heard a din, the shock of a gigantic hammer, with regular strokes, come from they knew not where; while the mists, which had mounted from the sea, had put in the sky the filing off of a moving chaos, the wandering fragments of which seemed at certain moments to extinguish the bright sparks of the gas-jets. With a prompt movement he had already opened the knife. But he uttered a half-stifled oath.

"Nom de Dieu! we're balked, he is going away!"

It was true; the moving shadow, after having approached them within about fifty steps, had turned to the left and was departing, with the regular movement of a night watchman who is disturbed by nothing. Then, she pushed him.
"Follow, follow!"

And they both started off, he in front, she at his heels; they slunk along, glided behind the man they were chasing, avoiding noise. For an instant, at the corner of the repair shops, they lost sight of him; then, they made a short cut across a freight track and found him again, distant twenty paces at most. They were forced to profit by the slightest bits of wall in order to shelter themselves, a single false step would have betrayed them.

"We shall not get to him," growled he, in an undertone. "If he reaches the switch-tender's post, he will escape."

She still repeated:

"Follow, follow!"

At that minute, amid those vast flat grounds, drowned in darkness, amid the nocturnal desolation of the huge dépôt yard, he was resolved, as if in the favoring solitude of a cut-throat's den. And, while furtively hastening his pace, he excited himself, reasoning with himself again, setting forth arguments which turned the murder into a sage, legitimate action, logically debated and decided upon. It was merely a right he was exercising, the very right of life, since this blood of another was indispensable to his very life. Nothing but that knife to plant and he had conquered happiness.

"We shall not get to him, we shall not get to him," repeated he, furiously, on seeing the shadow move past the switch-tender's post. "It's over, he's off."

But, with her nervous hand, suddenly she grasped him by the arm, immobilized him against her.

"Look! he is coming back!"

Roubaud, in fact, was retracing his steps. He had turned to the right, then he redescended. Perhaps, behind his back, he had felt the vague sensation of the murderers let loose upon his scent. Nevertheless, he continued to walk with his tranquil step, like a consci-
entious guardian who does not wish to go in without having given a glance everywhere.

Stopped short in their course, Jacques and Séverine no longer stirred. Chance had planted them at the very corner of a pile of charcoal. They backed up against it, seemed to enter it, their spines glued to the black wall, confounded, lost in that pool of ink. They held their breath.

And Jacques watched Roubaud coming straight toward them. Thirty mètres scarcely separated them, each step diminished the distance, regularly, proportioned as if by the inexorable scales of fate. Twenty steps more, ten steps more and he would have him before him, he would raise his arm in this way, he would plant the knife in his throat, drawing it from right to left in order to stifle the cry. The seconds seemed interminable to him, such a flood of thoughts traversed the void of his brain that the measure of time was abolished. All the reasons which had determined him filed off once more, he again clearly saw the murder, the causes and the consequences. Five steps more. His resolution, stretched to the point of breaking, remained unshaken. He wished to kill, he knew why he would kill.

But when Roubaud was two steps, one step off there was a breaking up. Everything crumbled in him at a stroke. No, no! he would not kill, he could not kill that man thus, without defence. Reasoning would never accomplish the murder, it required the instinct to bite, the leap which throws the killer upon the prey, the hunger or passion which rends it. What did it matter if the conscience was made up only of ideas transmitted by a slow heredity of justice! He felt that he had not the right to kill, and it was in vain he might try, he would never succeed in persuading himself that he could take it.

Roubaud passed tranquilly. His elbow almost touched the two others in the charcoal. A breath would have revealed them; but they remained as if dead. The
arm was not raised, did not plant the knife. Nothing shook the thick darkness, not even a quiver. Already, he was at a distance, at ten steps, while yet motionless, their backs nailed to the black pile, both of them remained breathless in their fear of that man, alone, disarmed, who had nearly touched them as he walked so peacefully by.

Jacques uttered a low sob of rage and shame.

"I cannot! I cannot!"

He caught hold of Séverine, with a need of being excused, consoled. Without speaking a word, she escaped. He put out his hands, he felt her skirt slip through his fingers; and he heard only her light flight. In vain he pursued her an instant, for her sudden disappearance had finished upsetting him. Was she then so angry at his weakness? Did she despise him? Prudence prevented him from rejoining her. But when he found himself alone in those vast flat grounds, stained with little tears of yellow gas, a frightful despair seized upon him; he hastened to get out of them, to go bury his head in the depths of his pillow, there to annihilate the abomination of his existence.

It was about ten days later, toward the end of March, that the Roubauds finally triumphed over the Lebleus. The administration had recognized their demand as just, supported by M. Dabadie; the more so as the famous letter of the cashier, pledging himself to give up the lodgings if a new under station master claimed them, had been found by Mlle. Guichon while searching for old accounts among the archives of the dépôt. And, immediately, Madame Lebleu spoke of removing, exasperated by her defeat: since they desired her death, as well get done with it without waiting. For three days this memorable removal excited the corridor. Little Madame Moulin even, so retiring that no one ever saw her either enter or go out, compromised herself in it by carrying Séverine’s work table from one set of apart-
ments to the other. But Philomène particularly fanned the discord, come there to aid at the first moment, making bundles, overturning the furniture, invading the front lodgings before the tenant had quitted them; and it was she who expelled her from them, amid the confusion of the two sets of household goods, mingled, confounded, in the transfer. She had come to show for Jacques and all he loved such zeal that Pecqueux, astonished, filled with suspicion, had demanded of her, with his evil, sullen air, his air of a vindictive drunkard, if she now had a tenderness for the engineer, warning her that he would settle their accounts the day they became too demonstrative. When she had carried away the last chair, the doors slammed. Then, having perceived a stool, forgotten by the cashier’s wife, she reopened the door and threw it across the corridor. The affair was ended.

Then, slowly, life resumed its monotonous course. While Madame Lebleu, in the back lodgings, nailed to her fauteuil by her rheumatism, was dying of vexation, with big tears in her eyes, at no longer seeing anything but the zinc of the marquee, barring the sky, Séverine worked at an interminable bed quilt she had commenced, installed at one of the windows in the front apartments. She had, beneath her, the gay agitation of the court-yard of departure, the continual flow of pedestrians and vehicles; already the forward spring had turned green the buds of the tall trees at the edge of the sidewalks; and, beyond, the distant hills of Ingouville rolled away their wooded slopes, which the white stains of country houses pricked. But she was astonished at taking so little pleasure in at last realizing this dream, at being there, in those coveted lodgings, at having before her space, daylight, sunshine. She even, at times, regretted her old den, as she called it, where the dirt showed less. Roubaud had simply let things go as they would. He did not seem to know that he had
changed his niche: often he made a mistake, did not notice his error until his new key refused to enter the old keyhole. Besides, he absented himself more and more, the disorganization continued. For an instant, however, he appeared reanimated beneath the reawakening of his political ideas; not that they were very clear, very ardent; but he kept at heart his affair with the sub-préfect, which had nearly cost him his situation. Since the Empire, shaken by the general elections, had been passing through a terrible crisis, he had triumphed, he had repeated that those people would not always be the masters. A friendly warning from M. Dabadie, notified by Mlle. Guichon, before whom the revolutionary sentiment had been uttered, had, however, sufficed to calm him down. Since the corridor was tranquil and they were living in accord, now that Madame Lebleu was growing weaker, killed by sadness, why have new vexations with the affairs of the government? He made a simple gesture, he scoffed at politics as at everything else! And, fatter every day, without a touch of remorse, he went on with his heavy step, indifferent.

Between Jacques and Séverine the embarrassment had increased since they could meet each other at any time without fear of being watched. The unrealized, the deed desired, consented to by both, but unaccomplished, had put between them uneasiness, an insurmountable wall. He, who brought with him the shame of his weakness, found her more sombre at each visit, sick from useless waiting. The departure, the marriage in the foreign land, the other life—that was the only happiness they wanted.

One evening, Jacques found Séverine in tears; and, when she saw him, she did not stop, she sobbed more bitterly, hanging upon his neck. Already she had wept thus, but he had quieted her, while, this time, he felt that she was ravaged by a growing despair. He was upset, he finished by taking her face between his two
hands; and, looking into the depths of her downcast eyes, he swore, comprehending that, if she was thus filled with despair, it was because she was a woman, because she dare not strike herself, in her passive softness.

"Pardon me, wait yet. I swear to you that I will do it soon, as soon as I can!"

Instantly she kissed him, as if to seal the oath, and he returned the kiss.
AUNT PHASIE died on Thursday evening, at nine o'clock, in a final convulsion; and, vainly, Misard, who was waiting at her bedside, had tried to close her eyelids: the eyes obstinately remained open, the face had stiffened, leaning a trifle on the shoulder, as if to look about the chamber, while a contraction of the lips seemed to have drawn them up in a bantering laugh. A single candle was burning, planted on a corner of a table near her. And the trains which, since nine o'clock, had passed swiftly by, ignorant of that still warm corpse, had shaken it for a second, beneath the flickering flame of the candle.

Immediately, Misard, in order to get rid of Flore, had sent her to give notice of the death at Doinville. She could not return before eleven o'clock, he had two hours before him. Tranquilly, he first cut himself a slice of bread, for he felt his stomach empty, not having dined, because of that death struggle which had seemed interminable. And he ate standing, going and coming, putting things in order. Fits of coughing stopped him, bent double, half-dead himself, so thin, so puny, with his dull eyes and his faded hair, that he did not appear likely long to enjoy his victory. No matter, he had destroyed that incubus, that big and handsome woman, as the insect destroys the oak; she was upon her back, finished, reduced to nothing, and he was there yet. But an idea caused him to kneel down, in order to take from under the bed a pan containing a remnant of flour and water, prepared as a lotion; since she had suspected
his trick, it had been no longer in the salt, but in her lotions that he had put rat poison; and, too stupid, having no suspicions in that direction, she had absorbed it all the same, with fatal effect this time. As soon as he had emptied the pan outside, he came in again and washed up with a sponge the floor of the room, soiled with stains. But why had she been obstinate? She had wished to be sharp, so much the worse! When man and wife play at which shall bury the other, without bringing any one else into the dispute, one should keep an eye open. He was proud of what he had done, he chuckled as over a good story at the drug absorbed so innocently with the lotion when she had watched with so much care all that had entered her mouth. At that moment, an express train which passed enveloped the low house with such tempestous panting that, in spite of his habituation, he turned toward the window with a start. And, after the train had gone, in the heavy silence, he encountered the wide-open eyes of the dead woman, the fixed pupils of which seemed to follow each of his movements, while the drawn up corner of the lips laughed.

The phlegmatic Misard was seized upon by a little fit of anger. He understood perfectly, she was saying to him: "Hunt! hunt!" But surely she had not taken them with her—her thousand francs; and, now that she was no longer there, he would finish by finding them. Should she not have given them to him willingly? In that way all these troubles would have been avoided. The eyes followed him everywhere. "Hunt! hunt!" He glanced around that chamber, which he had not dared to search while she was alive in it. He looked in the clothes-press first: he took the keys from under the bolster, overturned the shelves loaded with linen, emptied the two drawers, even took them out, in order to see if there was any hiding-place about them. No, nothing! Afterwards he thought of the night table.
He took off the marble top, turned it, uselessly. He also felt behind the mirror on the mantelpiece with a flat ruler, but drew out only a collection of black dust. "Hunt! hunt!" Then, to escape from the wide-open eyes which he felt upon him, he got down on all fours, tapping the floor lightly with his fist, listening to discover if some resonance would not reveal to him an empty space. Several planks were loose, he tore them up. Nothing, still nothing! When he was on his feet anew, the eyes took hold of him again; he turned, strove to plunge his glance into the fixed glance of the dead woman; while, with the corner of her drawn-up lips, she accentuated her terrible laugh. He no longer doubted it—she was scoffing at him. "Hunt! hunt!"

The excitement gained upon him, he approached her, invaded by a suspicion, by an idea of sacrilege, which paled his wan face still more. Why had he believed for certain that she had not carried off her thousand francs with her? Perhaps, nevertheless, she had carried them off. And he dared to examine her, since she had told him to hunt. Under her, back of her neck, behind her back, he hunted. The bed was overturned, he plunged his arm up to the shoulder in the mattress. He found nothing. "Hunt! hunt!" And the face, fallen back upon the disordered pillow, still looked at him with its bantering eyes.

As Misard, furious and trembling, was trying to arrange the bed, Flore came in, having returned from Doinville.

"It will be on Saturday, at eleven o'clock," said she. She spoke of the burial. But, at a glance, she had comprehended at what work Misard had put himself out of breath during her absence. She made a gesture of disdainful indifference.

"Quit, won't you!—you will not find them!"

He imagined that she also was braving him. And, advancing, he cried, between his clenched teeth:
"She gave them to you, you know where they are!"

The idea that her mother could have given her thousand francs to any one, even to her, her daughter, made her shrug her shoulders.

"Ah! yes, gave them—gave them to the soil, yes! That's where they are, you can hunt and see!"

And, with a sweeping gesture, she indicated the entire house, the garden with its wall, the railroad, all the vast country. Yes, there, in the depths of a hole, some place where never more any person would discover them. Then, while beside himself, anxious, he resumed overturning the furniture and tapping the walls, without heeding her presence, the young girl, standing at the window, continued, in a half-voice:

"Oh! it's pleasant out-of-doors, a fine night! I walked quickly, the stars lighted up everything as in broad day. To-morrow what beautiful weather we shall have at sunrise!"

For an instant Flore remained at the window, her eyes upon that serene country, softened by the first warmth of April, from which she had returned thoughtful, suffering further from the stimulated wound of her torment. But when she heard Misard quit the chamber and renew his furious search in the other rooms, she approached the bed in her turn, she sat down, looking at her mother. At the corner of the table the candle was still burning, with a high and motionless flame. A train passed which shook the house.

Flore's resolution was to remain all night there and she reflected. At first, the sight of the dead woman drew her from her fixed idea, from the thing which haunted her, which she had debated beneath the stars, in the quiet of the darkness, all along the road from Doinville. A surprise now put to sleep her suffering: why had she not been more grieved by her mother's death and why, at the present moment, did she not weep? She had loved her, nevertheless, despite her savagery of
a big mute girl, escaping incessantly, running the fields as soon as she was released from duty. Twenty times, during the last crisis which was to end in her death, she had come and seated herself there to beg her to have a doctor summoned; for she had suspected what Misard was doing, she had hoped that fear would stop him. But she had never obtained from the sick woman anything but a furious no, as if the latter had made it her pride in the struggle not to accept aid from any one, certain, in any event, of the victory since she would carry away the money with her; and then she had interposed no further, herself again seized upon by her malady, vanishing, running about in order to forget. It was that, certainly, which had barred her heart: when a person has one too heavy grief, there is no room for another; her mother had departed, she saw her there, destroyed, so pale, without the power to be more sad despite her efforts. What was the good of summoning the gendarmes and denouncing Misard, since everything was going to crumble? And little by little, invincibly, although her look remained fixed on the dead woman, she ceased to perceive her, she returned to her internal vision, wholly reconquered by the idea which had planted its nail in her brain, having no longer any sensation but that of the deep rumbling of the trains, the passage of which, for her, marked the hours.

For an instant past, in the distance she had heard the roaring approach of a Paris omnibus. When the engine finally passed the window, with its headlight, there was, in the chamber, a flash, a burst of fire.

"Eighteen minutes past one," thought she. "Seven hours yet. This morning, at 8.16, they will pass."

Every week, for months, this waiting had possessed her. She knew that, on Friday morning, the express, engineered by Jacques, also took Séverine to Paris; and she no longer lived, in a jealous torture, save to watch them, to see them, to say to herself that they were going
to be happy together in the city. Oh! that fleeing train, that abominable sensation of not being able to hang on to the last wagon, in order also to be borne away! It seemed to her that all those wheels cut her heart. She had suffered so much that one evening she had hidden herself, wishing to write to the authorities; for all would be over if she could get that woman arrested; and she, who had in the past surprised her relations with President Grandmorin, suspected that, by exposing the fact to justice, she would betray her. But, pen in hand, she could not write down the thing. And, besides, would the authorities heed her? All those fine people must understand each other. Perhaps it would be she they would put in prison, as they had put Cabuche there. No! she wished to avenge herself, she would avenge herself alone, without having need of anybody. It was not exactly a thought of vengeance, as she understood it, the thought of doing an evil to cure herself of hers; it was a need to finish matters, to overthrow everything, as if a thunderbolt had fallen. She was very proud, stronger and more convinced than the other of her right to be loved; and when she took her solitary way amid the paths of that desolate district, with her heavy casque of blonde hair, always uncovered, she would have preferred to have the other there and settle their quarrel at the corner of a wood, between them, like two hostile warriors. She had beaten men; and that was her invincible strength—she would be victorious.

The week before, the sudden idea had planted itself, plunged itself in her, as if beneath a hammer stroke come from she knew not where: to kill them that they might no longer pass, that they might no longer go to Paris together. She did not reason, she obeyed the savage instinct to destroy. When a thorn stuck in her flesh, she tore it out, she would have cut off a finger to get rid of it. Kill them, kill them the first time they passed; and for that overthrow the train, drag a beam upon the road, tear up a
rail, in short, break everything, swallow up everything. He would certainly remain upon the engine, his limbs crushed; the woman, always in the first carriage in order to be nearer him, could not escape; as to the others, that continual flow of people, she did not even think of them. They were nobody, did she know them? And this wrecking of a train, this sacrifice of so many lives, became the possession of each of her hours, the only catastrophe broad enough, deep enough with human blood and pain for her to bathe therein her enormous heart, swollen with tears.

However, on Friday morning, she had weakened, not having yet decided where or in what manner she would tear up a rail. But, in the evening, being no longer on duty, she conceived an idea, went through the tunnel to prowl as far as the Dieppe bifurcation. It was one of her promenades, this long underground passage half a league in extent, this straight vaulted avenue, in which she experienced the excitement of trains rolling upon her, with their blinding headlights: every time she missed being crushed there, and it was this peril which drew her there, in a need of bravado. But, that evening, after having escaped the surveillance of the watchman, and having advanced to the middle of the tunnel, keeping to the left, so as to be certain that every train arriving in front would pass to her right, she committed the imprudence of turning to watch the lanterns of a train going to Havre; and, when she resumed walking, a false step having made her turn anew, she was unable to tell in what direction the red lights had disappeared. Despite her courage, still stunned by the thunder of the wheels, she halted, her hands cold, her uncovered hair uplifted by a wind of fear. Now, when another train should pass, she would not know whether it was coming or going, she would throw herself to the right or to the left and would be cut to pieces in any event. With an effort, she strove to retain her reason, to remember, to discuss.
Then, all at once, terror bore her away, at hazard, straight ahead, in a furious gallop. No, no! she did not wish to be killed before having killed the two others! Her feet got entangled in the rails, she slipped, fell, ran faster. It was the madness of the tunnel, the walls which seemed to draw together to crush her, the vault which echoed imaginary noises, voices of menace, formidable rumbles. Every instant she turned her head, believing she felt on her neck the burning breath of an engine. Twice, a sudden certitude that she had deceived herself, that she would be killed in the direction in which she was fleeing, made her change her course with a bound. And she was galloping, galloping, when in front of her, in the distance, appeared a star, a round and flaming eye, which grew. But she steeled herself against the almost irresistible desire to again retrace her steps. The eye became a brazier, the muzzle of a devouring oven. Blinded, she leaped to the right, without knowing it; and the train swept by like a thunderbolt, striking her only with its tempestuous wind. Five minutes afterwards, she emerged on the Malauay side, safe and sound.

It was nine o'clock, yet a few minutes and the express from Paris would be there. Immediately she went on at a promenade pace to the Dieppe bifurcation, two hundred mètres away, examining the road, seeking if some circumstance would not serve her. It so happened that upon the Dieppe road, which was being repaired, a ballast train was stationed, which her friend Ozil had just switched there; and, in a sudden illumination, she found, arranged a plan: simply prevent the switch-tender from putting the switch back on the Havre road, so that the express would run into and crush itself against the ballast train. She had been friendly toward this Ozil since the day she had half-split his skull with a blow from a stick and liked to make him thus unforeseen visits through the tunnel, like a goat escaped from its mountain. A former soldier, very slim and but little
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given to chatter, he had not yet a piece of negligence with which to reproach himself, his eye open both day and night. Only this savage, who had beaten him, as strong as a lad, turned his head if she but beckoned to him with her little finger. Hence, that night, in the darkness, when she approached his post, calling him out, he joined her, forgetting everything. She bewildered him, led him toward the country, telling him complicated tales, that her mother was sick, that she would not remain at the Croix-de-Maufras if she lost her. His ear, in the distance, listened to the rumbling of the express, quitting Malaunay, approaching at full steam. And, when she felt that it was there, she turned to see. But she had not thought of the new safety apparatus: the engine, on entering the Dieppe road, itself gave the signal to stop; and the engineer had time to arrest the express a few paces from the ballast train. Ozil, with the cry of a man who is awakened by the fall of a house, returned on a run to his post; while she, stiffened, motionless, watched, from the depths of the darkness, the manoeuvre necessitated by the accident. Two days afterwards, the switch-tender, dismissed, came to say farewell to her, suspecting nothing. Well, the stroke had failed, something else must be found!

At that moment, beneath this evoked remembrance, the mist of reverie which had obscured Flore's glance vanished; and again she saw the dead woman, lighted by the yellow flame of the candle. Her mother was no more, should she go away, wed Ozil, who wanted her, who would, perhaps, make her happy? All her being revolted. No, no! if she was cowardly enough to let the two others live and to live herself, she would rather tramp the roads, hire herself out as a servant, than marry a man she did not love! And an unusual noise having made her prick up her ears, she comprehended that Misard was tearing up the floor of trodden earth in the kitchen with a pick: he was madly pursuing his
search for the hoard, he would tear down the house to find it. But she did not wish to remain with him either. What should she do? A wind blew, the walls shook and over the white visage of the dead woman passed the reflection from a furnace, giving a bloody tinge to the open eyes and the ironical contraction of the lips. It was the last omnibus from Paris, with its heavy and slow engine.

Flore turned her head, looked at the stars which shone in the serenity of the spring night.

"Ten minutes after three. Five hours more and they will pass."

She would try again, she suffered too much. To see them, to see them thus every week going to enjoy themselves was beyond her strength. Now that she was certain of never having Jacques for herself alone, she preferred that he should be no more, that he should have nobody. And that lugubrious chamber in which she was watching enveloped her with mourning, beneath a growing need of annihilating everything. Since there remained no one who loved her, the others might as well depart with her mother. Her sister was dead, her love was dead, what should she do? Be alone, whether she remained or departed, always alone, while the others were together? No, no! let everything go to ruin rather, let death, which was there, in that smoky chamber, breathe over the road and sweep away everybody! Then, decided, after this long debate, she discussed the best method of putting her project into execution. And she returned to the idea of tearing up a rail. It was the surest, the most practical way and easy to do: only to loosen the spikes with a hammer, then pull the rail from the sleepers. She had the tools, no one would see her in that deserted district. The best spot to choose was certainly, after the cut, going toward Barentin, the curve which crossed a valley, upon a bank seven or eight mètres high: there the derailing would be certain, the
overturn frightful. But the calculation of the hours, which occupied her afterwards, left her anxious. On the ascending road, before the express from Havre, which passed at 8.16, there was only an omnibus train at 7.55. That gave her then twenty minutes to do the work, which would suffice. But between the regular trains, they often sent out unforeseen freight trains, especially at the periods when the arrival of merchandise was great. Hence what a useless risk! How was she to know in advance if it would be the express which would be wrecked there? For a long while she rolled the probabilities in her head. It was yet dark, the candle was expiring in a flood of tallow, with a high burnt wick, which she had neglected to snuff.

As, just at that moment, a freight train arrived, coming from Rouen, Misard entered. His hands were covered with earth, he having been searching the wood-house; and he was panting, dismayed by his vain hunt, so excited by powerless rage that he resumed searching beneath the furniture, in the chimney, everywhere. The interminable train seemed never likely to end, with the regular din of its heavy wheels, each shock of which agitated the dead woman in her bed. And he, extending his arms to unhook a little picture hanging on the wall, again encountered the open eyes which were following him, while the lips seemed to move with their laugh.

He turned pale, he shivered, stammering in frightened anger:

"Yes, yes, hunt, hunt! I will find them, nom de Dieu! if I have to turn every stone of the house and every clod of earth in the district!"

The black train had passed with a crushing slowness amid the darkness, and the dead woman, again motionless, still gazed at her husband, so jocose, so certain of conquering, that he disappeared anew, leaving the door open.
Flore, disturbed in her reflections, had arisen. She shut the door that that man might not return to derange her mother. And she was astonished to hear herself say, aloud:

“Ten minutes before, all will be well.”

In fact, ten minutes would give her ample time. If, ten minutes before the express, no train was signaled, she could go to work. Thenceforward, the thing being settled, certain, she felt no more anxiety, she was very calm.

Toward five o’clock the day broke, a cool dawn, of a pure limpidity. Despite the slightly keen cold, she threw the window wide open and the delicious morning entered the lugubrious chamber, full of smoke and an odor of death. The sun was yet below the horizon, behind a hill crowned with trees; but it appeared, vermilion, gushing over the slopes, inundating the sunken roads, in the living gayety of the soil at each new spring. She had not deceived herself the previous night: it would be a fine morning, weather for youth and radiant health in which one loves to live. In that deserted district, among the continual hills cut by narrow valleys, how nice it would be to go along the goat paths at her own free fancy! And, when she turned, walking back into the chamber, she was surprised to see the candle, almost out, no longer stain the light save with a pale tear. The dead woman now seemed to be looking at the railroad, on which trains continued to cross each other, without even remarking the faded glimmer of that watch taper beside that corpse.

Flore only resumed her service when it was day. And she quitted her chamber but for the omnibus from Paris at 6.12. Misard, also, at six o’clock replaced his colleague on duty during the night. It was at his horn blast that she planted herself before the barrière, the flag in her hand. For an instant she followed the train with her eyes.
"Still two hours," thought she aloud.

Her mother had no further need of any one. Thenceforth she felt an invincible repugnance for re-entering the chamber. It was over, she had kissed her, she could dispose of her own existence and that of the others. Usually, between the trains, she escaped, disappeared; but that morning a special interest seemed to keep her at her post, beside the barrière, on a bench, a simple plank at the edge of the road. The sun climbed the horizon, a warm shower of gold fell in the pure air; and she did not stir, bathed with that mildness, amid the vast country, all quivering with the sap of April. For a moment she was interested by Misard in his plank cabin on the other side of the line, visibly agitated, rid of his habitual somnolence; he came out, went back, manoeuvred his appliances with a nervous hand, with continual glances toward the house, as if his mind had remained there, still hunting. Then, she forgot him, not even knowing that he was there. She was entirely given over to the wait, absorbed, her face stolid and rigid, her eyes on the bit of the road in the direction of Barentin. And down there, amid the gayety of the sunshine, she, doubtless, beheld a vision which sharpened the obstinate savagery of her look.

The minutes passed, Flore did not move. Finally, when, at 7.55, Misard, with two horn blasts, signaled the omnibus from Havre, upon the up road, she arose, closed the barrière and planted herself before it, the flag in her fist. Already, in the distance, the train was lost, after having shaken the ground; and they heard it plunge into the tunnel, where the din ceased. Flore did not return to the bench, she remained standing, counting the minutes anew. If in ten minutes no freight train was signaled, she would run down there, beyond the cut, to tear off a rail. She was very calm, her bosom only oppressed, as if beneath the enormous weight of the act. Besides, at this last moment, the thought that Jacques
and Séverine were approaching, that they would pass there again, going to happiness, if she did not stop them, sufficed to stiffen her, blind and deaf, in her resolution, without the debate even recommencing within her: it was the irrevocable, the claw stroke of the she-wolf which breaks the back of its prey as it passes. She still saw, in the selfishness of her vengeance, only their two mutilated bodies, without preoccupying herself with the crowd, with the flood of people who had filed away before her, for years, unknown. Corpses, blood, the sun would be hidden by them, perhaps, that sun the soft gaiety of which irritated her.

Two minutes more, one minute more, and she would go; she had started, when heavy jolts on the Bécourt road stopped her. It was a vehicle, a truck without doubt. Passage would be demanded of her, she would be forced to open the barrière, talk, remain there: impossible to act, the stroke would fail. And she made a gesture of enraged heedlessness, she resumed her course, leaving her post, abandoning the vehicle and the driver to get through the best way they could. But a whip cracked in the morning air, a voice cried gayly:

"Eh! Flore!"

It was Cabuche. She was nailed to the ground, arrested in her first bound, before the very barrière.

"What's the matter?" continued he. "Are you still asleep in this beautiful sunshine? Quick, that I may pass before the express comes!"

There was a crumbling within her. The stroke had failed, the two others would go to their happiness, and she would find nothing with which to kill them there. And, while she was slowly opening the half-decayed old barrière, the hinges of which grated in their rust, she sought furiously for an obstacle, something that she could throw across the road, desperate to such a point that she would have stretched herself out there had she believed her bones hard enough to make the engine
jump the rails. But her glances had fallen upon the truck, the clumsy and low vehicle, loaded with two blocks of stone, which five strong horses had difficulty in drawing. Enormous, tall and broad, of such a gigantic mass as to bar the road, these blocks offered themselves to her and awakened in her eyes a sudden covetousness, a mad desire to take them and place them there. The barrière was wide open, the five sweating animals, panting, were waiting.

“What ails you this morning?” resumed Cabuche.

“You have a very strange air.”

Then, Flore spoke.

“My mother died yesterday evening.”

He uttered a cry of sad friendship. Putting down his whip, he grasped her hands in his.

“Ah! my poor Flore! It was to be expected for a long time, but it's very hard all the same! Then, she is there; I want to see her, for we would have finished by coming to some understanding had not this misfortune happened.”

Softly he walked with her to the house. On the threshold, however, he glanced at his horses. In a few words, she reassured him.

“No danger that they'll stir! And, besides, the express is quite a distance off.”

She lied. With her practiced ear, in the warm quiver of the country, she had just heard the express quit the Barentin station. Five minutes more and it would be there, it would emerge from the cut at a hundred mètres from the passage at grade. While the quarryman, standing in the dead woman's chamber, forgot himself, thinking of Louisette, greatly moved, she, who had remained without, in front of the window, continued to hear, in the distance, the regular puffing of the engine, coming nearer and nearer. Suddenly the idea of Misard came to her; he would see her, he would prevent her; and her bosom heaved when, having turned, she did not perceive
him at his post. She found him on the other side of the house, where he was searching the soil beneath the curb of the well, not having been able to resist his madness for the hunt, seized, doubtless, with the sudden certainty that the hoard was there: altogether given over to his passion, blind, deaf, he hunted, he hunted. And this was for her the last excitement. Things themselves wished it. One of the horses began to neigh, while the engine, beyond the cut, puffed very loudly, like a hurried person who is hastening along.

"I'll keep them quiet," said Flore to Cabuche. "Have no fear."

She sprang forward, took the first horse by the bit, pulled with all her fighter's strength increased tenfold. The horses stiffened themselves; for an instant the truck, heavy with its enormous load, oscillated without starting; but, as if she had geared herself to it as a reinforcing animal, it moved, went upon the railway. And its entire bulk was across the rails, when the express, a hundred mètres off, emerged from the cut. Then, to immobilize the truck, afraid lest it might pass to the other side of the track, she checked the horses with a sudden pull, a superhuman effort, which made her limbs crack. She who had her legend, of whom they related feats of extraordinary strength—a car, launched upon a slope, stopped in its course; a cart pushed, saved from a train—she then did this thing: she held, with her iron fist, the five horses, rearing and neighing in the instinct of peril.

It was scarcely ten seconds of an endless terror. The two gigantic stones seemed to bar the horizon. With its bright copper, its shining steel, the engine was gliding along, coming with its steady and lightning speed, beneath the golden rain of the beautiful morning. The inevitable was there, nothing in the world could now prevent the crash. And the wait lasted.

Misard, who had returned to his post with a bound,
shouted, his arms in the air, shaking his fists, in the mad wish to warn and stop the train. Come out from the house at the noise of wheels and neighs, Cabuche sprang forward, shouting also, to make the animals advance. But Flore, who had leaped aside, held him back, which saved him. He believed that she had not had the strength to master his horses, that they had dragged her along. And he accused himself, he sobbed, with a rattle of hopeless terror; while she, motionless, drawn up to her full height, her eyelids widened and burning, looked on. At the moment when the breast of the engine was about to strike the blocks, when there remained a mètre, perhaps, for it to run over, during that inappreciable time she very clearly saw Jacques, his hand upon the governing lever. He turned, their eyes met in a glance which she found immeasurably long.

That morning, Jacques had smiled upon Séverine when she came down on the quay, at Havre, to take the express as she did every week. What was the good of spoiling life with nightmares? Why not profit by happy days when they presented themselves? All this would finish by arranging itself, perhaps. And he was resolved to taste, at least, the joy of that day, making projects, dreaming of breakfasting with her at a restaurant. Hence, as she had cast a grieved glance at him because there was no first-class wagon at the head of the train and she was forced to install herself at a distance from him, in the rear, he had striven to console her by smiling upon her so gayly. They would arrive in Paris together all the same, they would make up then for having been separated. After having leaned out to see her get into her compartment away at the end, he had even pushed good humor so far as to joke with the chief conductor, Henri Dauvergne, whom he knew to be smitten with her. The preceding week he had imagined that the latter had grown bolder and that she was encouraging him through a need of amusement, wishing
to escape from the atrocious existence which she had made for herself. And Jacques had demanded of Henri for whom, the previous night, hidden behind one of the elms of the court-yard of departure, he had thrown kisses in the air, which had made Pecqueux almost split his sides with laughter, as he was charging the fire-box of the Lison, smoking and ready to depart.

From Havre to Barentin the express had traveled with the regulation speed, without incident; and it was Henri who first, from his lookout box, on emerging from the cut, signalled the truck across the track. The baggage car at the front was packed with baggage, for the train, heavily loaded, was bringing a large number of passengers who had disembarked the night before from a steamer. When the chief conductor perceived the obstacle, his surprise was such that he doubted for an instant, frightened, paralyzed. Several seconds were lost, the train was already speeding along out of the cut and a great cry had mounted from the engine when he decided to pull the cord of the alarm bell, the end of which hung before him in his elevated station.

Jacques, at that supreme moment, his hand upon the governing lever, was looking without seeing, in a minute of absence. He was thinking of confused and distant things, from which the image of Séverine herself had vanished. The mad ringing of the bell, the shout of Pecqueux, behind him, awakened him. The fireman, who had pulled up the rod of the ash-pit, dissatisfied with the draught, had just seen, on leaning out to assure himself of the speed. And Jacques, of the pallor of death, saw all, understood all—the truck across the road, the engine darting ahead, the frightful shock, all that with a clearness so sharp that he distinguished even the grain of the two stones, while he had already in his bones the thud of the crash. It was the inevitable. Violently he turned the lever, closed the regulator, tightened the brake. He strove to back the engine, he hung, with an
unconscious hand, to the rod of the whistle, with a furious and powerless will to avert, to set aside the gigantic barricade in front. But, amid that terrible whistling of distress which tore the air, the Lison did not obey, went on at a scarcely slackened speed. It was no longer the docile engine of the past, since it had lost in the snow its excellent vaporization, its easy movement, grown capricious and unruly now, like a woman who has aged, whose lungs have been destroyed by a cold. It panted, resisted its brake, went on, went on constantly in the heavy obstinacy of its mass. Pecqueux, wild with fear, leaped out. Jacques, stiffened at his post, his right hand clenching the regulation lever, the other remaining on the whistle rod without his knowledge, waited. And the Lison, smoking, panting, with that sharp roar which did not cease, dashed against the truck, with the enormous weight of the thirteen cars it drew.

Then, twenty mètres away, at the edge of the road where terror had nailed them, Misard and Cabuche, with their arms in the air, Flore, with staring eyes, saw this frightful thing: the train rise up, seven wagons mount one upon another, then fall back with an abominable crash in a shapeless confusion of débris. The first three were ground to pieces, the four others made but a mountain, an entanglement of split roofs, broken wheels, doors, chairs and window frames, amid fragments of glass. And, above all, had been heard the grinding of the engine against the stones, a hollow crushing terminated by a cry of agony. The Lison, disemboweled, was overturned to the left upon the truck; while the stones, cleft, had split in pieces as if shattered by a blast, and, of the five horses, four, rolled, dragged, had been killed instantly. The rear of the train, six more wagons, intact, had come to a stop, without even quitting the rails. But cries arose, appeals, the words of which were lost in inarticulate brutish howls.
"Help! help! Oh! mon Dieu! I am dying! Help!"

They no longer heard, they no longer saw. The Lison, thrown on its back, its stomach open, was losing its steam, where cocks had been torn off and pipes broken, in puffs which roared like the furious death-rattle of a giantess. An inexhaustible white breath came from it, rolling in thick whirls along the ground; while the live coals, red as the very blood of its entrails, fallen from the fire-box, added their black smoke. The smoke-pipe, in the violence of the shock, had entered the ground; at the spot where it had struck, the frame was broken, twisting the two rods running along it; and, with its wheels in the air, like a monstrous horse, ripped open by some formidable horn thrust, the Lison showed its twisted driving-rods, its broken cylinders, its drawers with their eccentrics crushed, a frightful wound gaping in the atmosphere, by which the soul continued to go out with a din of wild despair. Near the engine, the horse which was not dead also lay, its two fore feet carried away, losing its entrails in the same manner through a tear in its stomach. From its stretched out head, stiffened in a spasm of atrocious pain one saw that it was uttering the death-rattle in a terrible neigh, nothing of which reached the ear, amid the thunder of the expiring engine.

The cries were strangled, not understood, lost, borne away.

"Save me! kill me! I suffer too much, kill me! kill me!"

Amid this deafening tumult, this blinding smoke, the doors of the carriages left intact opened and a confusion of passengers threw themselves out. They fell upon the track, got up, struggled with kicks and fist blows. Then, when they felt the solid soil, the country open before them, they fled at a gallop, leaping over the live hedge, cutting across the fields, yielding to the single instinct to be far from danger, far, very far. Women, men, shout-
ing, their hair on end, lost themselves in the depths of the woods.

Trodten on, her hair down and her dress in tatters, Séverine had finished by freeing herself; and she did not flee, she ran toward the roaring engine, when she found herself face to face with Pecqueux.

"Jacques, Jacques! He is saved, is he not?"

The fireman, who, by a miracle, had not even sprained a limb, was also running, his heart wrung with remorse at the idea that his engineer was beneath the wreck. They had traveled so much, suffered so much together, beneath the continued fatigue of the heavy winds! And their engine, their poor engine, the good friend so beloved of their household of three, was there upon its back, losing all the breath of its breast through its cracked lungs!

"I leaped," stammered he. "I know nothing, nothing at all! Let us run, let us run fast!"

Upon the quay they came on Flore, who had watched them coming. She had not yet stirred, in the stupor of the act accomplished, of this massacre which she had made. It was over and it was well done; she felt only the satisfaction of a need, without pity for the misfortunes of the others, whom she did not even see. But when she recognized Séverine, her eyes opened immeasurably, a shadow of frightful suffering blackened her pale visage. What! that woman was alive when he was certainly dead! Amid the sharp pain of her assassinated love, that knife blow which she had given herself full in the heart, she suddenly realized the abomination of her crime. She had done that, she had killed him, she had killed all those people! A great cry tore her throat, she twisted her arms, she ran madly.

"Jacques, oh! Jacques! He is there, he was thrown backwards, I saw him. Jacques, Jacques!"

The Lison's death-rattle was less loud, a hoarse lamentation which grew weaker, and amid which now was
heard increasing, more and more heart-rending, the noise of the wounded. But the smoke remained thick, the enormous pile of débris, from whence came those voices of torture and terror, seemed enveloped by a black dust, motionless in the sunlight. What was to be done? Where were they to commence, how were they to reach those unfortunates?

“Jacques!” still cried Flore. “I tell you that he looked at me and that he was thrown there, beneath the tender. Come now, help me, wont you!”

Already Cabuche and Misard had picked up Henri, the chief conductor, who, at the last second, had leaped out also. He had dislocated his foot; they seated him on the ground, against the hedge, from whence, stupefied, mute, he watched the work of rescue, without appearing to suffer.

“Cabuche, come help me, I tell you that Jacques is under there!”

The quarryman did not hear, ran to the other wounded people, carried away a young woman, whose legs hung down, broken at the thighs.

And it was Séverine who rushed forward at Flore’s appeal.

“Jacques, Jacques! Where is he? I will help you.”

“Well then, help me!”

Their hands met, they pulled together at a broken wheel. But the delicate fingers of the one accomplished nothing, while the other, with her strong fist, beat down the obstacles.

“Attention!” said Pecqueux, also joining in the work.

With a sudden movement, he stopped Séverine at the moment when she was about to tread on an arm, cut off at the shoulder, still clad in a sleeve of blue cloth. She recoiled in horror. Nevertheless she did not recognize the sleeve: it was an unknown arm, rolled there, from a body which would be found somewhere else, without
doubt. And it made her tremble so that she stood as if paralyzed, weeping and watching the others toil, incapable even of clearing away the bits of glass which cut their hands.

Besides, the rescue of the dying and the search for the dead were full of anguish and danger, for the fire from the engine had communicated itself to fragments of wood, and it was necessary, in order to extinguish this incipient conflagration, to shovel earth upon it. While a messenger was hastening to Barentin to ask for aid and a dispatch was being sent off to Rouen, the clearing away began with the greatest activity possible, every arm was bent to it with great courage. Many of the fugitives had returned, ashamed of their panic. But the rescuers advanced with infinite precautions, the removal of each fragment demanded care, for they were afraid of finishing the buried unfortunates should slides be produced. Wounded persons protruded from the heap, covered to the breast, held there as if in a vise and groaning. They toiled a quarter of an hour to deliver a man, who did not complain, as pale as a sheet, saying that he was unhurt; and, when they had extricated him, both his legs were off, he expired immediately, without having either felt or known of his horrible mutilation in the shock of his fear. An entire family was withdrawn from a carriage which had caught fire: the father and mother were wounded at the knees, the grandmother had an arm broken; but these also did not feel their injuries, sobbing, calling their little daughter, who had disappeared in the crush, a blonde little thing scarcely three years old, whom the rescuers recovered beneath a strip of roof, safe and sound, smiling and seeming amused. Another little girl, this one covered with blood, her poor baby hands crushed, who had been placed aside, awaiting the discovery of her parents, remained solitary and unknown, so choked that she did not utter a word, her face convulsed into a mask of indescribable terror whenever any
body approached her. They could not open the doors, the iron work of which had been twisted by the shock, they were forced to descend into the compartments through the broken windows. Already four corpses were ranged side by side on the border of the road. Ten of the wounded, extended on the ground, near the dead, were waiting, without a physician to dress their hurts, without help. And the clearing away had scarcely commenced, they gathered up a new victim beneath each bit of wreckage, the pile did not seem to diminish, all quaking and palpitating with this human butchery.

"I tell you that Jacques is under there!" repeated Flore, relieving herself with this obstinate cry, which she uttered without reason, like the very groaning of her despair. "He is calling, listen! listen!"

The tender was fast under the wagons, which, after climbing one upon the other, had fallen over it; and, in fact, since the engine had subdued its death-rattle, they had heard the strong voice of a man roaring in the depths of the ruins. In proportion as they advanced the clamor of the voice of agony grew louder, of a pain so enormous that the toilers could no longer support it, weeping and crying out themselves. Then, finally, when they had this man, whose legs they had freed and were drawing to them, the roar of suffering ceased. The man was dead.

"No," said Flore, "it is not Jacques. It's further down, he is under there."

And, with her arms of a female warrior, she lifted wheels, hurled them away, she twisted the zinc of roofs, broke doors, tore off bits of chain. And, whenever she came upon a dead or a wounded person, she called out in order that she might be disembarrassed, not wishing to leave her mad search for a second.

Behind her, Cabuche, Pecqueux and Misard were working, while Séverine, faint from standing without being able to do anything, had sat down on the stove in seat of a wagon. But Misard, again seized upon by his
phlegm, easy and indifferent, shunned the heavier labor, aided particularly in transporting the bodies. And he, as well as Flore, looked at the corpses as if they hoped to recognize them from among the crowd of thousands and thousands of visages, which, in ten years, had defiled before them, at full steam, leaving them but the confused remembrance of a throng, brought, borne away in a flash. Flore believed she had found one with whom she had talked the day the train was snowbound: that American, with whose profile she had finished by becoming acquainted, without knowing either his name or anything concerning him and his. Misard carried him with the other dead, come from they knew not where, stopped there en route they knew not to what place.

Then, there was still another heart-rending spectacle. In the overturned body of a first-class compartment, they discovered a young couple, newly married, without doubt, thrown one against the other so unfortunately that the woman, beneath her, was crushing the man, without being able to make a movement to relieve him. He, stifled, was already giving vent to the death-rattle; while she, her mouth free, was wildly supplicating the rescuers to hurry, terrified, her heart wrenched, at feeling that she was killing him. And, when both had been delivered, it was she who, suddenly, expired, her side torn by a spike. And the man, having recovered consciousness, was clamorous in his grief, kneeling beside his wife, whose eyes remained full of tears.

Now, there were twelve dead, more than thirty wounded. But they had succeeded in freeing the tender; and Flore, from time to time, paused, plunged her hand among the splintered wood, the twisted iron, searching eagerly with her eyes to see if she could not perceive the engineer. Suddenly, she uttered a loud cry.

"I see him, he is under there! Yes, there's his arm and his blue woolen vest. And he don't stir, he don't breathe!"
She straightened herself up, she swore like a man.

"Nom de Dieu! make haste, won't you!—pull him out from under there!"

With both hands she strove to tear away the floor of a carriage, which other débris prevented her from drawing to her. Then, she ran off, she returned with the axe which at the Misard's was used to split wood; and brandishing it, as a wood cutter brandishes his axe in the midst of a forest of oaks, she attacked the floor with furious blows. The rest drew aside, let her go on, crying to her to take care. But there was no wounded person left save the engineer, sheltered beneath a tangle of axle-trees and wheels. Besides, she did not heed, stirred by excitement, sure of him, irresistible. She cleft the wood asunder, each of her blows cut away an obstacle. With her blonde hair flying, her corsage torn and showing her bare arms, she was like a terrible mower cutting a swath amid the destruction she had caused. A final blow, which struck an axle-tree, broke in two the blade of the axe. And, aided by the others, she threw aside the wheels which had shielded the young man from certain crushing, she was the first to seize him, to bear him away in her arms.

"Jacques, Jacques! He breathes, he lives! Ah! mon Dieu! he lives! I knew I had seen him fall and that he was there!"

Séverine, bewildered, followed her. Between them they placed him at the foot of the hedge, beside Henri, who, stupefied, was still looking, without appearing to comprehend where he was or what was being done around him. Pecqueux, who had approached, stood staring at his engineer, upset by seeing him in such a wretched state; while the two women, kneeling now, one on the right, the other on the left, supported the head of the unfortunate, watching with anguish the slightest quivers of his face.

At last, Jacques opened his eyelids. His troubled
glances fell upon them turn by turn, but he did not seem to recognize them. They were of no consequence to him. But his eyes having encountered, a few mètres away, the expiring engine, first grew frightened, then fixed themselves, fluttering with a growing emotion. He recognized the Lison perfectly and it recalled all to him—the two stones across the track, the abominable shock, that crushing which he had felt at once in it and in himself, from which he was resuscitated, while the engine surely was dying of it. The disemboweled giantess grew more quiet, gradually sank into a gentle sleep, finished by not uttering a sound. The engine was dead.

Then, Jacques, having comprehended that the Lison was no more, shut his eyes again with the desire to die also, so weak, besides, that he believed himself borne away in the last faint breath of the engine; and, from his closed eyelids, slow tears now flowed, flooding his cheeks. This was too much for Pecqueux, who had remained there, motionless, a great lump in his throat. Their good friend was dead and behold his engineer wished to follow it. And the fireman, who, nevertheless, had not been drinking, burst into violent sobs, which shook him from head to foot and which he could not restrain.

Séverine and Flore were also in despair, disturbed by this new fainting fit which had seized upon Jacques. The latter ran home, returned with some camphorated brandy, began to rub him, in order to do something. But the two women, in their anguish, were exasperated by the interminable death struggle of the horse which, alone out of the five, had survived, its two fore feet gone. It lay near them, it uttered a continuous neigh, a cry almost human, so resonant and of such frightful pain that two of the wounded, seized upon by the contagion, began to howl also like beasts. Never had a death cry rent the air with that deep, not to be forgotten
plaint which froze the blood. The torture became atrocious, voices trembling with pity and anger burst forth, begging that some one would finish the miserable horse, which was suffering so much and the endless death-rattle of which, now that the engine was dead, remained like the last lamentation of the catastrophe. Then, Pecqueux, still sobbing, picked up the broken axe and with a single blow full in the head killed it. And, upon the field of massacre, silence fell.

Aid finally arrived, after two hours of waiting. In the shock of the collision, the carriages had all been thrown to the left, so the clearing of the descending road could be accomplished in a few hours. A train of three wagons, drawn by a pilot engine had brought from Rouen the chief of the préfet's office, the Procureur Impérial, engineers and physicians in the service of the Compagnie, a whole flood of frightened and hurried personages; while the chief station master of Barentin, M. Bessière, was already on the spot, with a force of laborers, attacking the débris. An agitation, an extraordinary excitement reigned in this corner of the out-of-the-way district, so deserted and so silent ordinarily. The safe and sound passengers kept from the frenzy of their panic a feverish need of movement: some searched for vehicles, terrified at the idea of again getting into a railway wagon; others, seeing that they would not even find a wheelbarrow, were already uneasy to know where they would eat or where they would sleep; and all wanted a telegraph office, several started on foot for Barentin, carrying dispatches. While the authorities, aided by the railway administration, commenced an inquiry, the physicians proceeded in haste to dress the hurts of the wounded. Many had fainted amid pools of blood. Others, beneath the pincers and the needles, were groaning in feeble voices. There were, altogether, fifteen dead and thirty-two passengers grievously hurt. While waiting until their identity could be
established, the dead remained on the ground, ranged along the hedge, their faces upturned. Only a substitute, a blonde and pink young man, who displayed zeal, occupied himself with them, searching their pockets to see if papers, cards or letters would not enable him to bill each with a name and address. Meanwhile, around him, a gaping circle had formed; for, although there was not a house for a league in any direction, curious persons had arrived, about thirty men, women and children, who created bother, without aiding in anything. And, the black dust, the veil of smoke and steam which had enveloped everything, being dissipated, the radiant April morning triumphed over the field of massacre, bathing with the soft and gay rain of its bright sunshine the dying and the dead, the disemboweled Lison, the disaster of the heaped up ruins which the corps of laborers were clearing away, like insects repairing the ravages made by the tread of an absent-minded passer in their hill.

Jacques was still in his swoon, and Séverine had stopped a physician as he passed, supplicating him. The latter examined the young man without finding any apparent wound; but he feared internal injuries, for slender threads of blood had appeared on the lips. Unable to give a definite opinion as yet, he advised carrying away the wounded man as soon as possible and putting him in bed, avoiding shocks.

Beneath the hands which were feeling him Jacques again opened his eyes, with a slight cry of pain; and, this time, he recognized Séverine, he stammered, in his wandering:

"Take me away, take me away!"

Flore bent over him, and, turning his head he recognized her also. His looks expressed an infantile terror, he threw himself toward Séverine, in a recoil of hate and horror, repeating: "Take me away at once, at once!"

Then, she demanded of him in an affectionate manner, alone with him, for that girl no longer counted:
“Shall I take you to the Croix-de-Maufras house? If you wish to go there, it’s just opposite, we shall be at home.”

And he accepted, still trembling, his eyes upon the other.

“Wherever you will, at once!”

Motionless, Flore had turned pale beneath that look of terrified execration. So, in that carnage of the unknown and innocent, she had succeeded in killing neither of them: the woman had come off without a scratch; he, now, would, perhaps, escape; and she had only drawn them closer to each other, thrown them alone together in the depths of that solitary mansion. She saw them installed there, Jacques cured, convalescent, Séverine very attentive to him, paid for her nights of watching by continual caresses, the twain prolonging, removed from everybody, in absolute liberty, that honeymoon of the catastrophe. A great cold froze her, she looked at the dead, she had killed for nothing.

At that moment, in that glance cast at the slaughter, Flore perceived Misard and Cabuche, whom some gentlemen were questioning—justice for sure. In fact, the procureur impérial and the chief of the préfect’s office were striving to understand how that quarryman’s truck had got across the track. Misard maintained that he had not quitted his post, though he could give no precise information; he really knew nothing, he claimed that he had turned his back, occupied with his apparatuses. As to Cabuche, still upset, he related a long, confused story, why he had made the mistake of quitting his horses, desirous of seeing the dead woman, and in what manner the animals had started off alone and how the young girl had been unable to stop them. He got tangled up, began anew, without succeeding in making himself understood.

A savage need of liberty again put Flore’s frozen blood in circulation. She wished to be free from her-
self, free to reflect and arrange a plan, having never had need of any one to put her in the right road. What was the good of waiting for them to bore her with questions, to arrest her, perhaps? For, outside of the crime, there had been a fault of service, they would hold her responsible. Nevertheless, she remained, held there as long as Jacques should be there himself.

Séverine had supplicated Pecqueux so strongly that the latter had finally procured a stretcher; and he reappeared with a comrade to carry away the wounded man. The physician had also persuaded the young woman to take to her house the chief conductor, Henri, who seemed to be suffering only from a cerebral shock, stupefied. They would transport him after the other.

And, as Séverine bent down to unbutton Jacques' collar, which annoyed him, she kissed him upon the eyes, openly, wishing to give him the courage to bear the transfer.

"Have no fear, we shall be happy!"

Smiling, he kissed her in his turn. And this was for Flore the supreme rending, that which tore him from her forever. It seemed to her that her own blood was now running in streams from an incurable wound. When they bore him away, she fled. But, as she passed in front of the low house, she perceived through the window panes, the chamber of death, with the pale stain of the candle, which was burning in the full day, beside her mother's body. During the accident the dead woman had remained alone, her head half-turned, her eyes wide-open, her lip curled, as if she were watching all those people whom she did not know get crushed and die.

Flore galloped, turned immediately at the elbow which the road to Doinville made, then sprang to the left in the bushes. She knew each nook of the district, thenceforward she defied the gendarmes to take her, if they were sent in pursuit of her. Hence she suddenly ceased to run, continuing slowly, going to a hiding-place
where she loved to conceal herself on her days of sadness, an excavation above the tunnel. She raised her eyes, saw by the sun that it was noon. When she was in her den, she stretched herself out upon the hard rock, she lay motionless, her hands knotted at the nape of her neck, reflecting. Then only a frightful void was produced within her, the sensation of being already dead gradually numbed her limbs. It was not remorse for having uselessly killed all those people, for she was compelled to make an effort to recover regret and horror for the deed. But she was certain now that Jacques had seen her hold the horses; and she comprehended from his recoil that he entertained for her the terrified repulsion one has for monsters. Never would he forget. Besides, when one misses people, one must not miss one's self. Presently she would kill herself. She had no other hope, she further felt the absolute necessity of it as she lay there, calming herself and reasoning. The fatigue, an annihilation of all her being alone prevented her from rising to seek a weapon and die. And, nevertheless, from the depths of the invincible somnolence which had seized upon her, yet mounted the love of life, the need of good fortune, a final dream of being happy, since she had left the two others to the felicity of living together, free. Why should she not await the night and hasten to rejoin Ozil, who adored her, who would defend her? Her ideas grew soft and confused, she fell into a dark, dreamless sleep.

When Flore awoke, night had fallen, profound. Bewildered, she felt around her, suddenly remembered, on touching the bare rock, where she had lain down. And, like a thunderclap she realized the implacable necessity: she must die. It seemed as if the soft cowardice, that weakening before life possible yet, had gone away with the fatigue. No, no! death alone was good. She could not live in all that blood, her heart torn out, execrated by the only man she had wanted and who was anoth-
er's. Now that she had strength enough for it she must die. Flore arose, quitted the rocky den. She did not hesitate, for she had found by instinct where she would go. From another look at the sky, toward the stars, she knew that it was nearly nine o'clock. As she arrived at the line of the railway, a train passed, with great rapidity, upon the descending road, which appeared to give her pleasure: all would go well, they had evidently cleared that road, while the other was, without doubt, still obstructed, for the circulation did not seem to be re-established there. From that time she followed the live hedge, amid the great silence of the wild district. Nothing pressed, there would be no train before the express from Paris, which would reach there only at 9.25; and she still went slowly along the hedge, in the thick gloom, very calm, as if she were taking one of her customary promenades along the deserted paths. However, before arriving at the tunnel, she sprang over the hedge, she continued to advance on the very track, with her idling step, walking to meet the express. She was compelled to trick, in order not to be seen by the watchman, as she had habitually done every time she had gone to visit Ozil at the other extremity. And, in the tunnel, she still walked constantly, constantly forward. But it was no longer as it had been the other week, she was no longer afraid, if she turned about, of losing the exact notion of the direction in which she was going. The madness of the tunnel did not throb beneath her skull, that madness in which things founder, as well as time and space, amid the thunder of the sounds and the crushing of the vault. Little she cared, however, she did not reason, did not even think, had but one fixed resolution: to walk, to walk straight before her as long as she did not meet the train, and to walk still, straight up to the headlight as soon as she saw it flame in the darkness.

Flore, at length, grew astonished, for she believed she
had been walking thus for hours. How far off it was, that death which she wanted! The idea that she would not find it, that she would go for leagues and leagues without running against it, filled her with despair for a moment. Her feet were growing weary, would she then be obliged to sit down, to wait for it, lying across the rails? But that appeared base to her; she had the need of walking to the end, of dying on her feet, through the instinct of a maiden and a warrior. And there was within her an awakening of energy, a new push forward, when she perceived, very far off, the headlight of the express, like a little star, twinkling and alone in the depths of a sky of ink. The train was not yet beneath the vault, not a sound announced it, there was only that fire, so piercing, so bright, growing gradually. Drawn up to her full height, balanced upon her strong limbs, she advanced now with a striding step, but without running, as at the approach of a friend to whom she wished to spare a portion of the road. But the train entered the tunnel, the frightful rumbling came nearer, shaking the ground with a tempestuous wind, while the star had become an enormous eye, constantly increasing, gushing out as from the orbit of the darkness. Then, beneath the empire of an inexplicable feeling, perhaps in order to die entirely alone, she emptied her pockets, without ceasing her walk of heroic persistence, placed quite a bundle on the side of the road, a handkerchief, keys, pack-thread, two knives; she even took off the fichu tied about her neck, left her corsage unhooked, half-torn away. The eye changed into a brazier, into the muzzle of an oven, vomiting fire, the breath of the monster arrived, damp and warm already, amid that rolling of thunder more and more deafening. And she still walked, she went straight to that furnace, in order not to miss the engine, fascinated like an insect of the night attracted by a flame. And, in the dreadful shock, in the embrace, she drew herself up further, as if, excited by a fighter's last revolt,
she had wished to grasp the colossus and overthrow it. Her head had dashed into the centre of the headlight and extinguished it.

It was more than an hour afterwards that Flore’s corpse was picked up. The engineer had clearly seen that tall, pale figure walk against the engine, with the terrifying strangeness of an apparition, beneath the jet of sharp light which flooded it; and, when, suddenly, the lantern was extinguished, the train was in a profound obscurity, rolling with its noise of thunder, he had trembled, feeling the passage of death. At the exit of the tunnel, he had endeavored to shout about the accident to the watchman. But at Barentin only he was able to relate that some one had got cut to pieces down there on the track: it was certainly a woman; hair, mingled with the débris of the skull, still remained glued to the broken glass of the headlight. And, when the men, sent to search for the body, discovered it, they were frightened at seeing it so white, of the whiteness of marble. It lay upon the ascending road, hurled there by the violence of the shock, the head reduced to a jelly, the limbs without a scratch, half stripped, of an admirable beauty in their purity and strength. Silently the men covered her up. They had recognized her. She had surely killed herself, mad, to escape from the terrible responsibility devolving upon her.

At midnight, Flore’s corpse, in the little low house, reposed beside the corpse of her mother. They had put a mattress on the floor and relighted a candle between them. Phasie, her head still leaning, with the frightful laugh of her twisted mouth, now seemed to be looking at her daughter with her big fixed eyes; while, in the solitude, amid the profound silence, was heard on all sides the inexorable labor, the panting efforts of Misard, who had resumed his searches. And, at the regulation intervals, the trains passed, crossed each other upon the two tracks, the circulation having been completely re-estab-
lished. They passed inexorable, with their mighty mechanical power, indifferent, ignorant of those dramas and those crimes. What did the unknowns of the crowd fallen en route, crushed beneath the wheels, matter? They had borne off the dead, washed away the blood and again started for down there, for the future.
CHAPTER XI.

THE HUMAN ANIMAL IS SATISFIED.

It was in the great bed-chamber of the Croix-de-Maufras house, the chamber hung with red damask, the lofty windows of which opened upon the line of the railway, a few mètres off. From the bed, an old bed with posts, placed opposite, the trains could be seen passing. And, for years, they had not removed an object, not disturbed a piece of furniture.

Séverine had had Jacques, wounded and fainting, carried into this room; while she had left Henri Dauvergne on the ground-floor, in another and smaller bed-chamber. She had kept for herself a chamber adjoining that of Jacques, separated from it only by the stair landing. In two hours the installation was sufficiently comfortable, for the mansion had remained completely furnished, everything was there even to the linen in the depths of the closets. With an apron tied over her dress, Séverine had found herself changed into a nurse, after having simply telegraphed to Roubaud that he need not expect her, that she would, doubtless, remain there several days to take care of the wounded brought to their house.

And, the next day, the physician had believed that he could answer for Jacques, he even counted upon getting him on his feet in a week: a veritable miracle, a few slight internal injuries only. But he recommended the greatest care, the most absolute immobility. Hence, when the sick man opened his eyes, Séverine, who was watching over him as if he had been an infant, begged him to be kind, to obey her in everything. He, still very weak, promised with a nod of his head. He had
all his lucidity, he recognized this chamber, described by her the night of her confession: the red chamber, where, at sixteen and a half years of age she had met President Grandmorin. And he felt that house around him such as he had seen it so often when he had passed there, borne away upon his engine. He saw it again, planted crosswise on the border of the road, in its distress and the abandonment of its closed shutters, rendered, since it had been for sale, more lamentable and more dubious by the immense poster, which added to the melancholy of the garden, obstructed with briars. He recalled the frightful sadness he had experienced each time, the uneasiness with which it had haunted him, as if it were looming up in that place for the misfortune of his existence. Now, lying in that bed, so pale, he believed he understood, for it could be nothing but that: he was surely going to die there.

As soon as she had thought him in a condition to comprehend, Séverine had hastened to reassure him, whispering in his ear, as she pulled up the bed-clothes:

"Don’t worry yourself, I have emptied your pockets, I have taken the watch."

He stared at her, with widened eyes, making an effort of memory.

"The watch? Ah! yes, the watch."

"You might have been searched. And I have hidden it among some of my own things. Have no fear."

He thanked her with a pressure of the hand. On turning his head, he perceived, upon the table, the knife, also found in one of his pockets. There was no need of concealing that: a knife like all the others.

But, next day, Jacques was already stronger, and he resumed hoping that he would not die there. He had felt a veritable pleasure on recognizing, near him, Cabuche, making haste, deadening upon the floor his heavy steps of a colossus; for, since the accident, the quarryman had not quitted Séverine, as if carried away also by
an ardent need of devotion: he left his own work, returned each morning to aid in the heavy household toils, served her like a faithful dog, his eyes fixed upon hers. As he said, she was a strong woman, despite her weak air. One might well do something for her who did so much for others. And Jacques and Séverine got used to him and displayed their fondness for each other without heeding him when he was discreetly crossing the chamber, effacing his huge body as much as possible.

Jacques, however, was astonished by Séverine's frequent absences. The first day, by order of the doctor, she had hidden from him the presence of Henri below, fully realizing of what calming sweetness the idea of an absolute solitude would be to him.

"We are alone, are we not?"

"Yes, alone, entirely alone. Sleep in peace."

But she disappeared every minute, and the next day he heard on the ground floor sounds of steps and whispers. Then, the following day, ringing laughter, two young and fresh voices which chattered incessantly.

"What is it?—who is it? Then, we are not alone?"

"Well, no, there is below, just under your room, another wounded man to whom I have given an asylum."

"Ah! who then?"

"Henri, you know, the chief conductor."

"Henri—ah!"

"And, this morning, his sisters arrived. They are the people you hear, they laugh at everything. As he is very much better, they will return home this evening, because of their father, who cannot do without them; and Henri will remain two or three days longer to get completely well. Just think of it, he leaped from the train and broke nothing; but he was like an idiot, though he has got over that."

Jacques did not speak, fixed upon her a look so long that she added:
"You understand, eh? If he wasn't here, people might chatter about us. As long as I am not alone with you, my husband can have nothing to say, I have a good pretext for remaining here. You understand, do you not?"

"Yes, yes, it's all right."

And, until evening, Jacques listened to the laughter of the little Dauvergnes, which he remembered having heard, in Paris, mount thus from the lower story to the chamber in which Séverine had confessed to him. Then, quiet ensued, he no longer distinguished anything save the light step of the latter, going from him to the other wounded man. The door down-stairs was closed, the house fell into a profound silence. Twice, growing very thirsty, he was forced to rap with a chair on the floor in order to bring her up. And when she reappeared, she was smiling, greatly hurried, explaining that she would never get done with it because it was imperative to keep compresses of ice water upon Henri's head.

On the fourth day Jacques was able to be up and pass two hours in a fauteuil before the window. Leaning forward a little, he perceived the small garden which the railroad had cut, shut in by low walls, invaded by eglantines with pale flowers. And he recalled the night when he had raised himself up to look over the wall, he again saw the quite large grounds, on the other side of the house, enclosed only by a live hedge, that hedge over which he had climbed and behind which he had run against Flore, seated on the threshold of a small ruined hot-house, engaged in cutting stolen ropes with a pair of scissors. Ah! that abominable night, full of the terror of his malady! That Flore, with her tall and supple form of a blonde warrior, her flaming eyes fixed straight in his, had been like an incubus to him since memory had returned to him, clearer and clearer. At first he had not opened his mouth in regard to the accident and no one about him had spoken of it, through
prudence. But each detail had returned to him, he had reconstructed everything, he thought only of that with an effort so continuous that now, at the window, his sole occupation was to seek the traces, to watch the actors in the catastrophe. Why did he no longer see her at her post at the barrière, the flag in her fist? He dare not ask the question, which aggravated the uneasiness imparted to him by this lugubrious house, which seemed to him wholly peopled by spectres.

One morning, however, when Cabuche was there, aiding Séverine, he, at last, made up his mind to ask.

"And Flore, is she sick?"

The quarryman, overwhelmed, failed to understand a look given him by the young woman, believed that she directed him to speak.

"Poor Flore is dead!"

Jacques stared at them, quivering, and it was then necessary to tell him all. Between them, they related to him the suicide of the young girl, how she had caused herself to be cut to pieces in the tunnel. They had postponed the burial of the mother until evening, in order to take away the daughter at the same time; and the twain slept side by side in the little cemetery of Doinville, where they had gone to rejoin the first to go, the younger sister, that gentle and unfortunate Louisette, also borne off violently, all stained with blood and mud. Three wretched ones, of the number who fall by the wayside and are crushed, vanished as if swept away by the terrible wind of the passing trains.

"Dead, mon Dieu!" repeated Jacques, in a very low tone, "My poor Aunt Phasie, Flore and Louisette!"

At the name of the latter, Cabuche, who was helping Séverine make the bed, instinctively raised his eyes to her, troubled by the remembrance of his past tenderness, amid the growing passion by which he had been invaded, without defence, like a tender and ignorant being, like a good dog which yields to the first caress.
But the young woman, who knew about his tragic love-affair, remained grave, looked at him with sympathetic eyes; and this affected him greatly; and, his hand having accidentally touched hers, as he passed her the pillows, he choked, and, in a stammering voice, made answer to this question which Jacques had asked him:

"So, she was accused then of having provoked the accident?"

"Oh! no, no! But it was her fault, you understand."

In broken phrases, he told what he knew. He himself had seen nothing, for he was in the house when the horses started, taking the truck across the track. From that came his heavy remorse, the gentlemen of the law had reproached him severely for it: the horses should not have been left, the frightful misfortune would not have happened if he had remained with them. The inquest had, therefore, resulted in a verdict of simple negligence on Flore's part; and, as she had atrociously punished herself, the matter had been left where it was, they had not even displaced Misard, who, with his humble and deferential air, had got himself out of the difficulty by throwing all the blame on the dead girl: she was always headstrong, he was forced to quit his post every minute to close the barrière. Besides, the Compagnie had been unable to establish anything to the contrary of the perfect correctness of his service that morning; and, until he should re-marry, he had been authorized to take with him, to keep watch at the barrière, an old woman of the neighborhood, Mère Ducloux, formerly servant at an inn, who lived on suspicious gains, amassed in the past.

When Cabuche quitted the chamber, Jacques retained Séverine with a look. He was very pale.

"You know perfectly well that it was Flore who pulled the horses and who barred the track with the stones."

Séverine grew pale in her turn.

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“What are you talking about! You are excited and must go to bed again.”

“No, no, it is not an illusion. Don’t you understand? I saw her as plainly as I see you. She held the horses, she prevented the truck from advancing, with her powerful fist.”

Then, the young woman sank upon a chair, opposite to him, her limbs having given way beneath her.

“Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! it fills me with fear. It’s monstrous, it will prevent me from sleeping.”

“Parbleu!” continued he, “the thing is clear, she attempted to kill both of us with the rest. For a long while she wanted me and she was jealous. With that, her head was deranged, she had ideas of the other world. So many murders at one stroke, a whole crowd in blood! Ah! the wretch!”

Her eyes widened, a nervous contraction drew her lips; and he was silent, they continued to look at each other for a long minute. Then, tearing himself from the abominable visions which had been evoked between them, he resumed, in a half-voice:

“Ah! she is dead and she returns! Since I have recovered consciousness, it has always seemed to me that she was here. This very morning, I turned around, believing her at my bedside. She is dead and we are alive. I hope she may not avenge herself now!”

Séverine trembled.

“Stop! stop! you will drive me mad!”

And she went out. Jacques heard her go down-stairs to the other wounded man. Remaining at the window, he forgot himself anew in examining the road, the little house of the garde-barrière, with its huge wall, the signal post, that small hut of planks in which Misard seemed to doze, amid his regular and monotonous toil. These things absorbed him now for hours, like the study of a problem which he could not solve and the solution of which, however, was important for his safety.
He never wearied of watching Misard, that puny, quiet and pale being, continually shaken by a wretched little cough, who had poisoned his wife, who had triumphed over that fine woman, like a gnawing insect, absorbed in his passion. Surely, for years, he had had no other idea in his head, day and night, during the twelve interminable hours of his service. Blowing his horn at each tinkle of the electric bell which announced a train to him; then, the train having passed and the way closed, touching a button to announce the fact to the post succeeding, touching another to open the way to the preceding post—these were the simple mechanical movements which had finished by entering as bodily habits into his vegetative life. Illiterate, obtuse, he never read, he remained with hanging hands and vague, listless eyes between the calls of his apparatuses. Almost always seated in his watch-box, he took no other amusement there than breakfasting as long as possible. Afterwards, he fell back into his stupefaction, his brain empty, without a thought, tormented particularly by terrible fits of somnolence, at times falling asleep with his eyes open. At night, if he did not wish to succumb to this almost irresistible torpor, he was forced to arise, to walk with legs as limber as those of a drunken man. And it was thus that the struggle with his wife, that secret fight for the thousand francs, as to who should have them after the death of the other, must have been, for months and months, the sole reflection in the benumbed brain of the solitary man. When he blew the horn, when he manoeuvred his signals, watching like an automaton over the safety of so many lives, he thought of the poison; and, when he waited, with inert arms and eyes blinking with sleep, he thought of it still. Nothing beyond: he would kill her, he would search, it was he who would have the money.

And now Jacques was astonished to find him the same. One killed then without a shock and life went
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on. After the excitement of the first searches, Misard, in fact, had fallen back into his phlegm, of the sullen mildness of a fragile being who fears clashes. But it was in vain that he had made away with her, his wife had triumphed notwithstanding, for he was beaten, he had turned the house inside out without discovering anything, not even a centime; and his looks alone, his uneasy and searching looks, betrayed his preoccupation in his earthy face. Continually he saw the wide-open eyes of the dead woman, the frightful laugh of her lips, which repeated: "Hunt, hunt!" He was searching, he no longer gave his brain a minute of repose; without relaxation, it toiled, toiled, in quest of the spot where the hoard was buried, resuming the examination of the possible hiding-places, casting aside those he had already searched, working himself into excitement the moment he had imagined a new one, driven there by such haste that he dropped everything to run to it—uselessly: a punishment grown intolerable at length, an avenging torture, a sort of cerebral insomnia which kept him awake, stupid and reflecting in spite of himself, beneath the clocklike tic-tac of the fixed idea. When he blew his horn, once for the down trains, twice for the up trains, he searched; when he obeyed the bell calls, when he touched the buttons of his apparatuses, closing, opening the way, he searched; incessantly he searched, searched wildly, in the daytime, during his long waits, made heavy by idleness, at night, tormented by sleep, like an exile at the end of the world, amid the silence of the vast dark country. And Mère Ducloux, the woman who at present kept the barrière, worked upon by the desire to cause him to marry her, was much worried, uneasy because he never closed his eyes.

One night, Jacques, who had begun to walk a few steps in his chamber, having arisen and gone to the window, saw a lantern coming and going at Misard's house: surely, the man was searching. But, the following night,
as the convalescent was again watching, he was astonished to recognize Cabuche in a tall, sombre form standing in the road, beneath the window of the adjoining room in which Séverine slept. And this, though he did not know why, instead of irritating him, filled him with commiseration and sadness: another unfortunate, that tall brute, planted there like a fond and faithful animal. Truly, Séverine, so slender, not handsome when one took her in detail, must have a very powerful charm, with her inky hair and her pale periwinkle eyes, that the savages themselves, the ignorant colossuses, were so smitten with her as to pass the nights at her door, like trembling little boys! He recalled circumstances, the eagerness of the quarryman to aid her, the looks of servitude with which he had offered himself to her. Yes, certainly, Cabuche loved her, wanted to be near her. And, the next day, having kept an eye on him, he saw him furtively pick up a hairpin, fallen from her chignon while she was making the bed, and keep it in his fist so as not to give it back. Jacques thought of his own torment, all he had suffered from love, all the trouble and frightful things which had returned to him with health.

Two days more passed, the week ended and, as the doctor had foreseen, the wounded men were in condition to resume their service. One morning the engineer, being at the window, saw go by, upon an entirely new engine, his fireman Pecqueux, who waved his hand to him, as if he were summoning him. But he was in no hurry, an awakening of love kept him there, a sort of anxious waiting for what was destined to occur. That very day, below, he had again heard fresh and youthful laughter, a gaiety of big girls, filling the mournful house with the din of a boarding-school at recess. He had recognized the little Dauvergnes. He did not speak of the matter to Séverine, who, besides, was constantly escaping during the entire day and
could not remain with him five minutes at a time. Then, in the evening, the house fell into the silence of death. And, as, with a grave air, a trifle pale, she lingered in his chamber, he gazed at her fixedly, he demanded of her:

"So he is gone, his sisters have taken him away?"
She answered, in a short voice: "Yes."
"And we are alone at last, altogether alone?"
"Yes, altogether alone. To-morrow we must separate, I will return to Havre. The camping in this desert is over."

He continued to gaze at her, with a smiling and embarrassed air. However, he made his decision.
"You regret that he has gone, eh?" And, as she gave a start, wishing to protest, he stopped her.
"I am not seeking a quarrel. You see plainly enough that I am not jealous. One day, you told me to kill you if I suspected you, but I have not the air of a man who thinks of killing, have I? Really, however, you did not stir from down-stairs. It was impossible for me to have you here a minute. I have finished by remembering what your husband said—that you would eventually be smitten with that young fellow."

She had ceased to struggle with herself, she repeated twice, slowly:
"Smitten, smitten—"

Then, in a burst of irresistible frankness:
"Well, listen, it's true! We can tell each other everything—enough things bind us together. For months, that man has pursued me. He knew that I was friendly with you and thought I could also be friendly with him. And, when he was down-stairs in this house, he spoke to me about his friendship for me again, he spoke with an air so full of gratitude for the cares I had bestowed upon him, with such kind tenderness that for a moment I dreamed of accepting him as a friend. His friendship would be calmness for me."
She interrupted herself, hesitated before continuing.

"For in front of us now all is barred, we will go no further. Our dream of departure, that hope of being rich and happy away off in America, all that felicity which depended upon you is impossible since you have not been strong enough. Oh! I reproach you with nothing; it is, perhaps, better that the thing be not done; but I wish to make you understand that with you I have nothing further to expect: to-morrow will be like yesterday, the same vexations, the same torments."

He had let her talk on, he questioned her only when she paused.

"And it's for that reason that you have made him your friend, eh?"

She had walked several steps in the chamber, she returned, shrugged her shoulders.

"No, I have not made him my friend, and I simply tell you so and you will believe me I am sure, because henceforth we will have no occasion to lie to each other. He kissed my hands, but not my lips, I swear that to you. He expects me in Paris later, because I found him so unhappy that I could not bear to drive him to desperation."

She was right, Jacques believed her, he saw that she had not lied. He cried out:

"But the other, there is still another, that Cabuche!"

"Ah! you have noticed, you know that also. Yes, it's true, there is yet he. I wonder what's the matter with them all! He never said a word to me. But I have seen him twist his arms when we were kissing. If he hears me talking affectionately to you, he goes in the corners and weeps. And, besides, he robs me of everything, my own property, gloves, even down to handkerchiefs which disappear, which he carries off over there to his cavern, like treasures. But you don't think me capable of encouraging that savage, do you? He is too big, he would frighten me. However, he demands nothing.
No, no, those huge brutes, when they are timid, die with love, without exacting anything. You could leave me a month in his cave and he would not touch me even with the tips of his fingers, no more than he touched Louise, and he did not touch her. I can answer for that to-day."

At this remembrance their glances met, a silence reigned. The things of the past were evoked—their meeting at the office of the Rouen Judge of Inquiry, then their first trip to Paris, their association at Havre and all that had followed, both good and terrible. She approached, she was so close to him that he felt the warmth of her breath.

"No, no, I want him still less for a friend than the other, I want, I can have no friend but you!"

She put out her arms, she wished to lay her head on his shoulder, to kiss him. But he seized her hands, he held her back, dismayed, terrified to feel the old quiver mount from his limbs, with the blood that made his brain throb. He heard the ringing in his ears, the hammer strokes, the din of the throng of his worst crises of the past. For some time he had been afraid to look at her either in broad day or even in the light of a candle, dreading lest he should go mad if he saw her. And a lamp was there which threw its brilliant illumination upon them both; and, if he trembled thus, if he had commenced to grow wild, it must be because he perceived the white roundness of her throat where the collar of her robe de chambre had got unbuttoned.

She continued, in a supplicating voice:

"It is in vain that our existence is barred, so much the worse! If I expect nothing new from you, if I know that to-morrow will bring back to us the same annoyances and the same torments, I don't care, I can do nothing but drag out my life and suffer with you. We are about to return to Havre, things may go as they like, provided that I can see you thus for an hour from time
to time. For three nights I have been unable to sleep, tortured in my chamber, there, on the other side of the landing, by the need of coming to sit with you. You have been so ill, you seemed to me so sombre, that I dare not. But let me sit with you this evening. And, besides, remember that it is the last night. We are at the end of the earth in this house. Listen—not a breath, not a soul. Nobody can come, we are alone, so absolutely alone that no one would know it if we were to die!"

Already, Jacques, in the excitement of his madness, having no weapon, was advancing his fingers to strangle Séverine, but she turned and sat down, disconcerting him. Then, he also sat down, beside her, and, as during the night of the confession in Paris, in Mère Victoire's chamber, he listened silently, while she, her mouth close to his ear, whispered endless words in a very low tone. Perhaps, that evening, she had felt that death was near. Up to that day she had remained smiling, unconscious, beneath the continual menace of murder. But she had just experienced the cold little quiver of it, and it was that inexplicable dread which kept her with Jacques, in a need of protection.

"Oh! if you had been able to do the deed, how happy we would have been in that foreign land! No, no, I no longer ask you to do what you cannot do; only, I so much regret our dream! I was afraid awhile ago. I don't know what, but it seems to me that something is threatening me. It is a childish freak, without doubt: every minute I turn, as if some one were there, ready to strike me. And I have but you to defend me. All my joy depends upon you, you are now my sole reason for living."

Without answering, he threw his arm about her, embraced her, putting into that pressure what he did not speak of: his emotion, his sincere desire to be kind to her, the strong affection with which she had not ceased
to inspire him. And he had again wished to kill her that evening; for, if she had not turned and sat down, he would have strangled her, that was certain. Never would he be cured; the crises returned at the hazard of circumstances, without his being able even to discover, to discuss the causes of them. Why had one come on that evening when he had found her faithful, trusting and affectionate? Was it then that the more she loved him the more he wished to destroy her?

"Say, why am I afraid? Do you know anything which threatens me?"

"No, no, rest easy, nothing threatens you."

"Why, there are moments when my whole body trembles. There is, behind me, a continual danger, which I do not see, but which I feel plainly. Why then am I afraid?"

"No, no, have no fear. I will not let any one hurt you."

There was a brief silence.

"Ah!" she continued, "we might pass all our lives thus together. You know, we would sell this house, we would go away with the money to rejoin in America your friend, who is still waiting for you. There's not a night that I don't arrange our existence in the country across the ocean. And every evening would be like this evening, we would be constantly in each other's society. But you cannot do the necessary deed, I know it. If I speak to you of it, it is not to give you pain, it is because it comes from my heart in spite of me."

A sudden decision, which he had already made so often, took possession of Jacques: to kill Roubaud in order not to kill her. This time, as on the other occasions, he believed he had the absolute, unshakable will to do so.

"I have not been able to do it," murmured he in his turn, "but I will do it. Have I not so promised you?"
She protested feebly.

"No, do not promise, I conjure you. It made us sick afterwards, when your courage failed you. And, besides, it's frightful, it mustn't be done, no, no, it mustn't be done!"

"Yes, on the contrary, you know very well that it must be done. It is because it must be done that I will find the strength to do it. I wished to talk to you about it and we will talk about it now, since we are here, alone and undisturbed."

Already she had resigned herself, sighing, her heart swollen and beating so tumultuously that he felt it throb as she leaned against him.

"Oh! mon Dieu! while it was not to be done, I desired it. But, at present, when it grows serious, it almost kills me."

And they paused, there was another silence, beneath the heavy weight of that resolution. Around them they felt the desert, the desolation of that wild district.

Then, as he kissed her, she resumed her faint murmur.

"It will be necessary for him to come here. Yes, I can summon him under a pretext. I don't know what one. We will see later. Then, you will hide yourself; and it will go on all alone, for we are certain not to be disturbed here. That's what must be done, eh?"

He contented himself with replying:

"Yes, yes."

But she, plunged in reflection, weighed every detail; and, in proportion as the plan developed itself in her head, she discussed it and improved it.

"It, however, would be too stupid not to take our precautions. If we are going to get ourselves arrested the next day, I should much prefer to remain where we are. Do you see, I read this, I no longer remember where, in a novel, no doubt: it would be best to make people believe in a suicide. He has been so queer for some
time, so out of order and so sombre that it would surprise no one to learn suddenly that he came here to kill himself. But it would be necessary to find the means, to arrange the thing, so that the idea of suicide would be acceptable—would it not?"

"Yes, without doubt."

"Something that would hide the trace, eh? Say now, here's an idea! If, for instance, his wound were in the throat, we would only have to take him and carry him between us there, across the track. Do you understand? We would put him with his neck on a rail so that the first train would decapitate him. They could search afterwards, when his neck was crushed: no longer any wound, no longer anything! Will that do, say?"

"Yes, that will do, it's just the thing."

They grew animated, she was almost gay and proud of having imagination. He caressed her tenderly, a quiver ran through her.

"No, wait a little. I'm thinking it over, it won't do yet. If you remain here with me, the suicide will appear dubious. You must go away. Do you hear?—to-morrow you will depart, but openly, before Cabuche, before Misard, that your departure may be well established. You will take the train to Barentin, you will get out at Rouen, under a pretext; then, as soon as night shall have fallen, you will return, I will let you in at the back of the house. It's only four leagues, you can get here again in less than three hours. This time, everything is fixed. It's done, if you so wish it."

"Yes, I wish it, it's done."

He now was reflecting, kissed her no longer, inert. And there was silence again, while they sat thus, without stirring, their arms about each other, as if annihilated in the future act, done, certain henceforth. Then, she released herself.

"And the pretext to bring him here? In any event, he can take only the eight o'clock evening train, after
his service, and he will not arrive before ten: that's all for the best. Ah! exactly—that purchaser for the house, of whom Misard has spoken to me and who is to visit it day after to-morrow morning! See, I'll telegraph to my husband, as soon as I get up, that his presence is absolutely necessary. He will be here to-morrow evening. As for you, you will depart in the afternoon and you can get back before he arrives. It will be dark, no moon, nothing to embarrass us. Everything arranges itself perfectly."

"Yes, perfectly."

The light had gone out, but, in their excitement, they had not noticed it. Finally, in the depths of the great silence, they fell asleep, worn out, where they sat, with their arms about each other, just as the dawn commenced to whiten the darkness which had hidden them, as if enveloped in a black cloak. Until ten o'clock he slept a crushing sleep, without a dream; and, when he opened his eyes, he was alone, she was changing her garments in her chamber on the other side of the landing. A sheet of bright sunshine had entered at the window, giving a fiery aspect to the red bed-curtains, the red wall-hangings, all that red with which the room flamed; while the house trembled in the thunder of a train which was passing. It must have been that train which had awakened him. Dazzled, he looked at the sunshine, the red gush in which he was; then he remembered: it was decided—the coming night he would kill, when that bright sunshine had disappeared.

Things took place that day as Séverine and Jacques had arranged them. She, before breakfast, requested Misard to carry to Doinville the dispatch for her husband; and, toward three o'clock, as Cabuche was there, he openly made his preparations for departure. As he started, in order to take the 4.14 train at Barentin, the quarryman even accompanied him, having nothing to do, happy to be near the man beloved by the woman he
himself adored. At Rouen, where Jacques arrived at twenty minutes to five, he went to an inn near the dépôt, kept by a woman from his district. He spoke of seeing some of his comrades on the morrow, before going to Paris to resume his service. But he said he was greatly fatigued, having presumed too much upon his strength; and, at six o'clock, he withdrew to go to bed in a chamber he had selected on the ground floor, with a window which opened upon a deserted alley. Ten minutes later, he was en route for the Croix-de-Maufras, after getting out of that window without being seen, taking care to push to the shutter so that he could re-enter there, secretly.

It was only at a quarter past nine that Jacques again found himself before the solitary mansion, planted side-wise at the border of the railroad, in the distress of its abandonment. The night was very dark, not a glimmer lighted the hermetically closed front. And he still had in his heart the painful shock, that stroke of frightful sadness, which was like the presentiment of the misfortune, the inevitable maturity of which awaited him there. As had been agreed upon with Séverine, he threw three little pebbles against the window-shutter of the red chamber; then, he passed behind the house, where, finally, a door was silently opened. Having closed it after him, he followed light footsteps which were climbing the stairs, feeling his way. But, above, by the glimmer of the big lamp, burning upon the corner of a table, he perceived that the bed had already been occupied, that the young woman's garments were thrown across a chair and that she herself was in her night-dress, with her thick hair rolled up very high, exposing her neck, and he stood motionless with surprise.

"What! you have retired?"

"Without doubt, that was for the best, an idea which came to me. You understand, when he shall arrive and I shall go down-stairs to open the door for him in this
attire, he will be much less suspicious. I will tell him that I have been seized upon by a headache. Already Misard believes that I am ill. That will enable me to say I did not quit this chamber, when, to-morrow morning, he has been found down there, on the track."

But Jacques, trembling, grew angry.

"No, no, dress yourself. You must be up. You can't remain that way."

She smiled, astonished.

"Why not? Don't be uneasy, I assure you that I am not at all cold."

With a cajoling movement, she approached him, raising her round throat. And, as he recoiled, in increasing irritation, she added:

"Don't get angry, I'll cover myself up in the bed. Then, you will no longer fear lest I may contract illness."

When she had gone to bed again, the covers pulled up to her chin, he, indeed, appeared to calm himself a trifle. Besides, she continued to talk with a tranquil air, she explained to him how she had arranged matters in her head.

"As soon as he shall knock, I will go down-stairs and open the door for him. At first, I had the idea of letting him come up here, where you would be waiting for him. But carrying him down again would have further complicated things; and, then, in this chamber, there is a wooden floor, while the vestibule is tiled, which will permit me to wash it easily, should there be stains. Awhile ago I thought of a romance in which the author relates that a man, in order to kill another, removed his garments. You understand?—he washed afterwards, he had not a single splash of blood on his clothes. Is that practicable?"

Frightened, he stared at her. But she was simply preoccupied with the success of the affair. He shuddered, shaken to the bones.

"No, no! Why not then eat his heart, to be still
further like savages! Do you detest him so very much?"

Séverine's face suddenly grew gloomy. This question threw her from her preparations of a prudent manager into the horror of the act. Tears drowned her eyes.

"I have suffered too much for several months, I can scarcely love him. A hundred times I have said so: everything, rather than remain with that man another week. But you are right, it is frightful to have reached the point we have, we must truly desire to be happy together. But, to return, we will go down-stairs without a light. You will place yourself behind the door, and, when I have opened it and he has entered, you will do as you like. As for me, if I have occupied myself with the plan, it was to aid you, it was that you alone might not have all the care. I have arranged matters the best I could."

He had stopped before the table on seeing the knife, the weapon which had been used by the husband himself and which she had evidently placed there that he might strike him with it in his turn. Wide-open, the knife was gleaming beneath the lamp. He took it, examined it. She was silent, looking also. Since he had it, it was useless to speak to him about it. And she continued only when he had put it back upon the table.

"I am not pushing you to this thing, am I? There is yet time—go away if you cannot do it!"

But, with a violent gesture, he persisted.

"Do you take me for a coward? This time, it's settled, it's sworn!"

At that moment the house was shaken by the thunder of a train, which was passing like a flash of lightning, so near the chamber that it seemed to traverse it with its rumbling; and he added:

"That's his train, the direct to Paris. He has got out at Barentin, he will be here in half an hour."

And neither Jacques nor Séverine spoke any further,
a long silence reigned. Down there, they saw that man, who was advancing along the narrow paths, through the black night. He, mechanically, had also begun to walk in the chamber, as if he were counting the steps of the other, whom each stride brought nearer. One more, one more; and, at the last, he would be in ambush behind the vestibule door, he would plant the knife in his throat as soon as he entered. She, the bed-covers still at her chin, lying on her back, with her big fixed eyes watched him go and come, her mind soothed by the cadence of his march, which came to her like an echo of the distant steps down there. Incessantly, one after another, they were coming, nothing would stop them now. When enough of them had been taken, she would spring from the bed, would descend to let him in, barefooted, without a light. "It's you, my friend, come in, I have gone to bed." And he would not even reply, he would fall in the darkness, his throat open.

Again a train passed, a descending one this time, the omnibus which crossed the direct to Paris before reaching the Croix-de-Maufras, at five minutes' distance. Jacques had stopped, surprised. Five minutes only! How long half an hour's wait would be! A need of movement urged him, he resumed walking from one end of the chamber to the other. He was already questioning himself, uneasy, like a person stricken by nervousness: would he be able to do it? He knew perfectly the progress of the phenomenon within him from having followed it for more than ten times: at first, a certainty, an absolute resolution to kill; then, an oppression at the pit of his stomach, a coldness of the feet and hands; and, all at once, weakness, the powerlessness of the will over the muscles, grown inert. In order to excite himself by argument, he repeated what he had said to himself so many times: his interest in suppressing this man, the fortune which awaited him in America, the possession of the woman
he loved. The worst was that, awhile before, on seeing Séverine's bare throat, he had believed the business a failure again; for he ceased to belong to himself as soon as his old quiver reappeared. For an instant he had trembled before the too strong temptation—the woman's throat, which offered itself, and that open knife, which was there. But, now, he was solid, gathered for the effort. He could do it. And he continued to await the man, striding about the chamber, from the door to the window, passing at each turn beside the bed, which he did not wish to see.

Séverine, in that bed, had not yet stirred. Her head motionless upon the pillow, she was following him with her eyes, anxious also, agitated by the fear that, that night again, he would not dare to strike. To be done with it and recommence life—she desired but that, complaisant for the man she loved, devoted to him, heartless for the other, for whom she had never cared. She would get rid of him since he embarrassed her, nothing was more natural. Suddenly the conviction came to her that if, presently, Jacques could not strike, he would flee from her never to return. Then, she decided that he should kill, that she would give him sufficient strength, should there be need of it.

"Still a quarter of an hour," said Jacques aloud. "He has passed the wood of Bécourt, he is half way here. Ah! how long it is!"

But, as he was returning toward the window, he found Séverine standing beside the bed and waiting for him.

"Suppose we go down-stairs with the lamp," explained she. "You can see the spot, you can place yourself, I will show you how I am going to open the door and what movement you will have to make."

He, trembling, recoiled.

"No, no! not the lamp!"

"Listen now, we will hide it afterwards. We must take a look around."
"No, no! go back to bed!"

She did not obey; on the contrary, she marched upon him, with the invincible and despotic smile of a woman who is aware of her omnipotence. When she had thrown her arms about him and kissed him, he would yield, he would do as she wished, and she continued to talk, in a caressing voice, to conquer him.

"See here now, what's the matter with you? It looks as if you were afraid of me. As soon as I approach, you seem to shun me. And if you knew, at this moment, how I need to lean upon you, to feel that you are here, that we are in full accord for all time to come, forever, do you understand!"

She had finished by penning him up against the table, and he could not flee further, he looked at her in the bright light of the lamp. Never had he seen her thus, with her hair coiled so high that all her neck was bare. He choked, struggling, already carried away, bewildered by the flow of his blood, in the abominable quiver, and he remembered that the knife was there, behind him, upon the table: he had but to put out his hand and take it.

With an effort, he again succeeded in stammering out:

"Go back to bed, I supplicate you!"

She drew still nearer to him.

"Come, kiss me. That will give us courage. Ah! yes, we have need of courage! We must love each other in a different manner from the rest, more than all the rest, to do what we are going to do. Kiss me with all your heart, with all your soul."

Strangled, he no longer breathed. The din of a crowd in his skull prevented him from hearing; while fiery bites, behind his ears, pierced his head, gained his arms, his legs, drove him from his own body, beneath the gallop of the other, the invading animal. He would soon lose control of his hands in the too strong intoxication of the crisis. She crushed herself against him; her bare
neck, so white, so delicate, of an irresistible temptation, finished throwing him into a furious vertigo, an endless swaying, in which foundered his torn, annihilated will.

"Kiss me, while we have yet a minute. You know he will soon be here. Now, if he has walked rapidly, from one minute to another he may knock. Since you do not wish to go down with me in advance, bear this well in mind: I will open the door, you will be behind it; and don't wait, strike instantly, oh! instantly, to be done with it! I love you so much, we shall be so happy! He is only a bad man who has made me suffer, who is the sole obstacle to our happiness. Kiss me, kiss me!"

Jacques, without turning, with his right hand, feeling behind him, had taken the knife. And, for an instant, he remained thus, grasping it in his fist. Was this his thirst, which had returned to him, to avenge very ancient offences of which he had lost the exact memory, that animosity amassed from male to male since the first deception in the depths of the caverns? He fixed his wild eyes on Séverine, he had no longer any need but that of throwing her dead upon her back, like a prey which one snatches from others.

"Kiss me, kiss me."

She threw back her face, submissive, of a supplicating tenderness, exposed her bare neck at the swelling commencement of the throat. And he, seeing that white flesh, as in a burst of flame, raised the fist armed with the knife. But she saw the flash of the blade, she sprang backwards, overcome with surprise and terror.

"Jacques, Jacques! Me, mon Dieu! Why, why?"

His teeth clenched, he did not utter a word, he pursued her. A short struggle brought her back beside the bed. She recoiled, haggard, without defence, her night-dress torn.

"Why, mon Dieu! Why?"

And he brought down his fist, and the knife nailed the question in her throat. In striking, he had turned the
weapon, through a frightful need of the hand which satisfied itself: the same blow as that with which President Grandmorin had been stricken, in the same place, with the same rage. Did she cry out?—he never knew. At that second the Paris express passed, so violently, so rapidly, that it made the floor tremble, and she was dead, as if struck by a thunderbolt in that tempest.

Motionless, Jacques now stared at her, stretched out at his feet, before the bed. The train lost itself in the distance, he stared at her in the heavy silence of the red chamber. Amid those red hangings, those red curtains, where she lay, she bled greatly, with a red flood which gushed over her body and fell in big drops upon the floor. Her night-dress, half-torn to pieces, was soaked with it. Never would he have believed that she had so much blood. And what held him, haunted him, was the mask of abominable terror taken on in death by her pretty face. Her black hair was standing on end, a casque of horror, sombre as night. Her periwinkle eyes, immeasurably widened, still questioned, bewildered, terrified by the mystery. Why, why had he assassinated her? And she had been crushed, borne away in the fatality of murder, an unconscious creature whom life had rolled from mud into blood, tender and innocent nevertheless, without her even having understood why.

But Jacques was amazed. He heard the snorting of a beast, the growling of a wild boar, the roar of a lion; and he quieted himself, it was he who was breathing. At last, at last! he had satisfied himself, he had killed! Yes, he had done that. An immoderate joy, an enormous pleasure, uplifted him in the full satisfaction of the eternal desire. She was no more, she would never again love any one. And a sharp remembrance returned to him, that of the other victim of assassination, the corpse of President Grandmorin, which he had seen that terrible night, five hundred metres from there. This delicate body, so white, striped with red, was the same
human tatter, broken automaton, soft rag, which a knife blow had made of a creature. Yes, that was it. He had killed, and he had that at his feet. Like the other, she had fallen over, but upon the back, her limbs apart, her left arm folded beneath her side, the right twisted, half-torn from the shoulder. Was it not that night, that, his heart beating with great thuds, he had sworn to dare in his turn, in an itch for murder which was exasperated at the sight of the slaughtered man? Ah! not to be a coward, satisfy himself, plunge in the knife! Obscurely, that had germinated, had grown up within him; not an hour for a year past but he had been marching toward the inevitable; even on the neck of that woman, beneath her kisses, the secret travail had been completed; and the two murders had rejoined each other—was not the one the logic of the other?

A din as of something falling, a shaking of the floor, drew Jacques from the gaping contemplation in which he had remained in the presence of the dead woman. Were the doors flying to pieces? Had people come to arrest him? He looked, found about him only the deep and mute solitude. Ah! yes, another train! And that man who was about to knock at the door downstairs, that man whom he had wished to kill! He had completely forgotten him. If he regretted nothing he already judged himself imbecile. What had occurred? The woman he loved, by whom he was passionately adored, lay upon the floor with her throat open; while the husband, the obstacle to his happiness, still lived, was steadily advancing, step by step, in the darkness. For that man whom, for months past, the scruples of his education, the ideas of humanity slowly acquired and transmitted had spared, he had been unable to wait; and, in contempt of his interest, he had been carried away by the heredity of violence, by that need of murder which, in the primeval forests, had thrown beast upon beast. Does one kill through calculation! One kills only under
the impulsion of the blood and the nerves, a remnant of the ancient struggles, the necessity of living and the joy of being strong. He had no longer anything but a glutted lassitude, he grew bewildered, sought to understand, without finding anything even in the depths of his satisfied passion, save the astonishment and the bitter sadness of the irreparable. The sight of the unfortunate woman, who still looked at him with her terrified interrogation, became atrocious to him. He strove to turn away his eyes, he had the sudden sensation that another white figure had arisen at the foot of the bed. Was it a redoubling of the dead woman? Then, he recognized Flore. Already she had returned, while he was suffering with fever, after the accident. Without doubt, she was triumphant, avenged at this hour. A fear froze him, he asked himself what he was doing, delaying thus in that chamber. He had killed, he was gorged, glutted, drunken with the frightful wine of crime. And he stumbled over the knife, lying on the floor, and he fled, ran down the stairway, opened the huge front door as if the little door had not been large enough, sprang out into the inky night, in which his furious gallop was lost. He had not turned, the fatal house, planted sidewise on the border of the railroad, remained open and desolate behind him, in its abandonment of death.

Cabuche, that night, like the rest, had climbed over the hedge of the grounds and was prowling beneath Sèverine’s window. He was aware that Roubaud was expected and was not astonished at the light which filtered through the crack in a shutter. But that man, bounding down the porch steps, that wild gallop of an animal, rushing away into the country, nailed him with surprise. And already there was no longer time to set out in pursuit of the fugitive, the quarryman stood frightened, full of uneasiness and hesitation, before the open door, yawning upon the great black gap of the vestibule. What had happened? Ought he to enter? A heavy silence,
the absolute immobility, while that lamp continued to burn up-stairs, wrung his heart with a growing anguish.

At last, Cabuche made his decision, climbed the stairs, feeling his way. In front of the door of the chamber, also left open, he stopped anew. In the tranquil brightness he seemed to see a pile of skirts before the bed. Without doubt, Séverine had retired. He called softly, seized with trouble, his veins throbbing with great thuds. Then, he saw the blood, he understood, sprang forward, with a terrible cry which came from his torn heart. Mon Dieu! it was she, assassinated, thrown there in a pitiful state. He thought that she was still uttering the death-rattle, he felt such despair, ashamed, so sorrowful, on seeing her thus dying, that he was seized upon by a fraternal burst, raised her up in his arms, placed her upon the bed, the clothes of which he threw back to cover her. But, in this embrace, the only tenderness between them, both his hands and his breast were covered with blood. He was gushing with her blood. And, at that minute, he saw that Roubaud and Misard were there. They also had decided to come up-stairs on finding all the doors open. The husband had arrived late, having stopped to talk with the garde-barrière, who had afterwards accompanied him, continuing the conversation. Both of them, pale, stupid, stared at Cabuche, whose hands were dripping with blood like those of a butcher.

"The same gash the President received," finally said Misard, as he examined the wound.

Roubaud tossed his head, without answering, without being able to take his glances from Séverine, from that mask of abominable terror, her black hair standing on end over her forehead, her immeasurably widened blue eyes, which demanded why.
CHAPTER XII.

THE FIGHT ON THE ENGINE.

THREE months later, one warm night in June, Jacques was engineering the Havre express, which had left Paris at 6.30. His present engine, engine 608, wholly new, of which he had the initiation, as he said, and which he had begun to be pretty well acquainted with, was not easy to control, stubborn, fantastic, like those young colts which must be tamed by wearing them out before they resign themselves to the harness. He often swore about it, regretting the Lison; he was forced to watch it closely, his hand always upon the regulating lever. But, that night, the sky was of such a delicious mildness that he felt himself prone to indulgence, letting it gallop a little at its will, happy himself to breathe freely. Never had he been in better health, without remorse, with a relieved air, in a great, delightful peace.

He, who never spoke en route, joked with Pecqueux, who had been left with him as fireman.

"What's up? You keep your eyes open like a man who has drunk nothing but water."

Pecqueux, in fact, contrary to his habit, seemed fasting and very sober. He answered, in a rough voice:

"You must keep your eyes open when you want to see clearly."

Mistrustful, Jacques looked at him, like a man whose conscience is not clear. The preceding week he had taken a walk with his comrade's friend, that terrible Philomène, who for a long while had been hanging about him like a thin cat. And he had done so only from curi-
osity, he had yielded, above all, to the desire of making an experiment: was he definitively cured, now that he had satisfied his frightful need? Could he be in her company without planting a knife in her throat? Twice already he had been in her society, and nothing, not an uneasiness, not a quiver. His great joy, his calmed and laughing air, came, even without his knowledge, from the happiness of being no longer anything but a man like the others.

Pecqueux having opened the fire-box of the engine to put in coal, he stopped him.

"No, no, don’t push it, it is going very well."

Then, the fireman growled out ill-natured words.

"Ah! yes! very well. A pretty joker, a fine wretch! When I think that you grumbled about the other, the old one, which was so docile! This wretched thing can’t compare with it."

Jacques, in order not to get angry, avoided answering. But he felt very clearly that the old family of three was no more; for the good friendship between him, his comrade and the engine had flown with the death of the Lison. Now they quarreled for a mere nothing, for a nut screwed on too tightly, for a shovelful of coal thrown on sidewise. And he had promised himself to be prudent with Philomène, not wishing to arrive at open warfare upon that narrow, moving floor which carried him and his fireman. While they had lived like brothers, silent amid the daily danger, they had got on without a word. But their existence would become a hell if they no longer agreed, always side by side, shaken together, while they were quarreling. The preceding week the Compagnie had been compelled to separate the engineer and fireman of the Cherbourg express because, disunited on account of a woman, the first had brutally treated the second who no longer obeyed him; blows, regular battles en route, in the complete forgetfulness of the string of passengers rolling behind them at top speed.
Twice again Pecqueux opened the fire-box, threw coal into it, out of disobedience, seeking a dispute, without doubt; and Jacques feigned not to see anything, with the air of being altogether devoted to the manœuvre, only taking the precaution each time to turn the lever of the injector to diminish the pressure. It was so mild, the cool little breeze of the passage was so agreeable in the warm July night! At 11.05, when the express arrived in Havre, the two men cleaned up the engine with an air of perfect accord, as in the past.

But, at the moment they were quitting the shelter-house to go to their beds in the Rue François-Mazeline, a voice hailed them.

"Why are you in such a big hurry? Come in a minute!"

It was Philomène, who, from the threshold of her brother's house had been watching for Jacques. She had made a movement of lively vexation on perceiving Pecqueux; and she had decided to hail them only for the pleasure of chatting with her new friend, even though she had to submit to the presence of the old one.

"Let us alone, will you!" growled Pecqueux. "You're a bother, we're sleepy!"

"Isn't he amiable, though!" gaily resumed Philomène. "But Monsieur Jacques is not like you, he'll take a little glass—isn't it so, Monsieur Jacques?"

The engineer was about to refuse through prudence, when the fireman suddenly accepted, yielding to the idea of watching them. They went into the kitchen and sat down at the table, on which she placed glasses and a bottle of brandy. She resumed, in a lower voice:

"You must try not to make too much noise, because my brother is asleep up-stairs and he don't like me to receive visitors."

Then, as she served them, she added immediately:

"By the way, do you know that Mère Lebleu has kicked the bucket in her back lodgings, a real prison?"
She lasted four months, all the time lamenting that she no longer saw anything but zinc. And what finished her, when it became impossible for her to budge from her fauteuil, was surely no longer being able to play the spy upon Mademoiselle Guichon and Monsieur Dabadie, a habit which she had acquired. Yes, she was enraged at never having surprised anything between them and she died of it."

Philomène paused, swallowed some brandy and said:

"Say now, isn't it next week that the Roubaud case will be tried at Rouen?"

Until then Jacques and Pecqueux had listened without putting in a word. The latter found her simply very talkative; never with him had she made such a display of conversation; and he did not take his eyes from her, gradually firing up with jealousy at seeing her excite herself thus before his chief.

"Yes," answered the engineer, with an air of perfect tranquillity, "I have received the summons."

Philomène drew nearer to them and said:

"I also am a witness. Ah! Monsieur Jacques, when I was questioned in regard to you, for you know they wish to find out the real truth concerning your relations with that poor lady—yes, when they questioned me, I said to the Judge: 'But, monsieur, he adored her, it is impossible that he could have done her any injury!' Was I not in a proper position to speak about that?"

"Oh!" said the young man with a look of indifference, "I was not uneasy, I could have given hour by hour the employment of my time. If the Compagnie has kept me, it is because it has not the slightest reproach to make to me."

Silence reigned, all three drank slowly.

"It makes me tremble," resumed Philomène, "to think of that ferocious animal, that Cabuche, who was arrested while yet covered with the poor lady's blood!"
And what I shall never forget in my life, do you see, was when M. Cauche came down there on the quay to arrest Monsieur Roubaud. I was there. You know that that took place three days afterwards only, when Monsieur Roubaud, on the morrow of the burial of his wife, had resumed his service with a tranquil air. Then M. Cauche tapped him on the shoulder, telling him that he had an order to take him to prison. Just think of it, they who were inseparable, who played together for whole nights! But when one is a commissary, one would take his father and mother to the guillotine, since the trade exacts it. M. Cauche, however, didn’t mind it in the least!—I saw him still at the Café du Commerce awhile ago, shuffling the cards, without bothering himself any more about his friend than if he were the Grand Turk!"

Pecqueux, his teeth clenched, struck the table with his fist.

"God’s thunder! if I was in the place of that miserable Roubaud! You admired his wife. Another killed her. And now they’re going to send him to the Assizes! It’s enough to make one burst with rage!"

"But, you big stupid!" cried Philomène, "he is accused of having pushed the other to disembrace his wife, yes, for money matters or I don’t know what! It appears that they found in Cabuche’s den President Grandmorin’s watch: you remember—the gentleman who was assassinated in a railway wagon eighteen months ago. Then, they hooked together that evil stroke and the evil stroke of the other day, a whole history, a regular bottle of ink. I can’t explain it to you, but it was in the newspaper—two columns of it."

Absent-minded, Jacques did not seem to be even listening. He murmured:

"What’s the good of bothering our heads about that, is it our business? If the authorities do not know what they are doing, we shall never hit on the thing."
Then, he added, his eyes lost in the distance, his cheeks invaded by pallor:

"In all that there is only that poor woman. Ah! the poor, poor woman!"

"For my part," cried Pecqueux, violently, "if any one should take a notion to touch my wife, I would commence by strangling them both. After that they might cut off my head, I wouldn't care."

There was a new silence. Philomène, who was filling the little glasses for the second time, affected to shrug her shoulders, with a sneer. But, in reality, she was entirely upset, she was studying him with a sidelong glance. He had greatly neglected himself, was very dirty and in rags, since Mère Victoire, grown useless in consequence of her accident, had been compelled to quit her post at the dépôt and get admitted to a hospital. She was no longer there, tolerant and maternal, to slip silver coins into his hand, to mend his garments, not wishing that the other, the one at Havre, should accuse her of keeping him in bad condition. And Philomène, won by Jacques' neat and delicate air, displayed disgust.

"Is it your Paris wife you would strangle?" demanded she, by way of bravado. "There's no danger of any one taking her from you!"

"That one or another!" growled he.

But already she was drinking, with a jocose air.

"Here's to your health! And bring me your linen that I may wash and mend it, for, truly, you no longer do honor either to the one or to the other. To your health, Monsieur Jacques!"

As if he had come out of a dream, Jacques started. Amid the complete absence of remorse, amid that relief, that physical comfort, in which he had lived since the murder, Séverine passed thus sometimes, melting to tears the mild man who was within him. And he drank, saying hurriedly, in order to hide his trouble:

"You know we are going to have war, don't you?"
“Impossible!” cried Philomène. “And with whom?”

“Why, with the Prussians. Yes, because of a prince of theirs who wants to be king of Spain. Yesterday, in the Chamber, there was question only of that story.”

Then, she grew sad.

“Ah! well, that will be funny! They have already fooled us enough with their elections, their plébiscite and their riots in Paris! If they fight, say, will they take all the men?”

“Oh! we’re safe, they can’t disorganize the railroads. But we shall be upset with the transportation of troops and provisions. Well, if it comes, we must do our duty.”

And, with these words, he arose, seeing that she was becoming careless in her actions and that Pecqueux was observing it, with blood in his face, already clenching his fists.

“Let’s go to our beds, it’s time.”

“Yes, that’s the best thing we can do,” growled the fireman.

He had grabbed Philomène by the arm, he wrenched it with such force as almost to break it. She stifled a cry of pain, she contented herself with whispering in the engineer’s ear, while the other was finishing his little glass in a fit of rage:

“Look out for him, he’s a real brute when he has been drinking.”

But heavy steps were heard descending the stairway; and she grew frightened.

“My brother! get out quick, get out quick!”

The two men were not twenty paces from the house when they heard blows, followed by howls. She was receiving an abominable correction, like a little girl taken in fault, her nose in a pot of preserves. The engineer stopped, ready to succor her. But he was held back by the fireman.

“Is that any of your business? Ah! nom de Dieu, the wretch! If he could only beat her to death!”
At the house in the Rue François-Mazeline, Jacques and Pecqueux retired without exchanging a word. The two beds almost touched in the narrow chamber; and, for a long while, they remained awake, with open eyes, each listening to the respiration of the other.

It was on Monday that the trial of the Roubaud case was to commence at Rouen. It had been a triumph for the Judge of Inquiry Denizet, for there was no end to the eulogiums, in the judiciary world, upon the way in which he had brought order out of that complicated and obscure affair: a masterpiece of fine analysis, they said, a logical reconstruction of the truth, a veritable creation, in a word.

In the first place, as soon as he had arrived at the Croix-de-Maufras, several hours after the murder of Séverine, M. Denizet caused Cabuche to be arrested. Everything plainly pointed to him, the blood with which he was gushing, the overwhelming depositions of Roubaud and Misard, who related in what manner they had surprised him with the corpse, alone, dismayed. Questioned, urged to tell why and how he came to be in that chamber, the quarryman stammered out a tale which the Judge received with a shrug of the shoulders, so absurd and stereotyped did it appear to him. He had expected this tale, always the same, of the imaginary assassin, of the invented culprit, whose flight across the dark country the real culprit said he had heard. That terrible fellow must be a good distance off—if he were still running! Besides, when he was asked what he was doing in front of the house at such an hour, Cabuche grew troubled, refused to answer, finished by declaring that he was out for a walk. It was childish, how was one to believe in that mysterious unknown, assassinating, escaping, leaving all the doors open, without having either rummaged a drawer or carried away even a handkerchief? From whence had he come?—why had he killed? The Judge, however, at the commencement of
his inquiry, having learned of the relations between the victim and Jacques, had been uneasy about the employment of the latter's time; but the accused himself admitted having accompanied Jacques to Barentin for the 4.14 train, and, in addition, the proprietress of the inn at Rouen swore that the young man, who went to bed immediately after his dinner, had not quitted his chamber until about seven o'clock the next day. And, further, a man does not, without reason, kill the woman he adores, with whom he has never had even the shadow of a quarrel. Such a supposition would be absurd. No, no, there was but one possible assassin, an evident assassin, the jailbird found there, his hands red, the knife at his feet, that stupid brute who told justice such improbable tales.

But, arrived at this point, despite his conviction, despite his scent, which, as he said, gave him more reliable information than the proofs, M. Denizet had experienced an instant of embarrassment. In the first search, made at the hut of the accused, in the forest of Bécourt, absolutely nothing had been discovered. Being unable to establish robbery, he must find another motive for the crime. Suddenly, amid the chances of an examination, Misard put him on the track by relating that, one night, he had seen Cabuche scale the wall of the property to watch Madame Roubaud through the window of her chamber. Questioned in his turn, Jacques tranquilly told what he knew, the mute adoration with which the quarryman had pursued Séverine, always at her heels to wait upon her. No further doubt was, therefore, allowable: Cabuche had been actuated by an ungovernable passion; and everything reconstructed itself very well—the man returning by means of the door, of which he might have a key, even leaving it open in his trouble, then the struggle which had brought on the murder; finally, remorse, interrupted by the arrival of the husband. Nevertheless, a last objection presented itself, for

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it was singular that the man, knowing that arrival imminent, should have chosen just the hour when the husband could surprise him; but, upon reflection, this turned against the accused, finished overwhelming him, by establishing that he must have acted under the empire of a supreme crisis, maddened by the thought that if he did not profit by the minute when Séverine was yet alone in that isolated house, nevermore would he have the opportunity, since she was to depart on the morrow. From that moment the Judge's conviction was complete, not to be shaken.

Annoyed by examinations, caught and caught again in the shrewd tangle of questions, heedless of the traps which were spread for him, Cabuche persisted in his first version. He was passing along the road, he was breathing the cool air of the night, when an individual passed him on a gallop, shrouded so thoroughly by the darkness that he could not even tell in what direction he fled. Then, seized on by uneasiness, having cast a glance at the house, he had perceived that the door was standing wide open. And he had finished by deciding to go up-stairs, and he had found the dead woman, yet warm, who stared at him with her big eyes, so that on putting her upon the bed, believing her living, he had got covered with blood. He knew only that, he repeated only that, never did he vary a detail, having the air of shutting himself up in a story arranged in advance. When an attempt was made to draw him away from it, he grew frightened, maintained silence, like an ignorant man who no longer understands. The first time M. Denizet questioned him in regard to his affection for the victim, he grew very red and uttered a denial. No, no! he had not loved her, he could never be made to talk of what seemed to him a profanation now that she was dead. But this persistence in not admitting a fact that several witnesses had affirmed also turned against him. And, when the Judge, gathering together all the proofs, wishing to tear the
truth from him by striking the decisive blow, threw the murder for love in his face, he fell into a mad fury of protestation. He kill her because he loved her!—he who respected her like a saint! The gendarmes, recalled, were compelled to hold him, while he spoke of strangling the whole cursed shop. A scoundrel of the most dangerous type, in fact, sullen, but of a violence which broke out nevertheless, confessing for him the crimes he denied.

The examination was at that point—the accused grew furious, cried out that it was the other, the mysterious fugitive, each time that the assassination was referred to—when M. Denizet met with a windfall, which transformed the affair by suddenly increasing its importance tenfold. As he had said, he scented out truths: hence he wished, from a sort of presentiment, to proceed himself to a new search in Cabuche's hovel; and he discovered, simply behind a beam, a hiding-place in which were a woman's gloves and handkerchiefs; beneath them was a gold watch, which he recognized instantly, with a great fit of joy: it was the watch of President Grandmorin, so much searched for by him in the past, a large watch with two initials interlaced, bearing on the inside of the case the number of manufacture 2516. He received a lightning flash from it—everything was illuminated, the past was bound to the present—the facts which he strung together enchanted him by their logic. But the consequences would have such a wide sweep that, without speaking of the watch at first, he questioned Cabuche in regard to the gloves and handkerchiefs. The latter, for an instant, had the confession on his lips: yes, he had adored her, yes, even to kissing the dresses she had worn, even to picking up, to stealing behind her whatever fell from her, bits of lacing cord, hooks, pins. And, when the Judge, deciding, put the watch under his eyes, he looked at it with an air of amazement. He remembered well: he had been surprised to find that watch
tied up in the corner of a handkerchief, taken from beneath a bolster, borne away to his abode like a prey; afterwards, it had remained there, while he was digging in his head to find out some way of returning it. But what good would it do to tell that? It would be necessary then to confess his other thefts, those gewgaws, that linen which smelt good, of which he was so much ashamed. Already nothing he said was believed. Besides, he himself had begun no longer to comprehend, everything was getting mixed up in his simple man's brain, he was entering into the midst of a nightmare. And he did not even get angry any longer at the accusation of murder; he remained stupefied, he repeated to each question that he did not know. About the gloves and the handkerchiefs, he did not know. About the watch, he did not know. They wearied him, they had only to let him alone and guillotine him at once.

M. Denizet, the next day, caused the arrest of Roubaud. He had issued the warrant, strong in his omnipotence, in one of those minutes of inspiration in which he believed in the genius of his perspicacity, before even having sufficient proof against the under station master. Despite the yet numerous obscurities, he scented in that man the pivot, the source of the double affair; and he triumphed immediately when he had seized the donation to the last living which Roubaud and Séverine had made before Maître Colin, notary of Havre, a week after coming into possession of the Croix-de-Maufras property. From that time the entire history reconstructed itself in his brain, with a certainty of reasoning, a force of evidence, which gave to his scaffolding of accusation a solidity so indestructible that the truth itself would have seemed less true, stained with more fancy and illogicalness. Roubaud was a coward, who, on two occasions, fearing to kill himself, had made use of the arm of Cabuche, that violent animal. The first time, being in haste to inherit from President Grandmorin, with whose
will he was acquainted, knowing, besides, the quarryman's animosity against the latter, he had pushed him into the coupé at Rouen, after having put the knife in his fist. Then, the ten thousand francs shared, the two accomplices never, perhaps, would have seen each other again, if murder had not engendered murder. And it was here that the Judge had displayed that depth of criminal psychology which was so much admired; for he now declared that he had never ceased to keep an eye on Cabuche, his conviction being that the first assassination would mathematically bring on a second. Eighteen months had sufficed, the family of the Roubauds was destroyed, the husband had lost the five thousand francs at the gaming-table, the wife had gone elsewhere to amuse herself. Without doubt, she had refused to sell the Croix-de-Maufras property, fearing lest he might dissipate the money; perhaps, in their continual disputes, she had threatened to give him up to justice. At all events, plentiful testimony established the absolute disunion of the couple; and there, finally, the distant consequence of the first crime was produced: Cabuche reappeared with his brutish appetites, the husband, in the background, put the knife in his fist to assure himself definitively the ownership of that accursed house, which had already cost a human life. Such was the truth, the blinding truth, everything pointed to it: the watch found at the quarryman's den, above all the two corpses struck with the same blow in the throat, by the same hand, with the same weapon, that knife picked up in the chamber. However, on this last point, the accusation emitted a doubt, the wound of the President appearing to have been made by a smaller and sharper blade.

Roubaud, at first, answered yes and no, with the heavy and somnolent air which he now had. He did not seem astonished by his arrest, everything had become the same to him in the slow disorganization of his being. To make him talk, a watchman had been placed in his
cell, with whom he played cards from morning till night; and he was perfectly happy. Besides, he was convinced of Cabuche's culpability: he only could be the assassin. Questioned about Jacques, he had shrugged his shoulders, with a laugh, thus showing that he was aware of the relations between the engineer and Séverine. But, when M. Denizet, after having felt him, finished by developing his system, pushing him, overwhelming him with his complicity, striving to tear a confession from him in his fright at seeing himself discovered, he became very circumspect. What was he relating to him there? It was no longer he, it was the quarryman who had killed the President as he had killed Séverine; and both times, nevertheless, he was the guilty one, since the other had struck on his account and in his place. This complicated matter stupefied him, filled him with suspicion: surely, a trap was set for him, a lie was being told to force him to confess his portion of murder, the first crime. At the time of his arrest he had shrewdly suspected that the old story had sprung up again. Confronted with Cabuche he declared that he did not know him. But, as he repeated that he had found him red with blood, the blood of his victim, the quarryman got into a rage and a violent scene, an extreme confusion again embroiled things. Three days passed, the Judge multiplied the examinations, certain that the two accomplices were in a plot to play for his benefit the comedy of their hostility. Roubaud, very weary, had adopted the course of no longer replying, when, suddenly, in a minute of impatience, wishing to be done with it all, yielding to a secret need which had been working on him for months, he let out the truth, nothing but the truth, the whole truth.

That day, M. Denizet was fighting with finesse, seated at his desk, veiling his eyes with his heavy lids, while his mobile lips grew thin, in an effort of sagacity. He had been wearing himself out for an hour in wily tricks
with this thickened accused, invaded by unhealthy yellow fat, whom he accounted of a very subtle cunning, beneath that weighty envelope. And he believed that he had tracked him step by step, tied him up in every part, caught him in the trap at last, when the other, with a gesture of a man pushed to the wall, exclaimed that he had had enough of it, that he preferred to confess in order not to be tormented further. Since, in any event, it was desired to find him guilty, let him be found guilty, at least, of what he had really done. But in proportion as he related the story, the wife's treatment when very young by Grandmorin, his fit of jealous rage on learning of it, and how he had killed him, and why he had taken the ten thousand francs, the eyelids of the Judge were raised in a frown of doubt, while an irresistible incredulity, the professional incredulity, distended his mouth in a bantering grimace. He was wholly smiling when the accused finished. The fellow was still stronger than he had thought: taking the first murder to himself, making it a crime purely passionate, washing himself thus of all premeditation of robbery, especially of all complicity in the assassination of Séverine, this was certainly a bold manoeuvre, which indicated an intelligence, a will but little common—only, it would not stand.

"See here, Roubaud, you mustn't believe us children. You claim then that you were jealous, that you killed him in a transport of jealousy?"

"Certainly."

"And, if we admit what you relate, you must have wedded your wife, knowing nothing of her relations with the President. Is that likely? Everything, on the contrary, would prove, in your case, the speculation offered, discussed and accepted. You were given a young girl reared like a lady, she was dowered, her protector became yours, you were not ignorant of the fact that he had left her a country house in his will, and you claim that you suspected nothing, absolutely nothing! Come now, you
knew all, otherwise your marriage no longer explains itself. Besides, the establishment of a simple fact suffices to confound you. You were not jealous; dare to say again that you were jealous!"

"I have spoken the truth, I killed him in a fit of jealous rage."

"Then, after having killed the President for a vague, old relationship, which, for that matter, you have invented, explain to me how you were able to tolerate the conduct of that solid young fellow, Jacques Lantier! Everybody spoke of that affair, you yourself have not hidden from me that you were aware of it. You left them free to act as they pleased—why?"

Weighed down, his eyes troubled, Roubaud stared fixedly into space without finding an explanation. He finished by stammering:

"I don't know. I killed the other, I did not kill this one."

"Then, don't tell me any more that you are a jealous man who avenged himself, and I advise you not to repeat that romance to messieurs the jurors, for they would shrug their shoulders at it. Believe me, change your system, the truth alone can save you."

From that moment, the more Roubaud persisted in telling that truth, the more he was convinced that it was a falsehood. Everything, besides, turned against him to that point that his old examination, at the time of the first inquiry, which should have supported his new version, since he had denounced Cabuche in it, became, on the contrary, the proof of an extraordinarily shrewd understanding between them. The Judge refined the psychology of the affair with a veritable love of his trade. Never, said he, had he descended so deeply into human nature. The proofs, however, were not lacking, a crushing assemblage. Henceforth the inquiry had a solid basis, certainty had burst forth as dazzling as the light of the sun.
And what further augmented the glory of M. Denizet was that he had brought the double case in one block, after having patiently reconstructed it in the most profound secrecy. Since the noisy success of the plébiscite, an excitement had not ceased to agitate the country, like that vertigo which precedes and announces the grand catastrophes. There was, in the society of that end of the Empire, in politics and in the press particularly a continual uneasiness, a fever in which joy itself took an unhealthy violence. Hence, when, after the assassination of a woman in the depths of that isolated house of the Croix-de-Maufras, it was learned by what stroke of genius the Rouen Judge of Inquiry had exhumed the old Grandmorin case and connected it with the new crime, there was an explosion of triumph among the official journals. From time to time in the opposition sheets had yet reappeared the jokes about the legendary, unfindable assassin, that invention of the police, put forward to hide the turpitudes of certain great personages who were compromised. And the answer was decisive, the assassin and his accomplice were arrested, the memory of President Grandmorin would come out from the affair intact. The polemics recommenced, the excitement increased day by day in Rouen and in Paris. Outside of this atrocious romance which haunted the imaginations, people were elated, as if the truth, discovered at last, irrefutable, ought to consolidate the State. During a whole week, the press overflowed with details.

Summoned to Paris, M. Denizet presented himself at the personal residence of the secrétaire général, M. Camy-Lamotte, in the Rue du Rocher. He found him standing in the centre of his severe study, his visage thinned, more fatigued than ever; for he was declining, invaded by sadness in his skepticism, as if he had foreseen, beneath that brightness of apotheosis, the approaching fall of the régime he served. For two days past, he had been a prey to an internal struggle, not knowing yet
what use he would make of Séverine’s letter, which he had kept, that letter which would have ruined the whole system of the accusation, by supporting Roubaud’s version with an undeniable proof. No one in the world knew of its existence, he could destroy it. But, the night before, the Emperor had said to him that, this time, he exacted that justice should take its course, outside of all influence, even if his government should suffer from it. And, if the secrétaire général had no scruples of conscience, having reduced the affairs of this world to a simple question of mechanics, he was troubled by the order received, he asked himself if he ought to love his master to the point of disobeying him.

Immediately M. Denizet showed his triumph.

“Well, my scent did not deceive me, it was that Cabuche who struck the President. But I admit that the other theory also contained a little truth and I felt myself that the case of Roubaud remained suspicious. At last, we have them both.”

M. Camy-Lamotte looked at him fixedly with his pale eyes.

“Then, all the facts of the docket which was transmitted to me are proved, and your conviction is absolute?”

“Absolute, no hesitation possible. Everything links together, I do not remember a case in which, despite the apparent complications, the crime has followed a more logical march, one easier to determine in advance.”

“But Roubaud protests, takes the first crime to himself, relates a story, his wife’s misfortune, he, mad with jealousy, killing in a crisis of blind rage. The opposition journals say all that.”

“Oh! they say it in the form of gossip, not daring themselves to believe it. That Roubaud jealous! Ah! he can repeat that tale at the Assizes, but he will never raise the sought for scandal! Now, if he only had some proof!—but he produces nothing. He speaks, indeed, of
a letter, which, he claims, he made his wife write and which should have been found among the victim's papers. You, Monsieur the secrétaire général, who classified those papers, you would have found it, would you not?"

M. Camy-Lamotte did not answer. It was true, the scandal would be buried at last with the system of the Judge! No one would believe Roubaud, the memory of the President would be washed clean of the abominable suspicions, the Empire would benefit by this noisy rehabilitation of one of its creatures. And, besides, since this Roubaud confessed himself guilty, what difference did it make in the idea of justice whether he was condemned for one version or the other! There was Cabuche, however; but, if he had not participated in the first murder, he seemed to be really the author of the second.

"Is it not so?" repeated M. Denizet. "You have not found that letter?"

Again M. Camy-Lamotte cast his eyes upon him and, tranquilly, he answered:

"I have absolutely found nothing."

Afterwards, smiling, very amiable, he overwhelmed the Judge with praise. Scarcely did a slight wrinkle of the lips indicate an invincible irony. Never had an inquest been conducted with so much penetration; and, it was a settled thing with the government, he would be called as counsellor to Paris after the holidays. Thus he led him out as far as the landing.

"You alone have been clear-sighted, it was truly admirable. And, from the moment that truth speaks, there is nothing can stop it, neither the interest of persons nor even the reasons of State. Go on, let the case take its course, no matter what may be the consequences."

"The duty of the magistracy is wholly there," concluded M. Denizet, who bowed and went away radiant.
When he was alone, M. Camy-Lamotte first lighted a candle; then, he took Séverine's letter from a drawer where he had classified it. The candle burned very high, he unfolded the letter, wishing to read the two lines again; and the remembrance was evoked of that delicate criminal, with periwinkle eyes, who had stirred him in the past with such tender sympathy. Now, she was dead, he saw her once more with a tragic cast. Who knew the secret which she had carried away with her? There remained for him, of that unknown and charming woman, only the admiration of a moment. And as he approached the letter to the candle, and as it burned, he was seized upon by sadness, by a presentiment of misfortune: what was the good of destroying that proof, of charging his conscience with that action, if fate had decreed that the Empire should be swept away, like that pinch of black ashes, fallen from his fingers?

In less than a week M. Denizet terminated the inquest. He found in the Compagnie de l'Ouest an extreme goodwill, for it also heartily wished to be done with this deplorable matter of one of its employés which had shaken it even to its Conseil d'Administration. The gangrened limb must be cut off at once. Hence, again filed off in the Judge's office the personnel of the Havre dépôt, M. Dabadie, Moulin and the others, who gave disastrous details as to Roubaud's ill conduct; then, the chief station master of Barentin, M. Bessière, as well as several employés from Rouen, whose depositions had a decisive importance relative to the first murder; then, M. Vandorpe, the chief station master of Paris, the signalman Misard and the chief conductor Henri Dauvergne, the last two very affirmative as to the conjugal complaisances of the accused. Henri, whom Séverine had nursed at the Croix-de-Maufras, even related that, one evening, while yet weak, he believed he heard the voices of Roubaud and Cabuche concerting before his window, which fully explained things and overthrew the
system of the two prisoners, who claimed that they did not know each other.

But the new proceedings had, above all, awakened lively passions in the Grandmorin family and in that direction, if M. Denizet found another potent aid, he was compelled to fight in order to maintain the integrity of his inquest. The Lachesnayes chanted victory, for they had always affirmed the culpability of Roubaud, exasperated by the legacy of the Croix-de-Maufras property. Hence, in the revival of the case, they saw only an occasion to attack the will; and, as there existed but one method of obtaining the revocation of the legacy, that of striking Séverine with forfeiture through ingratitude, they in part accepted Roubaud's version, the wife an accomplice, aiding to kill, not in order to obtain vengeance for an imaginary infamy, but to rob him; so that the Judge entered into conflict with them, with Berthe especially, very bitter against the assassinated woman, her old friend, whom she accused abominably and whom he defended, warming up, getting angry, as soon as they touched his master-work, that edifice of logic, so well constructed, as he himself declared with an air of pride, that if a single bit of it were displaced the whole would fall. There was, in relation to this matter, a very lively scene in his office between the Lachesnayes and Madame Bonnehon. The latter, favorable to the Roubauds in the past, had been compelled to abandon the husband; but she continued to sustain the wife through a sort of tender complicity, very tolerant for charm and love, all upset by this romantic tragedy, splashed with blood. She was very sharp, full of disgust for money. Was not her niece ashamed to return to this question of the inheritance? Séverine guilty, was not that the complete acceptance of Roubaud's pretended confession, the memory of the President soiled anew? If the inquest had not so ingeniously established the truth, it should have been invented for the honor of the
family. And she spoke with a trifle of bitterness of the Rouen society, amid which the case was making so much noise, that society over which she no longer reigned now that age had come and she had lost her opulent blonde beauty of a goddess grown old. Yes, the very night before, at the house of Madame Leboucq, the wife of the counsellor, that tall, elegant brunette who had dethroned her, they had whispered the gay anecdotes, the adventure of Louisette, everything that public malignity had invented. At that moment, M. Denizet having interposed to tell her that M. Leboucq would sit as associate judge at the approaching Assizes, the Lachesnayes stopped, having the air of yielding, seized upon by uneasiness. But Madame Bonnehon reassured them, certain that justice would do its duty: the Assizes would be presided over by her old friend, M. Desbazeilles, whose rheumatism confined him to his recollections, and the second associate judge would be M. Chaumette, the father of the young substitute whom she protected.

When the famous trial came on at last, the rumor of an approaching war, the agitation which was gaining the whole of France, interfered greatly with the success of the proceedings. Rouen, nevertheless, had three days of excitement, there was a crush at the doors of the courtroom, the reserved places were invaded by the ladies of the city. Never had the old palace of the Ducs de Normandie seen such a crowd of people since its transformation into the Palais de Justice. It was toward the close of June, the afternoons were warm and sunny. They were already stifling before the session was opened. Women got on tiptoe to see the articles in evidence upon the table, Grandmorin’s watch, Séverine’s blood-stained night-dress and the knife which had served for both murders. Cabuche’s counsel, an advocate come from Paris, was also much stared at. On the jury benches twelve Rouennais were seated in rows, in black coats, thick and grave. And, when the Court entered
there was so much pushing among those standing that
the President was at once compelled to threaten to have
the court-room cleared.

At last, the proceedings were opened, the jurors took
the oath and the call of the witnesses again agitated the
crowd with a quiver of curiosity: at the names of
Madame Bonnebon and M. de Lachesnaye the heads
undulated; but Jacques, above all, excited the ladies
who followed him with their eyes. But when the
prisoners were brought in, each between two gendarmes,
the looks of everybody were fastened on them; opinions
were exchanged—they were found to have a ferocious
and low air, two bandits. Roubaud, in his dark colored
jacket, with his cravat negligently tied, surprised by his
aged air, his face stupefied and ready to burst with fat.
As to Cabuche, he was such as they had imagined him,
clad in a long blue blouse, the very type of an assassin
—enormous fists, jaws of a carnivorous animal; in short,
one of those fellows whom it is not good to meet at the
corner of a wood. And the examinations confirmed this
bad impression, certain answers raised violent murmurs.
To all the questions of the President Cabuche replied
that he did not know: he did not know how the watch
came to be in his hovel, he did not know why he had
let the real assassin flee; and he adhered to his story of
that mysterious unknown, whose gallop he said he had
heard in the depths of the darkness. Then, interrogated
as to his passion for the unfortunate victim, he began to
stammer, in such a sudden and violent rage that the two
gendarmes grabbed and held him. No, no! he had not
loved her, they were lies that had been told, he would
have thought his affection a disgrace to her, she who
was a lady, while he had been in prison and lived like a
savage! Afterwards, calmed down, he fell into a mourn-
ful silence, uttering only monosyllables, indifferent to the
conviction which might strike him. Likewise, Roubaud
clung to what the accusation called his system: he
related how and why he had killed Grandmorin, he denied all participation in the assassination of his wife; but he did so in broken, almost incoherent phrases, with sudden losses of memory, his eyes so troubled, his voice so thick that he seemed at times to be seeking and inventing details. And, the President urging him, demonstrating to him the absurdities of his recital, he finished by shrugging his shoulders, he refused to answer: what was the use of telling the truth, since it was falsehood which was logical? This attitude of aggressive disdain in regard to justice did him the greatest damage. The profound lack of interest of the two prisoners in each other was noticed as a proof of previous understanding, of a shrewd plan, followed with an extraordinary force of will. They claimed not to know each other, they even accused each other, solely to put the tribunal off the track. When the examinations were terminated, the case was judged, with such address had the President conducted them, so that Roubaud and Cabuche, falling into the traps set for them, appeared to have betrayed themselves. That day, they heard a few more witnesses, without importance. The heat grew so great toward five o’clock that two ladies fainted.

But, the next day, the great excitement was the hearing of certain witnesses. Madame Bonnehon scored a véritable success of distinction and tact. People listened with interest to the employés of the Compagnie, M. Vandorpe, M. Bessière, M. Dabadie, M. Cauche particularly, the latter very prolix, who related how he had been intimately acquainted with Roubaud, having often played cards with him at the Café du Commerce. Henri Dauvergne repeated his overwhelming testimony, his almost entire certainty that he had heard, amid the somnolence of fever, the low voices of the two prisoners, who were concerting their plan; and, questioned about Séverine, he showed himself very discreet, let it be understood that he had admired her, but that, knowing she
was the friend of another, he had loyally stepped into the background. Hence, when that other, Jacques Lantier, was finally introduced, a buzz arose from the throng, people stood up the better to see him, there was even among the jurors an excited movement of attention. Jacques, very tranquil, grasped the bar of the witness stand with both hands, with the professional movement of which he had acquired the habit while managing his engine. This appearance, which should have troubled him profoundly, left him in an entire lucidity of mind, as if nothing in the business concerned him. He was about to testify like a stranger, an innocent man; since the crime not a quiver had come to him, he had not even thought of those things, his memory abolished, in a state of equilibrium, in perfect health; there again, at that bar, he had neither remorse nor scruples, of an absolute unconsciousness. Immediately he had glanced at Roubaud and Cabuche with his bright eyes. The first he knew to be guilty, he addressed to him a slight nod of the head, a discreet salute. Then, he smiled at the second, the innocent man, whose place on that bench he should have occupied: a good animal in reality, beneath his air of a bandit, a brisk fellow whom he had seen at work, whose hand he had grasped. And, full of ease, he deposed, he responded in clear little phrases to the questions of the President, who, after having interrogated him without measure as to his relations with the victim, made him relate his departure from the Croix-de-Maufras several hours before the murder, how he had gone to take the train at Barentin, how he had slept at Rouen. Cabuche and Roubaud listened to him, confirmed his responses by their attitude. At the question of the President as to what he thought of the unknown fleeing in the darkness of whom the quarryman had spoken, he contented himself with tossing his head, as if he did not wish to overwhelm an accused. And a thing then took place which completely upset the audience. Tears appeared in
Jacques' eyes, overflowed, trickled down his cheeks. As he had already seen her, Séverine had risen before his mental vision, the wretched assassinated woman whose image he had borne away with him, with her blue eyes immeasurably widened, her black hair standing up on her forehead like a casque of fear. He adored her yet, an immense pity seized upon him and he wept big tears in the unconsciousness of his crime, forgetting where he was, amid that throng. Ladies sobbed, invaded by tenderness. They found Jacques' grief extremely touching, when the husband remained with dry eyes. The President having asked the defence if they had any question to put to the witness, the advocates replied in the negative, while the stupefied prisoners looked after Jacques, as he returned to his seat amid the general sympathy.

The third session was wholly occupied by the speech of the Procureur Impérial and by the pleading of the advocates. First, the President had presented a résumé of the case, in which, beneath an affectation of absolute impartiality, the charges of the accusation were aggravated. The Procureur Impérial, afterwards, did not seem to make use of all his resources, which was put down to the overwhelming heat. On the contrary, Cabuche's defender, the advocate from Paris, gave great pleasure, without convincing. Roubaud's defender, a distinguished member of the Rouen bar, also did all he could with his bad cause. Fatigued, the public minister did not even reply. And when the jury passed into the hall of deliberations, it was only six o'clock. A great noise of voices arose, impatient pushes shook the iron grating which separated the reserved places from the miscellaneous public. But the silence became religious again as soon as the jury and the Court reappeared. The verdict admitted extenuating circumstances, the tribunal sentenced the two men to hard labor for life. And this caused great surprise, the crowd went away in a tumult, some hisses were heard as at the theatre.
On quitting the Palais de Justice, Jacques was joined by Philomène, who had remained as a witness. He was not to resume his service until the next day. He asked her to dine with him at the inn near the dépôt, where he claimed to have slept the night of the crime. After that he must leave her, as he was absolutely forced to return to Paris by the 12.50 train.

"I would swear," said she, as she was going on his arm to the inn, "that awhile ago I saw some one of our acquaintance. Yes, Pecqueux, who told me the other day that he would not put foot in Rouen for the case. I had turned for a moment, and a man, of whom I only perceived the back, stole away amid the crowd."

The engineer interrupted her, shrugging his shoulders.

"Pecqueux is in Paris having a good time, only too happy because of the holiday my leave of absence procured for him."

"That may be. But we must look out for him, for he's a terrible fellow when he's mad."

She pressed against him, she added, with a glance behind her:

"And do you know that man who is following us?"

"Yes, don't be uneasy. Perhaps he wants to ask me something."

It was Misard, who, in fact, had accompanied them at a distance from the Rue des Juifs. He also had deposed, with a sleepy air; and he had remained, prowling around Jacques, without making up his mind to ask him a question which was visibly on his lips. When the couple had disappeared in the inn, he entered in his turn and ordered a glass of wine.

"Ah! it's you, Misard!" cried the engineer. "And how goes it with your new wife?"

"As well as possible," growled the signalman. "Ah! the she-wolf, she got the better of me! I told you about that on my other trip here."

Jacques had been much amused by that story. Mère
Ducloux, seeing him hunting in the corners, had quickly seen that he must be searching for a hoard hidden by his defunct wife; and an idea of genius had come to her, in order to make him marry her, that of letting him understand, by reticences, by little laughs, that she had found it. At first, he had nearly strangled her; then, thinking that the thousand francs would still escape him, if he suppressed her like the other, before getting them, he had become very cajoling, very kind; but she repulsed him: no, no, when she should be his wife, he would have all, herself and the money besides. And he had married her, and she had mocked him, telling him he was too stupid in believing all that was said to him. Now, she had caught the contagion and was hunting with him. Ah! those unfindable thousand francs! They would unearth them some day, two of them being at work!

“So you have found nothing yet?” said Jacques, in a bantering tone. “Mère Ducloux don’t aid you much, does she?”

Misard looked at him fixedly; and he spoke at last. “You know where they are, tell me!”

But the engineer got angry. “I know nothing at all about them; Aunt Phasie did not give them to me; you are not going to accuse me of stealing them, are you?”

“Oh! she gave you nothing, that’s very sure. You see that this thing has made me sick. If you know where they are, tell me.”

“Eh! are you going to get yourself in trouble! Take care that I don’t talk too much! Look if they are in the salt-box!”

Pale, his eyes glowing, Misard continued to stare at him. Then, a sudden light broke on him.

“In the salt-box! ah! that’s true! There is in it, beneath the drawer, a hiding-place in which I have not searched.”

He hastened to pay for his glass of wine, and he ran
to the railway to see if he could not yet take the 7.10 train. In the little low house, eternally would he hunt.

In the evening, after dinner, while waiting for the 12.50 train, Philomène asked Jacques to walk with her into the country, which was near at hand. It was a hot, moonless July night and the atmosphere was very heavy. Twice, having believed she heard footsteps behind her, she turned without perceiving any one, so thick was the darkness. Jacques was suffering greatly from the oppressive weather. Amid his tranquil equilibrium, amid the perfect health he had enjoyed since the murder, he had felt awhile before, at table, a distant uneasiness return every time that woman had touched him with her wandering hands. Fatigue without doubt, a weakness caused by the heaviness of the air. He had been thoroughly cured of his malady—experiments had established that. His excitement, however, became such that the fear of a crisis would have made him drop her arm, if the darkness in which they were drowned had not reassured him; for never, even on the worst days of his malady, would he have struck without seeing. And, suddenly, the monstrous need again seized upon him, as they were passing along a deserted road, he was carried away by a rage, he sought among the grass for a weapon, a stone, with which to crush her head. With a start, he sprang away from her, and he was already fleeing, dismayed, and he heard a man's voice, oaths, a fierce battle.

"Ah! wretch, I have been following you all the time, I wanted to be sure."

"It's not true! Let go of me!"

"Ah! it's not true, eh! Let him run, the other, I know who he is and I'll get even with him! Ah! wretch, tell me again that it's not true!"

Jacques galloped away into the night, not to flee from Pecqueux, whom he had recognized; but he fled from himself, wild with grief.
What! one murder had not sufficed, he had not cloyed himself with the blood of Séverine, as he had believed that very morning. Behold! he had recommenced. Another, and then another, and then always another! When he had fed, after some weeks of torpor, his frightful hunger would reawaken, he would incessantly need woman's flesh to satisfy it. Even at present he did not require to see it, for it to brush against him sufficed to make him yield to the thirst for crime. Life was finished for him, there was no longer anything before him but that profound night, of boundless despair, into which he was fleeing.

Several days passed. Jacques had resumed his service, shunning his comrades, fallen back into his anxious savagery of the past. War had been declared, after stormy sessions of the Chamber; and there had already been a little outpost fight, with a happy result, it was said. For a week the transportation of troops had crushed with fatigue the personnel of the railways. The regular service was deranged, constant unforeseen trains caused considerable delays; without counting that they had requisitioned the best engineers to hasten the concentration of the corps d'armée. And thus it happened that one evening, at Havre, Jacques, instead of his customary express, had to engineer an enormous train, eighteen wagons, absolutely overflowing with soldiers.

That evening, Pecqueux arrived at the shelter house very drunk. The next day after he had surprised Philomène and Jacques, he had gone on engine 608, as fireman with the latter; and, since that time, he had made no allusion, sombre, having the air of not daring to look at his chief. But the latter felt that he was getting more and more towards revolt, refusing to obey, greeting him with a low growl when he gave him an order. They had finished by completely ceasing to talk to each other. That moving floor, that little bridge which had carried them in the past so united, was nothing more at this
hour than the narrow and dangerous plank on which their rivalry clashed. The hatred augmented, they were ready to devour each other in those few square feet, going at top speed, and from whence the slightest shock would have thrown them. And that evening, on seeing Pecqueux drunk, Jacques was mistrustful; for he knew that he was too sullen to get angry while fasting, wine alone unchained the brute in him.

The train, which should have started toward six o'clock, was delayed. It was already night when they embarked the soldiers like sheep in cattle wagons. They had simply nailed on planks in guise of benches, they piled them in by squads, cramming the carriages beyond their capacity, so that the men were seated one on another, some standing, packed to such an extent as to be unable to move an arm. On their arrival in Paris, another train awaited them to take them to the Rhine. They were already crushed with fatigue, in the confusion of departure. But, as brandy had been distributed to them and as many had visited the wine shops of the vicinity, they had a heated and brutal gaiety, very ruddy, their eyes bulging from their heads. And, as soon as the train started, quitting the dépôt yard, they began to sing.

Jacques immediately glanced at the sky, in which a storm cloud hid the stars. The night was very dark, not a breath agitated the burning air; and the wind of the passage, always so cool, seemed warm. At the black horizon there were no other lights than the bright sparks of the signals. He augmented the pressure to climb the great up-grade from Harfleur to Saint-Romain. Despite the study he had made of it for weeks, he was not yet master of engine 608, too new, of which the caprices, the extravagances of youth surprised him. That night particularly he felt it stubborn, fanciful, ready to cut capers because of a few lumps of coal too much. Hence, his hand on the regulating lever, he watched the fire, more
and more uneasy on account of the behavior of his fireman. The little lamp which lighted the water level left the platform in a penumbra, which the door of the firebox, reddened, rendered violetish. He ill distinguished Pecqueux, he had felt twice on his legs the sensation of a grazing, as if fingers had been trying to grab him there. But this, without doubt, was only a drunkard’s awkwardness, for he heard him, amid the din, chuckling very loudly, breaking his coal with exaggerated hammer blows, struggling with the shovel. Every minute he opened the door, threw the fuel on the grate in unreasonable quantities. "Enough!" cried Jacques.

The other affected not to understand, continued to throw in shovelfuls one after another; and, as the engineer grabbed him by the arm, he turned, threatening, having at last the quarrel he had been seeking, in the rising fury of his intoxication.

"Don’t touch me, or I’ll strike! It amuses me to dash ahead!"

The train now was rolling at top speed over the plateau which goes from Bolbec to Motteville. It was to go straight through to Paris, without any stop, save at the points marked to take on water. The enormous mass, the eighteen wagons, loaded, overflowing with human cattle, traversed the black country with a continuous rumbling. And those men, who were being carried to the massacre, sang at a lung-splitting rate, a clamor so loud that it dominated the noise of the wheels.

Jacques, with his foot, had closed the door again. Then, manoeuvring the injector, containing himself yet, he said:

"There is too much fire. Sleep, if you are drunk."

Immediately Pecqueux reopened the door, persisted in again throwing on coal, as if he had wished to make the boiler explode. It was revolt, orders disregarded, exasperated passion which no longer heeded all those human lives. And, Jacques having leaned forward to lower the rod of the ash-pit himself, so as, at least, to
diminish the draught, the fireman suddenly seized him by the waist, strove to push him, to hurl him with a jerk upon the track.

"Scoundrel! that's it, is it? You would say that I fell off, sullen wretch!"

With one hand he had caught hold of one of the sides of the tender, and they both slipped, the fight continued upon the little iron-plate bridge, which danced violently. Their teeth clenched, they no longer spoke, they strove one to precipitate the other through the narrow opening, which a bar of iron alone protected. But this was not easy, the devouring engine rolled, rolled constantly; and Bar-entin was passed, and the train plunged into the Malaunay tunnel, while they were still holding each other tightly, wallowing in the coal, knocking their heads against the walls of the water-holder, avoiding the red-hot door of the fire-box, which burned their legs every time they stretched them out.

For an instant Jacques thought that, if he could get up, he would close the regulator, summon help in order that he might be disembarrassed of that furious madman, enraged with drunkenness and jealousy. He was weakening, the smaller, he despaired now of finding the strength to precipitate him, already conquered, feeling pass through his hair the terror of the fall. As he was making a supreme effort, his hand feeling, the other understood, stiffened himself on his back, lifted him as if he had been a child.

"Ah! you want to stop the train! You have taken Philomène from me! Come, come, out you go!"

The engine rolled, rolled, the train emerged from the tunnel with a great din, and it continued its course across the empty and sombre country. The station of Malaunay was passed in such a gust of wind that the under station master, standing upon the quay, did not even see those two men about to devour each other, while the thunder bore them along.
But Pecqueux, with a final spring, hurled Jacques out; and the latter, feeling the void, dismayed, clung to his neck so tightly that he drew him along. There were two terrible cries, which were confounded, which were lost. The two men, fallen together, drawn under the wheels by the reaction of the speed, were cut, mangled in their clutch, in that frightful embrace, they who had so long lived like brothers. They were found headless, without feet, two bloody trunks which still clung together as if to stifle each other.

And the engine, free from all direction, rolled, rolled constantly. At last the stubborn, the fanciful machine could yield to the fury of its youth, like a yet untamed horse, escaped from the hands of its keeper, galloping over the flat country. The boiler was provided with water, the coal, with which the fire-box had been filled, was glowing; and, during the first half hour, the pressure mounted madly, the speed became frightful. Without doubt, the chief conductor, yielding to fatigue, had fallen asleep. The soldiers, whose intoxication was increasing from being thus packed together, suddenly grew delighted with the violent passage, sang louder than ever. The train shot through Maromme like a flash of lightning. There was no longer a whistle at the approach of signals, on passing dépôts. It was a gallop straight ahead, the animal which, head down and mute, leaps among the obstacles. It rolled, rolled endlessly, as if maddened more and more by the strident noise of its breath.

At Rouen they should have taken on water; and terror froze everybody in the dépôt when they saw pass, in a whirl of smoke and flame, that mad train, that engine without either engineer or fireman, those cattle wagons filled with troops, shouting patriotic refrains. They were going to the war, it was to get more quickly down there, on the banks of the Rhône. The employés stood gaping, shaking their arms. All at once the cry was general: never would that unbridled train, abandoned to
itself, pass without accident through the dépôt of Sotteville, always barred by the manœuvres, obstructed with carriages and engines like all the great dépôts. And they ran to the telegraph, they gave warning. It so happened that down there a train could be run back under a shelter house. Already, in the distance, the roll of the escaped monster was heard. It had rushed through the two tunnels which were near Rouen, it arrived at its furious gallop, like a monstrous and irresistible power which nothing could any longer arrest. And the dépôt of Sotteville was turned, it dashed through the midst of the obstacles without meeting with any harm, it plunged again into the darkness, where its rumbling gradually died away.

But now all the telegraphic apparatuses of the line were ticking, all hearts were thumping at the news of the phantom train which had been seen to pass at Rouen and at Sotteville. People trembled with fear; an express, which was in advance, would surely be overtaken. Like a wild boar in a forest, it continued its course, without heeding either the red lights or the torpedoes. It nearly crushed itself, at Oissel, against a pilot engine; it terrified Pont-de-l'Arche, for its speed did not seem to relax. Again vanished, it rolled, it rolled in the black night one knew not where.

What difference made the victims which the engine crushed on the road! Was it not going, nevertheless, to the future, careless of the blood spilled? Without conductor, amid the darkness, like a blind and deaf animal, which might have been let loose amid death, it rolled, it rolled, loaded with that cannon flesh, with those soldiers, stupefied with fatigue, and drunk, who were singing.

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